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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WAR OF THE AXE; OR, ADVENTURES IN SOUTH AFRICA ***

J. Percy-Groves

"The War of the Axe"

"Adventures in South Africa"

Chapter One.

The Surat Castle—Our Hero—A Rough Night in the Atlantic—After the Gale—Land ho!

In the early summer of the year of grace 1844 the *Surat Castle*, a fine clipper barque of 400 tons burthen, left the London docks on a voyage to the Cape of Good Hope, with a valuable cargo and several passengers, including a small draft of volunteers and recruits for the Saint Helena regiment. The *Surat Castle* traded regularly between the port of London and Table Bay, and so well-known was she as a fast-sailing, seaworthy vessel, with excellent accommodation, and such was the popularity and reputation of her commander and part-owner, Captain John Ladds, that many Cape gentlemen, who had occasion to make the trip to the old country and back every two or three years, preferred taking their passage in her rather than in the ordinary mail-packets.

Amongst the cabin passengers who were now returning to the Cape in the *Surat Castle* was a good-looking lad of sixteen—a fine, well-built youngster, with a cleanness of make and shape that bespoke muscular strength and activity combined, and whose sun-burned healthy face and clear well-set eye bore ample evidence that he was in capital condition; in fact, sound in wind as well as limb.

Thomas Flinders, for that was the lad's name, was the only son of a retired major of the Cape Mounted Riflemen, who had, with the money realised by the sale of his commission, purchased a farm in the neighbourhood of Cape Town, and there settled down with his family, "turning his sword into a ploughshare." On this farm Master Tom first saw the light of day, and there he lived until within a few weeks of his eleventh birthday, when Major Flinders, finding that his son and heir was becoming somewhat troublesome and self-willed, packed him off to England to be educated at Rugby, under the great and good Doctor Arnold, who was then in the zenith of his fame. Five years of public-school life—three under Doctor Arnold (Arnold died in 1842), and two under his successor—worked wonders with young Flinders, and developed him into a plucky, straightforward English lad, full of fun and exuberant spirits, but without a spark of vice in his composition; a gentleman in the truest and noblest sense of the word, holding in hearty contempt aught that savoured of meanness or "bad form." Nor had the lad's physical education been neglected, for he became a very fair hand at most outdoor games and sports; from fives to football, from quoits to hare-and-hounds, and could play rough-and-tumble with any boy of his own weight. And now Tom Flinders, having imbibed the regulation quantum of Latin and Greek and a modicum of mathematics, together with a very proper notion of his position as an ex-school-house boy and a member of the upper-fifth, had left Rugby for good, and was returning to the land of his birth under the nominal charge of Captain Ladds, who was an old friend of the major's.

The early part of the voyage of the *Surat Castle* was unmarked by any incident worth recording. Stress of weather detained her in the Downs for some few days, but once clear of the Channel she met with favourable winds and (except in the Bay of Biscay) smooth seas, and so made a quick run to the island of Saint Helena, where she anchored off James Town in order to disembark her military passengers and replenish her fresh-water tanks and sea stock. At Saint Helena Tom had the opportunity of enjoying a run ashore and of visiting the empty tomb of the great Napoleon Buonaparte, whose remains had recently been removed from beneath the weeping-willows in Slane's Valley (whither, nineteen years before, they had been carried by the grenadiers of the 66th Regiment) to their honoured resting-place within the walls of the Invalides.

But the *Surat Castle* remained at anchor only a short time, for as soon as the soldiers were clear of the ship, and the fresh provisions and water had been taken on board, Captain Ladds put to sea and shaped his course for Table Bay.

On the sixth evening after the barque left Saint Helena there was every indication of a change for the worse in the weather; away to the north-east the clouds were thick and threatening at sundown, and Captain Ladds, judging that a heavy gale lay behind them, ordered sail to be reduced. The breeze stiffening into a gale, everything was made snug for the night; the top-gallant masts and yards sent down, preventer-braces rove, the hatches battened down, and dead-lights shipped—preparations which bespoke no good tidings to the passengers; many of whom retired to their berths at a much earlier hour than usual. Nor did these preparations prove unnecessary, for gradually the wind increased until it blew with almost hurricane force, and before long the *Surat Castle* was scudding under bare poles, not a stitch of canvas showing, her storm-sails having been blown from their bolt-ropes or split into ribands.

The storm raged throughout the long hours of the night with undiminished fury, the lightning darting forth from the dark clouds illumined the whole firmament, and the thunder rolled continuously; whilst the sea, running mountains high, threatened every instant to engulf the gallant barque.

Tom Flinders had remained on deck, not caring to go to his cabin. This was the first big storm he had experienced, and he stood watching the gigantic and angry billows with mingled interest and awe.

“You had much better go below and turn in, my boy,” said Captain Ladds kindly, as a huge wave “pooped” the barque, and, sweeping along the deck, drenched Tom to the skin. “We have not had the worst of it yet, I can assure you. You might get washed overboard like poor Jennings was just now.”

“What! the bos’un?” exclaimed Tom, who was clinging to the brass handrail of the companion. “I *am* sorry to hear that! Do you think there’s much danger, Captain Ladds?” he added. “If so, I’d rather stop on deck—that is if you don’t object. I shouldn’t like to be drowned like a rat in a hole!”

Before the captain could reply to his young friend’s question a tremendous squall, with a shift of the wind, struck the barque, and immediately afterwards another heavy sea broke over her weather quarter, causing her to shiver from stem to stern. The half-doors of the companion burst open, and poor Tom, losing his grasp of the handrail, shot down the ladder head foremost, whilst it was only by a supreme effort that Captain Ladds saved himself from a similar mishap.

“The boy must have broken his neck!” was the captain’s anxious exclamation when he recovered himself. “Below there!” he continued, raising his voice and peering down the hatch. “Steward! Jackson, see to Mr Flind— oh, there you are, Tom! Are you much hurt?”

“Made my nose bleed, that’s all,” Tom replied, picking himself up. “I landed on a heap of blankets and was then pitched against the pantry-door. All the same I sha’n’t come on deck again; I think I had better turn in.”

“I think so too,” was the rejoinder. “A pretty figure you’ll cut to-morrow morning! Good night!”

“Good night, captain!” replied Tom, mopping away at his nose; and off he staggered to his berth.

It blew “great guns” for the next fifty-six hours, and the unfortunate passengers—Tom Flinders included—were reduced to a state of misery pitiable to behold. One and all were frightfully ill, and the steward and his assistant were run off their legs, and could no longer attend to their duties. The cabin now presented a scene of confusion and disorder that contrasted woefully with its usual comfortable appearance; the floor was strewn with the débris of the breakfast and dinner services—shattered plates and dishes, cups and saucers, glasses and decanters, whilst the piano had fetched away from the ring-bolts and lay on its “beam ends” with its front stove in.

At length the weather began to moderate, the heavy storm-laden clouds rolled away, and on the fourth night of the gale the stars shone out bright and clear. The wind continued to slacken, and the sea to go down, until dawn of day, when the sun rose once more in all his wonted splendour, and the sky was blue and cloudless.

At noon Captain Ladds and his chief mate brought out their quadrants and took an observation, when it was found that the storm had driven the barque far out of her course; much further indeed than the captain had thought. However, there was no help for it, the lost ground must be recovered, so all hands set to work to repair damages, and after many hours’ arduous toil through the night the *Surat Castle* had once more a taut ship-shape appearance, and was running before a favourable breeze which most opportunely sprang up in the morning.

And now by twos and threes the passengers appeared on deck to breathe again the invigorating sea air. Very pale and woebegone did those helpless mortals look, and listless was the manner in which they lolled about, until they were suddenly startled into a semblance of life and action by the unexpected cry:

“Land! land on the port bow!”

Chapter Two.

The Desert Island—A Happy Release.

The land, thus unexpectedly reported in sight, proved to be a small rocky island, which the second mate, after a careful examination through his glass, declared was inhabited.

“My eyes don’t often play me false,” said that officer to Captain Ladds, who had followed him into the fore-top; “and I’m a’most sartin that I can make out people moving about on yonder shore. Please to look for yourself, sir,” he added, handing his glass to the skipper.

“Yes—no—and yet—yes, I’m inclined to think you are right, Weatherhelm,” said Captain Ladds, bringing the mate’s

glass to bear on the island. “But my eyesight is not so good as it was ten years ago, and I cannot be positive.”

“Ay, but *I* am, sir,” retorted the mate, who was a thorough outspoken “salt” of the old school; one who, having “come in through the hawse-holes,” had worked his way to his present position by acquiring a sound practical knowledge of his profession, and attending strictly to his duties. “It’s possible that the crew of some craft—probably a whaler, for we’re pretty well out o’ the track of other vessels—have been cast away there.”

“Quite possible,” the captain assented, “and we will stand in a little closer. It is our duty to make sure whether such is the case; for we have been mercifully preserved through one of the worst gales that I have ever experienced, and should therefore be all the more ready to render assistance to those who have been less fortunate.”

“That’s truth, sir,” rejoined old Weatherhelm, as they descended the fore-rigging, “and ’tis a pity that others don’t see things in the same light as you do. We hear a sight too much of distressed vessels being passed by, by those who could help ’em if they’d only the will.”

So the barque’s course was altered, and she stood towards the island.

When the passengers heard that there was reason to suppose the island was inhabited, their recent sufferings were forgotten in their excitement; and many and marvellous were the speculations amongst them, as to who, and what, the mysterious islanders could be.

One old gentleman declared that they must be savages—probably cannibals—and expressed his decided opinion that the captain had no business to go near them; *he* was immediately, and most deservedly, snubbed by the ladies, whereupon he retired to his cabin in high dudgeon. Another suggestion was, that some of the passengers and crew of the ocean steamer *President* (which left New York in March, 1841, and was never seen or heard of afterwards) might have escaped and got ashore on the island; and this notion found great favour with the fair sex, until Captain Ladds, on being appealed to, hinted that they were a *few* degrees too far to the southward to expect to fall in with any survivors of the long-missing ship—even if such survivors existed, which was not within the bounds of probability.

“No, my friends, there can be very little doubt that the *President* foundered off the banks of Newfoundland,” said he, with a mournful shake of the head; “and that poor Roberts and his crew and passengers went down in her. If there are people on yonder island, they will most likely prove to be the crew of some Yankee whaler.”

As the *Surat Castle* approached the island all doubt as to its being inhabited was dispelled, for standing on the summit of a conical rock were three wild-looking individuals frantically waving their arms. The barque was then hove-to, and one of the quarter-boats lowered.

“May I go in her, Captain Ladds?” asked Tom Flinders, all alive at the prospect of an adventure.

“Very well, my boy; only don’t get into mischief,” replied the good-natured skipper. “Remember that I promised your good mother to keep an eye upon you, and unless I can hand you over with a whole skin, I shall not dare show my nose at Rustenburg Farm.”

“No fear of *my* coming to grief, sir,” laughed Tom, as he went down the side and seated himself in the stern-sheets of the boat. “They taught us to take care of ourselves at Rugby!”

“But not to keep your legs in a gale of wind!” retorted Captain Ladds. “Don’t forget the header you took down the companion-ladder, young man! Are you ready, Mr Weatherhelm?”

“All ready, sir.”

“Then shove off, if you please; and mind that you are cautious in approaching the island.”

“Ay, ay, sir!” responded the officer. And at his command the bowman pushed off, and the sailors, bending to their oars, sent the light boat through the smooth water in a style that would not have discredited a man-o’-war’s crew.

It was now discovered that the land consisted of two low-lying rocky islets, divided by a narrow channel, the entrance to which was barred by a dangerous reef, over which the waves broke with considerable force; the southmost of the islets terminating in a lofty “sugar-loaf” peak. When within a hundred yards of the shore, Mr Weatherhelm ordered his men to rest on their oars, while he looked out for a likely spot to run the boat ashore. Just then a tall, gaunt man appeared from behind the sugar-loaf rock, and hailing the boat, pointed to a narrow strip of beach some yards away to his left.

MR. WEATHERHELM RESCUES THE THREE CASTAWAYS.

“You can land there,” he shouted, in a husky voice. “Steer between those rocks right ahead of you—port a little—steady! now give way!”

The next moment the boat’s keel grated on the shingle, and the man ran forward to meet it. He was followed by a lad, apparently about Tom’s own age, and a young girl of eleven or twelve, whose long fair hair hung down her back almost to her waist, its golden colour contrasting strangely with her skin, which was so tanned by exposure to the fierce rays of the tropical sun, that the child was as brown as any gypsy.

The poor creatures looked thin and careworn; their cheeks were hollow, their eyes were unnaturally bright, and wore an anxious expression of mingled hope and doubt—an expression rarely seen except in the faces of those whose hearts have been sickened by hope long deferred. Their only garments consisted of a sack-like tunic made of goat-skin which reached some inches below the knee, but left the arms and neck bare.

With what delight and emotion did the castaways welcome their rescuers!

“Are you alone on this island?” inquired Mr Weatherhelm, wrapping his pea-jacket round the girl’s shoulders.

“We are,” the man answered, tears of joy and thankfulness coursing down his sunken, weather-beaten cheeks. “These are my children, and here have we been for more than twelve weary months. My name is Weston, and I was owner and commander of the *Sea-mew*, whaler, which was wrecked on this island after the crew deserted her.”

“Just what I thought!” exclaimed the old mate. “But we mustn’t waste time palavering; get your traps together—”

“They are here,” interrupted Mr Weston, holding up a battered tin deed-box. “This is all I care to bring away.”

“Then jump into the boat and let’s be off,” cried Weatherhelm. “Now, Missy! I’ll take care of you.”

The castaways needed no second bidding, and in another half-hour they found themselves safe on board the *Surat Castle*.

Captain Ladds received the unfortunate strangers with the utmost kindness, expressing his deep commiseration at their sorry condition, and heartily congratulating them on their providential release from their seagirt prison. Mr Weston thanked him in broken tones, but was too overcome with feelings of emotion to say very much, and presently

he asked that he and his children might be allowed to retire to rest; so the captain took him down to his own cabin, whilst the lady passengers carried off the little girl, and Tom Flinders marched the boy to his single state-room, and insisted on his taking possession of the only berth.

Chapter Three.

Tom Flinders is reminded of the old saying—“The World is very small.”

The sun was high in the heavens when young Weston awoke next morning, and on turning his face to the light, the first object that his eyes rested upon was Master Tom Flinders, seated on a portmanteau, regarding him with pitiful looks.

“Halloa, old fellow!” exclaimed our hero, colouring red as a turkey-cock, at being thus caught staring; “how do you find yourself this morning? You’ve had a jolly long caulk!”

For a moment young Weston appeared a little confused; but he quickly recollected the joyful events of the previous day, and feeling much refreshed by his protracted sleep, replied that he was all right, and would like to get up and go on deck.

“All serene!” said Tom; “turn out by all means; and while you’re washing, I’ll see what can be done in the way of clothes. There’s some water in the basin, and there’s my sponge and towels. It’s too late for you to have a tub, for the bath-room boy goes off duty at ten, and it’s now close on twelve.”

“Then I must have slept nearly twice the round of the clock!” cried the other in surprise.

“Going on that way,” laughed Tom, diving into his portmanteau and fishing out several garments. “My ‘duds’ are most of them packed away in my trunks,” he went on, “and they, you know, are down in the hold with the rest of the heavy luggage; but I’ll do my best to turn you out respectably. By the way, what’s your name?”

“George—George Maurice Weston.”

“Well, George, here’s a pair of white flannel ‘bags,’ and a ditto shirt—they’re my old cricketing ‘togs;’ but I thought they’d come in useful during the voyage, and so left ’em out. Here’s a jacket, rather the worse for wear, and that stupid fellow, the second steward, capsized a plate of soup over it the other night—see, there are the stains, down the right shoulder and arm! But you won’t mind that?”

“Not a bit,” put in George, taking the unlucky garment. “I’ve learnt not to be over particular.”

“There’s a collar, a cravat, and a pair of socks; and there’s a pair of shoes—nice, easy ones, too. Now, look alive, old chap; slip ’em on, and then we’ll go and get some grub.”

Rattling on in this manner, Tom helped his new friend to dress—or fitted him out “from truck to kelson,” as he expressed it; for Tom had become very nautical in his language since he joined the *Surat Castle*—and then surveyed him with a critical eye.

“Come, that’s not so bad! you look less like an ancient Briton now,” said he, crowning young Weston with a cricket cap upon which was embroidered the school-house badge. “Feel a bit queer though at first, eh, George Maurice?”

“Rather so,” George answered, wriggling himself. “The shoes and socks are the worst. You see I’ve gone barefoot for such a precious long time. However, I shall no doubt get accustomed to them in a day or two.”

“Of course you will,” assented Tom. “Now come along and I’ll introduce you to the ladies; we have five on board—three married women and two girls. Won’t they make a fuss over you and that little sister of yours!”

When our hero and his friend made their appearance on deck they found Mr Weston (now shaven and shorn, and clad in a suit of true nautical cut, the property of Mr Weatherhelm) standing near the skylight talking to the skipper and Mr Rogerson, the chief mate of the *Surat Castle*.

“Halloa!” he exclaimed, catching sight of his son’s head-gear. “I ought to know that cap.”

“It is the Rugby school-house cap,” said its owner with conscious pride. “We have only lately worn them; but I’ve heard old school-house men say that they were introduced years ago—long before Arnold’s time—but dropped out after a while.”

“That’s quite right,” rejoined Mr Weston. “I am an old Rugby boy myself, and well remember the school-house badge being introduced. It must be nearly five-and-thirty years ago,” he added with a sigh, “when I was about little Grade’s age.”

“Why!” Tom cried, his interest in the family increasing fourfold, “you must have been at Rugby with my father! Flinders is his name—Major—”

“Not dear old Matthew Flinders surely?” interrupted the other, “who afterwards went into the Cape Rifles?”

“The same,” answered Tom, nodding his head. “Did you know him?”

“Know Mat Flinders! Why, my dear boy, your father was the best and truest friend I ever had! But it is many, many years since we met. You must tell me all about him.”

Tom was delighted at this discovery, and he there and then proceeded to give Weston a full account of his father's doings, and of their farm near Cape Town; in the midst of which he was interrupted by the steward announcing that "tiffin was on the table."

"Well," said the boy as they entered the saloon together, "they say the world is very small, and that one tumbles against friends and connections in all manner of queer places; but I should never have dreamed of meeting an old school-house man, a chum of the *pater's*, on a desolate island in the South Atlantic Ocean."

The Westons soon became favourites with both the officers and cabin passengers of the *Surat Castle*. Mr Weston himself was a well-bred, well-informed man of pleasing address and manners; in person tall and powerfully built (old Weatherhelm was the only one on board who approached him in height), with a handsome but rather sad countenance, and dark curly hair just slightly grizzled.

George Weston, though he had not had the advantage of a public-school education, was as nice a lad as anyone could wish to meet; well-behaved and intelligent, quiet and studiously inclined. He was in his sixteenth year, had a pleasant bright look about his face, and was slight of figure, but active and sinewy withal.

As for Miss Gracie, when she recovered her spirits and got over her shyness, she became the life and soul of the ship; and must inevitably have been spoiled had she not been blessed with a sweet unspoilable disposition. As Tom had prophesied, the lady passengers made a great deal of Gracie and her brother, for their tender womanly hearts overflowed with compassion when they heard of the misfortunes and sufferings of the family.

It was not until he had been on board nearly a week that Mr Weston gave a full account of the loss of the *Sea-mew*, and of his previous adventures; but one Saturday, when the cabin party were seated round the dinner-table chatting over their wine and walnuts, Captain Ladds suggested that he should spin them a yarn.

"Willingly," replied Mr Weston, pushing away his plate; "and as we are all friends here I will also give you a brief sketch of my career before I became skipper of a South Sea whaler. My life has been a chequered one, and not devoid of adventure, so I trust my story will interest you; anyhow, I feel assured that I am secure of your sympathy."

And without further preamble Weston commenced his yarn, to which we will devote the next chapter.

Chapter Four.

Mr Weston's Story.

"I have already stated," began Mr Weston, "that I was educated at Rugby, where I first became acquainted with our young friend's father. Mat Flinders and I were both school-house boys, and we shared the same study, fagged for the same sixth-form boy, belonged to the same form, and no doubt—if the truth is to be told—were often flogged with the same birch; so we were, as a matter of course, firm allies.

"Shortly before my fourteenth birthday I was offered a midshipman's rating on board the *Thétis*, a fine 36-gun frigate which had been taken from the French and purchased into the navy in 1808; and as my father—a retired rear-admiral who had served with distinction under Keppel and Rodney—was determined that I should follow in his footsteps and serve King George afloat, I bade farewell to the old school and all my chums and journeyed down to Chatham, where the frigate was 'fitting foreign.'

"Those were stirring times in the navy, I can tell you, my friends! and our captain was no niggard of shot and shell; indeed a more dashing officer never trod his majesty's quarter-deck!

"His invariable rule was to engage every Frenchman under a '74' that he fell in with, and he certainly managed to fall in with a good many; so that during the four years I remained in the *Thétis* I saw my share of fighting, and was twice wounded—once when engaged in a 'cutting-out' affair, and again in action with a 50-gun ship, which I'm proud to say we took.

"Having powerful interest at the Admiralty it was not long before I received my commission, and when barely twenty years of age I was appointed second lieutenant of the *Dido*, a corvette on the West Indian station.

"My messmates regarded me as one of fortune's special favourites, but the 'fickle goddess' treated me scurvily enough in the end; and if my promotion had been rapid, at any rate I was not destined to enjoy it for any length of time.

"Whilst at Jamaica I stumbled up against my old school-fellow, Mat Flinders, then a lieutenant in the —th Foot. Mat was quartered at Kingston, and as the *Dido* had been docked to undergo certain repairs we saw a good deal of each other, and renewed our friendship.

"But now it was that Dame Fortuna began to frown upon me, or perhaps it would be more honest to say that I incurred her displeasure by my rash conduct. It so happened that I had the ill-luck to offend my captain, a man of imperious overbearing temper; high words ensued between us, and in a moment of ungovernable passion I knocked him down. Of course my prospects in the navy were for ever blighted; no provocation could be urged as an excuse for such a gross act of insubordination; no interest with the 'powers that be' could shield me from the consequences of my rash act.

"A court-martial assembled, and I was tried, found guilty of the charges preferred against me, and sentenced to be dismissed his majesty's service.

“My fair-weather friends gave me the cold shoulder, for Captain B— was a near relation of the Governor and a man of considerable influence; so everybody took his part, and abused me roundly. No, not everybody! I had one true friend —Matthew Flinders. If I were to tell all that Tom’s father did for me during that miserable time I might keep you round this table until we reach Table Bay. Suffice it to say, that never did poor unfortunate meet with a kinder or stauncher comrade.

“I returned to England under arrest, and the sentence of the court having been approved and confirmed I was broken and turned adrift. My father closed his doors against me, with a curt intimation that he would have nothing more to say to a son who had disgraced himself and his family as I had done; he would listen to no explanation, and returned my letters unopened.

“I had a few pounds in my pocket, and they represented all my means; but I was a good sailor, and had no fear but that I could earn my own living. Through the kind offices of Matthew Flinders, who had given me a letter to a relative of his connected with the mercantile marine, I obtained a berth as second mate on board a merchant brig, and in her I made three voyages to the Cape.

“An offer was then made to me to ship on board a South Sea whaler as second mate, with the understanding that I should be promoted chief mate after my first trip; this offer I closed with. My captain was a gentleman, and a right good fellow, and I made two voyages with him; he then retired. I succeeded him in command of the ship, and shortly afterwards married his youngest daughter.

“Several years passed happily enough, and two children—George and Gracie—blessed our union; but my happiness was short-lived, for when Gracie was nine years of age my wife died of a fever.

“Two years after this sad event I received news of my father’s death, and that I was entitled to a few thousand pounds, which it was not in his power to will away from me, for, implacable to the last, he had left the bulk of his fortune to a distant relative, who had already more money than he knew what to do with.

“I now purchased and fitted out the *Sea-mew*, a barque of 300 tons; my intention being to take a long whaling cruise in the South Seas, and, if successful, to retire altogether from a seafaring life, and settle down in one of the colonies. Save 500 pounds, which I left in my agent’s hands, I embarked every guinea of my slender fortune in this venture; though fortunately I took the precaution to insure the barque for about half her value.

“Not wishing to be separated from my children for so long a period I determined that they should accompany me. I therefore engaged the carpenter’s wife—who had no youngsters of her own, and was a highly respectable woman—to attend on Gracie; and the surgeon of the *Sea-mew*, Angus McDougal, an old shipmate of mine and a sound scholar, volunteered to superintend George’s education.

“On the 22nd January, 1842, we sailed from England, and after a tedious and perilous voyage arrived at our fishing ground, and prepared for our campaign against the ‘spermaceti.’

“But we did not meet with the success I had anticipated; three months passed away and still we had a clean hold; the whales seemed to have disappeared from those seas!

“This continued ill-luck sent my hopes of realising a modest competence down to zero, and, moreover, it dispirited the crew, rendering them discontented and sullen.

“At length one morning we observed many polypi, medusae, and squid—”

“And what?” interrupted Tom Flinders, who was listening to Weston’s narrative “*auribus erectis*.” “What on earth is squid?”

“Squid isn’t on earth at all,” retorted Mr Weston; “it floats on the surface of the water, and is nothing more or less than a sort of jelly-fish upon which the whale feeds. Well, the sight of this raised our hopes, for we knew that we should probably fall in with a whale before long; and sure enough we were soon roused to action by the welcome cry: ‘There she spouts!’

“I was on deck at the moment, and springing up the shrouds to the main-top-mast head, I descried three whales right ahead of us and at no great distance. Two of them appeared to be half grown, or what we South Sea whalers call ‘forty-barrel bulls,’ forty barrels being about the quantity of oil we usually get out of them; the third was a regular old stager, a magnificent fellow of enormous proportions.

“In a very few minutes we had four boats in the water manned and ready to push off; I went as ‘headsman’ of the largest, of which—at his special request—Doctor McDougal pulled the stroke-oar; the second and third mates and the boatswain took charge of the others.

“Now I must tell you that the older and larger whales, besides proving the most valuable prizes, are by far the easiest to kill; whereas the ‘forty-barrel bulls’ are difficult to come up with, and dangerous customers to tackle. So I directed my second mate and the boatswain to go in chase of the old whale, whilst I and the third mate—a very experienced headsman—attacked the young bulls.

“Away we pulled, and in a short time approached within four hundred yards of the young whales, when the one nearest to us ‘peaked his flukes’—that is, went down head foremost; but his companion remained above water and showed no inclination to avoid us.

“‘We’ll make sure of that fellow and leave the other alone for the present,’ I shouted to the third mate. ‘Give way, my lads!’ Then the two boats raced through the smooth water, and we were soon within striking distance of our prey.

“Up to this time the two boat-steerers had been pulling the bow-oars of their respective boats, whilst the headsman steered; but now they laid in their oars, and, seizing their harpoons, stood up ready to strike. My boat was the first in action, and the harpoon flew from the steersman’s grasp and sank deep into the whale’s body, just as he was in the act of ‘sounding;’ down, down he went, and our line uncoiling rapidly from its tub ran out with a loud whirring noise. I now changed places with my boat-steerer, and, armed with several lances, took my stand in the bow, ready to give the whale the *coup de grâce* the instant he reappeared.

“In less than half an hour the stricken monster rose to the surface about a quarter of a mile distant, and set off at a good ten knots an hour, towing the two boats after him, for the mate had bent his line on to mine. Suddenly he stopped and commenced plunging furiously, lashing the water into a boiling foam, and spurting jets of blood from his blow-holes—a sign of approaching death. (Apertures or nostrils placed on the highest part of a whale’s head, through which he breathes.)

“‘He’s in his flurry! Stern all! stern all!’ was the cry, and quickly we backed our boats out of harm’s way. Soon the whale ceased his struggles and lay like a huge log on the bloodstained water, apparently exhausted; then once more we dashed forward, and as the boats came alongside, the mate and I thrust our lances up to the stocks into his carcass, close to the fin.

“Alas, in our eagerness to make sure of our prize we forgot our usual caution! The leviathan was not yet vanquished, but still had sufficient life left in him to make one final effort to avenge himself on his relentless foes!

“Without a moment’s warning the dying whale reared his enormous head and rushed open-mouthed at the mate’s boat, which, unable to avoid the charge, was capsized and sunk; then the monster gave one last mighty plunge, and with a stroke of his powerful tail sent my boat flying into the air, scattering the crew into the foaming water.

“The mate, his boat-steerer, and one man must have gone down at once, but the others saved themselves by clinging to their oars. My boat’s crew were even more unfortunate, for I alone escaped; the rest were either killed when the whale struck us, or else sank to rise no more. I thus lost, literally at one blow, my poor friend Angus McDougal, and seven of my best hands; also two boats with all their gear.

“The accident had been witnessed by the other boats, and the boatswain at once pulled for the scene of the mishap and picked us up.

“About six weeks after this disaster sickness broke out in the *Sea-mew*. The carpenter and the carpenter’s wife were the first who succumbed; the cook and one of the oldest boat-steerers were the next victims, and several of the crew sickened, but recovered after laying many days in the ‘sickbay’ almost at death’s door.

“We were now so short-handed, and the survivors of the crew were so discontented and mutinous, that I resolved to abandon the cruise and make for some port where I might be able to pick up fresh hands to help take the ship home, and accordingly I shaped my course for Table Bay. But my cup of misfortune was not yet full.

“A fortnight after doubling Cape Horn a stiff gale got up, and increased in fury until it developed into one of the most fearful storms that it has ever been my lot to cope with.

“The storm continued for a day and a night, and when it abated the poor *Sea-mew* was left a dismasted wreck at the mercy of the waves. We were all much exhausted, and sorely needed rest, but not a man could be spared from the pumps, for the ship had sprung a leak, which gained upon us slowly but surely. Five more of my crew, including the first mate, had gone to their last account, three having been washed overboard and two killed by the fall of the main-mast.

“By almost incredible exertions we succeeded in keeping the battered ship afloat, and the sea having gone down we were able to discover and stop the leak. We then got a spare try-sail up on the stump of the foremast, and put the barque before the wind.

“Rest was now absolutely necessary, for we had been working unceasingly for the last thirty-six hours. The second mate begged that I would take the first spell, whilst he kept watch; as he appeared the fresher of the two, I consented, and retiring to my cabin was soon fast asleep. When I awoke and returned on deck I found that my cowardly crew had deserted the ship, in the only boat that was seaworthy, leaving me and my poor children to perish.

“But a merciful Providence watched over our safety. After drifting for three or four days the barque ran on a rock, off the island where you discovered us, and as it was quite calm at the time we succeeded in getting ashore without much difficulty. A week later the poor old *Sea-mew* was broken up by a gale, but after she went to pieces we managed to secure some casks of provisions, and several useful articles. I also saved the ship’s papers, and other private documents of importance. On exploring the island we found that it was not altogether bare of vegetation, and that it was inhabited by a small herd of very lean goats—whose progenitors had probably been left there by the benevolent captain of some passing vessel, for the benefit of any persons who, like ourselves, might be cast ashore; there were also hundreds of sea-birds, and a plentiful supply of good water; so that there was no fear of our perishing of hunger or thirst. Of clothes, we had only those we stood up in, and when they wore out, we replaced them with goatskins.

“I will not weary you with an account of our life on the island; as you may well imagine, the time hung heavily on our hands, though we did all we could to lessen the monotony of our existence, but at times we felt very down-hearted; still we never quite lost hope that, some day or other, a vessel might come within hail, and take us off.

“At length, after thirteen months of solitude and privation, that hope was realised—when a kind Providence sent the *Surat Castle* to rescue us from our desert home and restored us to the society of our fellow-creatures.”

“Well!” exclaimed Captain Ladds when Weston finished his narrative; “you certainly have had a run of ill-luck! Let us hope that brighter days are in store for you. The tide must turn at last, you know; and you shall not want friends to help you to retrieve your fortunes.”

“No, indeed!” cried Master Tom impulsively. “If the *pater* don’t stand by you, I’m jolly well mistaken. You must come to Rustenburg until something turns up. But I say, Mr Weston,” he went on; “you’ve had about enough of the sea! I’d try my luck on ‘terra firma’ now, if I were you!”

“I’m inclined to agree with you, Tom,” Mr Weston replied; “and I might do worse than settle down in Cape Colony. The anxieties and dangers of my last voyage have rather sickened me, and if there is a suitable berth to be found on shore, I don’t think I shall be tempted to go afloat again.”

Chapter Five.

The end of the Voyage—Table Bay—“Doth not a meeting like this, make amends!”

> “The perils and the dangers of the voyage are past,
> And the barque has arrived at—at—at Cape Town at last;
> The sails are furled, and the anchor’s cast,
> And the happiest of the—”

“Passengers is Master Thomas Flinders!” laughed Captain Ladds, interrupting our hero, who was giving utterance to his joyful feelings by trolling forth the above verse with, it must be confessed, more energy than harmony. “Yes, Tom, my son,” he continued, “here we are safe in old Table Bay; and there’s the port-captain’s boat putting off from the quay. You’ll be at Rustenburg in time for ‘tiffin.’ Mr Rogerson, see that the accommodation ladder is ready; Captain Morrison is coming off.”

It was a most glorious morning when the *Surat Castle* ran into Table Bay, and brought up off the old wooden quay, which half a century ago served as the principal landing-place at Cape Town; for the splendid Alexandra Docks, affording ample accommodation for the three-thousand tonners of the Union Company, and Donald Currie’s Royal Mail Lines, were not yet designed; the South African metropolis being in a chrysalis sort of condition, and not having reached any great degree of commercial prosperity—though it was a favourite resort of invalided Anglo-Indians, who found it a very pleasant place in which to spend a few months’ sick leave, after broiling in the “gorgeous east” for the best part of their lives.

Tears of pleasure dimmed Tom’s eyes at the sight of home (for home is home, whether we live within the sound of “Bow Bells” or at the Antipodes) and the thought of meeting his parents and sisters after a five years’ separation.

How familiar was the scene upon which he gazed.

There was the old Dutch city, situated on a plain rising by a gentle ascent to the base of the far-famed Table Mountain—the heights of which, viewed from the sea, bear some resemblance to the ruined walls of a Titanic fortress. There was the quaint castle with its broad fosse and regular outworks, and Forts Knokke and Craig defending the shore to the east of the city; whilst westward of the principal landing-place—overlooked by the saddle-back hill, terminated at one extremity by the “Lion’s Head,” and at the other by the “Lion’s Rump”—stood the fortifications known as the Rogge, Amsterdam, and Chavonne batteries, all of which commanded the anchorage and entrance to Table Bay, with their “thirty-twos” and formidable 68-pounders.

“The old place looks just the same as it did five years ago,” said Tom to himself as he leaned over the bulwarks, gazing landwards. “No change that I can see.”

In these go-ahead, high-pressure days, if we leave a town for any length of time it is hardly recognisable when we return: villas, “genteel residences,” “emporiums,” and hotels, the handiwork of Mr Jerry the speculative builder, cover the green fields where we were wont to play cricket and football; and even churches, chapels, and public institutions appear to have sprung up with mushroom-like rapidity. But fifty years ago things were very different—both in England and Cape Colony; people thought twice before they meddled with “bricks and mortar,” remembering the good old saw—“Fools build houses for wise men to live in.” Had our young friend left his native land in 1880 and returned in 1885, he would have opened his eyes with astonishment. The good citizens of Cape Town have manifested a wonderful “go-ahead” spirit of late! But Tom’s eyes are no longer scanning the shore, for he is eagerly watching the port-captain’s boat, as, manned by six stalwart Kroomen, it approaches the barque. “Tom,” says Mr Weston, “I haven’t seen my old friend Matthew Flinders for nearly a quarter of a century, but if he is not—halloa! where’s the lad got to?”

Tom had recognised the dear old *pater* seated beside the port-captain, and as the boat pulled alongside he rushed down the accommodation ladder so as to be the first to welcome him.

First greetings over, and the usual anxious questions answered, Tom thought of the Westons, and informed his father of their presence on board the barque; at the same time he briefly related the circumstances that led to their being there. The lad had set his heart upon having his new friends at Rustenburg, at any rate for the present; and he was not doomed to disappointment. Major Flinders at once hastened to meet his former school-fellow, and right cordially did he welcome him.

“I don’t forget,” said he, “that it was Maurice Weston who risked his life to save mine, when we were youngsters

together at Jamaica! But for you, Maurice, I should certainly have become the food for 'Port Royal Tom.' Now, remember, no roof but mine shelters you and yours even for a single night!—not a word, my dear old friend, not a word! If you had a score of children, my wife and I would welcome them for their father's sake. Please, say no more. Tom, my boy, get your traps together as sharp as you can, and then we'll go ashore."

Three hours later, Mr Weston, Grace, and George were seated in a four-horse Cape cart, with Tom and the Major, spinning along the Wynberg road at a good fourteen miles an hour, *en route* for Rustenburg Farm.

Chapter Six.

Tom Flinders' Home—"A friend in need Is a friend indeed!"—An Expedition proposed.

Five miles from Cape Town, on the Wynberg and Simon's Town road, lies the picturesque, wood-girt village of Rondebosch. The ground in rear of this village is beautifully timbered, and rises with a more or less gradual ascent, towards a mountain range extending from Table Bay to Muissenburg; an old fort and military station about two-and-a-half leagues from Simon's Town; and upon one of the rocky spurs of this range, overlooking Rondebosch, there used to stand an ancient Dutch block-house, from the summit of which a splendid view of the surrounding country, and "veldt," stretching far away to the foot of the Stellenbosch Hills, could be obtained, on a fair, clear day.

Between the "Block-house Hill"—as it was then called—and the village of Rondebosch lay Major Flinders' property, the "Rustenburg House Farm," consisting of some 300 morgens (about 600 acres) of carefully cultivated land and vineyards, with a substantial dwelling-house and farm buildings; the whole being screened from the highroad by plantations of well-grown trees. The Major also held 60 morgens of coarse grazing-land, with a cottage and stables, two miles away on the "veldt" to the north-east of Rondebosch.

So you see the Major's commission-money had been well invested; the more so, because—thanks to good management and untiring industry—the farm had greatly increased in value since he took possession of it.

One warm evening, some few weeks after the *Surat Castle* anchored in Table Bay, Major and Mrs Flinders, with Tom, his two sisters, and their guests the Westons, were seated on the "stoep" of Rustenburg House; the ladies busily engaged in mending a pair of canvas saddle-bags, whilst the Major, Mr Weston, and the two boys occupied themselves cleaning and oiling a couple of sporting rifles and a double-barrelled "Joe Manton"—which latter weapon Tom had brought out from England.

When Major Flinders heard of the misfortunes that had befallen Mr Weston he offered to assist him in any way that lay in his power—either by using his influence with the Governor to obtain for him some suitable appointment in Cape Colony, or by rendering him pecuniary aid. At the same time the Major pressed his friend to join him in farming at Rondebosch, rather than seek government employment, or continue his seafaring life.

Mrs Flinders warmly seconded her husband's proposition, pointing out that Rustenburg House was quite big enough to accommodate the two families, and declaring—with most unmistakable sincerity—how much it would please her to have Gracie Weston as a companion for her own girls, Ella and Maud.

"They can be educated together, Mr Weston," said the good lady, "and that, you know, will be a mutual advantage."

After a little consideration Weston thankfully accepted this offer, and decided to settle down at the Cape, and join his fortunes to those of his quondam school-fellow. The *Sea-mew* was insured for 1500 pounds (about one-third her value) and Mr Weston had 500 pounds in his London banker's hands; and the Major introduced him to a lawyer, who consented to advance him 250 pounds on his policy, and promised to take the necessary steps to secure the whole sum for which the ill-fated barque had been insured. So Mr Weston did not come into the "firm" quite empty-handed.

"By the way, my dear Mat," said Mr Weston as he proceeded to take the lock of one of the rifles to pieces, "we have been so engaged with lawyer Rutherhorn that we have forgotten all about that trip up country you were talking of the week before last. Suppose you tell us about it."

"Oh, I had not forgotten it," rejoined the Major; "indeed Kate and I were going over the 'pros and cons' this morning, and we came to the conclusion that—"

"What?" cried Tom eagerly, laying down the barrel he was cleaning.

"That Rugby hadn't cured our son and heir of his impatience and impetuosity," laughed Mrs Flinders, rising from her seat. "Come along, girls, we will leave the gentlemen to talk over this important project by themselves. There are your saddle-bags, Tom; but if your father takes you with him, you must have a new pair; these have seen their best days."

"Now, Maurice," said Major Flinders as soon as the ladies had disappeared into the house, "I will give you an idea of my plans, and see what you think of them. To begin with, I must tell you that an old brother officer of mine, Donald Jamieson, has gone in for breeding horses at his farm up country, 180 miles north-east of Mossel Bay. He has been exceptionally lucky, for it so happens that the district in which he has settled is wonderfully free from the fatal 'horse-sickness;' and that pest of the country the 'tsetse' is almost unknown there."

"What is the 'tsetse,' Major Flinders?" inquired George Weston, who was a lad with a thirst for knowledge of any description.

"A most intolerable nuisance, George," replied the Major; "in the shape of a small, brownish-yellow fly, which attacks horses and cattle, too often causing their death; for the bite of this insect produces blood-poisoning, and that

generally proves fatal. Oddly enough human beings rarely suffer any ill effects from the bite.”

“Jot that down, Geordie,” laughed Tom.

“I think I will,” quietly observed his friend, suiting the action to the word.

“Quite right, my boy,” said Major Flinders, with an approving nod; “pick up information whenever you can; you never can tell when it may not prove useful. But to proceed! Just now horses are very dear in these parts, and high prices are being offered in Cape Town even for unbroken colts and fillies. I heard some time ago from Jamieson that he had several young horses to dispose of, so I thought we might combine business and pleasure.”

“Good!” assented his friend.

“Jamieson mentioned in his letter,” continued the Major, “that he wanted two good Cape-carts and four sets of double-harness from Muter in Berge Street, besides a host of other things which are not to be had for love or money in his parts; and I propose, therefore, to purchase all he requires in Cape Town, go round by sea to Mossel Bay, and from thence ‘trek’ up country to Ralfontein, where he lives. If Jamieson has any suitable horses we can take them off his hands and bring them down to Cape Town; when the price we shall get for them will cover all our expenses, and leave a good profit into the bargain. As for sport, we shall have our fill of it; altogether the trip, at this season of the year, should prove most enjoyable. Now, what say you?”

“Capital! excellent, my dear Mat!” exclaimed Mr Weston. “When do you propose to start, and who are to form the party?”

“Well,” the Major answered, “I saw Muter yesterday, and he has three carts all but finished. By putting on extra hands—which he is quite willing to do—two can be got ready for shipment in a week from this, and the sets of harness will be ready at the same time. Now, old Van Ryn’s schooner, the *Knysna*, makes two trips to Mossel Bay every month, and I see that she is advertised to sail on Saturday week; so we might take our passage in her, and that will give us ample time to prepare for the journey.”

“Very good,” assented Mr Weston. “And who are to go?”

“Why, there will be you and I, the two boys, and Patrick Keown, and Black William; six all told—a number sufficient to bring down a score of horses, and to hold our own should any roving bands of Caffres or Bosjesmans venture to attack us, which is not very probable.”

“How do you propose to travel back, father?” asked Tom, who was highly excited at the prospect of the trip.

“Ride, my boy; ride the whole distance from Ralfontein, and let the led-horses carry our baggage. I shall take a dozen pack-saddles with us, for Jamieson is certain to have at least twenty horses to dispose of.”

And after some further discussion, in which Mrs Flinders was invited to take part, the Major’s proposals were carried “nem con.”

Chapter Seven.

The Start from Mossel Bay—On “Trek”—Outspanned—Round the Camp Fire.

“The carts are all corrict, sorr, and ready for the line of march,” reported Mr Patrick Keown, whilom a troop sergeant-major in the “Cape Mounted Riflemen,” but now his former captain’s major-domo, master-of-the-horse, and general factotum. “And, sorr,” he went on, bringing his dexter hand down from the salute, and assuming a less poker-like attitude and a more confidential manner, “the mules we’ve hired from the postmaster here, seem loikely to suit us—that’s to say, fairly well. They’re good animals, sorr, barrin’ the off-leader of the second team, and he’s a terrible kicker, and did his best to break Black William’s leg just now. And thin, sorr, there is another that’s a bit contrary in harness—but shure now, that’s no matther; we’ll soon break the baste in! I’ll lay me quarter’s pinsion that they’ll have larned betther manners before we outspan this evening.”

“No doubt of it, Patrick,” rejoined Major Flinders, who was standing on the stoep of the hotel, with his long bamboo whip in hand, listening to the ex-sergeant’s report. “No doubt of it,” said he as soon as he could edge in a word; “we shall manage them all right! But it’s quite time we were on the road, for we ought to cover forty miles before sundown. Now then, Maurice! Come along, my boys; hurry up!”

The Major and his party had landed the previous morning at Mossel Bay, with all their goods and chattels; and now in front of a long one-storied building, dignified by the name of “Moorhead’s Royal Star and Garter Hotel,” two well-built white canvas tilted Cape-carts, fresh from the hands of Mr Muter of Berge Street, were drawn up, each being *horsed* by a team of six mules hired from the postmaster of the district.

One cart was packed with a variety of useful articles—from a saddle to a screw-driver—ordered by Captain Jamieson from the Cape Town storekeepers; whilst in the other cart the Major and his companions were to travel.

Under each cart was slung a strong “witte els” (a soft, tough wood) box, containing axes, hammers, saws, and other tools, a supply of nails and screws, straps and buckles, a small coil of “half-inch,” and some stout cord and twine; so that in the event of a break-down, repairs might be executed on the spot Major Flinders and his faithful henchman Patrick Keown had travelled too much in South Africa to think of starting on a long journey without being prepared for emergencies.

As the crow flies, the distance from Mossel Bay to Ralfontein was rather more than one hundred and eighty miles, but by road it was nearer two hundred and fifty. The journey there was to be got over as rapidly as possible without unduly pressing the teams, and there were to be no unnecessary stoppages by the way. The return journey would be a much more leisurely affair, for it was the Major's intention to ride from Ralfontein to Rondebosch, a distance of at least three hundred and fifty miles (instead of returning to Mossel Bay, and from thence by sea to Cape Town), and to take his own time on the road, so as to bring home his equine purchases in good condition.

For the first two or three days after leaving Mossel Bay our travellers had an easy time and were not called upon to rough it in the smallest degree. The road they followed—one of the best in the colony—led through a beautiful fertile district, studded with prosperous-looking farm-houses around which vineyards and orange groves flourished in wonderful luxuriance. At these farms they were lodged and entertained with a hospitality worthy of the patriarchal ages, so that, as yet, there was no "camping out."

Soon, however, the country presented a wilder, but no less beautiful aspect, the road became a mere track, and our friends found themselves journeying across tracts of rough, uncultivated land, through wooded valleys and steep rocky defiles, aglow with the brilliant crimson and amber blossoms of the aloe; here for miles they did not meet a human creature, or see a house of any description, and the silence of these vast solitudes grew almost oppressive.

On the evening of the fourth day they arrived at a romantic spot five-and-twenty miles from any civilised habitation—the nearest being a German mission station at Ryk's Drift—and here the Major decided to outspan, beneath the shade of a fine tope of trees, near to a "donga," or dry watercourse. It was a most suitable halting-place! A tiny "spruit," or streamlet, trickled amidst the reeds and boulders that lay all along the "donga," and crossing the track close by the "bivouac," formed a shallow, but clear pool, at the foot of a grassy eminence, which was topped by a thicket of silver trees, aloes, and flowering shrubs.

On every side the various tribes of the vegetable kingdom throve luxuriously, perfuming the air; whilst in the distance the foliage and coppice presented a thousand lively and variegated tints most pleasing to the eye.

The mules having been knee-haltered and turned out to graze, under charge of the Hottentot, Black William, the Major and his companions set to work to light a fire and put the camp-kettle on to boil, and before long they were discussing some excellent broiled venison and ship's biscuit, washed down by copious draughts of black coffee.

"This is what I call uncommonly jolly!" exclaimed Tom as they sat round the camp fire after supper; "ever so much better than putting up at a farm-house."

"But how will you like taking your turn of 'sentry-go' to-night, Master Tom?" asked Patrick Keown.

"Ah, to be sure!" put in the Major. "Two hours at a stretch, you know, Tom; and we shall expect you to be on the '*qui-vive*;' no sleeping on your post, young man!"

"No fear of that, father," retorted the boy with a good-humoured laugh. "But I say, do you really think there's any likelihood of our being attacked?"

"Well, it is within the bounds of possibility that some wild beast might take a fancy to one of the mules, or a roving Bushman or Hottentot to our rifles," was his father's reply; "so it will be best to keep a night-watch."

"I suppose there are no lions in these parts?" inquired George Weston.

"I should think not, George," answered Major Flinders. "There is no doubt that they, and many other savage beasts, have retreated before the progress of European colonisation, and are now very rarely to be seen, except further north and east. Still they are not extinct, even in this district."

"Plenty lion in Bosjesman's country," observed Black William; "an' dey terrible savage dere too! Eat up poor black mans, like de silver jackal eat missis' chickens; but dey seldom touch de white mans. Tink de black moch nicer."

"Find them more *gamey*, I presume," was Mr Weston's sotto voce remark.

"I have heard several curious instances of the unwillingness of lions to attack a white man, especially if he shows a bold front," said the Major, refilling his pipe; "and I will relate one that I can vouch for. During the expedition against the Fitcani tribe in '28, I had attached to my troop as volunteers two Cape Dutchmen—Hendrik and Gert Eoos. You'll recollect them, Patrick?"

"Shure I do, sorr," replied the ex-rifleman. "Hendrik Eoos saved me loife at Schepers Drift, but I nearly broke me heart thrying to kape him clane! He and his brother were the bravest and dhirtiest men I iver came across!"

"Well," continued the Major after one or two draws at his long Dutch pipe, "the brothers Roos were renowned as mighty hunters, and it was said that they had killed upwards of thirty lions in their time, to say nothing of other big game. But you know that 'the pitcher that goes too often to the well runs a good chance of getting smashed,' and Master Hendrik Roos on one occasion went very near proving the truth of the old proverb. He was hunting alone in the wilds when suddenly he found himself face to face with an enormous lion, who, so far from retiring before the white man, seemed determined to dispute with him the right of way. Hendrik dismounted, threw his reins over his arm, and, waiting until the lion was within twenty paces and couched and in the act of springing, took careful aim at his forehead, but the moment he pressed the trigger his horse started, the reins broke, and, worse than all, his bullet missed its mark!

"The lion bounded forward, and at a few paces' distance confronted the intrepid hunter, who now stood defenceless—his 'roer' (smooth-bore gun for big game) empty, his horse fled; but he showed no sign of fear.

“Man and beast stared hard at each other for some little time, and at length the latter slowly retired backwards, whereupon Hendrik began to reload his gun. At this movement the lion growled and came forward again. The hunter stood stock-still, motionless as a statue, and again the lion retired. Once more Hendrik attempted to ram home his bullet, and once more his formidable adversary advanced, growling ominously. Hendrik fixed his eyes upon him, and the lion seemed confused—halted for a moment, and stood lashing his flanks with his tail, growling all the while; then of a sudden, unable to face any longer the stern gaze of the man, the savage beast turned about and fairly took to his heels; and so Hendrik Roos was saved.”

“Well, he *was* a plucky chap!” exclaimed Tom. “I wouldn’t have stood in his shoes for something!”

“You see that this Dutch hunter possessed an intimate knowledge of the nature of the animal he was pitted against; and knowledge is power,” observed Mr Weston. “But, talking of wild animals, I remember that it was not very far from Mossel Bay that I fell in, for the first and last time in my life, with a wild elephant. It was in ’16, just before I ‘shipped the swab,’ and I was then acting third ‘luff’ of the *Phaeton*. We had been on the Cape station a few months, and our skipper had been ordered round to the Knysna to make a report as to the feasibility of forming a government ship-building establishment on the banks of the river.

“Whilst there I went out duck-shooting with the purser, who had the reputation of being a thorough sportsman and an excellent shot. We went some miles up country, and I soon found that my shipmate, though a capital shooter, was a precious bad hitter; and got through a large amount of ammunition in a very short time with no appreciable results.

“Well, after blazing away half the day without bagging a single bird, we came to a large pool of water surrounded with very high grass (some of it quite ten feet in height) and abounding with wild ducks and geese.

“‘Now’s our chance, Wraggles!’ I exclaimed, bringing my fowling-piece to the shoulder. ‘Let fly into the middle of them!’

“Bang! bang! went our guns, and at least one duck fell a victim to our unerring aim.

“But ere we could secure the butchered birds the welkin rang with an awful roar, and the whole pool was in a state of commotion. The next moment an enormous elephant rushed from out the grass, trumpeting loudly and striking the grass with his trunk.

“Neither the purser nor I had ever seen a wild elephant before, and we had no wish for a nearer inspection; so, leaving our slaughtered ducks to their fate, we took to our heels and never stopped until we reached a place of safety.”

“Well, you certainly did not show a bold front on that occasion,” laughed the Major.

“No, indeed,” rejoined his friend. “But I can assure you that few men could have presented a broader back than did the gallant purser; and it has always been a mystery to me how a man of his rotundity got over the ground at such a wonderful pace. He beat me by a good fifty yards. Now who is going to take first watch?”

“Black William is first on the roster, sorr, and I shall relave him,” answered Patrick Keown; and the Hottentot having been duly posted, the others lay down before the camp fire and were soon wrapped in sleep—sleep—

> “The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
> Great nature’s second course,
> Chief nourisher in life’s feast!”

Chapter Eight.

Tom gives the Alarm—Rifle versus Assegai—Triumph of the White Man!—“Kicking Jan” outkicks himself—A Catastrophe—Arrival at Ralfontein.

The night passed away quietly and day dawned with all the splendour of a South African morning. By five o’clock the little camp was astir, and our friends, having first enjoyed a refreshing dip in the clear pool at the foot of the hill, hastened to prepare breakfast; whilst Patrick Keown and his sable ally busied themselves making ready for the day’s journey.

“Well, Tom, how did you get on between one and three am?” was Mr Weston’s first question when they sat down to break their fast with the remains of last night’s supper. “Found it rather lonely, didn’t you?”

“I should just think I did,” was the candid reply; “horribly lonely! And I was obliged to keep trotting backwards and forwards like a hyaena in a cage to prevent myself nodding; not that I should have minded that, if I’d only had someone to talk to.”

“Well, you look fresh as a four-year-old this morning,” Major Flinders said. “I’m certain that a trip of this sort is a capital thing for getting young fellows into condition.”

“No doubt of it,” assented his friend; “so long as it is not attended with too much fatigue or hardship.”

As soon as Tom had finished his breakfast he expressed his intention of taking a look round before they inspanned.

"Don't go far, my boy; keep within hail," said his father. "We shall make a start directly Keown has the carts ready."

"All right, father," replied the boy, taking up his rifle. "I'll just stroll up the donga and see if I can get a crack at something or other. There's no fresh meat in the larder, you know." And off he trudged—

"Unknowing what he sought,
And whistling as he went for want of thought."

Tom had not gone many yards when his attention was attracted by a rustling amongst the reeds, and looking round, his quick eyes espied several dark forms stealing down the watercourse towards the bivouac. He at once scented danger, but had the presence of mind not to show that he was alarmed; and turning coolly about he returned to his friends and informed them of what he had seen. Hardly had he given the alarm when thirty or forty dusky figures rushed down the donga and advanced with threatening gestures—brandishing their weapons and uttering loud cries of defiance.

"Inspan, Patrick!" shouted Major Flinders to his servant as he seized his rifle. "We can keep these black rascals off until you are ready."

In order that Keown and his assistant should have time to collect the few articles which had been unloaded from the carts (the Major was not the man to abandon any of his impedimenta) and inspan, it was necessary to meet the enemy in the open and take up a position between them and the carts. This of course somewhat exposed the little party; but Major Flinders was pretty well sure that his assailants belonged to a roving tribe—half Bosjesmans, half Korannas—more renowned for thievish propensities than for valour or warlike qualities; and he felt satisfied that if he and his friends received them boldly they would beat a hasty retreat. These dusky warriors were indeed but sorry specimens of their race; they were short, narrow-chested, and hippy, whilst their faces were of a very low type, with thick projecting lips, small depressed noses, and roguish shifting eyes. Their weapons consisted of rough, ill-made assegais, iron-wood clubs, or knobkerries, and small oval, hide-covered shields. However, seeing how small a force they had to contend with, and animated by the hope of plunder, the dingy troop advanced with more confidence and *élan* than might have been expected.

"Give them one barrel first," said Major Flinders, bringing his rifle to the "present." "Take a steady aim, and low. Now—fire!" The four rifles rang out nearly together, and three of the enemy rolled over and over, but their fall did not stop the rush of the others; on they came, bent on the destruction of the little band of white men.

"Fire again!" shouted the Major as he discharged his second barrel.

This time every bullet found its billet, and four Caffres bit the dust; whereupon their comrades pulled up, sent a few assegais whistling harmlessly through the air, and then went to the right-about and bolted. In the excitement of this, their first fight, Tom and George would have followed up the flying enemy had not the Major restrained them, saying:

"I have no wish to kill those poor benighted creatures save in self-defence. Go and help Patrick to inspan, and let us be off as quickly as possible."

"They're not gone yet!" exclaimed Mr Weston, seeing several woolly heads pop up amongst the shrubs and bushes to the left of the donga.

"No, indeed! And unless I'm greatly mistaken they intend to renew their attack," rejoined his friend. "They've more pluck and determination than I thought for! Get the carts and mules under cover of the trees!"

Patrick Keown at once dragged the carts into the centre of the tope, whilst the boys and Black William drove in the mules and tethered them between the carts, forming a sort of laager, into which the Major and Mr Weston retired. They all took up their rifles and opened fire upon the advancing enemy, who showed no lack of courage, and sent their assegais hurtling amongst the trees in a style that would have done credit to Zulu warriors.

But they did not attempt to come to close quarters, their sole object being to carry off their dead and wounded, not to renew their attack on the white men, whose terrible rifles had already done to death so many of their company. Had they been able to explain their intentions they might have done this without let or hindrance; as it was, they lost three more of their number.

At last Black William divined what they were about, and begged his master to cease firing for a minute or two. The savages then rushed forward, caught up their unfortunate comrades, and bolted back in double-quick time.

"The beggars are off now, and no mistake!" cried Tom. "Let us see what damage they have done us."

"First and foremost there are two mules killed," responded his father; "Sandboy and Admiral—the best animals in either team."

"And Kicking Jan's got an ugly wound in his flank," put in Keown. "Bad cess to the contrary baste; he's sure to git into mischief if there's mischief about!"

"I got hurt too," said Black William with a grin, showing a tear in his sleeve, which was covered with blood. "And dere's young Mas'r George been hit by dem niggers!"

An assegai had indeed grazed George Weston's shoulder, but happily no serious injury had been done to any of the party—nothing, in fact, that cold water and a strip of lint would not cure.

The dead mules were now stripped of their harness; Kicking Jan's wound was dressed—an operation that the "contrary baste," true to his nature, resented to the best of his power; and the travellers resumed their journey. No sooner were they well on the move, and at a respectable distance from their late encampment, than the discomfited savages once more appeared on the scene, and fell tooth and nail on the carcasses of the slain mules.

"Bedad!" exclaimed the ex-sergeant when he saw the blacks cutting and hacking away with their short assegais, "they'll be having a foine gorge now! Sorra a bit of flesh will they lave on the bones of poor Sandboy and Admiral."

"They have paid dearly for their feast," observed Mr Weston, who was seated beside him. "Are all the Caffres such gluttons?"

"Indade they are, sorr," was the reply. "Just sit the best of them down before a dead animal of any sort, from an elephant to a dossie, and they'd go on eatin' till they were fit to bust."

Deprived of the two best mules in the teams, and having a third partially disabled, the travellers did not get so quickly over the ground as they had hitherto done, and it was some time after dusk before they arrived at Ryk's Drift. Here they were entertained by the German missionary, and on the following morning they started on the final stage but one of their journey.

Soon after leaving Ryk's Drift the travellers came in sight of a range of mountains, whose varied outline struck out into bold, precipitous spurs, or shot up into craggy peaks, the summits of which shone in the African sunshine almost like snow.

"On the far side of yonder hills lies Ralfontein," said the Major, "and crossing them will prove the toughest job of the whole journey."

"That I can believe," rejoined his friend. "My admiration is now changed to consternation! How ever will our mules contrive to drag the carts up such precipices?"

"As I said before, it will prove a very tough job," Major Flinders answered; "but 'where there's a will there's a way.'"

"I shall believe that when I *see* the way," laughed Mr Weston. "At present I must confess that I am sceptical, for in all my varied experience I have never come across a quadruped that could fly! However, it is not for me to give my opinion; I am but a fish out of water!"

Towards noon the travellers commenced the ascent, and right toilsome it proved.

The way—for road, or even track, it certainly could not be called—was rugged in the extreme, and full of rocks and gullies, with here and there a narrow chasm over which the carts were dragged with the greatest risk and difficulty.

Every one dismounted and lent a helping hand; the Major and his servants managing the teams, with much cracking of whips, and loud shouts of warning or encouragement; whilst Mr Weston and the boys, literally "put their shoulders to the wheel."

"Oh, for the turnpike roads of old England!" sang, or rather gasped, Mr Weston, when for about the twentieth time they halted to allow the distressed mules to recover themselves a little. "This is desperate work! eh, boys?"

"Slightly warm," said Tom, mopping his perspiring face. "It takes the superfluous flesh off one's ribs."

"Shure, Misther Weston, we're nearly at the top," said Patrick Keown encouragingly, "and thin you know, sorr, we'll go down the other side noice and aisy."

"A little too 'aisy,' perchance," muttered Weston. "Facilis descensus!"

At length the highest point of the ascent was reached; but this proved the most hazardous part, as the track swept round a precipitous ledge jutting out from a spur of the mountain, so narrow that it hardly allowed six inches grace to the wheels. Along this dangerous path the carts were taken at a snail's pace; the one containing Captain Jamieson's goods and chattels leading the way; whilst the other (which, save for a few articles used when outspanning, was empty) followed at an interval of twenty paces; the mules going very gingerly, for, surefooted though they were, it was no easy matter for them to keep on their legs.

At this critical moment a large bird swept down from its nest in the overhanging cliff, and with a piercing cry flew close over the tilt of the hinder cart. Now, as ill-luck would have it, "Kicking Jan" was one of the four mules attached to this cart, and no sooner did that contrary and troublesome animal hear the bird's shrill call than he stopped dead; then down went his head and up went his heels. This unseemly behaviour set the other mules plunging and kicking, and before Black William, who had charge of the team, could quiet them, the cart was upset, and fell half over the ledge; the wheel-mules coming down on their sides at the same time.

Another plunge—a violent struggle—a wild snort of terror! and over the precipice rolled the cart, carrying the wheelers with it.

The moment "Kicking Jan" and the other leader felt the traces jerked and then tighten, they ceased kicking, and strained every nerve to retain their footing. But their efforts were in vain! The weight the poor brutes had to sustain was too much for them; they were dragged over the side of the ledge, and down went the cart and its team: down—down—down; crashing through trees and bushes and striking against rocks in their headlong descent; down they fell to the very bottom of the precipice!

Horrified at this terrible catastrophe, the Major and Mr Weston ran back and found Black William lying in the middle of

the narrow path; a broken "reim" clenched in his hand.

"Are you much hurt?" inquired Major Flinders, picking him up.

"Not mine vault, baas," blubbered the Hottentot with a frightened stare; "not mine vault."

"No, no, William," said his master; "we know that. You did all you could. Are you hurt?"

"I got kick in mine stomach; and all mine vind go," was the reply.

"And our profits have gone with it, I'm afraid," said Mr Weston dolefully. "'Pon my word, I'm a regular Jonah, and bring misfortune on all my friends!"

"Don't talk like that, Maurice," said the Major sharply. "Let us thank Heaven it is no worse—that no life has been lost."

"And it might have been the other cart, you know," put in Tom, who had joined them. "That *would* have been a smash!"

"Well, Mat, I am thankful it is no worse—on your account!" Mr Weston said. "Let us reckon up the damage."

Major Flinders smiled, and replied:—"There's the cart, forty pounds; four mules, at, let me say, twelve pounds a head—that's as much as they were worth!—forty-eight pounds; harness and sundries another fifteen. I think a hundred will cover everything; so we sha'n't lose all our profits, Maurice. And now, *en avant*!"

The travellers accomplished the descent of the mountain without further mishap, and found shelter that night at a solitary farm situated in the plain below.

Here they remained for a couple of days, for the mules were regularly knocked up, and required a long rest before they were in a condition to travel the last stage—a distance of forty miles.

Early on the morning of the second day they once more inspanned, and the team being freshened considerably by their twenty-four hours "play," they got over the ground in capital style, and reached Ralfontein an hour before sundown.

Chapter Nine.

Ralfontein—Captain Jamieson and his family—Business before pleasure!—The last evening at the Farm—A startling proposal.

Captain Jamieson's farm was situated in the midst of a fertile tract of country, bounded on the north and east by ranges of lofty mountains and hills; beyond which lay vast plains and dense forests, abounding with wild animals and members of the feathered tribes, of every size and description—from the huge elephant to the diminutive "zenik;" from the ostrich to the tiny "creeper."

The house, stables, and farm buildings stood on the summit of an eminence, which rose somewhat abruptly at the junction of two narrow, but swift streams; they were built in the form of a quadrangle, and were admirably planned for defence.

The pasturage in the immediate neighbourhood of the farm was remarkably rich, wood and water were plentiful, the climate was all that could be desired; yet this lovely district was but thinly populated, and the "Squire of Ralfontein" was practically "monarch of all he surveyed," there being no other settlement within five-and-thirty miles, and no town or village within double that distance.

Donald Jamieson was—what our Yankee cousins would call—a "very remarkable man." He had just turned his sixtieth year, but was as hearty and active as a man of forty. The youngest son of a poor, but proud, Scotch laird, he had taken the "king's shilling" when a lad of eighteen, and after seeing much active service in all parts of the world, was awarded an ensign's commission in the "Cape Mounted Riflemen;" in which corps he remained until he obtained his troop, when he retired on half-pay, and took to farming. He was now considered one of the most successful farmers in South Africa, and was also noted for his knowledge of the country, his skill as a hunter, and the influence he had acquired over the natives.

(Although a mounted corps, the junior subs, of the C.M.R. held the rank of *ensign*, not *cornet*.)

When Matthew Flinders exchanged from the —th Foot to the Cape Mounted Riflemen he was attached to Jamieson's troop, and from that time they had been on the closest terms of friendship. Captain Jamieson was a widower; his family consisted of three sons and two daughters. Frank, the eldest boy, had just turned eighteen; his brothers, James and David, were sixteen and fourteen respectively. The girls were—but no, we must not divulge the young ladies' ages! suffice it to say that Miss Janet (who since Mrs Jamieson's death had acted as her father's housekeeper) was well out of her teens, whilst Miss Elsie had not long jumped into hers. A pair of bonnier lasses could not have been found in the whole of Cape Colony!

The young Jamiesons assisted their father in looking after the farm and the men employed upon it; of whom there were between twenty and thirty—mostly Hottentots, Korannas and Griquas, or "Bastaards;" these lived in decent cottages on the estate with their wives and families, and were all trained to the use of fire-arms; thus in the event of Ralfontein being attacked, it could be defended by a well-disciplined and well-armed garrison.

“Business first, pleasure afterwards,” was Major Flinders’ motto; so on the morning after he arrived at Ralfontein he informed his host of his wish to purchase some horses.

“You could not have come to me at a better time, Mat,” was the captain’s reply. “I have now nearly seventy young uns—two, three, and four-year olds—and about half as many aged horses in the paddocks and stables; and early next month I expect a drove of brood mares and colts from Campbell’s Doorp. You can take your pick of those that are here or wait for the others.”

Major Flinders replied, that as he could not remain at Ralfontein more than a week he must choose from the horses then on the farm; so the next three days were spent in examining and trying several “young uns,” of which the Major ultimately purchased fifteen, making up the score with older horses.

Tom and his crony George Weston had hoped to see some big shooting during their stay at the Jamiesons’; but in this they were disappointed, as, it being a busy season at the farm, their young hosts had no opportunity of going out with them; however, like sensible lads, they contented themselves with roaming about the estate shooting hares and guinea-fowl, and assisting in the selection and trial of the horses; thus they found the time pass very quickly and the last day of their visit to the farm came round all too soon...

“Well, my lads what think you of Ralfontein?” asked their hospitable host as they sat round the supper-table the evening before their departure.

“It is the prettiest and jolliest place I ever stayed at,” cried George, with unmistakable earnestness; “that is to say, except—except *Rustenburg*,” he added, with some confusion.

“I only wish the pater would give up Rustenburg, and settle here!” exclaimed Tom. “How jolly we should all be together, and what sport we’d have!”

“That is exactly what our friend wishes me to do, Tom,” laughed the Major; “but I didn’t think he would have found a supporter in you!”

“Yes, that is true,” said their host. “I tell your father that he could sell Rustenburg for a large sum now, and once up here he would make no end of money. You and Weston must really think it over, Mat.”

“And then you know, father,” put in Tom, “when you had made your fortune, you might return to England, and buy back Flinders Court.”

“That’s your ambition, is it!” the captain said. “You want to become a Marlshire squire! But you must see a little more of your native land first, Tom; and I should say that a couple of years’ service in the ‘C.M.R.’ would be the best way of seeing it. Mat, my friend, let us have a glass together and drink to the welfare of the old corps?”

“With all my heart, Donald! you and I have both served in other regiments, but I am sure our happiest days were spent with the ‘Green Jackets.’”

“Do you think you will come up here, father?” inquired Tom as soon as the old comrades had drunk their toast—with “all the honours,” as old comrades should do.

“We must see what your mother says, Tom; such a ‘migration’ is not to be thought lightly of,” the Major replied. “In the meantime it may satisfy you to know that our good friend has invited us to spend a month with him next year, just to see how we like it. And now, as we have to be in the saddle by cock-crow, I think you youngsters had best turn in.”

Chapter Ten.

Farewell to Ralfontein.

“Good-bye, and a pleasant journey to you,” said Captain Jamieson, who, with his sons and daughters, had turned out at daybreak to see the last of his departing guests. “Follow the route that I have mapped out, and I stake my reputation that you will find it comparatively easy travelling.”

“Shall we come across plenty of game, Captain Jamieson?” was Tom’s eager question, as he took leave of his host. “I am very anxious to try this rifle.”

“But you had a famous chance coming up here, Tom,” laughed Frank Jamieson. “There’s no doubt that one or two of the blacks, who attacked you, fell before your aim.”

“That’s all very well, Frank,” retorted Tom, “but niggers aren’t *game*, you know. I want to try my hand at a tiger or buck. I should very much like to send my old form-master a handsome ‘kaross,’ made up of skins of my own shooting.”

“Well, my boy,” said Captain Jamieson, “if you knock over one-thousandth part of the game you see ’twixt this and Rondebosch, you’ll be able to present karosses to every master at Rugby, and feather-cloaks to their wives and daughters; ay, and clothe the elevens with tiger-skins into the bargain. Once more, good-bye! Hope to see you all again next year.”

“Good-bye! good-bye!” echoed his stalwart sons.

“Adieu! adieu! take care of yourselves,” chorused the young ladies. And amidst the waving of white handkerchiefs and regretful farewells the little cavalcade moved off.

Our friends had spent a very pleasant week at Ralfontein, and now they were starting on their return journey, with the twenty horses which they had purchased from Captain Jamieson. Several of their purchases were already broken to the saddle, and had also been trained to behave steadily under fire; four of these horses the Major and Mr Weston decided to retain for their own stable, to be ridden by themselves and the boys. Tom’s “mount” was a useful red “skimmel” (roan) standing just under fifteen hands; a well-looking animal enough, with good shoulders, and clean, well-shaped legs, but—like most Cape horses—inclined to be “goose-rumped.” George rode at least twelve pounds lighter than did his friend, so Mr Weston picked him out a smaller horse—a nice-looking quiet little grey.

Patrick Keown, who was an excellent rough-rider, chose a wild half-broken bay.

“I loike to combine business wid plisure,” quoth he, when he gave his troublesome nag the first bucketting. “Shure, I’ll ‘take the gay impidince out of his tail,’ afore he’s much oulder!”

Black William was mounted on an ugly raw-boned animal that matched him in colour.

The route which Captain Jamieson had advised the Major to follow lay across the Middel Roggeveldt, then over the Groote Karoo, striking into the Beaufort-Worcester track near to Kudos Kop. From thence the road followed the course of the Gamska River for some miles, passed close to the base of the western extremity of the Black Mountains, and so through the Worcester and Stellenbosch districts to Cape Town, the actual distance which the travellers would have to cover being between 300 and 400 miles.

The Middel Roggeveldt was traversed without adventure; they saw plenty of game, and Tom and George proved themselves no mean shots with gun and rifle; but, as the former truly observed, nothing happened to crow or fuss about.

The first difficulty the party met with occurred after they crossed the Newied Bergen. A small river flows at the foot of this range of mountains, the road from the north-east crossing it at a place called Hottentot’s Drift. On arriving at the drift, Major Flinders found that, instead of a shallow river, a hundred and fifty yards wide at the most, he would have to cross a small inundated plain; for the river had overflowed its banks, and laid all the low land at the foot of the Newied Bergen, under water.

It was rather awkward work getting the horses over. Some of them did not like it at all, and plunged and snorted with terror; others did not seem to mind the water, but then they must needs try to roll. However, after some trouble they were all got across; and as it was then getting late, the major ordered a “halt,” and bivouacked for the night on the banks of the river.

Chapter Eleven.

How Tom and his friend went a-hunting; and what befell them.

Early next morning the march was resumed across the Groote Karoo—a vast undulating plain clothed with long waving grass, and studded with acacias, mimosa bushes, and camel-thorn—and towards noon on the succeeding day the travellers came in sight of the Black Mountains. The country through which they had now to pass was still open, but the slopes of the neighbouring hills were thickly wooded; here game of all descriptions was abundant, and the spoor of deer and other animals was frequently to be seen.

“Look, father!” cried George Weston, as they were traversing at a foot-pace a fine savannah. “Look, Major Flinders, is not that a herd of deer feeding over yonder?”

The Major drew rein, and unstrapping his field-glass looked in the direction indicated by his young friend.

“You’re right, George!” he presently exclaimed; “they’re hartebeest. I say, Maurice, suppose we send the youngsters after them on their own account? They are quite old enough to go without ‘leading reins.’”

“Oh, do, father!” cried George eagerly.

“I’m sure you may trust us,” put in Tom.

“I am quite willing, Mat,” replied Mr Weston, smiling at the boys’ eagerness. “After all, there’s nothing like letting lads shift for themselves to make them self-reliant. Let them go, by all means, say I.” Whereupon Master Tom gave vent to an ear-splitting “who-o-o-p,” for which display of excitement he was called to order by the pater.

“Gently! gently, my boy,” said the Major, raising his hand; “don’t get excited, or I shall have to withdraw my permission.”

Tom looked very crestfallen.

“Now, listen to me both of you,” continued his father. “Do you see that curious-shaped hill looming in the distance?”

“A little to our right, and about five miles off?” asked George Weston.

“Five!” exclaimed Major Flinders. “It is nearer five-and-twenty! But that is the hill I mean. Well, that is Kudos Kop, and we shall this evening encamp on the banks of the Gamska, about seven miles this side of it; so now if you lose sight

of us, as you're pretty sure to do, you will know in what direction to steer."

"I have my pocket-compass," said Tom, producing one from his breast-pocket.

"That's right! Now, see that your water-bottles are full, and put a pound or two of biscuit and some 'biltong' (pieces of beef, venison, or other meat dried in the sun) into your wallets; then you'll be independent for the next forty-eight hours. Bear in mind one thing! never when attacking any animal have both your rifles unloaded at the same time; always be prepared for danger, as that is the readiest way of escaping it. Be very careful of your horses; don't over-ride them, and look out for sore backs."

"All right, father, we'll not come to grief if we can help it," rejoined Tom, tightening his girths. "Now, Patrick, hand us over the 'grub'—there, that'll be plenty. Are you ready, George?"

"Yes, quite ready," was the reply. "Come along!"

"Mind you approach the herd to leeward," shouted the Major, as the boys galloped off.

A smart "scurry" over the yielding turf soon brought our young sportsmen within three or four hundred yards of the unsuspecting hartebeest, when Tom called to his companion to pull up.

"We mustn't go at them with a rush," said he. "In fact, I almost think our best plan would be to tether the horses to these trees and stalk the herd on foot. What do you say?"

"I agree with you, old fellow," replied young Weston. "You see we're not much accustomed to shoot from the saddle." And so they both dismounted, tied up their horses to separate trees (for Tom's nag was rather given to using his heels), and having unslung and loaded their rifles with more than usual care, they advanced towards the hartebeest. The hartebeest—generally supposed to be the *Bubalus* of the ancients—is one of the commonest breed of deer in Southern Africa. It stands from four to four-and-a-half feet at the withers, the form of its body being something between that of a red-deer and a heifer; the tail reaches nearly to the hocks and is terminated by a tuft of coarse hair. The head of the hartebeest somewhat resembles that of an ox, but the ears are "asinine" in shape, and the eyes are placed very high; below each eye is a pore from which exudes a matter: this matter the Hottentots preserve as a rare and valuable medicine, but what diseases it is supposed to cure we cannot say. The hartebeest is furnished with a pair of strong black horns, embossed with rings; the horns are quite close together at the base, diverging upwards, and at the tops bending rearwards in a horizontal direction almost to the tips, which are several inches apart. The colour of this animal is a dark cinnamon, except the hind-quarter and inside the thighs, which are of a yellowish white; the face and the fore-part of the legs are marked with black.

When galloping, the hartebeest appear to go heavily with a donkey-like action; but nevertheless they get over the ground quite as fast as other large deer; if, when followed, they manage to get ahead, they are apt to stop short and gaze at their pursuers. When hard pressed, this animal—like the wood-antelope and nil-ghau—drops on his knees and shows fight.

Cautiously the two boys crept up to the herd, keeping well under cover of the bushes and tufts of karoo-grass.

"Now, Tom," said George, who, by the way, was much the best shot; "we're well within range. I'll take that big fellow standing near those mimosa bushes."

"All right, old boy," replied Tom. "I shall aim at the buck grazing directly in front of us; it is the easiest shot of the two, I think."

Bang! bang!

"Missed, by all that's unlucky!" cried Tom. "Here goes again!" He then discharged his second barrel with no better effect; and the herd, alarmed by the report of the rifles, galloped off towards the hills. George Weston had wounded his buck slightly, but not sufficiently to prevent him from following his companions.

The boys at once doubled back to the spot where they had left their horses, and untethering them, sprang in the saddle.

Away they raced after the herd, but the latter had got a splendid start and kept well ahead, until they reached some low, forest-clad hills, which crossed the plain from north to south. Beyond these hills the ground was covered with trees and tangled brushwood. The hartebeest ascended the nearest hill and disappeared from sight, and the boys then pulled up their distressed and panting horses and looked at each other with inquiring eyes.

"What's to be done?" asked Tom. "The nags are pretty well pumped, I guess."

"Yes, indeed," assented his companion; "we came the last mile or so at racing pace. I should never have thought the hartebeest could travel so fast! Shall we go back?"

"What! empty-handed?" cried Tom. "Not if I know it, old chap. At any rate we might overtake the beast you wounded. I'm sure you hit him hard."

"Well, we can't gallop up those hills, that's certain," returned young Weston. "Suppose we make for that ravine; no doubt we shall meet the herd again, if we have patience. But it's no use making a 'stern chase' of it; we must try and get round him."

Tom nodding assent, they rode forward at a gentle pace, to allow their horses to recover wind, and presently they entered a narrow ravine, the precipitous sides of which were covered with arboreous and succulent plants.

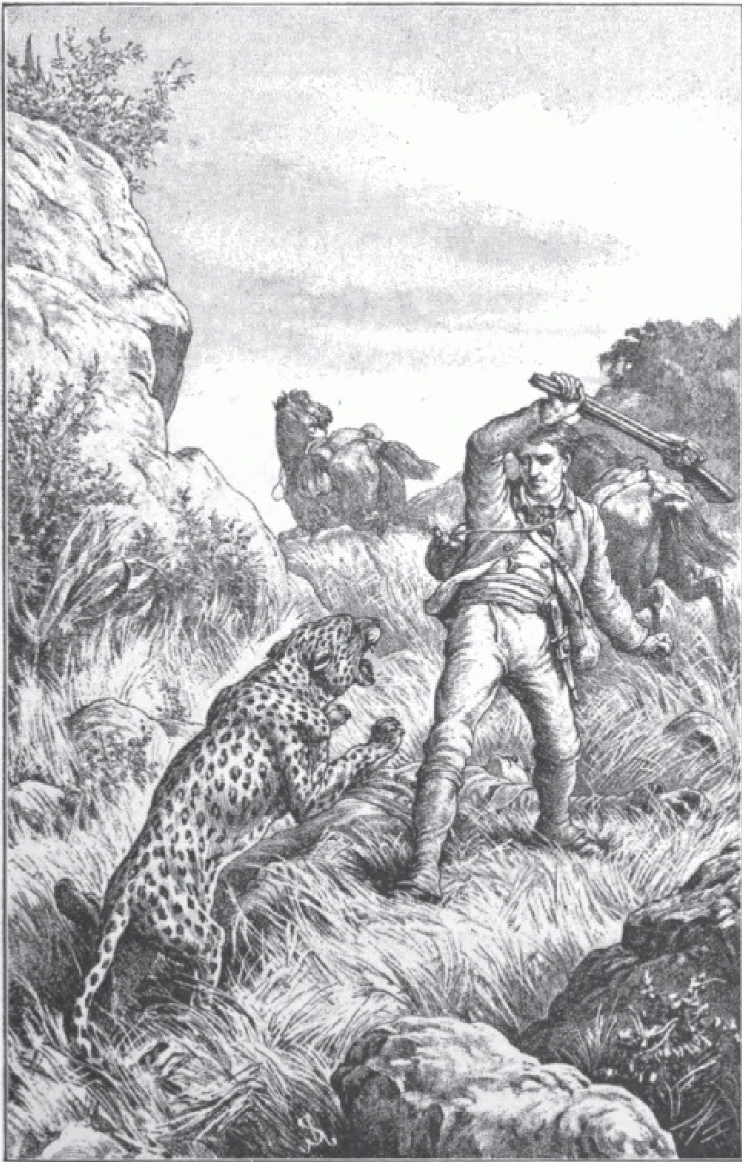
George Weston was some four horses' lengths in advance, when of a sudden he gave a shout of delight, as a magnificent female tree-leopard bounded across his path, and turned up the ravine. Tom saw the brute, too; and unslinging their rifles, the boys gave chase—George maintaining his position ahead.

The tree-leopard of South Africa (though called by Africanders the "Cape-tiger") is to all intents and purposes identical with the *Felis leopardus* of the naturalists; in plain English, is an ordinary leopard, and partakes of all the characteristics of that beautiful, but dangerous animal—the terror alike of the timid Hindoo, the Chinee, and the savage islander of Sumatra.

Now though the leopard will rarely attack a full-grown man, unless driven into a corner, he is a very awkward customer to deal with when he does turn; and many fatal encounters have been chronicled.

(Some of our readers may remember the sad fate of Captain Bowlby, 94th Regiment, who, shortly before the Transvaal war broke out, was fatally injured by a "Cape-tiger.")

Our readers will now be able to form a fair idea of the sort of "game" Master Thomas Flinders and George Weston thought fit to go in chase of. Finding herself hotly pursued, the leopard at first endeavoured to escape by clambering up the precipice on her left, but at that moment young Weston pulled up, and let fly with both barrels, inflicting a severe wound in the fleshy part of her shoulder. Maddened with pain and mingled rage and terror, the hard pressed and well-nigh frantic brute turned, and springing upon George dragged him out of the saddle.



TOM FLINDERS' FIGHT WITH THE LEOPARD.

Now, Tom Flinders knew well enough how savage and dangerous a leopard could be if once brought to bay, so when he saw his friend struggling on the ground, he uttered an involuntary cry of horror; then, regardless of the consequences, he jumped off his horse and rushed to the rescue.

Taking aim at the leopard's flank, Tom gave his two barrels at once; but owing to his natural agitation as well as his fear of injuring George, he missed with both shots. The leopard then abandoned her prostrate and senseless victim, and darted upon Tom with redoubled fury. In spite of the suddenness and ferocity of this onset, the boy was not taken unawares; and clubbing his rifle he swung it round his head, and by great good fortune caught the terrible brute a swashing blow which brought her to the ground. The butt of the rifle was shivered to splinters, but our young hero drew his long hunting-knife and threw himself on the leopard before she could regain her feet. Deep into the brute's throat Tom pressed the keen blade; with one convulsive effort she shook herself clear of her antagonist and

at the same time stunned him with a blow of her powerful paw; then, fatally wounded, she bounded off a few yards and fell dead.

That night, the moon rose upon a curious scene! Upon the bright green turf the two lads were stretched senseless and bleeding, and near them lay the carcass of their four-footed foe.

Chapter Twelve.

Missing!—The search—How Tom was besieged in a cave—The return home.

“Why, here come the boys!” exclaimed Major Flinders, as he and his friend Weston sat round the camp fire, on the banks of the Gamska River, smoking their after-supper pipes and chatting over old times. “I hear the sound of their horses’ gallop.”

“But you did not expect to see them much before noon to-morrow,” said Mr Weston in a tone of surprise. “They would never have returned so soon! You must be mistaken, Mat.”

“There are horses galloping in this direction, that I’ll swear to,” rejoined his friend, who had risen to his feet and was listening attentively. “And what’s more, they’re coming towards us at a tremendous pace. What say you, Keown?”

Kneeling down, Patrick Keown placed his ear to the ground; and after a lengthened pause, replied: “They’re horses, shure enough, sorr; but, by the beat of their gallop, I fear there’s never a sowl on their backs. No, sorr, there’s no doubt about that,” he presently added. “And they’re slackening pace now.”

At that moment, as if to prove the truth of the ex-sergeant’s words, two riderless horses cantered quickly up, and halted a few paces from the camp fire; they were those upon which Tom and George had ridden after the hartebeest in the morning!

The Major and Mr Weston stared at each other in consternation.

The horses were covered with sweat and dirt, and their distended nostrils and heaving, foam-flecked flanks bore silent but convincing testimony that they must have travelled some distance at a stretching gallop; whilst one of them—George’s grey—had an ugly wound on his near shoulder.

“Mat,” said Mr Weston huskily, his face betraying his agitation and alarm, “the poor lads must have come to grief—possibly they have been attacked, and—and murdered by natives!”

“I trust not, my dear Maurice; nay, I am sure that such is not the case,” answered the Major.

“In the first place, the natives would have been nearly certain to secure the horses; and in the second place—”

“This wound in the grey’s shoulder was inflicted by a wild baste, not a human cratur,” interrupted Keown, who had caught George’s horse. “Look ye, Misther Weston, there are the marks of the brute’s claws as plain as a pike-staff.”

“There’s no mistake about it,” said Major Flinders, stooping down and examining the grey’s shoulder; “this is a tiger’s work. Maurice,” he added, “you and Patrick Keown must remain here, whilst I take William and go in search of the poor boys.”

“I would rather go with you, Mat,” replied the other.

“No, old friend, do you remain here, the Hottentot is an admirable ‘tracker,’ and I could not do without him. Patrick, saddle up at once.”

A couple of horses were quickly saddled, and Major Flinders and Black William mounted.

“Is there any hope, Mat?” whispered Mr Weston, as he wrung his friend’s hand at parting.

“We must hope for the best, Maurice,” was the doubtful reply.

It was a bright moonlight night, and the Hottentot had no difficulty in following the back track of the horses, as he and his master went over the ground at a hand-gallop. The Major’s heart was heavy, for he feared the worst; and for some time he rode along in silence.

“What think you, William?” said he at length. “Is there any hope that the young gentlemen are alive?”

Black William shook his woolly head, saying: “I think tiger pull Baas George from his horse, and dat Baas Tom try to save him. But tiger too strong for yong baas to fight.”

The Major’s heart sank within him: not that he had had much hope from the first; and he bitterly reproached himself for having allowed the boys to go off alone. Day was beginning to dawn when they came in sight of the range of hills over which the herd had disappeared when chased by the boys; here the ‘spoor’ of the hartebeest was very distinct, and the Hottentot, tracking them to the foot of the hill, pointed out to his master where they had crossed. Hope then revived in the Major’s breast, for it struck him that the boys might have followed the game afoot, and during their absence the horses must have broken loose and galloped off—frightened most probably by some wild beast.

“We will off-saddle for an hour or so, William,” said he, drawing rein and dismounting near the entrance to the ravine. “And do you ascend the hills, and—”

“Vat dat, baas?” cried Black William, as a rifle-shot echoed amongst the hills—a shot that had evidently been fired at no great distance from the spot where they stood.

“The boys!” shouted Major Flinders; “the boys, no doubt! Come on, man.”

And springing into his saddle, he put spurs to his horse and rode up the ravine at full gallop, followed by the Hottentot.

When Tom Flinders recovered consciousness he staggered to his feet and took a look around him.

A few paces up the ravine lay George Weston; the dead leopard was a little further on; but the horses were nowhere to be seen.

“This is pleasant!” said Tom, feeling himself all over to make sure that no bones were broken. “How my poor head does ache, to be sure; that tiger must have caught me a thundering lick with his paw! I do hope poor old George isn’t done for,” he added, kneeling down by the side of his friend; “he got it far worse than I did. Halloa, George! how are you, old chap?”

At the sound of his friend’s voice George Weston’s senses partially came back to him, and—much to Tom’s relief—he made an attempt to raise his head; but he had been sorely mauled by the leopard, and was quite unable to speak, or help himself.

Seeing this, Tom looked about for a suitable place to take him, and presently hit upon a small cavity in the hillside: thither he carried the senseless boy, and proceeded to dress his wounds as well as he was able; for George was much hurt, the leopard having severely lacerated his thigh with her formidable claws, besides biting him right through the forearm.

However, Tom made him as comfortable as possible; then, seeing that nothing more could be done until morning, he gathered some boughs, brushwood, and large stones, and with them built up a rough breastwork in front of the cavity—which might be described as a small cave about six feet deep, by five or six in height. Then he dragged the dead leopard within it, secured George’s rifle and the shattered remains of his own, and, after a heart-felt prayer of thankfulness for his escape, lay down beside his friend, and fell fast asleep.

The day was breaking when Tom Flinders was awakened by a violent blow on the legs. Jumping to his feet, he seized his rifle and looked over the breastwork; his appearance was immediately hailed by a loud chattering, and a volley of stones and other missiles came whizzing about his ears.

“Niggers!” Tom exclaimed, bringing his rifle to the “ready;” “but where the dickens are they?”

“Hi! what on earth are you about?” he shouted, as a big piece of rock knocked off his hat. “You’re an uncommon good shot, no doubt,” he went on, ducking down in order to escape another stony “projectile;” “but if I catch a glimpse of you, I’ll let you know that it is not a rook you’re pegging at.”

As the boy spoke he caught sight of a dark active form swinging itself from tree to bush on the opposite side of the ravine; without a moment’s thought, he raised his rifle and pulled the trigger, and down came the figure by the run.

“There!” cried Tom angrily, for his temper was considerably ruffled. “I’ll teach you to make a cock-shy of me!” But now the ravine resounded with ear-splitting cries, and to Tom’s utter amazement a whole troop of baboons appeared amongst the trees and bushes; and, after gibbering and grimacing round their deceased brother for a few seconds, they suddenly scampered off, springing from rock to rock, from tree to tree with marvellous agility, until they were lost to view.

“Why, hang it all! I must have bowled over a monkey!” was the boy’s exclamation. “Poor brute! I wish I hadn’t been quite so ready with my rifle.”

The next moment Major Flinders and Black William appeared in sight, and with a wild shout of delight Tom jumped over his barricade and ran to meet them.

The Major looked very grave when he examined poor George’s wounds, for he at once saw that they were of a serious, if not of a highly dangerous, character—such, in fact, as called for skilled treatment. If the boy’s life was to be saved, it would be necessary to procure medical assistance as soon as possible. Now the nearest place where Major Flinders could make certain of finding a surgeon was Fort Crause, a small town and military post situated some thirty-five miles to the east-north-east: and to Fort Crause he resolved to carry the lad without any delay.

“We must start at once, you and I, Tom,” said the Major, as he scribbled a few hasty lines on a leaf torn from his pocket-book. “William will take this note back to Weston; I have briefly related what has occurred, and told him to join us at Fort Crause.”

“And what is to become of Patrick Keown and the horses, father? Are they to follow us, or wait until we return to the Gamska?”

“Keown will come on with Weston, and we shall have to change our route, and return home by the upper road to Tulbagh. Now, my boy, jump up, and we will place George in your arms; you must hold him in as easy a position as you can. There—now raise his head a little more; that will do! I will lead the horse.”

To convey a wounded person thirty miles on horseback under a burning South African sun is a very dangerous experiment; and, had George Weston been taken the whole distance under such circumstances, he would certainly have suffered severely, and probably not have survived the journey; but happily, before they had gone very far, they

fell in with an empty mule-waggon returning to Fort Crause, to which George was immediately transferred, and thus he travelled in comparative comfort.

A week later Major Flinders and Tom, with the servants and horses, made a fresh start, and at the end of five days marched into Rondebosch; but George Weston was detained at Fort Crause for more than a month, and of course his father remained to look after him. At first the doctor gave but faint hopes of his recovery—for inflammation set in, and it was feared that tetanus would supervene; but in the end, youth and a famous constitution gained the upper hand, and George was able to rise from his sick-bed.

When, at length, he and his father returned to Rustenburg Farm, they found to their satisfaction that the Major had disposed of the young horses for nearly double the price he paid for them; so, after all, "Kicking Jan" did not dissipate all the profits of the expedition, but when every expense had been allowed for there still remained a good round sum to be placed to the credit of the firm of "Flinders, Weston, and Sons."

Chapter Thirteen.

Two years after—Rumours of war—Good news for Tom—Mr Weston makes an interesting proposal.

Nearly two years have passed since the events recorded in the previous chapters, and our hero is once more the guest of Captain Jamieson. The Westons, too, are at Ralfontein, likewise Patrick Keown and the faithful Hottentot, Black William.

But not Major Flinders?

No; the Major is away in England with his wife and daughters, and many months must elapse before Tom can hope to see their faces again.

But let us "hark back," and see what has happened since George Weston was so nearly done to death by the tree-leopard.

In the spring of 1845 Mrs Flinders was suddenly seized with a sharp attack of illness which for some time entirely baffled the skill of the Cape Town doctors; and when, after weeks of anxiety and watching, they seemed to get the better of the disease, the poor lady was left almost at death's door. Days went by without the patient showing any appreciable signs of improvement, and at length the doctors were obliged to confess that though they had checked the disorder they had by no means conquered it. The plain truth was, they were altogether out of their depth.

Said the pompous and portly Dr Brownjohn: "Major, you must, I fear, take our interesting patient to England, and—ha—and—"

"Seek better advice," interrupted plain-spoken Mr Spike, his brother-medico. "We can do nothing more, my dear sir. The case is beyond us, I'm grieved to say."

"And—hum!—and, I was about to say, the sea voyage may possibly benefit her," continued the great M.D., looking "prussic acid and strychnine" at his candid colleague. "As my young friend Spike suggests," he added after a pause, "you *might* consult some well-known London physician. Sir Timothy Glauber and Doctor Peter Bolus are both eminent men—very eminent men, I may say; you could not do better than seek their valuable advice."

"But will my poor wife be able to stand the voyage?" the anxious husband inquired, glancing from one doctor to the other. "She is lamentably weak, you know."

"True—very true!" assented Brownjohn, pursing his lips. "But let us hope for the best—yes, my dear sir, let us hope for the best! While there's life—while there's life!—hum! Pray, what is *your* opinion, Mr Spike?"

"That it is her only chance," bluntly responded Mr Spike. "And hark ye, Major, take Mrs F to Newman—John Newman of Saint Margaret's Square. He is not a fashionable doctor, but there's not a more clever fellow in the whole College of Physicians, and what is better, he has had wonderful experience in intricate cases. If any man can pull your wife through this illness it is John Newman!"

And thus it came to pass that Major and Mrs Flinders started for England by the next steamer, their daughters accompanying them.

Now shortly before this trouble befell the Major he and Mr Weston (after much consideration and careful weighing of pros and cons) had, with the approval of Mrs Flinders, made up their minds to migrate to Ralfontein and enter into partnership with Captain Jamieson; and the former was on the point of closing with a most advantageous offer for Rustenburg Farm, when his wife's illness upset their plans and drove all other ideas from their heads.

In fact, nothing more was said concerning the projected migration until Doctors Brownjohn and Spike advised that Mrs Flinders should be taken to England. The Major then suggested that (as the above-mentioned offer still held good) Rustenburg should be sold forthwith, and that the Westons and Tom should proceed to Ralfontein as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made. To this proposal Mr Weston gave a ready consent; and accordingly he, Gracie, and the two boys, attended by Patrick Keown and Black William, started for Ralfontein a fortnight after the mail steamer sailed from Table Bay; and at the time the present chapter opens they had been with the Jamiesons upwards of six months.

And now we can go ahead with our "plain unvarnished tale" without any more "backing and filling."

It is a chilly evening in the early part of the Cape autumn, (March, April, and May are the autumn months in South Africa), and Captain Jamieson and his family are gathered round a blazing *castange hout* fire in the general sitting-room of Ralfontein House. The captain looks anxious and fatigued, as well he may do, for he has just returned from Graham's Town, whither, ten days before, he was summoned by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Eastern District to attend a "palaver" with some troublesome Caffres; and he has ridden upwards of 100 miles over a difficult country in less than fourteen hours—not bad work for a man who will never see sixty again!

"So we're in for another Caffre war!" Frank Jamieson said when his father informed them that the result of the "palaver" had been far from satisfactory. "That makes the third in sixteen years, to say nothing of minor affairs."

"I suppose the Caffres have grown 'fat' again," observed young James.

"'Fat!'" exclaimed Mr Weston; "in the name of all that's sensible, what has their growing *fat* got to do with their going to war?"

Captain Jamieson and his sons laughed at their friend's astonishment, and the former replied:

"You must know, my dear Weston, that our Cape wars rarely arise from political causes, but chiefly from a desire on the part of the young men of the various tribes to distinguish themselves and earn the coveted title of 'warrior.' When a tribe has been some years at peace with its neighbours the number of young men increase; this they call growing 'fat,' or, in other words, becoming ready to take the field. Once in this condition the young men never rest until they find a pretext for going to war either with us or their neighbours."

"And what pretext have they now?" inquired Miss Janet.

"A very simple one, my dear. Two Caffres, warriors of some standing in their tribe, were lately caught in the act of stealing an axe from a Beaufort storekeeper. They were secured, committed by the magistrate, and in due course were sent down to Graham's Town with some other prisoners to stand their trial at the criminal court—their escort consisting of five or six civil constables. Now the highroad between Fort Beaufort and Graham's Town runs close along the Caffre border; and before the constables had gone many miles they were suddenly attacked by a party of Gaikas, who had crossed the border with the express purpose of rescuing their fellow-tribesmen. The escort appear to have made a stout resistance, but, overcome by their weight of numbers, they were forced to beat a retreat and leave their prisoners in the hands of the victorious Gaikas. Now it so happened that the warriors who were the cause of this attack were handcuffed to two Hottentots; and their rescuers, not being able to unfasten the handcuffs, and being pressed for time, deliberately murdered these unhappy men, and, cutting off their arms at the elbow-joints, set their rascally friends at liberty.

"When the lieutenant-governor was informed of this outrage he at once sent a message to the chiefs of the offending tribe, and demanded that the two prisoners should be brought back and the murderers of the unfortunate Hottentots surrendered. But the young 'amadodas' of the tribe were eager for war, and, their counsels outweighing the counsels of the older men, the government message was treated with contempt.

"A 'palaver' was, however, subsequently arranged for; and last Wednesday the lieutenant-governor, the senior officer at Graham's Town, and I started for the Block Drift mission station to meet the Gaika chiefs. They arrived at the appointed time, attended by a large body of warriors outnumbering the lieutenant-governor's escort by ten to one.

"That the treacherous scoundrels meant mischief I am certain, but Captain S— who commanded the escort placed his men so judiciously that they made no attempt to attack us; and though the meeting was most unsatisfactory, at any rate it broke up without a rumpus—which was more than I expected. War, of course, is imminent; for it is absolutely necessary that the government should bring the refractory chiefs to order, otherwise our prestige will be seriously damaged throughout South Africa."

"I suppose we shall have it all our way, Captain Jamieson?" said Tom Flinders, now a strapping young fellow of eighteen, with an incipient moustache and whiskers. "These Gaika fellows won't make much of a stand against our troops."

"The Gaikas and their allies are brave men, Tom, and fight well," was the reply. "Indeed, my experience of Cape warfare is that at first the Caffres have it all their own way, though in the long run they succumb to our superior discipline and resources. Take the advice of an old campaigner, and never despise your enemies."

"Shall you have to go out this time?" asked Janet Jamieson wistfully, putting her arm round the captain's neck. "I hope not, dear father!"

"I am afraid so, my girl," he answered gently. "The Lieutenant-governor has offered me the command of a force of volunteers and burghers, and I could not well refuse it."

"And what about us?" cried the young men in a breath.

"You cannot all go, boys," interposed Miss Jamieson, the tears starting into her bright eyes. "Who is to look after the farm and defend us in case of attack?"

"Janet is right," said her father. "Ralfontein must not be left unprotected, for we cannot tell how far this war may spread or how long it will last."

"You must allow *me* to accompany you, Jamieson," Mr Weston struck in; whereupon Miss Janet started and the colour left her cheeks. "I shall be content to serve as a simple volunteer."

"My dear Weston, I am relying on your taking command here," rejoined the captain, looking askance at his daughter.

“But let me tell you my plans. In the first place,” he went on, “the lieutenant-governor has offered provisional ensigncies in the Cape Mounted Rifles to Tom Flinders and Frank, on the—”

“Hurrah!” shouted Tom, who, in spite of his incipient whiskers, was as great a boy as ever; “won’t the pater be pleased!”

“On the condition,” resumed his host, smiling at the interruption—“on the condition that they serve a few months with my ‘commando,’ in order to establish a claim on the government. I have accepted this offer on their behalf; so they must go with me. I shall also take Patrick Keown, as he will be useful in assisting me to drill my ‘irregulars’ into something like soldiers. So you see, my dear Weston, you must remain at Ralfontein and take charge of the place, with George and James and David as your lieutenants. I hope you will not refuse the trust.”

“What say the young ladies?” was Mr Weston’s rejoinder. “Are you content to serve under my orders, Miss Janet?”

“If papa wishes it,” answered Miss Janet demurely.

“Then so be it,” laughed Weston; “I accept the responsible post of commandant of Ralfontein. When do you start for the seat of war?”

“Not for some days,” responded the captain. “Whilst at Graham’s Town I did a stroke of business—sold thirty horses to the government. A sergeant’s party of the Rifles are to fetch them in the course of a week or so, and I propose to return with them. And that reminds me I have accepted, in part payment for the horses, a brass six-pounder field-piece, with eighty rounds of canister, grape, and shell. The escort will bring it up with them. Should you have to defend the farm, you will find this gun of considerable service.”

The captain and Mr Weston sat up talking long after the others had sought their couches, and before they retired to rest Mr Weston told his friend that he had formed an attachment for Janet Jamieson.

“I did not intend to broach the subject until I had consulted with Matthew Flinders,” said he; “but after your request that I should remain in charge of your property and family during your absence, I felt in honour bound to mention it. In spite of the disparity in our ages, I cannot but think your daughter returns my affection. If such is the case, are you willing to give her to me?”

And as Captain Jamieson had no objection to offer, but on the contrary appeared well satisfied that the “course of true love should run smooth,” Mr Weston next morning asked Miss Janet to be his wife; to which tender question the young lady, with a becoming blush, said “Yes.”

Chapter Fourteen.

Off to the wars!—Jamieson’s Horse—A bumptious sub—Tom’s first patrol.

Although the Cape government declared war almost immediately after the “palaver” at Block Drift, some considerable time elapsed before the troops received final orders to take the field and enter Caffreland; and the first week of April was nearly over when Captain Jamieson, accompanied by his eldest son, Tom Flinders, and Patrick Keown, and escorted by the Mounted Riflemen in charge of the horses, left Ralfontein to assume command of the volunteers.

In the interval between the captain’s return from Graham’s Town and his departure to join the army, Miss Janet and Mr Weston found time and opportunity to get married, at a Church of England mission chapel forty miles from the farm; so he bade farewell to his family with the consoling assurance that he was leaving them under care of one who now had a relation’s right to comfort them in adversity or defend them in peril.

On the thirty-second anniversary of the battle of Toulouse (Wellington defeated Soult at Toulouse on the 10th April, 1814. It was the final battle of the Peninsular war.) (in which action Donald Jamieson, then sergeant-major of the —th Foot, was severely wounded) the party from Ralfontein arrived at Graham’s Town and handed over the horses to the military authorities; and, having purchased a few articles likely to prove of service during the campaign, they proceeded to join Colonel H. Somerset’s column, encamped at Victoria—a military post which had been recently established on neutral territory between the Kat and Keiskamma Rivers.

The burgher force, of which Captain Jamieson now took command, consisted of about six-score well-armed, well-mounted men; for the most part farmers and their sons from the neighbouring settlements, with a sprinkling of storekeepers and clerks from Graham’s Town and Bathurst. They were hardy, active fellows enough, accustomed to the saddle and the use of the rifle; but—with the exception of a few of the older hands, who had served on “commandos” in former wars—they were as ignorant of drill or military discipline as any civilian in England before the “volunteer movement” had been thought of.

“Shure now, Masther Tom,” observed Patrick Keown, regarding his future comrades (who had mustered and formed up to receive their commandant) with a critical eye, “we have here fornint us the raw *matherials* for as foine a squadron of Light Horse as there is in Her Majesty’s service. But, bedad, sorr!” he added with a solemn shake of the head, “they’ll take a dale of *mixing*.”

“Mixing!” laughed Tom. “I should say they’re pretty well mixed as it is. Still, I wager a dollar they know how to ride, and they’ll fight well enough. After all, that’s the main point.”

“They are for work, not for show,” put in young Jamieson.

“True for ye, Misther Frank,” the old sergeant rejoined; “niver-the-less, with your father’s lave, I must tache them to pay attintion to their dhressing and intervals. A loine is a loine, you’ll be plased to remimber, sorr; not a sort of double semicircle.”

Of this irregular corps—which Captain Jamieson formed into two troops—Frank and Tom were appointed officers, with the local and temporary rank of ensign; the lieutenant-governor promising that after they had seen a little service he would recommend their transfer to the Cape Mounted Riflemen as provisional ensigns.

Much to his chagrin, Patrick Keown had scant opportunity of imparting the “ilimints” of drill and discipline to the Albany farmers and townsmen who rode in the ranks of “Jamieson’s Horse;” for three days after he was appointed sergeant-major of that corps the advance against the Caffres commenced.

Early on the morning of the 13th April, the troops marched from Victoria in two columns—one commanded by Colonel Henry Somerset, Cape Mounted Rifles, the other by Colonel Richardson, 7th Dragoon Guards—and crossing the Keiskamma near its junction with Debe River, they, on the 15th, encamped on the Debe Flats, near the base of the “Taban Doda,” or Man Mountain; here the two columns were formed into one division, of which Colonel Somerset assumed command.

At cock-crow on the following day the troops were again on the move; and, the camp having been broken up, they advanced towards the Amatola Mountains. The point at which Colonel Somerset intended to enter the Amatolas was Burns Hill, where there was a large mission station, and near which the great chief Sandilli had his principal kraal.

Shortly before the division was formed up, Captain Jamieson received orders to detail an officer and twenty men of his corps to join a reconnoitring party, under command of Lieutenant B— of the Mounted Rifles. The officer who brought the order was a very young and consequential subaltern of the —th Foot, attached to Colonel Somerset’s staff as galloper. Said he, when he had delivered his message:

“B— has orders to advance towards Burns Hill, and if he finds Sandilli’s kraal deserted, or only held by a small force, he is to occupy it. You’ll be good enough to make your fellows hurry themselves; in affairs like this it is important that no time should be lost.”

“They shall be in the saddle in ten minutes,” the captain replied. “I hear the mission station has been destroyed,” he added. “Is that so?”

“Yes, but the missionaries and their people bolted, and are now at Graham’s Town,” was the reply.

“Should all go well, we shall encamp at Burns Hill this evening, and there await the arrival of Major Sutton’s ‘commando’ of Hottentots from the Kat River. If he joins us to-night, no doubt we shall be at it ‘hammer and tongs’ to-morrow—or next day at the latest.”

“I trust we shall soon bring the Caffres to reason,” Captain Jamieson answered, with something like a sigh. “These oft-recurring little wars must inevitably ruin the country, for they paralyse every industry and trade; besides, the destruction of life and property is simply appalling.”

“I’m afraid we military men think more of ‘medals, rank, ribbons,’ etc, than of trade, industry, or even life and property,” was the flippant rejoinder. “Of course that is the soldier’s point of view; but you amateurs—”

“Amateurs!” exclaimed Tom, boiling over at hearing his “chief” thus designated. “*Coxy* young—”

“I am scarcely an amateur,” Captain Jamieson interrupted, frowning at Tom to make him hold his tongue. “Allow me to tell you, young gentleman, that I was present at the passage of the Douro, and saw the last shot of the Peninsular war fired at Toulouse. I presume you have heard of the Peninsula?”

“Eh! Peninsula! Oh, yes. I—I—beg pardon, I’m sure!—thought you—you were a—a—a civilian, you know. Very sorry—quite a mistake—Good—good morning!” stammered the ensign turning as red as his shell-jacket. And off he cantered, muttering to himself, “Doosid awkward! Put my foot into it, by George! Hope our fellows won’t hear about it.”

But “our fellows” did hear of it, and the bumptious youth got unmercifully chaffed in consequence; which he most thoroughly deserved, and which, no doubt, did him a vast deal of good.

After a brief consultation with Patrick Keown, Captain Jamieson decided to send Tom Flinders in command of the detachment; so, twenty minutes later, our hero found himself cantering over the Flats at the head of a score of well-armed volunteers. Each man of the detachment was armed with a double-barrelled rifle, hunting-knife, and horse-pistol, and carried a “cross-bag” (after the manner of Dutch burghers when on the “war-path”) containing a supply of moss-biscuit and biltong, sufficient to last for several days. Moss-biscuit, we may add for the information of our readers, is a light, dry biscuit made of fine flour mixed with “mosto,” the unfermented juice of the grape; it will keep good for almost any length of time, and is both portable and nutritious.

Lieutenant B—, who commanded the reconnoitring party, was a right good fellow, and Tom soon became friends with him.

B— had been some years in the Mounted Rifles, and was considered one of the smartest officers in that corps; he was also an enthusiastic sportsman—just the man that a lad of Tom’s age and disposition could look up to, and at the same time be on terms of good fellowship with.

“Were you in the ‘C.M.R.’ with my father?” asked Tom, as they rode side by side; having slackened pace in order to breathe the horses, for they had been “putting on the steam” since they left camp.

“No; but I have often met him. The Major, I think, retired in ’29, and I did not get my commission until ’35; just about the time Hintza was killed. You will remember that business, I daresay.”

“Can’t say I remember it, for I was quite a youngster at the time; only just ‘breeched’ in fact,” Tom replied, “but I have heard the pater mention it. Hintza was shot when attempting to escape, was he not?”

“Yes; when a prisoner on parole.”

“I should like to hear about it,” said Tom, who dearly loved a yarn.

“Well,” replied his companion; “it is rather a long story, but I can tell you the main facts, for I was one of those who pursued him. In May, 1835, Hintza, the paramount Chief of Caffreland, was a prisoner in the British camp, and, for his sins, had been sentenced to pay a fine of 50,000 head of cattle. This fine he expressed himself willing to pay, if he were allowed to return to his own country to superintend the collection of the cattle. At first the governor would not listen to this, but after a lot of palaver and negotiation, it was arranged that Hintza should be permitted to go, under a strong escort; his son Kreilli and his uncle Bookoo being retained as hostages in the British camp.

“An old Rifle Brigadesman, General Sir Harry Smith, was selected to command the escort; which consisted of both horse and foot, regulars and irregulars, but no artillery. I was then serving in the ‘Guides’ corps as a volunteer, and was one of those appointed to the general’s body-guard.

“Well, the column left the head-quarter camp on the banks of the Kei, and advanced into Caffreland by forced marches. Hintza was treated as a sort of a prisoner at large, and usually rode with the general; he was splendidly mounted, and had been permitted to retain his arms—the usual bundle of seven assegais.

“On the fourth morning after leaving the camp, the column reached the summit of a table-topped mountain. We now had a splendid view of the country beyond the Bashee River, and to our surprise, saw thousands and thousands of cattle being driven *away* from us.

“This circumstance somewhat staggered us, and Sir Harry was examining the retreating masses through his field-glass, when suddenly somebody shouted, ‘Hintza has bolted!’

“On hearing the cry, Sir Harry dropped his glasses and, putting spurs to his charger, raced after the fugitive, who had got a start of fifty or sixty yards. We, of course, joined in the chase, but the general soon distanced us, and, overtaking the chief, ordered him to pull up; whereupon Hintza made a stab at him with his bundle of assegais.

“Sir Harry parried the thrust, and drawing a pistol threatened to shoot the chief, if he did not immediately surrender. Hintza replied by making another attempt to stab him, so Sir Harry fired, but without effect.

“Thousands of Caffres were now to be seen crowning the hills in all directions, and towards them Hintza rode for dear life. Once more Sir Harry dashed up to him, and, seizing him by his tiger-skin kaross, hurled him to the ground; but the impetus of his gallop carried him past the fallen chief, who was on his legs in an instant, and off down the precipitous side of the mountain.

“By this time four of the Guides, who had joined in the chase, came up, and jumping from their horses, followed the fugitive on foot; these four were S—y, D—r, B—r and myself. I sent two shots after the flying chief, both of which went wide of their mark; he then gained the bush at the foot of the hill, and disappeared from sight.

“S—y and B—r now entered the bush from above, and D—r and I (who were further down the hill) from below; and, working towards one another, we presently closed in upon our human quarry, S—y being the first to come upon him.

“Hintza was then standing up to his middle in a narrow stream, which ran through the bush, beneath a shelving rock; and when he caught sight of S—y he drew an assegai, and poised it. Nothing daunted S—y approached and called upon him to surrender, whereupon the Caffre threw back his right arm and was in the act of hurling the assegai at his pursuer, when the latter, seeing that he must either kill or be killed, levelled his rifle and fired. His ball struck the fugitive right in the centre of the forehead, and throwing up his hands, he fell backwards against a rock. We rushed in and lifted him up, but the rifle-ball had done its work, and Hintza, the powerful Chief of Caffraria, had gone to his last account.”

“Serve the treacherous scoundrel right!” exclaimed Tom, when the lieutenant came to the end—the tragical end—of his narrative. “Had he got the escort into his power not one of you would have lived to tell the tale. I suppose that was what he was aiming at?”

“No doubt of it; his purpose was to entice us into the heart of his country, and then surround us with an overwhelming force,” rejoined Mr B—. “He played a bold game, and lost it! Still we were, one and all, from the general downwards, sorry for his untimely death; and nobody more so than the man who shot him. And now, Flinders, I think you had better ride with your troop, for yonder is Burns Hill. The mission station lies to the right, and Sandilli’s kraal is a little beyond it.”

In another ten minutes they came in sight of the mission station, and B— galloped forward to join his advanced files.

“Keep your fellows well in hand,” said he to Tom, before riding off; “and be ready to support me if necessary. From the fact that the houses and chapel are still standing, I am inclined to think that Sandilli intends to hold his ground.”

Mr B—, however, was mistaken, for on approaching, with every precaution, Burns Hill, he found that both the mission station and the chief’s kraal were deserted; but though the former was not burned down (as had been reported), every house had been ransacked, and broken furniture, papers, school-books, Bibles, and many other articles lay scattered in all directions.

“Verily, the Caffre is a destructive animal!” cried Tom, when he rode up and surveyed the scene. “His bump of mischief must be strongly developed.”

“A European mob would commit quite as much damage, if in the mood,” Lieutenant B— answered. “I don’t think there would be much to choose between Santerre’s ‘sans culottes,’ and Sandilli’s ‘amadodas.’ But behold our only trophy!” he added, holding up a couple of lions’ tails. “Sergeant Jackson found them at the entrance of the chief’s hut.”

“What are they?” asked Tom. “Chamboks?” (A peculiar kind of thonged whip.)

“Chamboks! no indeed; they’re the Caffre emblems of royalty.”

Towards noon the division reached Burns Hill, and encamped near the mission station, and shortly afterwards Major Sutton’s “commando” marched up, and formed a separate camp on the other side of the Keiskamma River. So when the tired soldiers lay down to rest that night it was pretty well understood that there would probably be warm work on the morrow.

Chapter Fifteen.

Tom receives an unexpected invitation—With the Cape Rifles—Mountain warfare—Formidable odds—The effects of shell.

Shortly before daylight on the 17th April, the trumpets of the 7th Dragoon Guards and of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and the shrill bugles of the infantry corps, sounding the “reveillé,” roused Tom Flinders from his slumbers; and hardly had he finished a very hasty toilet, and made a hastier breakfast (consisting of a piece of biltong, a handful of “moss-biscuit,” and a draught of icy-cold water from a neighbouring spruit), when the clear notes of the “assembly,” quickly followed by those of “boot and saddle,” rang through the still morning air.

“Now, old chap,” cried Frank Jamieson, who was already in the saddle, “look alive! Sergeant Keown is calling the roll; and—why, here comes the governor looking very down on his luck! What’s the matter, father?” he added as Captain Jamieson cantered up.

“Matter enough,” growled the old gentleman—“matter enough! We’re to remain in camp instead of marching with the column of attack. Where’s that boy Tom Flinders?”

“Here am I, sir,” replied our hero from under the saddle-flap; for he was tugging away at the girths. “Bother these buckles! they’re as stiff as—”

“Never mind the buckles, but listen to me,” his chief struck in. “Your friend B— of the Mounted Rifles has got leave for you to be attached to his troop for to-day. Will you go with him?”

“Will a duck swi—I beg pardon, sir; I mean I’ll go like a shot,” cried Tom.

“To get shot!—eh, Tom?” laughed Frank Jamieson.

“But I say, sir,” continued Tom after a moment’s thought, “perhaps Frank would like to—”

“Frank’s all right, my boy,” interrupted Captain Jamieson; “he is to ride ‘galloper’ to Major Sutton. And now the sooner you’re off the better. The Rifles are parading.”

And Tom, thrusting the remains of his morning meal into his haversack, shook hands with the captain and Frank, jumped into the saddle, and galloped off to the Rifle lines, where he found Lieutenant B— awaiting him.

At a “council of war,” held at the Burns Hill mission station on the previous evening, Colonel Somerset and his brother-commanders had decided to form the division into three columns of attack; and it was in this order that the troops took the field on the morning of the 17th April.

The right column, which was composed entirely of infantry corps, commanded by Major Glencairn Campbell, 91st Foot, entered the Amatola Mountains at the gorge of the Amatola Basin, with Mount McDonald on the right and the Seven Kloof Mountain on the left.

The centre column, consisting of two squadrons of the Cape Mounted Riflemen and Sutton’s Kat River Burgher Horse, crossed the Keiskamma River and ascended one of the ridges of the Seven Kloof Mountain to its summit.

The left column, under Colonels Somerset and Richardson, consisting of the 7th Dragoon Guards (the “Old Black Horse,” as they loved to be styled) and the remaining troops of the Mounted Rifles, with a half-battery of artillery, advanced towards the Seven Kloof Mountain, and, passing along its base, marched in the direction of Chumie Hoek.

The troop of the “C.M.R.,” to which Tom Flinders was attached, was with the centre column, which was led by Major Armstrong, with Major Sutton as his second in command.

When at length, after a toilsome climb up a steep mountain path winding amongst patches of bush and rocky boulders, Major Armstrong’s horsemen reached the summit of the Seven Kloof Mountain, they beheld a strong body of Caffres drawn up in the shape of a crescent, with a dense forest in their rear and their front protected by a tangled mass of brushwood and swamp, apparently impracticable for cavalry.

At the same time the incessant rattle of musketry in the Amatola Basin below told them that Campbell’s infantry were hotly engaged with the enemy.

“They seem to be having a pretty warm time of it down there,” observed Tom to his friend B—.

“You’re right, Flinders,” the other replied. “And I can tell you those fellows yonder will give us a warm time of it *up here*. Hark to the yelling savages! ’Pon my word, they’re no—”

“No worse than ‘Santerre’s sans culottes,’” Tom broke in with a sly laugh, as he called to mind his friend’s previous remarks anent the “noble savage.”

“I never meant to say that they were,” retorted B—; “so none of your chaff, my boy! But they are very fiends for all that, and Heaven help the poor fellows who fall into their hands! For my part, I’d rather be shot fifty times over than be taken alive by Sandilli’s warriors.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Tom carelessly replied. “‘While there’s life there’s hope,’ as old Brownjohn used to say.”

“Old Brownjohn, whoever he may be, wouldn’t have much hope left in him if he once fell into a Caffre’s clutches,” was B—’s dry remark. “In a warfare like this our motto should be that of Napoleon’s old guard—‘We die, but we do not surrender!’ Here comes Major Armstrong. I wonder if he intends to attack the enemy’s position?”

All this while the Caffres had been jeering at their foes, uttering loud cries of defiance and derision, brandishing their weapons and shields, and daring them to give battle. This insolent behaviour was very galling to the Mounted Rifles and their Kat River comrades, and they were naturally impatient to accept the challenge and teach the sable warriors a sharp lesson. But Major Armstrong, after consulting with his second in command, decided that the enemy’s position was too strong for him to attack; and so he gave the word for the column to move on towards Chumie Hoek, in order that he might effect a junction with Colonel Somerset.

Though both officers and men were greatly disappointed at their leader’s decision, they could not but own that he was acting wisely. It was one of those cases when “discretion becomes the better part of valour,” and inclination has to give way to duty.

Directly the column was put in motion, the Caffres, advancing with discordant yells (wherewith they thought to strike terror into the hearts of their foes), made an attack on its rear, and some smart skirmishing took place; but they never came to very close quarters, and after a while retired, leaving the column to proceed on its way unmolested.

Armstrong now led his troops down a steepish descent on to a low ridge which divided the Amatola Basin from the Chumie Hoek, at the foot of the Hog’s Back Mountain. Just as he reached the ridge Campbell’s infantry made their appearance, toiling up the precipitous slope of a lofty hill out of the valley of the Amatola, fighting desperately as they went, and evidently hard pressed by superior numbers. They had been attacked immediately after entering the gorge of the basin, and had been in action ever since; their losses had been considerable, and many of the wounded had fallen into the enemy’s hands, there being no means of carrying them off the field.

Now between Major Armstrong’s column and the infantry there was a steep rocky ledge, so that it was quite out of the question his despatching mounted troops to their assistance. Major Campbell, however, when he caught sight of the riflemen, ordered his well-nigh exhausted soldiers to make for the ledge, where the ground became comparatively open; whereupon Armstrong, seeing his opportunity, placed a couple of troops in such a position as would enable them to charge the enemy should he venture upon the open ground.

This some of the Caffres presently did, and then the squadron of Mounted Rifles went at them with a will, and, driving them back, sent them flying right and left into the valley below; at the same time Lieutenant B—’s troop dismounted, and, advancing to the brink of the ledge, held it until the last of Campbell’s infantry had passed over in safety. This was not accomplished without loss, for two riflemen were shot dead, and Tom Flinders got a musket ball right through his “dopper” hat.

Shortly afterwards Colonel Somerset came up from the direction of the Chumie Hoek to his lieutenant’s support, bringing with him two field-guns. These guns were at once unlimbered, and the Caffres were treated to a dose of shell which very soon sent them to the right-about, driving them out of bush and from behind rocks, and dispersing them in all directions, until there was not one to be seen save upon the distant hills.

“That’s always the way!” angrily exclaimed a rifle officer as the enemy rapidly dispersed. “Directly we get a really fair chance at these beggars, they disappear like magic. And yet I’d wager a month’s pay and allowances that, if a small party of our fellows ventured only just out of range of the guns, they would be surrounded and cut to pieces before we could proceed to their assistance.”

Colonel Somerset now ordered the columns to re-form; and the wounded having been placed, some on the gun-limbers and others in front of their mounted comrades, the troops moved down the slope of the hill to the Chumie Hoek.

The afternoon was now pretty far advanced, so Colonel Somerset gave up all idea of returning to the camp at Burns Hill, and decided to move on to an open plain beneath the high point of the Seven Kloof Mountain, close to the sources of a stream known as the “Geel Hout” River, and there bivouac until morning. But before continuing his march to this spot the colonel wrote a hasty despatch to the camp commandant at Burns Hill, directing that officer to advance at break of day to Chumie Hoek with all his forces, guns, ammunition waggons, and camp equipage; and this despatch he intrusted to one of his staff to carry back to the mission station.

A mounted party was at once detailed to escort the staff-officer on his dangerous mission, and, acting on Lieutenant

B—’s advice, Frank Jamieson and Tom Flinders obtained leave to accompany the officer, so that they might rejoin their own corps in time to be with it during the morrow’s march. The escort, consisting of a subaltern and twenty-five picked troopers of the Mounted Rifles and four of Sutton’s Kat River Burghers, paraded about four o’clock; and, arms and accoutrements having been carefully inspected, the word was given to “mount” and “away!”

Chapter Sixteen.

The attack on the escort—Fifty to one!—A deed of “Derrin’ do”—Arrival at the camp—Bad news.

The most direct route from the Chumie Hoek to the Burns Hill mission station led along the valley up which Campbell’s infantry column had fought its way that morning; through the gorge of the Amatola Basin, then across a branch of the Keiskamma River, and so on to the camp. A cattle “trek” passed through the valley; but it was ill-defined and difficult to follow, being intersected at frequent intervals by spruits and gulches, and in many parts entirely obliterated by thick patches of “bosch,” huge boulders, and tangled masses of “waght-en-beetje,” or “wait-a-bit” thorn. The march of the column was, however, only too clearly marked by the sad traces of the morning’s bloody fray; for here and there lay the mutilated corpses of the poor soldiers who had fallen in the fight, presenting a ghastly spectacle, stripped as they were of their uniform, and gashed and hacked beyond all recognition.

Along this rough cattle-track the escort proceeded at a smart canter, both officers and men keeping a sharp look-out, as the track was commanded by projecting spurs and bluffs where hundreds of the enemy might be lurking, ready to pounce down upon and annihilate an isolated body of troops. Tom Flinders, with the four Burgher horsemen and two troopers of the Mounted Rifles, rode twenty horse-lengths in advance; then came the main body of the escort in “half-sections,” with “flankers” thrown out on either hand; and Frank Jamieson, with a non-commissioned officer and four troopers, brought up the rear.

In this order they rode for a considerable distance without seeing a solitary Caffre; and they were beginning to hope that the enemy had really retired far away into the surrounding hills, and that they would reach their destination without having to fight their way through a horde of bloodthirsty savages, when one of the Kat River men caught Tom Flinders by the arm, and, pointing to some huge boulders that lay a few yards to the right of the track, exclaimed: “Oh, mynheer! there are the Caffres!” And Tom, looking in the direction indicated, descried the woolly heads of several dusky warriors who were lying in ambush behind the rocks.

Seeing that they were detected, these Caffres at once sprang up from their hiding-place, and, with their old-fashioned flint-lock muskets and fowling-pieces (which were mostly loaded with small bullets cast out of zinc or pewter stolen probably from the neighbouring farm-houses), commenced a hot but ill-directed fusillade on the escort; whereupon Lieutenant S—, the officer in command, at once called in his rear files, and the whole party, bending low in their saddles to avoid as much as possible the leaden shower, dashed past the rocks at racing pace. But hardly had they run the gauntlet of this ambuscade when numbers of the enemy came leaping down from the wooded slopes of the valley, and, forming across the track, opened fire at about thirty paces’ distance.

Coolly as if on parade, Lieutenant S— halted his men and wheeled them into line. “We must cut our way through those fellows,” said he as he fitted fresh caps to his double-barrel. (When in action most of the officers of the C.M. Riflemen carried double-barrelled sporting rifles.) “But first we’ll give them a volley. Take it quietly, my lads, and don’t throw a shot away if you can help it.” The volley was delivered—somewhat hastily, it must be confessed, though not altogether without effect, for several of the Caffres fell before it.

Then, bursting over the rough ground that intervened between them and their enemy, the little band of horsemen charged down upon the yelling, surging horde. The majority of the Caffres broke before this gallant charge, scattering right and left to take refuge in the bush and amongst the rocks; but many stood their ground bravely.

Then for the space of six or seven minutes there ensued a regular mêlée; the troopers, urging forward their half-maddened steeds, wielded their sabres right manfully, and slashed and thrust at their opponents, who in their turn offered a stubborn resistance, striving to drag the soldiers from their saddles, and stabbing furiously at the horses’ bellies as they were ridden down; until at length the escort cut their way right through “the black shining wall of human flesh,” and rode onwards at a swinging canter.

THE ESCORT ATTACKED BY THE CAFFRES.

Tom Flinders—who had borne himself in the mêlée as gallantly as any veteran *sabreur*—was one of the last to get clear through; and he was racing to catch up his comrades when he heard a voice shout out: “Tom! Tom Flinders! for Heaven’s sake don’t leave me!” He at once turned in his saddle, and to his horror saw Frank Jamieson standing across the body of his gallant “mooi paard,” (grey horse) and defending himself against half a dozen Caffres, who were attacking him with their assegais.

Wheeling his horse round like lightning, Tom galloped to the rescue of his friend, and swooping down upon the group rode clean over two of the Caffres, knocking them right and left like nine-pins. A third—a herculean warrior, whose leopard-skin kaross bespoke the chief—sprang at his horse’s head and clung to the bridle; but the brave lad, rising in his stirrups, threw all his strength into one downward cut, and the big chief, cloven clean through the brain-pan, fell beneath the horse’s feet.

“Well done, young Flinders!” cried a cheery voice—“well done, my boy!” And the next moment Lieutenant S— dashed up and put to flight the other Caffres, just as they were on the point of assegaiing Frank Jamieson, whose sword had broken short off at the hilt, leaving him entirely at the mercy of his assailants.

“Jump up behind me, Jamieson,” Mr S— said as the Caffres made off, “and let us get out of this before those savages come on again. I’ve had enough fighting for one day! Now, Flinders, ride for your very life!”

And Frank, being safely mounted *en croupe*, they rode at full speed after their comrades, who, not perceiving their absence, had galloped on and were now nearly a quarter of a mile ahead. Fortunately, however, the Caffres did not follow in pursuit; so they rejoined their friends without further misadventure.

An hour later the escort arrived safely at Burns Hill...

When the staff-officer delivered his despatch to the camp commandant he learned, to his astonishment, that the troops left behind at Burns Hill had been hotly engaged with the enemy, who early in the day had attacked the camp, and, though finally repulsed with heavy loss, had succeeded in carrying off a number of draught cattle.

In the hope of recapturing these cattle, a troop of the 7th Dragoon Guards under Captain Bambric (a fine old officer who had fought at the battle of Waterloo), and a strong party of the Cape Mounted Riflemen under Lieutenant Boyes, had followed the daring Caffres into the bush, but, being attacked at a disadvantage by a vastly superior force, they had been compelled to retire, leaving their veteran leader *mort sur le champ de bataille*.

Chapter Seventeen.

Fighting their battles o'er again.

The sun had set and "retreat" long since been sounded when the escort reached Burns Hill, so that by the time Tom Flinders had reported himself to Captain Jamieson, had seen his horse fed, watered, and "fettled up" for the night, and had got rid of the traces of his arduous day's work, the officers of the various detachments in camp were already gathered round the big watch-fire, and were eating their frugal supper, talking over the stirring events of the day, or paying a soldier's tribute to the memory of their brave comrades who only the evening before formed part of their circle, but who now lay stiff and stark in the distant bush. Of those who had ridden in from Chumie Hoek the first to join the group round the fire was Lieutenant S—, and he at once proceeded to relate the gallant manner in which Tom had rescued Frank Jamieson from the Caffres. Said he warmly: "It was one of the pluckiest things I have seen for a long time. Young Flinders is a fine lad, and will make a capital officer."

"He is a 'chip of the old block,' as those of you who know Matthew Flinders will agree," put in Captain Jamieson, who had heard full particulars from his son. "I'm proud of him, I can assure you."

"And here comes the young hero!" exclaimed Mr S— as Tom walked up to the fire. "We were just talking of you, Flinders," he added, slapping the lad's shoulder. "By Saint George, sir, that cut you delivered was worthy of Shaw the life-guardsman!"

"Sit beside me, Tom," said Captain Jamieson, making room for him. "We'll find a bone for you to pick somewhere. I can't say all I wish to say now," he went on in a low tone. "But you know how deeply I—eh, my dear boy!" And the old officer pressed his young friend's hand.

"Allow me to congratulate you on your débût in the battle-field, Mr Flinders," called out Major G—, the camp commandant.

"My friend here has informed me of your gallant behaviour, and you may be sure I shall report most favourably of you to the brigadier."

Our hero was quite taken aback at thus publicly receiving so much "kudos," and he felt not a little relieved when the conversation turned from his personal exploits to matters of more general interest.

"The campaign has opened with some hard fighting," observed Major G—; "and I fully expect that Sandilli and his warriors will give us considerable trouble before we subdue them."

"If they attack us to-morrow on the line of march we shall have our work cut out for us," said another dragoon officer. "It will be no easy job to guard the waggons with the force we have."

"No, indeed," responded an artillery captain, who had some experience of South African warfare. "Thompson tells me that we have over a hundred bullock-waggons to escort, to say nothing of our guns and ammunition train. We shall have to fight tooth and nail to take them through. What route do you propose to take, major?"

"Well," replied the major, "Jamieson, who knows the country thoroughly, advises me to follow the regular waggon-track—"

"*Ir*-regular waggon-track, major," laughed Mr S—. "The roads about here are not *macadamised*, though there's plenty of *metal* on the surface."

"Well, then, the *ir*-regular waggon-track that runs along the banks of Keiskamma and skirts the high ground upon which the ruins of Fort Cox stand," continued Major G— good-humouredly. "It is a somewhat circuitous route, but in this case the 'longest way round is the shortest way there.' No doubt we shall have to fight over every yard of the ground when once we are across the river."

"'Pon my honour, Jamieson," struck in an old captain of the Mounted Rifles, "Sandilli promises to give Somerset as much trouble as your old friend Marshal Soult gave the Duke!"

"As the Duke gave Soult, you mean?" was the retort.

"By the way, Jamieson," said Major G—, "talking of Soult reminds me of your promise to give us an account of the part your old regiment played at Albuera. Suppose we have it now? It is just the time and place for an old campaigner to 'fight his battles o'er again.'"

A murmur of approval greeted the major's suggestion; and so Captain Jamieson, willing to accede to what was evidently the wish of his companions-in-arms, thus commenced his "oft-told tale."

"The early spring of 1811 found me an 'impatient patient' in the General Hospital at Belem, suffering from the effects of a dangerous gunshot wound received at Busaco during our retreat down the valley of the Mondego. You must know that I was then colour-sergeant of the Light Company of the —th Foot; and my regiment—which was attached to Colborne's Brigade, 2nd Division—had marched in pursuit of Massena, who, having broken up his camp before Torres Vedras on the 2nd March, was retiring into Spain, laying waste the country as he went.

"Great was my disappointment at not being allowed to march with the regiment; for I began to fear lest my continued absence from the colours might lead my comrades to suppose that I had become a 'Belem Ranger,' and did not

intend to soldier any more. However, I was not detained in hospital very much longer, for at the end of April the doctors pronounced me fit for duty; and I was forthwith sent, with a large draft of men belonging to various corps, to rejoin the —th.

“After a fatiguing march the draft joined the 2nd Division at Albuera on the 13th May, and to my great pleasure I found myself reposted to the ‘Light Bobs.’

“Marshal Beresford was then in command of the 2nd Division, General Rowland Hill, its proper leader, being away on leave. Colborne was our brigadier.

“Beresford had taken up a position on the heights of Albuera to cover the siege of Badajos, information having been received that Soult (with 19,000 veteran infantry, 4000 cavalry, and 40 guns) was advancing from Seville to the relief of the beleaguered fortress.

“To oppose the French marshal, Beresford had 32,000 men of all arms; but of this number only 7000 were British troops, the remainder being Spaniards and Portuguese under Blake and Castanos.

“On the 15th May Beresford took post on the Albuera range, about seven miles from the town and fortress of Badajos. This range extends for four miles, and, being easy of ascent, is practicable for both cavalry and artillery. Along the eastern base of the hills flow the Albuera and its tributary the Feria, and between these two rivers is a wooded range of hills. This range Beresford most unfortunately neglected to occupy.

“The village of Albuera is situated above the river just at the junction of the main roads to Badajos and Seville, and Talavera and Valverde.

“Beresford placed Blake’s Spaniards on the right of the position; the British held the centre; Colborne’s brigade (consisting of the 3rd, 31st, 48th, and ‘ours’) being posted near the village, which was occupied by Alten’s Hanoverians; the Portuguese were on the left.

“On the evening of the 15th the light company of the —th was ordered to parade for piquet, and Captain Clarke marched us down to a narrow stone bridge spanning the Albuera in front of the village. Towards eight o’clock on the morning of the 16th Soult sent a battery of light guns, and some squadrons of light cavalry under Godinot, towards the bridge; and as soon as they had unlimbered, the French artillerists opened a smart cannonade upon our position, under cover of which Godinot’s light horsemen advanced as though they would charge across the bridge, which was barely wide enough to allow three horses to cross abreast.

“‘This is but a feint, Sergeant Jamieson,’ Captain Clarke said to me as we watched the movements of the enemy. ‘This is a feint, I feel sure. Depend upon it, Soult will try to turn our right, which is our weak point.’

“Now it happened that Beresford, who had come round to visit the piquets, overheard my captain’s remark, and turning sharply round, said:

“‘They are going to retreat, sir. I expect to attack their rear-guard by nine o’clock!’

“The words were hardly out of his mouth when an aide-de-camp galloped up from the right, where the Spaniards were posted, with the alarming intelligence that our *right was turned*!

“We afterwards learned that during the night Soult had quietly concentrated 15,000 troops, with 30 guns, behind the wooded range which Beresford left unoccupied, within ten minutes’ march of our weakest point—the right; and this movement he carried out entirely unknown to Beresford or his lieutenants, who remained in total ignorance of the proximity of this powerful force until it was too late to interpose between it and the Spaniards.

“So Blake was vigorously attacked and driven back with great slaughter; and Soult, confident that the day was won, pushed forward his columns.

“At this critical moment General Sir William Stewart galloped up to our brigadier and ordered him to move to the right in support of the Spaniards; our company then rejoined the battalion. Without waiting to form order of battle the brigade, led by the fiery William Stewart, doubled up the hill in open column of companies, and, passing the Spanish right, attempted to open line by succession of battalions as they arrived. But the French fire was too hot and well-directed to be borne quietly, and before the manoeuvre was completed the word was given to ‘charge.’

“With a ringing cheer we dashed onwards, but when close to the enemy the ‘halt’ was unexpectedly sounded, and the ‘retire’ followed almost immediately. At this time a heavy rain was falling, which obscured the view; and whilst we were wondering why the ‘retire’ had sounded the enemy’s cavalry appeared in rear of the ‘Old Buffs,’ who were, I believe, in the very act of re-forming column.

“We then advanced again; but before we had moved many paces a perfect swarm of Polish lancers, supported by several squadrons of chasseurs-à-cheval, charged the rear of the brigade and threw the four regiments into confusion. Separated and taken at a terrible disadvantage, our men had to act for themselves; so they formed groups of six or eight, and thus withstood the furious onslaught of the savage Poles. Many of the officers joined the men, and prepared to sell their lives dearly; for quarter was neither given nor asked for. Captain Clarke, his junior subaltern, Ensign Hay, and I, found ourselves in the midst of a group composed of a dozen men of our own company. Clarke snatched up a musket and blazed away as fast as he could ram home the cartridges, encouraging the men a while with words of approval or exhortation. Ensign Hay followed the captain’s example, and fired as hard as he could fire; and I too abandoned my pike for ‘Old Brown Bess,’ and may safely say that I never made better practice.

“All this time the Polish lancers were wheeling round the groups, stabbing at us with their long lances whenever they

got a chance. It was reported afterwards that they had been promised a doubloon apiece if they broke the British line. Gradually our men became mixed up with these lancers and with the chasseurs and French linesmen; and every one of us was thrusting and parrying, hacking and guarding, loading and firing, to the best of his ability. Never have I witnessed such a mêlée.

“I saw a savage-looking, bare-headed lancer attack our ensign and run him through the lungs, the lance coming out at his back. He fell, but regained his feet immediately. The Pole again delivered point, his lance striking Hay’s breast-bone; down he went as if shot, whilst his assailant pitched over his horse’s head and rolled over in the mud beside him. I ran forward to the ensign’s assistance, but came in collision with a chasseur-à-cheval, who cut at me with his sabre and brought me on my knees. I staggered up and drove my bayonet through his leg, pinning him to the saddle. He then cut at me again, inflicting a severe wound on my head and partially depriving me of my senses. At that moment my adversary’s horse was killed by a musket ball, and in its fall the poor brute crushed me to the ground. I struggled hard to regain my feet, but the weight of the dead charger kept me down, and so I was placed *hors-de-combat* for the rest of the day.

“In this desperate hand-to-hand encounter Colborne’s brigade suffered terribly, for of the four regiments composing it the 31st alone was able to form square when the French cavalry charged us. The 3rd Buffs, the 48th, and ‘Ours’ were nearly annihilated.

“At length a gust of wind blew aside the mist and smoke and revealed our desperate condition to General Lumley, who was in the plain below; and he at once despatched four squadrons of heavy dragoons against the lancers. Almost at the same moment Houghton’s brigade came up, and Major Julius Hartmann brought his light guns into action.

“When I heard the artillery thundering over the ground I gave myself up for lost, making sure that they must inevitably gallop over me; but they passed a few yards to my right, and, quickly unlimbering, opened fire.

“The battle was now continued with redoubled fury; the guns belched forth grape at half-range, the musketry kept up an incessant rattle; and the carnage on both sides was truly awful. Presently our gallant fellows found that their ammunition was beginning to run short, and they were obliged to slacken fire; and at this juncture—misfortunes never come single—another French column established itself on the right flank.

“Marshal Beresford—who had been doing his utmost to induce the cowardly Spaniards to advance to the assistance of their well-nigh vanquished allies—now saw that retreat was inevitable, and he most reluctantly gave the unwelcome order. But happily the battle was saved by the *moral* courage—hark ye to that, you young fellows!—by the *moral* courage of a young staff-officer, Colonel Hardinge, (afterwards Lord Hardinge, commander-in-chief), who entirely on his own responsibility rode off at full speed to General Cole (who had just arrived from Badajos) and urged him to advance with the 4th Division and Abercrombie’s brigade of the 2nd Division. Cole readily assented, and at once led the 7th and 23rd Fusiliers, flanked by a battalion of Portuguese caçadores, up the hill; whilst Abercrombie’s brigade followed in support.

“Separating themselves from the crowd of broken soldiery, these fresh troops attacked the French with irresistible fury, and slowly but surely drove them back to the farthest edge of the hill. In vain did Soult call upon his veterans to hold their ground, in vain did he bring up his reserves; nothing could withstand Cole’s splendid infantry; and after a desperate struggle the French masses went down the slope of the hill, breaking like a loosened cliff.

“The battle was over. By three o’clock the last shot had been fired, and the remnant of the British troops, who had fought with such devoted courage, stood triumphant on the bloodstained ground. Since that memorable day I have taken part in many a ‘stricken field,’ but never have I seen harder fighting than at the battle of Albuera.”

“It was indeed a brilliant affair,” said Major G—n when the old officer stopped speaking; “and our soldiers gave unmistakable proof of their superiority over Bonaparte’s veterans. Pray, what were the losses on either side?”

“I cannot say how the Spaniards and Portuguese came off; but out of 6000 British and Hanoverian troops actually engaged more than 4000 were killed, wounded, or missing,” Captain Jamieson replied. “The French, I believe, lost between 7000 and 8000 men. As for the poor old —th, we went into action over 400 strong, and on the morrow only 53 bayonets mustered at parade! The battalion may almost be said to have ceased to exist.”

“Well might Byron exclaim, ‘O Albuera, glorious field of grief!’” said S—. “But you have not told us how you fared after the battle.”

“Well, I lay crushed beneath the chasseur’s dead charger until morning, when I was found by a party of the light company who had been searching for me throughout the night. My wounds were not very severe, and when I recovered, the commanding officer, Major K—, appointed me sergeant-major of the battalion. I held that post until the end of the war, when I was invalided home and promoted to an ensigncy on the half-pay list. In 1821 they gave me my lieutenancy in the Cape Mounted Rifles.”

“You are to be congratulated on having seen so much active service,” said Major G—n. “I always envy you Peninsula heroes. Few men, I should imagine, have passed through so much peril, and yet lived to tell the tale.”

“I am not out of the wood yet, G—n,” was Jamieson’s quiet rejoinder. “But talking of peril, no man has experienced more of ‘moving accidents by flood and field’ than my friend Richards,” he went on, nodding at a wiry-built grave-looking man who sat near him. “You’ve seen some rough work in America—eh, John?”

“Yes, Jamieson,” responded the person addressed, who was an officer of native levies; “but not such work as you’ve been describing. This, you must know, is my first regular campaign. I have always been a ‘man of peace,’ gentlemen—that is to say, when the Red-skins would let me!”

“Which was seldom enough, no doubt,” put in Captain Jamieson. “By the way, hadn’t you a remarkable escape from the Indians some years ago? I think I remember hearing of it.”

“A—ah!” rejoined Mr Richards with a sort of gasp—he spoke, too, with a slight American intonation; “a—ah! that *was* an adventure! Why, do you know, gentlemen, that though it happened twenty-two years ago come next fall, I feel kinder nervous even now when I think of it; for ’twas just about the very narrowest shave of being scalped that ever I did run.”

“Come, tell us all about it, John,” said the captain. “I’m sure our friends will appreciate the yarn.”

“Well, then, gentlemen,” Mr Richards began, taking a look round the company as if he wanted to find some individual upon whom to fix his eye, “you must know that I met with this adventure in ’25, when I was a smart spry young fellow of nine-and-twenty. I was trapping beavers at the time, in company with my friend Job Potter, near the head-waters of the Missouri; and as we knew that the Blackfoot Indians were on the war-path, and that we should meet with but scant mercy if we fell into their hands, we just set our beaver-traps at night, visited them at dawn, and remained concealed in the woods during the day.

“Early one morning Job and I were paddling up stream in our canoe, on our way to examine the traps, when of a sudden we heard a noise as though a herd of buffaloes were galloping towards us; and the next minute a number of Red-skins in their war-paint came rushing along either bank of the river—a couple of hundred of them at the least.

“We turned the head of the canoe like lightning and paddled down stream as hard as we could paddle, but the Indians sent a flight of arrows after us and killed poor Job Potter, who in his fall upset the canoe. By a miracle, I only received two slight flesh-wounds; and when I found myself in the river I dived like a duck in order to escape the second shower. Now some thirty yards lower down the stream was a small island, and when we paddled past it I had noticed that against the upper part a sort of raft of drift-timber had lodged. This raft, I must explain, was formed of the trunks of several trees, large and small, covered over with smaller and broken wood to the depth of five or six feet.

“In my extremity I happily remembered this raft, and I saw in it my only chance of eluding my pursuers. Rising for one second to the surface in order to make sure of its position, I dived again and swam under water until I found myself directly beneath the raft. I then—not without considerable difficulty—managed to force my head and shoulders between the trunks of trees, so that the upper portion of my body was well above water, and at the same time completely hidden from view by the broken wood on the top of the raft.

“Hardly had I fixed myself in this position when the Indians arrived opposite my place of refuge, and several swam off to the island and searched for me amongst the brushwood; one or two actually got on the raft.

“Gentlemen, I remained in that terrible position for eleven mortal hours!—in fact, until the Red-skins took their departure, which was not before nightfall. As soon as I was certain that they were gone I dived from under the raft and swam some distance down the river, and there landing, made my way to Fort Jefferson. When I arrived there, after two days’ tramp, I found that my hair had turned quite grey; and I can assure you, that, if I live to be a hundred, I shall Dever forget the agony of suspense I suffered when fixed up between those trees.”

Many a thrilling tale of sport and war, of peril by flood and field, was told that evening; and the circle round the watch-fire would not have broken up until the small hours of the morning had not the commanding officer reminded them that they must be on the move by cock-crow. So the officers lay down to rest with their weapons beside them, ready for aught that might occur; and before midnight the camp was hushed in slumber, no sound being heard save the measured tramp of the patrol or the hoarse challenge of the sentinels.

Chapter Eighteen.

The 18th April—A Fight against terrible odds—Numbered with the slain!—The March to Block Drift.

The stars were still bright in the heavens, and the grey dawn of day had not yet appeared in the east, when the camp at Burns Hill was once more astir with the final preparations for the march to Chumie Hoek; and so soon as the waggons were ready and the draught cattle inspanned, the troops paraded without blast of bugle or beat of drum, and the order to form column-of-route was given. The advance-guard moved off just as the morning broke, and was presently followed by the long train of bullock-waggons—one hundred and twenty in number—and the guns and caissons of the Royal Artillery; but the day had “begun its broiling course” before the rear-guard, of which Jamieson’s Horse formed part, was clear of the camping ground.

As daylight grew more distinct, thousands of Caffre warriors were descried pouring down from the mountains; and it became palpable to all concerned that the way would be disputed by a determined and—so far as numbers went—an overwhelming force.

Said old Captain Jamieson, as he brought his glass to bear on the distant hordes, “Mark my words, G—! the 18th April will become famous in the annals of South African warfare. Those fellows yonder mean business; they have no doubt been excited to the verge of madness by their witch doctors, and will attack us with maniacal fury.”

“We shall have hard work to get through them,” the major replied, somewhat gloomily, for he felt much his responsibility; “and I fear many a good soldier amongst us will never see another sunrise. Still, were it not for the ‘impedimenta,’ I would not mind encountering double the number; and if we could only get them in the open for half an hour our cavalry should read them a lesson they’d never forget—a lesson that should be handed down to posterity! But I must move on to the front. *Au revoir*, Jamieson! I trust we shall meet again at Chumie Hoek before

many hours have passed.”

The road by which the convoy was to march followed the bank of the Keiskamma for some two or three miles; until the river, suddenly changing its course by a sharp bend to the right, swept round a rocky eminence upon which stood the ruins of a long-abandoned military post known as Fort Cox. At the base of this eminence (which the road traversed before it again met the Keiskamma at the drift or ford) the way led for nearly a half mile up a precipitous ascent, encumbered with huge boulders, and surrounded by bush.

It was at this point that the Caffre chiefs massed their eager warriors for the attack on the baggage-train.

The leading division of waggons, which carried the “impedimenta” belonging to Colonel Somerset’s column, were so admirably defended by G—n’s advanced-guard and their own escort, that they passed up this dangerous ground without disaster, and descending to the drift (which was held by a squadron of the Cape Mounted Rifles, under Lieutenant Bissett) (General Sir John Bissett, K.C.B., author of *Sport and War in South Africa*) crossed over the Keiskamma. This part of the train subsequently reached the camp at Chumie Hoek in safety; its rear being covered by Bissett’s riflemen, who, after the passage of the river was effected, were relieved at the ford by Major G—n’s advanced force. But the journey between the ford and Chumie Hoek was not made without opposition, for there was some very hard fighting all through the bushy country, and several of the escort were killed and wounded; Mr Bissett himself had a narrow escape of his life, his charger being shot under him, and his rifle knocked to pieces in his hands.

The centre division of the convoy—consisting principally of the baggage-waggons of the 7th Dragoon Guards—did not meet with similar good fortune; for the enemy attacked the escort with such impetuosity and in such overwhelming numbers, that the latter was compelled to fall back on the troops in the rear, and so the whole of the waggons were captured. To make matters worse, this disaster occurred in a narrow part of the road, and the wily Caffres immediately freed the teams from the yokes, overturned several of the waggons, and so completely blocked the way for the rest of the train.

By this time Colonel Somerset had despatched every man he could spare out of camp to Major G—n’s assistance; namely Sutton’s Kat River Burghers, and two companies of the 91st Regiment, under Captain Scott; but the enemy continued to come up to the attack in such astonishing force that the major was reluctantly compelled to abandon the baggage-waggons of the 7th Dragoon Guards (fifty-two in number) in order that he might have more men to defend the guns and ammunition train, which he was determined to save at all hazards.

Leaving the waggons to their fate, Major G—n made a détour to the left along the bushy slope, and having fought his way across the Keiskamma he entered a valley at the foot of the Seven Kloof Mountain.

Up this valley G—n led his column, fighting over every yard of the broken ground, until—just as night was falling—he reached the open country in the vicinity of Chumie Hoek. The Caffres here made one more desperate attempt to take the guns, but the gunners opening upon them with shot and shell, repulsed the attack, and it was not renewed; the column then marched on, and eventually arrived in camp with the loss of an artillery waggon, which had to be abandoned owing to the collapse of its team of bullocks...

We must now return to the rear-guard, and see how it had fared with our friends in “Jamieson’s Horse” during that eventful day.

When the officer commanding the rear-guard heard that the escort of the centre division of the convoy was being driven back, and that the waggons were in imminent danger of falling into the enemy’s hands, he consulted with Captain Jamieson as to whether he should not take it upon himself to send a troop to their assistance; but before he had time to come to a decision a mounted orderly arrived from the front with the alarming intelligence that the waggons had already been captured, and that the road was entirely blocked; he also brought an order that “Jamieson’s Horse” should be sent forward at once, to retake the waggons and hold the enemy in check until the road had been cleared.

Anxious to reach the scene of the disaster without a moment’s delay, and being well aware that if he advanced along the road he must necessarily meet with more or less hindrance, Captain Jamieson wheeled the corps to the left, and started off at a hand-gallop across country until he lost sight of the convoy; when he changed direction to the right and led his men over some broken ground, which ran almost parallel to, and was within easy rifle-shot of the road. They had advanced about three parts of a mile over this ground, and were within half that distance of the captured waggons—which were now completely surrounded by hundreds of the enemy—when Frank Jamieson, who was riding at the head of the leading troop, espied—away to the left front—a small party of Caffres driving off the bullock teams into the mountains. He at once pointed them out to his father, who ordered him to follow in pursuit with fifteen men, and do his best to recover the teams and bring them back as quickly as possible.

“Without them,” said the captain, “I do not see how we can take the waggons on; for I heard Thompson say that he had no spare draught cattle.”

As soon as Frank had ridden off, Captain Jamieson and the remainder of the corps galloped onwards, and—the nature of the ground and the “din of battle” favouring them—they approached within a couple of hundred yards of the baggage-train without attracting attention; for those of the enemy who were not actually engaged with either the advance-guard or escorts, were busily employed plundering the waggons. Jamieson’s volunteers were thus enabled to deliver a telling volley, and then charge down on the Caffres before the latter were thoroughly alive to the fact that they were being attacked from that quarter; and so impetuous was this charge, that the little band rode right through the dense masses of the enemy up to the waggons without losing a single man or horse. The next minute the Caffres, recovering from their surprise, closed in upon the gallant horsemen, and for a little while there was some desperate hand-to-hand fighting, in which, however, Jamieson and his men at first held their own. But the Caffres outnumbered them twenty to one, and, moreover, were excited to such a pitch of fury that they were utterly reckless of their lives;

and as fast as one was cut down or shot, half a dozen others would press forward to take his place; many, too, actually crawled on all-fours amongst the plunging horses, and thrust their assegais again and again into the poor brutes' bellies, and so in a short time nearly one-third of the volunteers were dismounted, and assegaied before they could disengage themselves from their dead chargers. And now the corps got broken up into groups, and the end soon came.

Amongst the first who had their horses killed, were Captain Jamieson, young Flinders, and Sergeant-major Keown; they, however, at the time, escaped personal injury, and so continued to fight on foot until they found themselves separated from their comrades, and standing at bay with their backs against a waggon.

Three worthier representatives of our glorious triune kingdom never faced their sovereign's foes!

On the left of the "dauntless three" stood the fine old Scotchman, cool and calm as if at sword-play; his grey head bare, his tall commanding figure reared to the full height, his long cavalry sabre red with the blood of his enemies. Next to him was our young hero, a trifle less collected than his veteran chief, but not a whit less fearless; could any of his former school-fellows have beheld Tom Flinders at that moment, they would have rested content that the honour of Rugby was safe in his hands! Tom had lost his sword when his horse was killed, and he was now defending himself with an assegai snatched from an enemy's hand.

Then on the right—close beside his master's son—stood that brave and honest son of "Ould Erin," Patrick Keown, armed with an old-pattern dragoon sabre, which he had picked up cheap in some Cape Town store, and had had sharpened until its edge was as keen as that of a scythe. Patrick Keown was a splendid swordsman (he had been sergeant-instructor of fencing to the C.M.E.), and not a few Caffres had fallen beneath his stalwart arm during the fray; but, alas! that good right arm now hung powerless—for an assegai had pierced it through and through, and poor Patrick's coat-sleeve was literally saturated with the crimson stream that gushed from the wound—and it was his *left* hand that was clenched within the basket hilt. Round these devoted men was gathered a mob of yelling savages, who thirsted for their blood, yet hesitated to come within reach of their formidable weapons.

But it was impossible that such an unequal contest could last for more than a few minutes.

Tom Flinders was the first of the trio who fell. Struck on the head by a jagged piece of rock, hurled by one of the infuriated Caffres, Tom dropped as if shot; and rolling between the wheels of the waggon lay motionless on his face—to all appearance dead.

Almost at the same moment Captain Jamieson received a ghastly wound in the breast, and sinking lifeless to the bloodstained ground was instantly despatched by his ruthless assailants. Hard fate his, poor old man! to have fought through many a hotly-contested action with "foemen worthy of his steel;" to have survived the glorious perils of the Peninsula campaigns; and then at last to have fallen by the hand of a South African savage!

When Sergeant-major Keown saw that his chief and his beloved master's son were both down, he gave utterance to a bitter cry of mingled rage and sorrow, and with uplifted sword rushed madly into the very midst of the exultant foe. Once—twice—thrice did his sabre flash in the sun, and each time that it descended a Caffre "bit the dust." Then a crushing blow from a knobkerrie—delivered from behind—brought the brave Irishman on his knees; he staggered up, and wiping away the blood that, streaming down his face, obscured his vision, he shortened his sword and thrust at the nearest Caffre, driving the keen point deep into his side; but the next moment a dozen assegais were plunged into Patrick Keown's body, and he fell to rise no more.

A few of the ill-fated corps succeeded in hewing themselves a path through the dense masses of the enemy, and rode back to the rear-guard; whilst one or two—of whom more anon—were taken prisoners; but the majority of those who took part in the fatal charge were slain fighting—like their heroic commander and his sergeant-major—to the very last gasp. The volunteers who escaped to tell the woeful tale were attached for the rest of the day to a troop of the Cape Mounted Rifles, and with them fought their way across the Keiskamma, and thence on to Chumie Hoek; where, late that same evening, they were joined by Frank Jamieson's party.

Frank's grief on hearing that his father and Tom Flinders were amongst the slain was very great, and he would certainly have gone forth alone to search for their bodies, had not the brigadier given him a peremptory order to remain in camp; declaring that—being one of Captain Jamieson's oldest friends—he would not hear of the young man throwing away his life to no purpose.

The "General Order" issued on the evening of the 18th, informed the weary soldiers and Burgher troops that it was the brigadier's intention to quit Chumie Hoek on the morrow, and march with his entire force and "impedimenta" to the mission station at Block Drift. This was anything but welcome news to the poor fellows, who sorely needed rest after the fatigues they had undergone, and had looked forward to remaining quiet at least a clear day, instead of only a few short hours; nor were they permitted to enjoy these few hours undisturbed, for during the night they had repeatedly to stand to their arms in order to repel the attacks which the enemy made on the camp. Then when morning dawned there was every indication of another day's desperate fighting; the mountains above the camp being alive with the enemy, whilst masses of their mounted warriors had assembled on the lower heights of the Chumie range.

As Colonel Somerset's advance-guard marched from the camping ground, the Caffres moved down from the mountains in vast numbers, extending themselves all along the line of route; and when the column approached the bushy country towards Block Drift, they attacked it in front, centre, and rear.

Somerset immediately gave orders for the Royal Artillery to come into action, and the guns opening with shell and canister, quickly drove the enemy back. When the head of the column neared the mission station, Colonel Somerset rode forward with his advance-guard and two guns, and taking possession of the ford of the Chumie River, placed the guns in position, and opened a hot fire upon the Caffres; who were still hovering round the flanks and rear of the

baggage-train—attacking the waggons whenever an opportunity occurred.

About two and a half miles from Block Drift the enemy were strongly posted on a sugar-loaf, bush-clad hill, at the base of which the road passed; here there was some severe fighting, and the rear of the column was at one time very hard pressed. To do the Caffres justice, it must be confessed that they exhibited undeniable courage, and returned again and again to the attack; and that in the face of a destructive artillery and musketry fire, such as might well have daunted even European troops. The passage of the Chumie River was not effected without considerable difficulty and delay, for the banks being precipitous and slippery, many of the waggons stuck fast in the bed of the stream, and had to be hauled up on "terra firma" by the soldiers—the bullocks not being equal to the task.

All this time the fighting in rear of the column was going on with unabated fury, until at last, the ammunition of the infantry of the rear-guard failing, volunteers were called for from the cavalry corps to relieve them. The troopers of the "Black Horse," and of the Cape Rifles readily responded to the call, and, the required number having been selected from amongst those who stepped to the front, they dismounted and doubled back to the rear.

The Caffre chiefs now began to think they had had enough of it; their losses had been very heavy, and they had only captured one waggon—which, as it turned out, they had much better have left alone; so their attacks became less furious, and at length they were finally repulsed. By that time the last of the waggons had been brought across the Chumie River, and Colonel Somerset continuing his march reached Block Drift in safety and there established his camp, taking advantage of the missionary buildings. Amongst those who were reported as "missing," after the day's work was done, was Frank Jamieson!

Thus ended what may be termed the "opening campaign" of the "War of the Axe."

Chapter Nineteen.

Out of the Frying-pan into the Fire.

When a hard unyielding substance such as a lump of rock, thrown with the full force of a vigorous arm, hits a man fairly on any part of—what Mr Seth Pecksniff, Emperor of servile hypocrites, once described as—"that delicate and exquisite portion of human anatomy, the brain," that man may think himself exceedingly fortunate if he escapes with no more serious injury than a broken head and a temporary deprivation of his senses. And such was the first thought that entered the mind of our friend Tom Flinders when, some hours after he was struck down in the manner recorded in the foregoing chapter, he found himself capable of thinking at all—in other words, when he so far recovered from the stunning effects of the blow he had received as to be able to realise the fact that he was still in the land of the living.

But though Tom recovered consciousness he certainly did not at once recover the full use of his reasoning faculties, otherwise he would have had "nous" enough to remain beneath the friendly shelter of the waggon until he could be sure that the coast was clear; whereas, instead of doing this, he must needs crawl out on to the road and take a look round him. The consequence of his rashness was that four Caffres, who were still prowling about, pounced upon him before he had time to offer any resistance, and, pinioning his arms with leathern thongs, marched him off in triumph.

Wounded as he was, breathless and almost insensible, the poor lad was half-dragged, half-carried by his savage captors, first across the Keiskamma Drift, then up the precipitous mountain side, until, shortly after sunset, they reached a small kraal situated on one of the rocky spurs of the Amatolas. Here the wretched prisoner's appearance was hailed with loud shouts of exultation by the few men and the numerous women and children who inhabited the kraal; and after he had been well beaten and loaded with abuse (not a word of which he understood) the thongs that bound his arms were cut, he was stripped of the greater portion of his clothing, and then ignominiously kicked into a hut, where his enemies left him to pass the night as best he might, without a drop of water or the smallest morsel of food.

That Tom Flinders' reflections as he lay, almost in a state of nudity, on the mud floor of the miserable hut—the interior of which swarmed with noxious insects and vermin—were not of an agreeable nature may be readily imagined. A dull feeling of pain racked his weary limbs, his temples throbbed violently, and a burning thirst consumed him, added to which his mental anguish bade fair to drive him mad.

He could not help calling to remembrance all that he had heard concerning the appalling cruelties practised by the Caffres on those unhappy creatures who chanced to fall into their hands; and the recollection of these horrors almost made him wish that the piece of rock had struck him just a little *harder*, or that his captors had put an end to his existence when they discovered him, instead of reserving him for a doom of protracted and unutterable suffering.

But Tom was not one to willingly give way to gloomy forebodings, and he strove hard to change his thoughts; so that presently he found himself thinking of his parents, especially of his mother, and of their grief at his sad fate; and next he began to wonder what had become of Captain Jamieson and faithful Patrick Keown (for when Tom crawled from beneath the waggon he had not noticed the mutilated bodies of those brave men lying by the road-side), and of the rest of his comrades—whether any of them had escaped, and if so whether they would make any search for him.

"They might as well look for a needle in a bundle of forage," said he half aloud.

But thinking of his absent friends was good for poor Tom, for it made him remember that he had One Friend who was never absent; and, reproaching himself for his rebellious and ungrateful feelings and his want of trust, he rose to his knees and offered up an earnest prayer for pardon, and for deliverance from his savage enemies.

After which he stretched himself on the floor of his foul prison, and (in spite of his painful condition and wretched

surroundings and the pangs of almost overwhelming thirst) he at length fell into a heavy sleep.

Tom remained in a heavy drowsy slumber—half sleep, half stupor—for eight or nine hours, and when at length he opened his eyes it was broad daylight. On attempting to get up he discovered that his ankles were secured by a stout cord, though his arms were still free.

“So the beggars have been paying me a visit during the night,” said he, assuming a sitting posture and taking a look round the hut. “I must have slept uncommonly sound, for them to have lashed my feet together without rousing me! Halloa! what’s this?” he went on as his eye lighted upon a gourd and a few green mealies placed just within his reach. “Come, they don’t intend that I should die of thirst, after all!” And eagerly seizing the gourd, which contained about a pint and a half of sour milk, he drained it to the dregs.

“I don’t remember ever having enjoyed a drink so much!” exclaimed the poor fellow as he threw down the empty vessel with a sigh. “But oh, don’t I wish there had been three times the quantity!”

The day passed without a soul visiting the prison except one repulsive old woman, who brought Tom another and larger vessel of milk and some more mealies during the afternoon, and who, after regarding him with looks of fiendish malignity, deliberately spat in his face as she left the hut.

“Beastly old crone!” growled Tom as he raised the milk to his lips and took a long draught. “What on earth did she want to do that for?” he added, putting down the half-emptied vessel.

By this time Tom was suffering from the pangs of hunger as well as those of thirst, and so he set to work on the hitherto neglected mealies, and managed to dispose of half of them, untempting though they were.

Next day our captive hero was left entirely alone, receiving neither food nor drink; driven almost to despair he had serious thoughts of freeing himself from his bonds and rushing out upon his foes, regardless of consequences, but he found he was too weak to make the attempt. Then he became quite light-headed, and jabbered and sang to himself, until at last he fell into a regular stupor; and when he once more awoke to consciousness he found that there was another prisoner in the hut, and that prisoner was—Frank Jamieson!

Chapter Twenty.

An unexpected Meeting—A friendly Caffre.

“Can this possibly be you, Tom?” exclaimed Frank Jamieson in utter astonishment, when, in the squalid, half-clad figure lying huddled up against the wall of the hut, he recognised his friend and comrade Tom Flinders. “How came you here? It was officially reported in camp that you were killed when our corps attempted to retake the waggons on the 18th. I am most—”

“Would that the report were true!” interrupted Tom in dejected tones; for he felt so completely broken down that not even the unexpected sight of his friend could rouse him. “I should be out of my misery then. These black devils have beaten and kicked me about like a dog; they’ve insulted and starved me, and driven me half-mad by keeping me without drink. Now I suppose they’ll finish up by torturing us both to death.” And, unable to control himself any longer, for he was quite hysterical from exhaustion, pain, and thirst, the poor lad burst into tears.

In an instant Frank Jamieson was down on his knees beside his prostrate friend, and, taking a spirit-flask from the pocket of his blouse, he raised Tom’s head and made him swallow a small quantity of brandy; he then produced a handful of moss-biscuit from another pocket and pressed him to eat it. But Tom shook his head, saying: “No, thanks, Frank, I’ll not take it; you may want it yourself before long. Food is not plentiful in this miserable hole, I can assure you.”

“Nonsense, man!” retorted the other, seeing that, in spite of his refusal, Tom cast a hungry look at the biscuit. “Eat it at once, or I’ll pitch it away.” Then, as Tom devoured the biscuit, Frank said:

“I think our lives are safe, though we may be detained prisoners for some time. The truth is I have a friend at court, who will do all he can for us.”

“But you’re not a prisoner, Frank?” inquired Tom (upon whom the sup of brandy and mouthful of wholesome food had already had a most beneficial effect), as he regarded his comrade with a puzzled look.

“You cannot for a moment suppose that I came here willingly!” laughed Jamieson. “What makes you ask such an extraordinary question? I hope you don’t think that I am a *deserter*!”

“Why, you don’t *look* like a prisoner,” Tom rejoined. “In the first place, the Caffres have left you your clothes; and secondly, they don’t appear to have made free with the contents of your pockets; whereas, they’ve stripped pretty nearly every rag off my back, and knocked me about into the bargain. How is it they let you off so easily?”

“Well, as I told you before, I have a friend at court,” Jamieson answered. “It fortunately happened that Untsikana, the chief into whose clutches I fell, is an old acquaintance—in fact, about two years ago I saved his life; and moreover, he was under great obligations to my poor father—”

“*Poor* father!” echoed Tom. “I hope the captain is—”

“The dear old governor is dead, Tom,” interrupted Frank with a deep sigh. “I thought you knew it. When last seen he was fighting by your side.”

"So he was, but he was all right when I got knocked over. Are you sure he is killed?"

"There can be no doubt of it, I grieve to say. Untsikana saw his body, and also that of poor Patrick Keown. The corps was almost annihilated—counting the fellows that were with me, there are not more than thirty left."

Their conversation was now interrupted by the entrance of two Caffre warriors, one of whom was Untsikana himself Frank, who could speak the Caffre language fairly well, at once appealed to him on Tom's behalf, and with such success that the chief not only provided him with food and drink, and water to bathe his wounds and bruised limbs, but also procured him an old tiger-skin kaross and a pair of "veldt schoon," to take the place of the garments of which his captors had stripped him, and which had been distributed amongst the dusky inhabitants of the kraal, so that there was no recovering them.

"Who shall say there is not *some* good in a Caffre?" observed Frank Jamieson as he dressed the wound on his friend's head; "come, Tom, you must acknowledge that."

"Your acquaintance Umpty-dumpty, or whatever his name is, is certainly not half a bad chap," replied Tom, whose customary good spirits were returning. "But he is a wonderful exception to the rule. I wonder what they'll do with us?" he added. "Turn us into white slaves, I expect!"

"Impossible to say," his friend answered. "I must sound Untsikana on the subject when he next pays us a visit. I might induce him to aid us in making our escape!"

"Not you," Tom rejoined with a shake of the head. "That would be testing his gratitude rather too much. By the way, when and how did he take you prisoner?"

"That is soon told," said Frank. "You must know," he went on, "that the brigadier broke up his camp at Chumie Hoek on the morning of the 19th, and marched, bag and baggage, for Block Drift.

"I was with the rear-guard in command of the remnants of our poor old corps. The enemy came down in thousands from the mountains and attacked the whole line of waggons, from front to rear, at one time, so that we had some precious hard fighting all along the route.

"Whilst the head of the column was crossing the Chumie River the rear waggons were forced to halt for a bit; and then it was that the Caffres made their hottest attack. The artillery received them with four or five rounds of canister and grape, which staggered them above a bit and checked their advance. A troop of the 7th Dragoon Guards then charged them, and I was ordered to support this charge; because, as no doubt you've noticed, the Caffres generally break when charged, and then re-form when the cavalry have passed through them.

"Well, during the charge my old horse 'Trumpeter' was killed, and I got a nasty fall, striking my head against a big stone. When I regained my feet our fellows were a hundred yards away, and before I well knew where I was, I was surrounded by a dozen Caffres, who would have quickly put an end to me had I not recognised Untsikana and called out to him to save my life. He at once interfered and would not let his men lay a finger upon me; but, in spite of my entreaties, he carried me off into the mountains. To make a long story short, I was kept, closely guarded, in a cave until yesterday morning, when Untsikana brought me on here."

"Did the enemy capture any of the waggons?" asked Tom.

"From what I heard them say, I think they must have got hold of the hospital stores waggon," answered Jamieson. "I saw three or four Caffres yesterday in a very miserable state, and Untsikana told me they had been drinking the white man's medicines. One fellow was terribly bad, and, from the condition of his mouth and lips, I should imagine that he must have been eating some sort of *blister* (a fact)—and a precious strong sort, too!"

"Hope it agreed with his complaint, whatever that may have been!" said Tom, grinning at the thought of the wretched Caffre's discomfiture when the blister began to draw. "But what could have induced the stupid beggar to taste such a thing?"

"Don't you know that the Caffres have an idea that the white man's medicines possess extraordinary strength-giving properties?" his friend replied. "You're not half up in the manners and customs of your coloured compatriots. They will at any time steal physic in any shape or form, and swallow all they steal."

"And did your friend Umpty go in for this course of promiscuous physicking? Though I don't suppose we should have found him so amiable if he had."

"Well," laughed Frank Jamieson, producing a glass-stoppered bottle from his pocket, "while I was in the cave I saw Untsikana handling this, which no doubt he 'looted' from the hospital waggon; and he was on the point of swallowing the contents, when, fortunately for him, I caught sight of the label and snatched the bottle from his hand."

"Why, what is it?—castor-oil?"

"Castor-oil!—no. He might have drenched himself with that for aught I should have cared," Frank answered. "This is *chloroform*—the stuff the surgeons use during operations to produce insensibility. It has only been in general use a few months, I believe."

"Ah! I heard Dr Fraser talking to old McAlpine about it the other evening," said Tom. "This is the first time it has been supplied to the field-hospital. But what did you want to keep such dangerous stuff for?" he added. "There's enough of it to poison a troop, I should think."

"To tell the truth, I popped the bottle in my pocket, and forgot that it was there until this moment. I must throw it

away when I have a chance.”

“The sooner the better,” said Tom. “A pretty job it would be if you smashed the bottle in this dog-hole of a place! We should probably drop off to sleep, and never wake again!”

“I will give the bottle to Untsikana when I see him again,” Frank rejoined, “and advise him to pitch it into the nearest river, or empty it away in the bush. It *is* nasty stuff to carry about.”

But Frank Jamieson did not see Untsikana again, for the friendly chief quitted the kraal that very evening to rejoin his brother-warriors, the majority of whom had by this time crossed the frontier into British territory, and were committing great ravages and depredations amongst the Albany farms and settlements—so much so that Colonel Somerset had to march with the greater number of his troops to Graham’s Town, and from thence follow up the enemy into Lower Albany.

Chapter Twenty One.

In Durance vile—The Prisoners learn their fate—A fatal Dose.

For three days after Untsikana left the kraal, Tom Flinders and Frank Jamieson were kept in the closest confinement, not being allowed to take any exercise, nor even so much as show their noses outside their narrow prison. During this weary time our unfortunate friends—though they had sufficient both to eat and drink, and were not made to suffer actual personal violence—were forced to put up with the insolent taunts of their captors, and with the virulent abuse of the women and children, who evidently took a delight in congregating round the hut, and assailing its occupants with every insulting epithet they could think of; and, what was far worse, they lost no opportunity of flinging mud, mealie-husks, and other filth through the low doorway, “as though,” as Tom truly remarked, “the hut was not dirty enough already!”

This was, of course, exceedingly annoying, and Tom Flinders waxed very indignant; but his friend took things in a more philosophical spirit, remarking that, as they could not possibly put a stop to these unpleasant attentions, they had best “grin and bear them.” On the fourth morning after the friendly chief’s departure, the old Caffre who had been told off to attend on the prisoners and bring them their daily food, informed Frank Jamieson that he and his companion in misfortune were to be taken under escort to one of the principal Caffre strongholds beyond the Bashee River, and there to become the slaves of Untsikana’s father—a chief of no small importance.

“Never more shall you see your people,” said the old fellow with a malicious grin; for, true to the instincts of his savage nature, he felt a cruel pleasure in attempting to strike terror into the hearts of his prisoners. “Our brave and invincible warriors have eaten up the ‘red soldiers’ of the island-queen, and are now sweeping before them the hated white men. Not one shall be left alive in this land except you and this boy, and you will end your days in slavery!”

“What does the old rascal say?” asked Tom, to whom the Caffre tongue was quite unintelligible. “Something unpleasant, I’ll wager a dollar; he looks so precious satisfied with himself. Ugh, you hoary-headed, hardhearted old sinner!” he added, as the man left the hut.

“He says that Colonel Somerset’s troops have been totally defeated, and that the Caffre warriors are driving our countrymen into the sea,” Frank replied with a slight smile.

“Oh, hang it all! You must tell that to the marines!” exclaimed Tom; though at the same time a feeling of uneasiness came over him lest there should be a spice of truth in their jailer’s report. “I don’t believe a word of it! It cannot possibly be true, you know.”

“And you and I are destined for transportation beyond the Bashee River, where we shall become the bondmen of the great chief Umbodhla—my friend’s father,” continued Frank. “A bright look-out, truly!”

“Very,” ejaculated Tom. “But the beggars haven’t got us there yet, and if we get the chance of giving them the slip, why—”

“We’ll do so,” interrupted Frank. “But, my dear fellow, if we wish to succeed in making our escape we must keep quiet and submit to any affront they may put upon us. Our chief endeavour must be to throw them off their guard, and thus lead them to imagine that we are both thoroughly cowed. Now, do you remember this, Tom! for our success depends upon it. Don’t you show your teeth, old chap—unless you have a good chance of using them.”

“I understand,” growled Tom. “A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse!”

They had no time to say more to each other, for at that moment their jailer came back, and was followed into the hut by three brawny savages, who, seizing Frank roughly, proceeded to fasten his arms behind him, after which they placed a long “reim” with a running noose round his neck; they then served Tom in a similar fashion.

“Hamb’uye ngapandhle (Get outside),” said the Caffre who appeared to be the leader, striking Tom Flinders a pretty smart blow across the shoulders with the staff of his assegai.

“You uncivilised brute!” shouted Tom, the hot blood mounting to his face. “If my hands were only free—”

“But they’re not, old boy,” interrupted Frank; “so take it quietly, like a sensible fellow. It may be our turn by and by.” And without a murmur he followed the guards out of the hut.

The instant the white prisoners appeared outside the hut the entire population of the kraal—from the grey-headed

“indoda” (indoda, man; inkwenkwee, boy; inkosikazi, chief’s wife; intombi, girl) to the woolly-pated, chubby “inkwenkwee;” from the lean and repulsive-looking “inkosikazi” to the plump little “intombi”—set up an awful and prolonged howling and caterwauling, such as would have done credit to an election mob engaged in the pleasing pastime of hooting an unpopular candidate. With this charming chorus ringing in their ears Tom and his friend were conducted by their sable guards through the midst of the kraal.

This was really the first time that Tom had seen the interior of an inhabited kraal (for it was dark when he was brought in after his capture), and in spite of his unpleasant position he cast curious glances round as he passed through. The kraal—which was but a small one—consisted of a number of beehive-shaped huts constructed of canes, wattled and filled in with clay, and thatched with reeds and long grass; the space upon which these huts were erected was inclosed by a wall or lofty hedge, formed of the branches of the “mimosa” strongly and tightly interlaced. The hut in which our friends had been kept in durance vile stood in the very centre of the inclosure, and was not above a quarter the size of the others. “About half as big, and twice as dirty as an English pig-sty, and as full of fleas as a gypsy’s van,” was Tom Flinders’ after description of his uncomfortable prison.

The party told off to escort the white prisoners to Umbodhla’s stronghold beyond the Bashee River consisted of five invalided warriors, who had received wounds during the attack on Campbell’s column on the 17th April; but although their injuries were of such a nature as to prevent their taking part in a “pitched battle” or a hard day’s bush warfare, these warriors were by no means in a weakly condition, and were perfectly capable of marching twenty or thirty miles between daylight and dark, and of resisting any attempt on the part of the prisoners to escape from their custody. The leader of the party—a most ferocious-looking savage, with a sinister and forbidding cast of countenance—was armed with an old-fashioned flint-lock “roer” of Dutch make; but his comrades carried only the usual bundle of assegais and their formidable knobkerries. The leader’s name was Waishlahla, and he, too, was a chief, but of much lower rank than Untsikana.

Quitting the kraal by a narrow opening in the inclosure wall, barely wide enough to allow of three persons passing abreast, the Caffres conducted their prisoners across some cultivated ground by which the kraal was surrounded, and ascended to the summit of the Amatolas. Traversing the range in a northeasterly direction, they presently hit upon a path that, passing down a rocky ravine, led over an extensive plain stretching far away from the base of the Amatolas to the banks of the Kei River.

Down this precipitous and dangerous path the escort proceeded at a rapid pace, forcing their prisoners to keep up with them by repeated blows, and even prods of their assegais, until they reached the mouth of the ravine; they then left the path and struck straight across country in the direction of the Kei River.

Through broken scrub and thorny mimosas, and over rough stony ground, Tom Flinders and Frank Jamieson were hurried at a pace that was well-nigh killing (for when on the march Caffres move over the ground at a sort of double stride or trot, which is terribly trying to those unaccustomed to such rapid travelling) until at length their guards came to a halt on the banks of a small stream. Worn out with heat and fatigue, and suffering intense pain from their bleeding and swollen feet, the weary prisoners—after a long refreshing draught of cool water—sank down on the veldt with a sigh of relief; but one of the escort immediately seized Frank by the collar and dragged him up again, and Waishlahla, severing the thongs that bound his arms, ordered him to strip. Frank hesitated for a moment, and was about to remonstrate, when a sharp blow over the shoulders reminded him that resistance was worse than useless; and so, gulping down his wrath, he threw off all his garments, his shirt excepted, and flung them on the ground.

“Now you may lie down,” said the chief with a savage grin. “You can have an hour’s rest, and then we go on again;” and picking up the clothes he distributed them amongst the escort, whilst Frank, with an exclamation of disgust, stretched himself beside his friend, who had been watching these proceedings with surprise and indignation.

“We’re in a pleasant fix, and no mistake,” whispered Tom as they lay side by side; “why are they treating you in this manner? I thought they intended to leave you your clothes, but now it appears we’re to fare alike!”

“I suppose it is the Caffres’ nature to maltreat those who fall into their power,” answered Frank in the same low tone. “You see as long as Untsikana was present this fellow Waishlahla dared not annoy us, but now—well, you ought to remember the good old nursery rhyme, ‘When the cat’s away the mice will play!’”

“Precious rough play,” growled the other. Then after a pause he said, “I’m afraid we shall not have much chance of getting away from these brutes; they’re a deal too wide-awake.”

“They were not wide-awake enough to fasten my arms again,” his friend rejoined, “and that is something in our favour! Never say die, old fellow! Remember the yarn John Richards spun us; he was in far greater straits than we are, nevertheless he managed to escape from two hundred Red-skins, every one of whom was eager to get his scalp. But turn your back, Tom,” he went on, “and let me see if I cannot loosen your bonds; you will be more at ease then.”

“But I say, Frank, did you take in all that yarn?” asked Tom, as the other cast loose the thongs round his arms. “I didn’t; at least I thought Richards was drawing on his imagination a good deal.”

“Not a bit of it; what he told us was true enough; Richards is not the sort of man to romance. I know him well, for he has acted as our agent at Graham’s Town for the last seven years—in fact ever since he came to South Africa.”

“Well, at all events,” yawned Tom, “I couldn’t escape at this moment if I had the chance; for I’m completely knocked up, and so are you, old fellow; and as we have only one hour—”

“We had better make the most of it,” Frank chimed in. “That is just what I was about to remark, Tom. We must manage to take rest whenever we can, for we shall require all our strength and vigour—mental and physical—if we want to give our guards the slip, and find our way back to the colony.”

It was about mid-day when our two friends lay down to snatch a hasty repose after their toilsome journey; but when Frank Jamieson awoke he found to his intense surprise that the sun had sunk below the horizon, and darkness was rapidly setting in. Tom Flinders was still asleep by his side, and round them were gathered the five Caffres, apparently also asleep—two of them face downwards, with their woolly heads buried in their arms, the other three stretched on the broad of their backs.

"Halloa!—why, it is nearly dark!" exclaimed Frank, sitting up and rubbing his eyes to make sure that he was quite awake. "We must have been sleeping considerably longer than an hour! Or is it possible that I have been dreaming?" was his mental question; but his bare limbs and swollen, bleeding feet were convincing proofs to the contrary. "Tom—Tom Flinders," he then whispered, bending over his friend and gently shaking him.

"What's the row?" cried Tom, waking up with a start.

"H'sh," whispered Frank; "don't make a noise! Waishlahla and his men have overslept themselves, and if we mean to make a dash for freedom, it must be now or never! We shall not get such a chance again."

"I'm game," Tom answered. "But we had better secure their weapons first, especially the chief's gun."

"Leave that to me," said his companion, as he crept cautiously up to the recumbent figure of Waishlahla, with the intention of taking possession of his "roer."

The savage chief lay flat on his back, with his brawny arms extended over his head; and when Frank leaned over him he saw that his jaw had dropped, and that his eyes were wide open and staring.

But there "was no speculation in those eyes"—for Waishlahla was stone dead!

In an instant it flashed across Frank's mind what had happened.

"He must have taken the chloroform!" he exclaimed. "I left the bottle in the pocket of my blouse."

WAISHLAHLA AND HIS MEN ARE FOUND POISONED.

"What?" cried Tom, looking over his shoulder, "you don't mean that!"

"There cannot be a doubt about it," said the other. "See, the man is quite stiff and cold; he must have been dead four

or five hours."

"Then, depend upon it, they're all in the same boat!"

And such proved to be the case.

Waishlahla had found the bottle of chloroform in the pocket of Frank Jamieson's blouse, and he and his comrades had drank the whole of the contents—about eight ounces—between them, with, of course, fatal results.

"Frank," said Tom, as they stood over the chief's stiffening corpse, "I'm very glad we never thought of *giving* the poor fellows that stuff! Still—well, it is a lucky thing for us that you didn't pitch the bottle away!"

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Starlight Tramp.

Although by a concatenation of unforeseen circumstances—that is to say, the accidental possession of a bottle of chloroform, and the Caffres' extraordinary craze for European medicaments—Tom Flinders and Frank Jamieson were freed from their savage guards, they felt by no means certain that they would even now be able to make good their escape. The untimely fate of Waishlahla and his men had, so to speak, left our friends "prisoners at large;" and this was a step—a long step!—in the right direction; but it was no use disguising the fact that there were still almost insurmountable difficulties to overcome, and unknown perils to encounter, before they could consider themselves fairly out of the wood.

They were alone in a hostile country, with only a scanty supply of food and almost without means of procuring more when that was gone (for, situated as they were, it would be running a great risk to use Waishlahla's gun, save in self-defence), whilst between them and Albany—the nearest British territory—lay the Amatola Mountains, which they knew to be swarming with their bloodthirsty foes. Moreover, Frank Jamieson had grave misgivings as to whether there might not be a certain amount of truth in what their old jailer had told him—namely, that Colonel Somerset had suffered a serious reverse, and that Albany was now overrun by the victorious Caffres; and, lest this should be the case, he thought it better for them to keep clear of that district altogether, and endeavour to reach—by a long and circuitous route—one of the more distant provinces, where they might reasonably hope the war had not yet spread. And so, after much anxious deliberation, he proposed to his companion that they should shape their course for the Storm Bergen (which lay almost due north), and having crossed that range, should travel in a westerly direction until they reached the Tarka River, and then proceed along its banks to Cradock—a small town in Somerset province, 70 miles north-west of Graham's Town.

"It will be a serious undertaking," said Frank, "and we shall have to undergo any amount of privation and hardship; but I know you will agree with me that anything is better than running the risk of falling again into the hands of the Caffres; for, depend upon it, we should not get off so easily a second time! Of course," he added, "we must travel by night, and conceal ourselves during the day—at any rate until we're clear of the enemy's country."

"But how are you going to find your way?" was Tom's doubtful query.

"I shall steer by the stars," replied the other. Then, seeing that his friend's face still wore a dubious expression, he said, "Remember, Tom, I don't for a moment suppose that it will be all plain sailing—quite the contrary! But I do honestly believe that in following this route, lies our best—nay, our *only* chance of eluding the Caffres."

"All right, old fellow," cried Tom cheerfully. "I am ready to trust myself to your guidance, and we'll sink or swim together. Now, the sooner we're off the better. I feel fresh as possible after my long caulk."

Frank then resumed his clothes (which luckily for him the Caffres had not put on), whilst Tom despoiled the unfortunate Waishlahla of his gun and ammunition; he also took his knobkerrie, shield, and bundle of assegais; and a bag of green mealies.

"Are you ready, Tom?" asked Frank.

"Ay, ay!" was the prompt reply; "quite ready."

The air was mild and calm, and the glorious constellations of the south shone down on the young men as they started on the first stage of their perilous journey; not knowing where that stage might end, but resolved to keep moving forward throughout the night. Setting their faces in the proposed direction, they trudged on; now dipping into a deep hollow where the grass grew tall and rank, now topping a gentle rise; now clambering over masses of rock, now forcing their way through spiky mimosa jungle or tangled coppice.

Tom Flinders was deeply impressed by the weird novelty of their first night march.

Strange indeed were the noises that sounded through the still night air—the deep hum of myriads of insects, the melancholy "croak, croak" of the bull-frog, or the shrill scream of the night bird mingling with the moaning bark of the jackal, the laughing cry of the hyaena, or the sullen roar of some prowling leopard; stranger still the gaunt, spectre-like forms which loomed through the darkness or moved from the path with snort of terror or angry growl.

At length the morning dawned, and then the weary, foot-sore fugitives—their faces and limbs scratched and bleeding, their garments rent and torn—climbed into the wide-spreading branches of a well-grown baobab tree, and sought shelter and rest amidst its dark green foliage.

Thus—turning night into day and day into night—our friends journeyed on for a week and a day, covering on an average eight miles betwixt sundown and sunrise.

Not very rapid travelling! True; something less than a mile an hour; but be it remembered that the travellers had to make their way by starlight through an unknown country; up hill and down dale, over “bosch” and “bron,” through deep, rugged, watercourses, and (twice) across rapid streams; keeping all the while a sharp lookout least any of the savage beasts, whose howlings and roarings made the night hideous, should spring upon them as they passed along. Of water, they happily found abundance; but all they had to eat during that wearisome tramp were the green mealies they had taken from the dead Caffres; they certainly might have killed some small birds or even animals, but then they dared not light a fire to cook them, and had no mind to devour raw flesh.

The ninth morning of their journey brought them to a grassy plain watered by a clear, shallow stream, which bubbled over a pebbly bed. This plain was bounded on the north by a long range of lofty mountains exhibiting a magnificent front, clothed with overhanging woods, diversified with hoary rocks, and steep buttresses of green turf.

“Look yonder, Tom!” cried Frank Jamieson, gazing with admiration and thankfulness on the view before; “there are the Storm Bergen! By this time to-morrow I trust we shall be on the far side of them.”

Chapter Twenty Three.

Crossing the Storm Bergen—A Scene of Slaughter—Tom’s last adventure—“Out of the Wood” at last!

Nearly opposite to the spot where the travellers had halted, the Storm Bergen were pierced by a narrow “poort” or valley, presenting a gloomy and terrific aspect of solitude. Through the “poort”—and winding in and out amongst huge boulders of moss-covered rock and beneath frowning precipices, past wild and gorgeous hollows rank with semi-tropical vegetation so peculiar to those regions—a rough track led to the open country north of the range.

Anxious to pass through the mountains before nightfall, our hero and his companion—after a very short rest, and a mouthful of mealie—entered the “poort,” and followed the tortuous path until the sun rose high in the heavens, and its burning rays beat down into the valley with cruel force; then, unable in their debilitated condition to stand the fierce heat, they came to a halt, and concluded to rest until the cool of the evening.

“This *has* been a tramp!” exclaimed Tom Flinders, dropping on his knees beside a tiny rivulet, that bubbled and sparkled across their path, and lapping up the cool, clear water, like a thirsty hound. “’Pon my life,” he added, when he had quenched his thirst, “there’s nothing to be compared to ‘Adam’s ale,’ when one is really parched! I say, Frank,” he went on in more serious tones, “we’ve a lot to be thankful for.”

“We have that, old fellow,” was Frank Jamieson’s hearty reply. “Our escape has been little short of a miracle.” Then after a pause he said, “But I fear our friends will have mourned for us as dead.”

“I’m afraid so,” rejoined Tom. “I only hope that Wilson hasn’t written to the *pater*, and reported me ‘killed in action;’ it might be the death of my poor mother to hear such news, in her delicate state of health. When do you think we shall reach Cradock?”

“That, of course, depends a great deal upon circumstances,” Frank answered; “but, barring accidents, I think we may fairly reckon on being there by this day week at the latest. You see, Tom, now we’re able to travel during the day, we shall get over the ground much more rapidly.”

“How far is Cradock from Ralfontein?” queried his friend.

“As the crow flies, something over a hundred miles; but the track, though a good one, is rather—halloa! what’s that noise?”

Frank’s attention was attracted by a rumbling sound, which might be likened to that made by a heavy *slow* train passing over a bridge just within earshot; a sound which grew louder every second, and was presently mingled with horrible shouts and yells that echoed and re-echoed through the valley.

“I know what *that* noise is!” exclaimed Tom, seizing the gun and springing to his feet.

“Caffres! we’re lost,” ejaculated Frank Jamieson, his face paling; “we’re lost, Tom!”

But Frank quickly recovered himself, and casting a glance around in the hope of discovering some hiding-place, his eyes rested upon a hollow—or small cave—in the cliff almost immediately over their heads, and about eight or nine feet above the path.

“There’s our chance! let us take refuge in that hole,” said he, catching Tom by the arm. “I’ll help you up first and hand you the gun and assegais; then you can haul me after you. Up you go, there’s not a moment to lose!”

So saying, Frank placed his body against the face of the cliff or rock, which was all but perpendicular, and Tom, without any hesitation, sprang upon his shoulders and clambered into the cave. The gun and assegais were next handed up, then Tom, lying down flat on his stomach, reached over the edge of the cave as far as he dare, and seizing his friend’s outstretched hands, hauled him up. The cave was just deep and wide enough for them to turn round, and just high enough to allow of their squatting on their haunches like a couple of Hindoos; the entrance was partially hidden by an overhanging bush.

Hardly had our friends concealed themselves, when—as though they had dropped from the clouds—a score of sinewy

black forms appeared in the valley, and took up a position on either side of the track, directly beneath the cave; they were armed with assegais only, and did not present a very warlike appearance; in fact it was evident that they were of quite a different race to Sandilli's dusky warriors.

"I don't believe these fellows will molest us," Frank Jamieson said with a sigh of relief. "They probably belong to one of the pastoral tribes inhabiting the country in the vicinity of Campbeldorp, and are now on a hunting expedition. Ha! I thought so."

And as he spoke a vast herd of small deer—beautiful animals, graceful of form and of a light cinnamon colour on the back, with white bellies and legs—came leaping and bounding along the valley, pursued by a number of savages, all yelling and shrieking at the very top of their voices.

"They're spring-bok," said Tom, leaning forward to get a fair view of the deer. "I wish I had my double-barrel! A good juicy steak off one of those fellows wouldn't come amiss, eh, Frank?"

"No indeed," replied the other. "But, I say, old fellow, take care you don't overbalance yourself. I wouldn't trust too much to that bush."

The leaders of the herd of deer were now almost abreast of the cave, and the sable hunters, who were lying in wait along the path, rushed in upon them. Then commenced a scene of slaughter; numbers of the affrighted spring-bok being slain by the assegais of the savages, whilst not a few fell down and died from sheer terror.

This cruel and unsportsmanlike butchery was at its height when, forgetful of his friend's warning, Tom Flinders leaned forward to obtain a better view of the scene, and in order to preserve his balance he caught hold of the bush which overhung the entrance of the cave; but, as Frank had suspected, the bush was not very firmly rooted, and so of a sudden it gave way, and poor Tom pitched head first out of the cave and landed right on the shoulders of one of the savages, who fell sprawling amongst the spring-bok, with our hero on the top of him.

Now nine feet is not a very terrible distance to tumble (though, of course, a great deal depends on how a person falls—for there's a knack in falling, as everybody should know), and Tom would probably have escaped with a few bruises, had he not unfortunately rolled from off the prostrate savage right in front of another, who was in the very act of spearing a spring-bok; the consequence was that his sharp weapon took effect in the biped instead of the quadruped; that is to say, poor Tom received a severe wound, the assegai-head being driven clean through his leg from side to side, an inch or two above the knee-cap.

The sudden and startling appearance of a white man in their midst so electrified the hunters that they stood stock-still, and allowed the spring-bok to dash onward through the valley without attempting to stop them; thus the greater number of the herd would certainly have galloped over Tom's body, and probably have injured him not a little, had not Frank Jamieson dropped down from the cave, and rushing forward dragged his friend out of harm's way. Tom was indeed badly hurt, and when Frank drew the assegai from the wound the pain was so sharp that the poor fellow fainted right away.

The blacks—to the number of fifty or sixty—now crowded round, and one of them—who appeared to be in authority—addressed Frank in broken English, volunteering his assistance, and assuring him that he had nothing to fear.

"My name is Ntlororo, and I am captain of a kraal," said he. "My tribe is at peace with our white brethren, and we will help you in your trouble."

Frank thanked the chief most warmly, and inquired how far distant his kraal might be.

"Twelve miles," Ntlororo replied. "But my hunters shall carry your friend thither," he quickly added, seeing his "white brother's" face fall considerably. "We will start at once."

He then gave some orders to his men, who commenced to collect the spring-bok they had slain, whilst Frank, with Ntlororo's aid, bound up Tom's injured leg. As soon as the stricken deer were all collected, a rough litter was formed of assegais covered with a kaross; on to this Tom was lifted, and the whole party quitted the scene of slaughter and marched up the valley—Frank Jamieson (forgetful of his fatigue and hunger in his thankfulness and excitement) walking beside the litter. The spring-bok were carried on the shoulders of the hunters, who kept up a sort of triumphant chant as they trudged along.

They were soon clear of the mountain, and three hours' march brought them to a green savannah, plentifully intersected by the spoor of cattle; which showed Frank Jamieson that they were not any great distance from the kraal. Another half-hour's "heel and toe," and the party came in sight of a cluster of ant-hills dotting a grassy slope leading down to a small river, beyond which lay the kraal.

But it was not the sight of the native village that drew forth an exclamation of astonished delight from Frank Jamieson's lips!

No, indeed! He scarcely noticed the bee-hive-shaped huts, for his eager eyes were fixed upon a couple of large bullock-waggons outspanned on the banks of the river.

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Last.

The bullock-waggons which had attracted Frank Jamieson's attention, when approaching the kraal, belonged to a

certain Mr Abraham Shipp, who was engaged in the adventurous and not unprofitable occupation of trading with the natives in the interior of South Africa, bartering a great variety of British hard goods—principally of "Brummagem" manufacture—for elephants' tusks, valuable skins and horns, and ostrich feathers. Mr Shipp, after many months' sojourn amongst the up-country tribes, had come down south, and was now hastening on to Natal, where he hoped to dispose of the ivory, skins, and plumes that he had collected, to some of the British and Dutch traders, who had branch houses in the fast-rising town of D'Urban, or else make arrangements to ship them off to Cape Town in one of the small coasting vessels plying regularly (more or less!) between Port Natal and Table Bay.

But apart from his desire to "trade," Abraham Shipp had another and more important reason for wishing to reach D'Urban as quickly as possible.

He had with him a sick companion, a young man of four—and—twenty, Oliver Maurice by name. Young Maurice was an Oxford man of good family and fortune, but having "gone the pace" whilst at college, and plunged into the dubious pleasure of what Captain Costigan was wont to call "poloit societee" with rather too much enthusiasm when reading for the bar, he had damaged his fortune and lost all taste for what is termed "life," and so came out to South Africa to seek enjoyment amidst "fresh woods and pastures new." Meeting with Abraham Shipp, Maurice had arranged to accompany him on his trading expedition, but whilst up country far north of the Gareep River, he had been seized with sickness, and now it was only too evident that his days were numbered. He suffered no pain, but lay all day in one of the waggons in a state of apathy. Still Mr Shipp clung to the hope that if Oliver Maurice could only be placed under a doctor's care he might "pull round."

Shipp, though somewhat brusque-mannered and rough-tongued, was a right good-hearted fellow, and when he heard Frank's story he at once proposed that they should join company.

"Look you now, my lad," cried he, slapping Frank's shoulder with a hand half as big as a fair-sized leg of mutton, "just you give up your mad idea of tramping to Cradock, and make up your mind to come with me. Your chum can share the waggon with poor Noll Maurice; it's plenty big enough for both, and they'll cheer one another up; and I've got a spare nag—rather a rum 'un, but I can see *you* won't mind that!—which you can ride. I'll find you in meat, baccy, and grog, and rig you out in fresh togs into the bargain. We inspan at daybreak to-morrow, and I hope to be at D'Urban by Tuesday week. Come now, what d'ye say?"

We need hardly add that Frank accepted this generous offer without hesitation.

Early next morning Shipp's waggons were got on the move, and having taken a friendly leave of Ntlororo—upon whom Frank bestowed Waishlahla's gun and ammunition—the party left the kraal en route for Natal.

Oliver Maurice seemed very pleased to have Tom as his companion, and before they had known one another four-and-twenty hours they were on friendly terms.

Maurice evidently felt a relief in having somebody with him in whom he could confide, and he gave Tom a brief sketch of his short, but misspent life.

"If I had only been a poor man I might have done better," said he one evening—the day before they reached D'Urban. "But it is a true saying that money unfairly come by brings—"

"Unfairly come by!" ejaculated Tom. "You surely don't mean that you *stole* it?"

"Not exactly, my dear fellow," replied the sick man, with just the ghost of a laugh. "But nevertheless, though *legally* mine, the best part of my fortune should by rights have gone to another man. My father had a distant relative—a queer, crochety old fellow whom he had never seen and never wished to see—and this distant relative had an only son, a lieutenant in the royal navy, who unfortunately—"

"Why!" interrupted Tom, a sudden light breaking in upon him, "you don't mean Weston?"

"Weston was the name of my father's relative; and his son was dismissed the service for striking his superior officer. Do you know anything about him?"

"I should think I did!" was Tom's reply; "why, my dear chap, Weston is my father's partner, and Frank Jamieson's brother-in-law." And thereupon he proceeded to give Maurice a full account of Mr Weston's history.

"I am glad to have the opportunity of making a restitution of this property," said Maurice when Tom finished. "Ask Shipp to give you some paper, and this very evening I'll draw up a will in Weston's favour, which, if I live to reach D'Urban, I will have put into regular legal jargon. I shall leave him every penny—no, I sha'n't though," he added with a faint smile; "I owe you something, Tom, and as I see that you feel a tender interest in Miss Gracie Weston I shall leave her a share of the property."

Poor Maurice was as good as his word; he reached D'Urban just in time to draw up a formal will, which was duly attested by the resident magistrate, leaving his fortune to Mr Weston, with the exception of 3000 pounds, which he settled on Miss Grace Weston. Two days later he breathed his last, and after his funeral Frank Jamieson and Tom Flinders took leave of Mr Shipp and embarked on board the *Mary Anne* cutter, bound for Table Bay, where they landed after a rough passage of a week's duration.

Our task is ended; but before parting we must ask our readers to accompany us once again to Ralfontein, and to imagine that ten years have elapsed since our hero and his friend escaped from the Caffres.

Quite a large village has sprung up on the plateau in rear of the old homestead; a village in which may be counted four substantial houses, "standing in their own grounds," and one tiny wooden church.

On the fertile plains that surround the plateau hundreds of splendid cattle are grazing, whilst the meadows and inclosures nearer home are enlivened by young horses sufficient in number to furnish remounts for any light cavalry corps in the service.

The village is inhabited by the employés of "Jamieson, Flinders, and Weston," the largest and most successful horse-breeders and farmers in the colony; and in the four substantial houses dwell the families of Messieurs Tom Flinders, Frank Jamieson, George Maurice Weston, and Richard (commonly called Dick) Jamieson; the little church is "*served*" by the Reverend James Jamieson.

Major and Mrs Flinders reside in the old house with Mr Weston and his wife.

And now let us lay down our pen, saying: "God save all this fayre compagnie!"

The End.

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