From Capetown to Ladysmith eBook

From Capetown to Ladysmith by George Warrington Steevens

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MAP OF THE COUNTRY ROUND LADYSMITH 95

Map illustrating the seat of war in south Africa At end

FROM CAPETOWN TO LADYSMITH

I.

First glimpses of the struggle.

> *First impressions—Denver with* A *dash of Delhi—government house—the legislative assembly—*A *wrangling debate—*A *demonstration of the unemployed—the menace of coming war*.

Capetown, *Oct. 10.*

This morning I awoke, and behold the *Norman* was lying alongside a wharf at Capetown. I had expected it, and yet it was a shock. In this breathless age ten days out of sight of land is enough to make you a merman: I looked with pleased curiosity at the grass and the horses.

After the surprise of being ashore again, the first thing to notice was the air. It was as clear—but there is nothing else in existence clear enough with which to compare it. You felt that all your life hitherto you had been breathing mud and looking out on the world through fog. This, at last, was air, was ether.

Right in front rose three purple-brown mountains—the two supporters peaked, and Table Mountain flat in the centre. More like a coffin than a table, sheer steep and dead flat, he was exactly as he is in pictures; and as I gazed, I saw his tablecloth of white cloud gather and hang on his brow.

It was enough: the white line of houses nestling hardly visible between his foot and the sea must indeed be Capetown.

Presently I came into it, and began to wonder what it looked like. It seemed half Western American with a faint smell of India—Denver with a dash of Delhi. The broad streets fronted with new-looking, ornate buildings of irregular heights and fronts were Western America; the battle of warming sun with the stabbing morning cold was Northern India. The handsome, blood-like electric cars, with their impatient gongs and

racing trolleys, were pure America (the motor-men were actually imported from that hustling clime to run them). For Capetown itself—you saw it in a moment—does not hustle. The machinery is the West's, the spirit is the East's or the South's. In other cities with trolley-cars they rush; here they saunter. In other new countries they have no time to be polite; here they are suave and kindly and even anxious to gossip. I am speaking, understand, on a twelve hours' acquaintance—mainly with that large section of Capetown's inhabitants that handled my baggage between dock and rail way-station. The niggers are very good-humoured, like the darkies of America. The Dutch tongue sounds like German spoken by people who will not take the trouble to finish pronouncing it.

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All in all, Capetown gives you the idea of being neither very rich nor very poor, neither over-industrious nor over-lazy, decently successful, reasonably happy, whole-heartedly easy-going.

The public buildings—what I saw of them—confirm the idea of a placid half-prosperity. The place is not a baby, but it has hardly taken the trouble to grow up. It has a post-office of truly German stability and magnitude. It has a well-organised railway station, and it has the merit of being in Adderley Street, the main thoroughfare of the city: imagine it even possible to bring Euston into the Strand, and you will get an idea of the absence of push and crush in Capetown.

When you go on to look at Government House the place keeps its character: Government House is half a country house and half a country inn. One sentry tramps outside the door, and you pay your respects to the Governor in shepherd's plaid.

Over everything brooded peace, except over one flamboyant many-winged building of red brick and white stone with a garden about it, an avenue—a Capetown avenue, shady trees and cool but not large: attractive and not imposing—at one side of it, with a statue of the Queen before and broad-flagged stairs behind. It was the Parliament House. The Legislative Assembly—their House of Commons—was characteristically small, yet characteristically roomy and characteristically comfortable. The members sit on flat green-leather cushions, two or three on a bench, and each man's name is above his seat: no jostling for Capetown. The slip of Press gallery is above the Speaker's head; the sloping uncrowded public gallery is at the other end, private boxes on one side, big windows on the other. Altogether it looks like a copy of the Westminster original, improved by leaving nine-tenths of the members and press and public out.

Yet here—alas, for placid Capetown!—they were wrangling. They were wrangling about the commandeering of gold and the sjamboking—shamboking, you pronounce it—of Johannesburg refugees. There was Sir Gordon Sprigg, thrice Premier, grey-bearded, dignified, and responsible in bearing and speech, conversationally reasonable in tone. There was Mr Schreiner, the Premier, almost boyish with plump, smooth cheeks and a dark moustache. He looks capable, and looks as if he knows it: he, too, is conversational, almost jerky, in speech, but with a flavour of bitterness added to his reason.

Everything sounded quiet and calm enough for Capetown—yet plainly feeling was strained tight to snapping. A member rose to put a question, and prefaced it with a brief invective against all Boers and their friends. He would go on for about ten minutes, when suddenly angry cries of "Order!" in English and Dutch would rise. The questioner commented with acidity on the manners of his opponents. They appealed to the chair: the Speaker blandly pronounced that the hon. gentleman had been out of order from

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the first word he uttered. The hon. gentleman thereon indignantly refused to put his question at all; but, being prevailed to do so, gave an opening to a Minister, who devoted ten minutes to a brief invective against all Uitlanders and their friends. Then up got one of the other side—and so on for an hour. Most delicious of all was a white-haired German, once colonel in the Hanoverian Legion which was settled in the Eastern Province, and which to this day remains the loyallest of her Majesty's subjects. When the Speaker ruled against his side he counselled defiance in a resounding whisper; when an opponent was speaking he snorted thunderous derision; when an opponent retorted he smiled blandly and admonished him: "Ton't lose yer demper."

In the Assembly, if nowhere else, rumbled the menace of coming war.

One other feature there was that was not Capetown. Along Adderley Street, before the steamship companies' offices, loafed a thick string of sun-reddened, unshaven, flannel-shirted, corduroy-trousered British working-men. Inside the offices they thronged the counters six deep. Down to the docks they filed steadily with bundles to be penned in the black hulls of homeward liners. Their words were few and sullen. These were the miners of the Rand—who floated no companies, held no shares, made no fortunes, who only wanted to make a hundred pounds to furnish a cottage and marry a girl.

They had been turned out of work, packed in cattle-trucks, and had come down in sun by day and icy wind by night, empty-bellied, to pack off home again. Faster than the ship-loads could steam out the trainloads steamed in. They choked the lodging-houses, the bars, the streets. Capetown was one huge demonstration of the unemployed. In the hotels and streets wandered the pale, distracted employers. They hurried hither and thither and arrived nowhither; they let their cigars go out, left their glasses half full, broke off their talk in the middle of a word. They spoke now of intolerable grievance and hoarded revenge, now of silent mines, rusting machinery, stolen gold. They held their houses in Johannesburg as gone beyond the reach of insurance. They hated Capetown, they could not tear themselves away to England, they dared not return to the Rand.

This little quiet corner of Capetown held the throbbing hopes and fears of all Johannesburg and more than half the two Republics and the mass of all South Africa.

None doubted—though many tried to doubt—that at last it was—war! They paused an instant before they said the word, and spoke it softly. It had come at last—the moment they had worked and waited for—and they knew not whether to exult or to despair.

II.

The army corps—has not left England!

A *little patch of white tents*—A *dream of distance—the desert of the Karroo—war at last*—A *campaign without headquarters—waiting for the army corps*.

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STORMBERG JUNCTION.

The wind screams down from the naked hills on to the little junction station. A platform with dining-room and telegraph office, a few corrugated iron sheds, the station-master's corrugated iron bungalow—and there is nothing else of Stormberg but veldt and, kopje, wind and sky. Only these last day's there has sprung up a little patch of white tents a quarter of a mile from the station, and about them move men in putties and khaki. Signal flags blink from the rises, pickets with fixed bayonets dot the ridges, mounted men in couples patrol the plain and the dip and the slope. Four companies of the Berkshire Regiment and the mounted infantry section—in all they may count 400 men. Fifty miles north is the Orange river, and beyond it, maybe by now this side of it, thousands of armed and mounted burghers—and war.

I wonder if it is all real? By the clock I have been travelling something over forty hours in South Africa, but it might just as well be a minute or a lifetime. It is a minute of experience prolonged to a lifetime. South Africa is a dream—one of those dreams in which you live years in the instant of waking—a dream of distance.

Departing from Capetown by night, I awoke in the Karroo. Between nine and six in the morning we had made less than a hundred and eighty miles. Now we were climbing the vast desert of the Karroo, the dusty stairway that leads on to the highlands of South Africa. Once you have seen one desert, all the others are like it; and yet once you have loved the desert, each is lovable in a new way. In the Karroo you seem to be going up a winding ascent, like the ramps that lead to an Indian fortress. You are ever pulling up an incline between hills, making for a corner round one of the ranges. You feel that when you get round that corner you will at last see something: you arrive and only see another incline, two more ranges, and another corner—surely this time with something to arrive at beyond. You arrive and arrive, and once more you arrive—and once more you see the same vast nothing you are coming from. Believe it or not, that is the very charm of a desert—the unfenced emptiness, the space, the freedom, the unbroken arch of the sky. It is for ever fooling you, and yet you for ever pursue it. And then it is only to the eye that cannot do without green that the Karroo is unbeautiful. Every other colour meets others in harmony—tawny sand, silver-grey scrub, crimson-tufted flowers like heather, black ribs of rock, puce shoots of screes, violet mountains in the middle distance, blue fairy battlements guarding the horizon. And above all broods the intense purity of the South African azure—not a coloured thing, like the plants and the hills, but sheer colour existing by and for itself.

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It is sheer witching desert for five hundred miles, and for aught I know five hundred miles after that. At the rare stations you see perhaps one corrugated-iron store, perhaps a score of little stone houses with a couple of churches. The land carries little enough stock—here a dozen goats browsing on the withered sticks goats love, there a dozen ostriches, high-stepping, supercilious heads in air, wheeling like a troop of cavalry and trotting out of the stink of that beastly train. Of men, nothing—only here at the bridge a couple of tents, there at the culvert a black man, grotesque in sombrero and patched trousers, loafing, hands in pockets, lazy pipe in mouth. The last man in the world, you would have said, to suggest glorious war—yet war he meant and nothing else. On the line from Capetown—that single track through five hundred miles of desert—hang Kimberley and Mafeking and Rhodesia: it runs through Dutch country, and the black man was there to watch it.

War—and war sure enough it was. A telegram at a tea-bar, a whisper, a gathering rush, an electric vibration—and all the station and all the train and the very niggers on the dunghill outside knew it. War—war at last! Everybody had predicted it—and now everybody gasped with amazement. One man broke off in a joke about killing Dutchmen, and could only say, “My God—my God—my God!”

I too was lost, and lost I remain. Where was I to go? What was I to do? My small experience has been confined to wars you could put your fingers on: for this war I have been looking long enough, and have not found it. I have been accustomed to wars with headquarters, at any rate to wars with a main body and a concerted plan: but this war in Cape Colony has neither.

It could not have either. If you look at the map you will see that the Transvaal and Orange Free State are all but lapped in the red of British territory. That would be to our advantage were our fighting force superior or equal or even not much inferior to that of the enemy. In a general way it is an advantage to have your frontier in the form of a re-entrant angle; for then you can strike on your enemy’s flank and threaten his communications. That advantage the Boers possess against Natal, and that is why Sir George White has abandoned Laing’s Nek and Newcastle, and holds the line of the Biggarsberg: even so the Boers might conceivably get between him and his base. The same advantage we should possess on this western side of the theatre of war, except that we are so heavily outnumbered, and have adopted no heroic plan of abandoning the indefensible. We have an irregular force of mounted infantry at Mafeking, the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment at Kimberley, the Munster Fusiliers at De Aar, half the Yorkshire Light Infantry at De Aar, half the Berkshire Regiment at Naauwpoort—do not try to pronounce it—and the other half here at Stormberg. The Northumberlands—the famous Fighting Fifth—came crawling up behind our train, and may now be at Naauwpoort or De Aar. Total: say, 4100 infantry, of whom some 600 mounted; no cavalry, no field-guns. The Boer force available against these isolated positions might be very reasonably put at 12,000 mounted infantry, with perhaps a score of guns.

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Mafeking and Kimberley are fairly well garrisoned, with auxiliary volunteers, and may hold their own: at any rate, I have not been there and can say nothing about them. But along the southern border of the Free State—the three railway junctions of De Aar, Naauwpoort, and Stormberg—our position is very dangerous indeed. I say it freely, for by the time the admission reaches England it may be needed to explain failure, or pleasant to add lustre to success. If the Army Corps were in Africa, which is still in England, this position would be a splendid one for it—three lines of supply from Capetown, Port Elizabeth, and East London, and three converging lines of advance by Norval's Pont, Bethulie, and Aliwal North. But with tiny forces of half a battalion in front and no support behind—nothing but long lines of railway with ungarrisoned ports hundreds of miles at the far end of them—it is very dangerous. There are at this moment no supports nearer than England. Let the Free Staters bring down two thousand good shots and resolute men to-morrow morning—it is only fifty miles, with two lines of railway—and what will happen to that little patch of white tents by the station? The loss of any one means the loss of land connection between Western and Eastern Provinces, a line open into the heart of the Cape Colony, and nothing to resist an invader short of the sea.

It is dangerous—and yet nobody cares. There is nothing to do but wait—for the Army Corps that has not yet left England. Even to-day—a day's ride from the frontier—the war seems hardly real. All will be done that man can do. In the mean time the good lady of the refreshment-room says: "Dinner? There's been twenty-one to-day and dinner got ready for fifteen; but you're welcome to it, such as it is. We must take things as they come in war-time." Her children play with their cats in the passage. The railway man busies himself about the new triangles and sidings that are to be laid down against the beginning of December for the Army Corps that has not yet left England.

III.

A *pastor's point of view*.

> *An ideal of Arcady—rebel Burghersdorp—its monuments—Dopper theology—an interview with one of its professors*.

Burghersdorp, *Oct. 14.*

The village lies compact and clean-cut, a dot in the wilderness. No fields or orchards break the transition from man to nature; step out of the street and you are at once on rock-ribbed kopje or raw veldt. As you stand on one of the bare lines of hill that squeeze it into a narrow valley, Burghersdorp is a chequer-board of white house, green tree, and grey iron roof; beyond its edges everything is the changeless yellow brown of South African landscape.

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Go down into the streets, and Burghersdorp is an ideal of Arcady. The broad, dusty, unmetalled roads are steeped in sunshine. The houses are all one-storeyed, some brick, some mud, some the eternal corrugated iron, most faced with whitewash, many fronted with shady verandahs. As blinds against the sun they have lattices of trees down every street—white-blossoming laburnum, poplars, sycamores.

Despite verandahs and trees, the sunshine soaks down into every corner—genially, languorously warm. All Burghersdorp basks. You see half-a-dozen yoke of bullocks with a waggon, standing placidly in the street, too lazy even to swish their tails against the flies; pass by an hour later, and they are still there, and the black man lounging by the leaders has hardly shifted one leg; pass by at evening, and they have moved on three hundred yards, and are resting again. In the daytime hens peck and cackle in every street; at nightfall the bordering veldt hums with crickets and bullfrogs. At morn come a flight of locusts—first, yellow-white scouts whirring down every street, then a pelting snowstorm of them high up over the houses, spangling the blue heaven. But Burghersdorp cared nothing. “There is nothing for them,” said a farmer, with cosy satisfaction; “the frost killed everything last week.”

British and Dutch salute and exchange the news with lazy mutual tolerance. The British are storekeepers and men of business; the Boers ride in from their farms. They are big, bearded men, loose of limb, shabbily dressed in broad-brimmed hats, corduroy trousers, and brown shoes; they sit their ponies at a rocking-chair canter erect and easy; unkempt, rough, half-savage, their tanned faces and blue eyes express lazy good-nature, sluggish stubbornness, dormant fierceness. They ask the news in soft, lisping Dutch that might be a woman’s; but the lazy imperiousness of their bearing stamps them as free men. A people hard to rouse, you say—and as hard, when roused, to subdue.

A loitering Arcady—and then you hear with astonishment that Burghersdorp is famous throughout South Africa as a stronghold of bitter Dutch partisanship. “Rebel Burghersdorp” they call it in the British centres, and Capetown turns anxious ears towards it for the first muttering of insurrection. What history its stagnant annals record is purely anti-British. Its two principal monuments, after the Jubilee fountain, are the tombstone of the founder of the Dopper Church—the Ironsides of South Africa—and a statue with inscribed pedestal complete put up to commemorate the introduction of the Dutch tongue into the Cape Parliament. Malicious comments add that Afrikander patriotism swindled the stone-mason out of L30, and it is certain that one of the gentlemen whose names appear thereon most prominently, now languishes in jail for fraud. Leaving that point for thought, I find that the rest of Burghersdorp’s history consists in the fact that the Afrikander Bond was founded here in 1881. And at this moment Burghersdorp is out-Bonding the Bond: the reverend gentleman who edits its Dutch paper and dictates its Dutch policy sluices out weekly vials of wrath upon Hofmeyr and Schreiner for machinating to keep patriot Afrikanders off the oppressing Briton’s throat.

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I went to see this reverend pastor, who is professor of a school of Dopper theology. He was short, but thick-set, with a short but shaggy grey beard; in deference to his calling, he wore a collar over his grey flannel shirt, but no tie. Nevertheless, he turned out a very charming, courteous old gentleman, well informed, and his political bias was mellowed with an irresistible sense of humour. He took his own side strongly, and allowed that it was most proper for a Briton to be equally strong on his own. And this is more or less what he said:—

“Information? No, I shall not give you any; you are the enemy, you see. Ha, ha! They call me rebel. But I ask you, my friend, is it natural that I—I, Hollander born, Dutch Afrikander since ’60—should be as loyal to the British Government as a Britisher should be? No, I say; one can be loyal only to one’s own country. I am law-abiding subject of the Queen, and that is all that they can ask of me.

“How will the war go? That it is impossible, quite impossible, to say. The Boer might run away at the first shot and he might fight to the death. All troops are liable to panic; even regular troop; much more than irregular. But I have been on commando many times with Boer, and I cannot think him other than brave man. Fighting is not his business; he wishes always to be back on his farm with his people; but he is brave man.

“I look on this war as the sequel of 1881. I have told them all these years, it is not finish; war must come. Mr Gladstone, whom I look on as greatest British statesman, did wrong in 1881. If he had kept promises and given back country before the war, we would have been grateful; but he only give it after war, and we were not grateful. And English did not feel that they were generous, only giving independence after war, though they had a large army in Natal; they have always wished to recommence.

“The trouble is because the Boer have never had confidence in the English Government, just as you have never had confidence in us. The Boer have no feeling about Cape Colony, but they have about Natal; they were driven out of it, and they think it still their own country. Then you took the diamond-fields from the Free State. You gave the Free State independence only because you did not want trouble of Basuto war; then we beat the Basutos—I myself was there, and it was very hard, and it lasted three years—and then you would not let us take Basutoland. Then came annexation of the Transvaal; up to that I was strong advocate of federation, but after that I was one of founders of the Bond. After that the Afrikander trusted Rhodes—not I, though; I always write I distrust Rhodes—and so came the Jameson raid. Now how could we have confidence after all this in British Government?

“I do not think Transvaal Government have been wise; I have many times told them so. They made great mistake when they let people come in to the mines. I told them, ’This gold will be your ruin; to remain independent you must remain poor.’ But when that was done, what could they do? If they gave the franchise, then the Republic is governed by

three four men from Johannesburg, and they will govern it for their own pocket. The Transvaal Boer would rather be British colony than Johannesburg Republic.

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“Well, well; it is the law of South Africa that the Boer drive the native north and the English drive the Boer north. But now the Boer can go north no more; two things stop him: the tsetse fly and the fever. So if he must perish, it is his duty—yes, I, minister, say it is his duty—to perish fighting.

“But here in the Colony we have no race hatred. Not between man and man; but when many men get together there is race hatred. If we fight here on this border it is civil war—the same Dutch and English are across the Orange as here in Albert. My son is on commando in Free State; the other day he ride thirteen hours and have no food for two days. I say to him, ’You are Free State burgher; you have the benefit of the country; your wife is Boer girl; it is your duty to fight for it.’ I am law-abiding British subject, but I hope my son will not be hurt. You, sir, I wish you good luck—good luck for yourself and your corresponding. Not for your side: that I cannot wish you.”

IV.

WILL IT BE CIVIL WAR?[1]

ON THE BORDER OF THE FREE STATE—AN APPEAL TO THE COLONIAL BOERS—THE BEGINNING OF WARLIKE RUMOURS—A COMMERCIAL AND SOCIAL BOYCOTT—THE BOER SECRET SERVICE—THE BASUTOS AND THEIR MOTHER, THE QUEEN—BOER BRUTALITY TO KAFFIRS.

Oct. 14 (9.55 p.m.)

The most conspicuous feature of the war on this frontier has hitherto been its absence.

The Free State forces about Bethulie, which is just over the Free State border, and Aliwal North, which is on our side of the frontier, make no sign of an advance. The reason for this is, doubtless, that hostilities here would amount to civil war. There is the same mixed English and Dutch population on each side of the Orange river, united by ties of kinship and friendship. Many law-abiding Dutch burghers here have sons and brothers who are citizens of the Free State, and therefore out with the forces.

In the mean time the English doctor attends patients on the other side of the border, and Boer riflemen ride across to buy goods at the British stores.

The proclamation published yesterday morning forbidding trade with the Republics is thus difficult and impolitic to enforce hereabouts.

Railway and postal communication is now stopped, but the last mail brought a copy of the Bloemfontein ‘Express,’ with an appeal to the Colonial Boers concluding with the words:—

“We shall continue the war to the bloody end. You will assist us. Our God, who has so often helped us, will not forsake us.”

What effect this may have is yet doubtful, but it is certain that any rising of the Colonial Dutch would send the Colonial British into the field in full strength.

Burghersdorp, through which I passed yesterday, is a village of 2000 inhabitants, and, as I have already put on record, the centre of the most disaffected district in the colony. If there be any Dutch rising in sympathy with the Free State it will begin here.

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Later.

And so there's warlike news at last.

A Boer force, reported to be 350 strong, shifted camp to-day to within three miles of the bridge across the Orange river. Well-informed Dutch inhabitants assert that these are to be reinforced, and will march through Aliwal North to-night on their way to attack Stormberg Junction, sixty miles south.

The bridge is defended by two Cape policemen with four others in reserve.

The loyal inhabitants are boiling with indignation, declaring themselves sacrificed, as usual, by the dilatoriness of the Government.

Besides the Boer force near here, there is another, reported to be 450 strong, at Greatheads Drift, forty miles up the river.

The Boers at Bethulie, in the Free State, are believed to be pulling up the railway on their side of the frontier, and to be marching to Norvals Pont, which is the ferry over the Orange river on the way to Colesberg, with the intention of attacking Naauwpoort Junction, on the Capetown-Kimberley line; but as there are no trains now running to Bethulie it is difficult to verify these reports, and, indeed, all reports must be received with caution.

The feeling here between the English and Dutch extends to a commercial and social boycott, and is therefore far more bitter than elsewhere. Several burghers here have sent their sons over the border, and promise that the loyal inhabitants will be "sjambokked" (you remember how to pronounce it?) when the Boer force passes through.

So far things are quiet. The broad, sunny, dusty streets, fringed with small trees and lined with single-storeyed houses, are dotted with strolling inhabitants, both Dutch and natives, engrossed in their ordinary pursuits. The whole thing looks more like Arcady than revolution.

The only sign of movement is that eight young Boers, theological students of the Dopper or strict Lutheran college here, left last night for the Free State for active service.

The Boers across the Orange river so far make no sign of raiding. Many have sent their wives and families here into Aliwal North, on our side of the border, in imitation, perhaps, of President Steyn, whose wife at this moment is staying with her sister at King William's Town, in the Cape Colony.

Many British farmers, of whom there are a couple of hundred in this district, refuse to believe that the Free State will take the offensive on this border, considering that such aggression would be impious, and that the Free State will restrict itself to defending its own frontier, or the Transvaal, if invaded, in fulfilment of the terms of the offensive and defensive alliance.

Nevertheless there is, of course, very acute tension between the Dutch and English here. No Boers are to be seen talking to Englishmen. The Boers are very close as to their feelings and intentions, which those who know them interpret as a bad sign, because, as a rule, they are inclined to irresponsible garrulity. A point in which Dutch feeling here tells is that every Dutch man, woman, or child is more or less of a Boer secret service agent, revealing our movements and concealing those of the Boers.

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If there be any rising it may be expected by November 9, when the Boers hold their "wappenschouwing," or rifle contest—the local Bisley, in fact—which every man for miles around attends armed. Also the Afrikander Bond Congress is to be held next month; but probably the leaders will do their best to keep the people together.

The Transvaal agents are naturally doing their utmost to provoke rebellion. A lieutenant of their police is known to be hiding hereabouts, and a warrant is out for his arrest. All depends, say the experts, on the results of the first few weeks of fighting.

The attitude of the natives causes some uneasiness. Every Basuto employed on the line here has returned to his tribe, one saying: "Be sure we shall not harm our mother the Queen."

Many Transkei Kaffirs also have passed through here, owing to the closing of the mines. Sixty-six crammed truckloads of them came by one train. They had been treated with great brutality by the Boers, having been flogged to the station and robbed of their wages.

[Footnote 1: This chapter has been deliberately included in this volume notwithstanding its obviously fragmentary nature. The swift picture which it gives of flying events is the excuse for this decision.]

V.

LOYAL ALIWAL: A TRAGI-COMEDY.

THE CAPE POLICE—A GARRISON OF SIX MEN—MERRY-GO-ROUNDS AND NAPHTHA
FLARES—A CLAMANT WANT OF FIFTY MEN—WHERE ARE THE TROOPS?—-"IT'LL
BE JUST THE SAME AS IT WAS IN '81."

ALIWAL NORTH, *Oct. 15.*

"Halt! Who goes there?" The trim figure, black in the moonlight, in breeches and putties, with a broad-brimmed hat looped up at the side, brought up his carbine and barred the entrance to the bridge. Twenty yards beyond a second trim black figure with a carbine stamped to and fro over the planking. They were of the Cape Police, and there were four more of them somewhere in reserve; across the bridge was the Orange Free State; behind us was the little frontier town of Aliwal North, and these were its sole garrison.

The river shone silver under its high banks. Beyond it, in the enemy's country, the veldt too was silvered over with moonlight and was blotted inkily with shadow from the

kopjes. Three miles to the right, over a rise and down in a dip, they said there lay the Rouxville commando of 350 men. That night they were to receive 700 or 800 more from Smithfield, and thereon would ride through Aliwal on their way to eat up the British half-battalion at Stormberg. On our side of the bridge slouched a score of Boers—waiting, they said, to join and conduct their kinsmen. In the very middle of these twirled a battered merry-go-round—an island of garish naphtha light in the silver, a jarr of wheeze and squeak in the swishing of trees and river. Up the hill, through the town, in the bar of the ultra-English hotel, proceeded this dialogue.

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A fat man (*thunderously, nursing a Lee-Metford sporting rifle*). Well, you've yourselves to blame. I've done my best. With fifty men I'd have held this place against a thousand Boers, and not ten men'd join.

A thin-faced man (*piping*). We haven't got the rifles. Every Dutchman's armed, and how many rifles will you find among the English?

Fat man (*shooting home bolt of Lee-Metford*). And who's fault's that? I've left my property in the Free State, and odds are I shall lose every penny I've got—what part? all over—and come here on to British soil, and what do I find? With fifty men I'd hold this place—

Thin-faced man. They'll be here to-night, old De Wet says, and they're to come here and sjambok the Englishmen who've been talking too much. That's what comes of being loyal!

Fat man. Loyal! With fifty men—

Brown-faced, grey-haired man (*smoking deep-bowled pipe in corner*). No, you wouldn't.

Fat man (*playing with sights of Lee-Metford*). What! Not keep the bridge with fifty men —

Brown-faced, grey-haired man. And they'd cross by the old drift, and be on every side of you in ten minutes.

Fat man (*grounding Lee-Metford*). Ah! Well—h'm!

Thick-set man. But we're safe enough. Has not the Government sent us a garrison? Six policemen! Six policemen, gentlemen, and the Boers are at Pieter's farrm, and they'll be here to-night and sjambok—

Thin-faced man. Where are the troops? Where are the volunteers? Where are the—

Brown-faced, grey-haired man. There are no troops, and the better for you. The strength of Aliwal is in its weakness. (*To fat man*.) Put that gun away.

Thin-faced man, thick-set man, and general chorus. Yes, put it away.

Thin-faced man. But I want to know why the Boers are armed and we aren't? Why does our Government—

Brown-faced man. Are you accustomed to shoot?

Thin-faced man (*faintly*). No.

Fat man (*returning from putting away Lee-Metford*). But where do you come from?

Brown-faced man. Free State, same as you do. Lived there five-and-twenty years.

Thin-faced man. Any trouble in getting away?

Brown-faced man. No. Field-cornet was a good old fellow and an old friend of mine, and he gave me the hint—

Thin-faced man. Not much like ours! Why, there's a lady staying here that's friendly with his daughters, and she went out to see them the other day, and the old man said they'd stop here and sjam—

Fat man. Gentlemen, drinks all round! Here's success to the British arms!

All. Success to the British arms!

Thick-set man. And may the British Government not desert us again!

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Fat man. I'll take a shade of odds about it. They will. I've no trust in Chamberlain. It'll be just the same as it was in '81. A few reverses and you'll find they'll begin to talk about terms. I know them. Every loyal man in South Africa knows them. (*General murmur of assent.*)

Hotel-keeper. Gentlemen, drinks all round! Here's success to the British arms!

All. Success to the British arms!

Thick-set man. And where are the British arms? Where's the Army Corps? Has a man of that Army Corps left England? Shilly-shally, as usual. South Africa's no place for an Englishman to live in. Armoured train blown up, Mafeking cut off, Kimberley in danger, and General Butler—what? Oh yes—General Buller leaves England to-day. Why didna they send the Army Corps out three months ago?

Brown-faced man. It's six thousand miles—

Thick-set man. Why didna they send them just after the Bloemfontein conference, before the Boers were ready? British Gov—

Brown-faced man. They've had three rifles a man with ammunition since 1896.

I (*timidly*). Well, then, if the Army Corps had left three months ago, wouldn't the Boers have declared war three months ago too?

All except brown-faced man (*loudly*). No!

Brown-faced man (*quietly*). Yes. Gentlemen, bedtime! As Brand used to say, "Al zal rijt komen!"

All (*fervently*). Al zal rijt komen! Success to the British arms! Good night!

(All go to bed. In the night somebody on the Boer side—or elsewhere—goes out shooting, or looses off his rifle on general grounds; two loyalists and a refugee spring up and grasp their revolvers. In the morning everybody wakes up unsjamboked. The hotel-keeper takes me out to numerous points whence Pieter's farm can be reconnoitred: there is not a single tent to be seen, and no sign of a single Boer.)

It is a shame to smile at them. They are really very, very loyal, and they are excellent fellows and most desirable colonists. Aliwal is a nest of green on the yellow veldt, speckless, well-furnished, with Marechal Niel roses growing over trellises, and a scheme to dam the Orange river for water-supply, and electric light. They were quite unprotected, and their position was certainly humiliating.

VI.

THE BATTLE OF ELANDSLAAGTE.

FRENCH'S RECONNAISSANCE—AN ARTILLERY DUEL—BEGINNING OF THE ATTACK—RIDGE AFTER RIDGE—A CROWDED HALF-HOUR.

LADYSMITH, *Oct. 22.*

From a billow of the rolling veldt we looked back, and black columns were coming up behind us.

Along the road from Ladysmith moved cavalry and guns. Along the railway line to right of it crept trains—one, two, three of them—packed with khaki, bristling with the rifles of infantry. We knew then that we should fight before nightfall.

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Major-General French, who commanded, had been out from before daybreak with the Imperial Light Horse and the battery of the Natal Volunteer Artillery reconnoitring towards Elandslaagte. The armoured train—slate-colour plated engine, a slate-colour plated loopholed cattle-truck before and behind, an open truck with a Maxim at the tail of all—puffed along on his right. Elandslaagte is a little village and railway station seventeen miles north-east of Ladysmith, where two days before the Boers had blown up a culvert and captured a train. That cut our direct communication with the force at Dundee. Moreover, it was known that the Free State commandoes were massing to the north-west of Ladysmith and the Transvaalers to attack Dundee again. On all grounds it was desirable to smash the Elandslaagte lot while they were still weak and alone.

The reconnaissance stole forward until it came in sight of the little blue-roofed village and the little red tree-girt station. It was occupied. The Natal battery unlimbered and opened fire. A round or two—and then suddenly came a flash from a kopje two thousand yards beyond the station on the right. The Boer guns! And the next thing was the hissing shriek of a shell—and plump it dropped, just under one of the Natal limbers. By luck it did not burst; but if the Boer ammunition contractor was suspect, it was plain that the Boer artillerist could lay a gun. Plump: plump: they came right into the battery; down went a horse; over went an ammunition-waggon. At that range the Volunteers' little old 7-pounders were pea-shooters; you might as well have spat at the enemy. The guns limbered up and were off. Next came the vicious *phutt!* of a bursting shell not fifty yards from the armoured train—and the armoured train was puffing back for its life. Everybody went back half-a-dozen miles on the Ladysmith road to Modder Spruit Station.

The men on reconnaissance duty retired, as is their business. They had discovered that the enemy had guns and meant fighting. Lest he should follow, they sent out from Ladysmith, about nine in the morning, half a battalion apiece of the Devonshire and Manchester Regiments by train, and the 42nd Field Battery, with a squadron of the 5th Dragoon Guards, by road. They arrived, and there fell on us the common lot of reconnaissances. We dismounted, loosened girths, ate tinned meat, and wondered what we should do next. We were on a billow of veldt that heaved across the valley: up it ran, road and rail; on the left rose tiers of hills, in front a huge green hill blocked our view, with a tangle of other hills crowding behind to peep over its shoulders. On the right, across the line, were meadows; up from them rose a wall of red-brown kopje; up over that a wall of grass-green veldt; over that was the enemy. We ate and sat and wondered what we should do next. Presently we saw the troopers mounting and the trains getting up steam; we mounted; and scouts, advance-guard, flanking

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patrols—everybody crept slowly, slowly, cautiously forward. Then, about half-past two, we turned and beheld the columns coming up behind us. The 21st Field Battery, the 5th Lancers, the Natal Mounted Volunteers on the road; the other half of the Devons and half the Gordon Highlanders on the trains—total, with what we had, say something short of 3000 men and eighteen guns. It was battle!

The trains drew up and vomited khaki into the meadow. The mass separated and ordered itself. A line of little dots began to draw across it; a thicker line of dots followed; a continuous line followed them, then other lines, then a mass of khaki topping a dark foundation—the kilts of the Highlanders. From our billow we could not see them move; but the green on the side of the line grew broader, and the green between them and the kopje grew narrower. Now the first dots were at the base—now hardly discernible on the brown hill flanks. Presently the second line of dots was at the base. Then the third line and the second were lost on the brown, and the third—where? There, bold on the sky-line. Away on their right, round the hill, stole the black column of the Imperial Light Horse. The hill was crowned, was turned—but where were the Bo—

A hop, a splutter, a rattle, and then a snarling roll of musketry broke on the question,—-not from the hill, but far on our left front, where the Dragoon Guards were scouting. On that the thunder of galloping orderlies and hoarse yells of command—advance!—in line!—waggon supply!—and with rattle and thunder the batteries tore past, wheeled, unlimbered as if they broke in halves. Then rattled and thundered the waggons, men gathered round the guns like the groups round a patient in an operation. And the first gun barked death. And then after all it was a false alarm. At the first shell you could see through glasses mounted men scurrying up the slopes of the big opposite hill; by the third they were gone. And then, as our guns still thudded—thud came the answer. Only where? Away, away on the right, from the green kopje over the brown one where still struggled the reserves of our infantry.

Limbers! From halves the guns were whole again, and wheeled away over ploughland to the railway. Down went a length of wire-fencing, and gun after gun leaped ringing over the metals, scoring the soft pasture beyond. We passed round the leftward edge of the brown hill and joined our infantry in a broad green valley. The head of it was the second skyline we had seen; beyond was a dip, a swell of kopje, a deep valley, and beyond that a small sugar-loaf kopje to the left and a long hog-backed one on the right—a saw of small ridges above, a harsh face below, freckled with innumerable boulders. Below the small kopje were tents and waggons; from the leftward shoulder of the big one flashed once more the Boer guns.

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This time the shell came. Faint whirr waxed presently to furious scream, and the white cloud flung itself on to the very line of our batteries unlimbering on the brow. Whirr and scream—another dashed itself into the field between the guns and limbers. Another and another, only now they fell harmlessly behind the guns, seeking vainly for the waggons and teams which were drawn snugly away under a hillside on the right. Another and another—bursting now on the clear space in rear of the guns between our right and left infantry columns. All the infantry were lying down, so well folded in the ground that I could only see the Devons on the left. The Manchesters and Gordons on the right seemed to be swallowed by the veldt.

Then between the bangs of their artillery struck the hoarser bay of our own. Ball after ball of white smoke alighted on the kopje—the first at the base, the second over, the third jump on the Boer gun. By the fourth the Boer gun flashed no more. Then our guns sent forth little white balloons of shrapnel, to right, to left, higher, lower, peppering the whole face. Now came rifle-fire—a few reports, and then a roll like the ungreased wheels of a farm cart. The Imperial Light Horse was at work on the extreme right. And now as the guns pealed faster and faster we saw mounted men riding up the nearer swell of kopje and diving over the edge. Shrapnel followed; some dived and came up no more.

The guns limbered up and moved across to a nearer position towards the right. As they moved the Boer gun opened again—Lord, but the German gunners knew their business!—punctuating the intervals and distances of the pieces with scattering destruction. The third or fourth shell pitched clean into a labouring waggon with its double team of eight horses. It was full of shells. We held our breath for an explosion. But, when the smoke cleared, only the near wheeler was on his side, and the waggon had a wheel in the air. The batteries unlimbered and bayed again, and again the Boer guns were silent. Now for the attack.

The attack was to be made on their front and their left flank—along the hog-back of the big kopje. The Devons on our left formed for the front attack; the Manchesters went on the right, the Gordons edged out to the extreme rightward base, with the long, long boulder-freckled face above them. The guns flung shrapnel across the valley; the watchful cavalry were in leash, straining towards the enemy's flanks. It was about a quarter to five, and it seemed curiously dark for the time of day.

No wonder—for as the men moved forward before the enemy the heavens were opened. From the eastern sky swept a sheer sheet of rain. With the first stabbing drops horses turned their heads away, trembling, and no whip or spur could bring them up to it. It drove through mackintoshes as if they were blotting-paper. The air was filled with hissing; underfoot you could see solid earth melting into mud, and mud flowing away in water. It blotted out hill and dale and enemy in one grey curtain of swooping water. You would have said that the heavens had opened to drown the wrath of man. And through it the guns still thundered and the khaki columns pushed doggedly on.

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The infantry came among the boulders and began to open out. The supports and reserves followed up. And then, in a twinkling, on the stone-pitted hill-face burst loose that other storm—the storm of lead, of blood, of death. In a twinkling the first line was down behind rocks firing fast, and the bullets came flicking round them. Men stopped and started, staggered and dropped limply as if the string were cut that held them upright. The line pushed on; the supports and reserves followed up. A colonel fell, shot in the arm; the regiment pushed on.

They came to a rocky ridge about twenty feet high. They clung to cover, firing, then rose, and were among the shrill bullets again. A major was left at the bottom of that ridge, with his pipe in his mouth and a Mauser bullet through his leg; his company pushed on. Down again, fire again, up again, and on! Another ridge won and passed —and only a more hellish hail of bullets beyond it. More men down, more men pushed into the firing line—more death-piping bullets than ever. The air was a sieve of them; they beat on the boulders like a million hammers; they tore the turf like a harrow.

Another ridge crowned, another welcoming, whistling gust of perdition, more men down, more pushed into the firing line. Half the officers were down; the men puffed and stumbled on. Another ridge—God! Would this cursed hill never end? It was sown with bleeding and dead behind; it was edged with stinging fire before. God! Would it never end? On, and get to the end of it! And now it was surely the end. The merry bugles rang out like cock-crow on a fine morning. The pipes shrieked of blood and the lust of glorious death. Fix bayonets! Staff officers rushed shouting from the rear, imploring, cajoling, cursing, slamming every man who could move into the line. Line—but it was a line no longer. It was a surging wave of men—Devons and Gordons, Manchester and Light Horse all mixed, inextricably; subalterns commanding regiments, soldiers yelling advice, officers firing carbines, stumbling, leaping, killing, falling, all drunk with battle, shoving through hell to the throat of the enemy. And there beneath our feet was the Boer camp and the last Boers galloping out of it. There also—thank Heaven, thank Heaven!—were squadrons of Lancers and Dragoon Guards storming in among them, shouting, spearing, stamping them into the ground. Cease fire!

It was over—twelve hours of march, of reconnaissance, of waiting, of preparation, and half an hour of attack. But half an hour crammed with the life of half a lifetime.

VII.

THE BIVOUAC.

A VICTORIOUS AND HELPLESS MOB—A BREAK-NECK HILLSIDE—BRINGING DOWN
THE WOUNDED—A HARD-WORKED DOCTOR—BOER PRISONERS—INDIAN BEARERS—AN IRISH HIGHLANDER IN TROUBLE.

LADYSMITH, *Oct. 23.*

Pursuing cavalry and pursued enemy faded out of our sight; abruptly we realised that it was night. A mob of unassorted soldiers stood on the rock-sown, man-sown hillside, victorious and helpless.

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Out of every quarter of the blackness leaped rough voices. “G Company!” “Devons here!” “Imperial Light Horse?” “Over here!” “Over where?” Then a trip and a heavy stumble and an oath. “Doctor wanted ’ere! ’Elp for a wounded orficer! Damn you there! who are you fallin’ up against? This is the Gordon ’Ighlanders—what’s left of ’em.”

Here and there an inkier blackness moving showed a unit that had begun to find itself again.

But for half an hour the hillside was still a maze—a maze of bodies of men wandering they knew not whither, crossing and recrossing, circling, stopping and returning on their stumbles, slipping on smooth rock-faces, breaking shins on rough boulders, treading with hobnailed boots on wounded fingers.

At length underfoot twinkled lights, and a strong, clear voice sailed into the confusion, “All wounded men are to be brought down to the Boer camp between the two hills.” Towards the lights and the Boer camp we turned down the face of jumbled stumbling-block. A wary kick forward, a feel below—firm rock. Stop—and the firm rock spun and the leg shot into an ankle-wrenching hole. Scramble out and feel again; here is a flat face—forward! And then a tug that jerks you on to your back again: you forgot you had a horse to lead, and he does not like the look of this bit. Climb back again and take him by the head; still he will not budge. Try again to the right. Bang! goes your knee into a boulder. Circle cannily round the horse to the left; here at last is something like a slope. Forward horse—so, gently! Hurrah! Two minutes gone—a yard descended.

By the time we stumbled down that precipice there had already passed a week of nights—and it was not yet eight o’clock. At the bottom were half-a-dozen tents, a couple of lanterns, and a dozen waggons—huge, heavy veldt-ships lumbered up with cargo. It was at least possible to tie a horse up and turn round in the sliding mud to see what next.

What next? Little enough question of that! Off the break-neck hillside still dropped hoarse importunate cries. “Wounded man here! Doctor wanted! Three of ’em here! A stretcher, for God’s sake!” “A stretcher there! Is there no stretcher?” There was not one stretcher within voice-shot.

Already the men were bringing down the first of their wounded. Slung in a blanket came a captain, his wet hair matted over his forehead, brow and teeth set, lips twitching as they put him down, gripping his whole soul to keep it from crying out. He turned with the beginning of a smile that would not finish: “Would you mind straightening out my arm?” The arm was bandaged above the elbow, and the forearm was hooked under him. A man bent over—and suddenly it was dark. “Here, bring back that lantern!” But the lantern was staggering up-hill again to fetch the next. “Oh, do straighten out my arm,” wailed the voice from the ground. “And cover me up. I’m perishing with cold.” “Here’s

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matches!" "And 'ere; I've got a bit of candle." "Where?" "Oh, do straighten out my arm!" "'Ere, 'old out your 'and." "Got it," and the light flickered up again round the broken figure, and the arm was laid straight. As the touch came on to the clammy fingers it met something wet and red, and the prone body quivered all over. "What," said the weak voice—the smile struggled to come out again, but dropped back even sooner than before—"have they got my finger too?" Then they covered up the body with a blanket, wringing wet, and left it to soak and shiver. And that was one out of more than two hundred.

For hours—and by now it was a month of nights—every man with hands and legs toiled up and down, up and down, that ladder of pain. By Heaven's grace the Boers had filled their waggons with the loot of many stores; there were blankets to carry men in and mattresses whereon to lay them. They came down with sprawling bearers, with jolts and groans, with "Oh, put me down; I can't stand it! I'm done anyhow; let me die quiet." And always would come back the cheery voice from doctor or officer or pal,—"Done, colour-sergeant! Nonsense, man! Why, you'll be back to duty in a fortnight." And the answer was another choked groan.

Hour by hour—would day never break? Not yet; it was just twenty minutes to ten—man by man they brought them down. The tent was carpeted now with limp bodies. With breaking backs they heaved some shoulder-high into waggons; others they laid on mattresses on the ground. In the rain-blurred light of the lantern—could it not cease, that piercing drizzle to-night of all nights at least? The doctor, the one doctor, toiled buoyantly on. Cutting up their clothes with scissors, feeling with light firm fingers over torn chest or thigh, cunningly slipping round the bandage, tenderly covering up the crimson ruin of strong men—hour by hour, man by man, he toiled on.

And mark—and remember for the rest of your lives—that Tommy Atkins made no distinction between the wounded enemy and his dearest friend. To the men who in the afternoon were lying down behind rocks with rifles pointed to kill him, who had shot, may be, the comrade of his heart, he gave the last drop of his water, the last drop of his melting strength, the last drop of comfort he could wring out of his seared, gallant soul. In war, they say,—and it is true,—men grow callous: an afternoon of shooting and the loss of your brother hurts you less than a week before did a thorn in your dog's foot. But it is only compassion for the dead that dries up; and as it dries, the spring wells up among good men of sympathy with all the living. A few men had made a fire in the gnawing damp and cold, and round it they sat, even the unwounded Boer prisoners. For themselves they took the outer ring, and not a word did any man say that could mortify the wound of defeat. In the afternoon Tommy was a hero, in the evening he was a gentleman.

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Do not forget, either, the doctors of the enemy. We found their wounded with our own, and it was pardonable to be glad that whereas our men set their teeth in silence, some of theirs wept and groaned. Not all, though: we found Mr Kok, father of the Boer general and member of the Transvaal Executive, lying high up on the hill—a massive, white-bearded patriarch, in a black frock-coat and trousers. With simple dignity, with the right of a dying man to command, he said in his strong voice, “Take me down the hill and lay me in a tent; I am wounded by three bullets.” It was a bad day for the Kok family: four were on the field, and all were hit. They found Commandant Schiel, too, the German free-lance, lying with a bullet through his thigh, near the two guns which he had served so well, and which no German or Dutchman would ever serve again. Then there were three field-cornets out of four, members of Volksraad, two public prosecutors—Heaven only knows whom! But their own doctors were among them almost as soon as were ours.

Under the Red Cross—under the black sky, too, and the drizzle, and the creeping cold—we stood and kicked numbed feet in the mud, and talked together of the fight. A prisoner or two, allowed out to look for wounded, came and joined in. We were all most friendly, and naturally congratulated each other on having done so well. These Boers were neither sullen nor complaisant. They had fought their best, and lost; they were neither ashamed nor angry. They were manly and courteous, and through their untrimmed beards and rough corduroys a voice said very plainly, “Ruling race.” These Boers might be brutal, might be treacherous; but they held their heads like gentlemen. Tommy and the veldt peasant—a comedy of good manners in wet and cold and mud and blood!

And so the long, long night wore on. At midnight came outlandish Indians staggering under the green-curtained palanquins they call doolies: these were filled up and taken away to the Elandslaagte Station. At one o’clock we had the rare sight of a general under a waggon trying to sleep, and two privates on top of it rummaging for loot. One found himself a stock of gent’s underwear, and contrived comforters and gloves therewith; one got his fingers into a case and ate cooking raisins. Once, when a few were as near sleep as any were that night, there was a rattle and there was a clash that brought a hundred men springing up and reaching for their rifles. On the ground lay a bucket, a cooking-pot, a couple of tin plates, and knives and forks—all emptied out of a sack. On top of them descended from the waggon on high a flame-coloured shock of hair surmounting a freckled face, a covert coat, a kummerbund, and cloth gaiters. Were we mad? Was it an apparition, or was that under the kummerbund a bit of kilt and an end of sporran? Then said a voice, “Ould Oireland in throuble again! Oi’m an Oirish Highlander; I beg your pardon, sorr—and in throuble again. They tould me there was a box of cigars here; do ye know, sorr, if the bhoys have shmoked them all?”

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VIII.

THE HOME-COMING FROM DUNDEE.

SUPERFLUOUS ASSISTANCE—A SMILING VALLEY—THE BORDER MOUNTED RIFLES—A RAIN-STORM—A THIRTY-TWO MILES' MARCH—HOW THE TROOPS CAME INTO LADYSMITH.

LADYSMITH, *Oct. 27.*

"Come to meet us!" cried the staff officer with amazement in his voice; "what on earth for?"

It was on October 25, about five miles out on the Helpmakaar road, which runs east from Ladysmith. By the stream below the hill he had just trotted down, and choking the pass beyond, wriggled the familiar tail of waggons and water-carts, ambulances, and doolies, and spare teams of old mules in new harness. A couple of squadrons of Lancers had off-saddled by the roadside, a phalanx of horses topped with furled red and white pennons. Behind them stood a battery of artillery. Half a battalion of green-kilted Gordons sunned their bare knees a little lower down; a company or two of Manchesters back-boned the flabby convoy. The staff officer could not make out what in the world it meant.

He had pushed on from the Dundee column, but it was a childish superstition to imagine that the Dundee column could possibly need assistance. They had only marched thirty odd miles on Monday and Tuesday; starting at four in the morning, they would by two o'clock or so have covered the seventeen miles that would bring them into camp, fifteen miles outside Ladysmith. They were coming to help Ladysmith, if you like; but the idea of Ladysmith helping them!

At his urgency they sent the convoy back. I rode on miles through the openest country I had yet seen hereabouts—a basin of wave-like veldt, just growing thinly green under the spring rains, spangled with budding mimosa-thorn. Scarred here and there with the dry water-courses they call sluits, patched with heaves of wire-fenced down, livened with a verandah, blue cactus-hedged farmhouse or two, losing itself finally in a mazy fairyland of azure mountains—this valley was the nearest approach to what you would call a smiling country I had seen in Africa.

Eight miles or so along the road I came upon the Border Mounted Rifles, saddles off, and lolling on the grass. All farmers and transport riders from the northern frontier, lean, bearded, sun-dried, framed of steel and whipcord, sitting their horses like the riders of the Elgin marbles, swift and cunning as Boers, and far braver, they are the heaven-sent type of irregular troopers. It was they who had ridden out and made connection with the returning column an hour before.

Two miles on I dipped over a ridge—and here was the camp. Bugles sang cheerily; mules, linked in fives, were being zigzagged frowardly down to water. The Royal Irish Fusiliers had loosened their belts, but not their sturdy bearing. Under their horses' bellies lay the diminished 18th Hussars. Presently came up a subaltern of the regiment, who had been on leave and returned just too late to rejoin before the line was cut. They had put him in command of the advanced troop of the Lancers, and how he cursed the infantry and the convoy, and how he shoved the troop along when the drag was taken off! Now he was laughing and talking and listening all at once, like a long wanderer at his home-coming.

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No use waiting for sensational stories among these men, going about their daily camp duties as if battles and sieges and forced marches with the enemy on your flank were the most ordinary business of life. No use waiting for fighting either; in open country the force could have knocked thousands of Boers to pieces, and there was not the least chance of the Boers coming to be knocked. So I rode back through the rolling veldt basin. As I passed the stream and the nek beyond the battery of artillery, the Gordons and Manchesters were lighting their bivouac fires. This pass, crevicing under the solid feet of two great stony kopjes, was the only place the Boers would be likely to try their luck at. It was covered; already the Dundee column was all right.

Presently I met the rest of the Gordons, swinging along the road to crown the heights on either side the nek. Coming through I noticed—and the kilted Highlanders noticed, too, they were staying out all night—that the sky over Ladysmith was very black. The great inky stain of cloud spread and ran up the heavens, then down to the whole circumference. In five minutes it was night and rain-storm. It stung like a whip-lash; to meet it was like riding into a wall. Ladysmith streets were ankle deep in half an hour; the camps were morass and pond. And listening to the ever-fresh bursts hammering all the evening on to deepening pools, we learned that the Dundee men had not camped after all, had marched at six, and were coming on all night into Ladysmith. Thirty-two miles without rest, through stinging cataract and spongy loam and glassy slime!

Before next morning was grey in came the 1st Rifles. They plashed uphill to their blue-roofed huts on the south-west side of the town. By the time the sun was up they were fed by their sister battalion, the 2nd, and had begun to unwind their putties. But what a sight! Their putties were not soaked and not caked; say, rather, that there may have been a core of puttie inside, but that the men’s legs were embedded in a serpentine cast of clay. As for their boots, you could only infer them from the huge balls of stratified mud men bore round their feet. Red mud, yellow mud, black mud, brown mud—they lifted their feet toilsomely; they were land plummets that had sucked up specimens of all the heavy, sticky soils for fifteen miles. Officers and men alike bristled stiff with a week’s beard. Rents in their khaki showed white skin; from their grimed hands and heads you might have judged them half red men, half soot-black. Eyelids hung fat and heavy over hollow cheeks and pointed cheek-bones. Only the eye remained—the sky-blue, steel-keen, hard, clear, unconquerable English eye—to tell that thirty-two miles without rest, four days without a square meal, six nights—for many—without a stretch of sleep, still found them soldiers at the end.

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That was the beginning of them; but they were not all in till the middle of the afternoon —which made thirty-six hours on their legs. The Irish Fusiliers tramped in at lunch-time, going a bit short some of them, nearly all a trifle stiff on the feet, but solid, square, and sturdy from the knees upward. They straightened up to the cheers that met them, and stepped out on scorching feet as if they were ready to go into action again on the instant. After them came the guns—not the sleek creatures of Laffan's Plain, rough with earth and spinning mud from their wheels, but war-worn and fresh from slaughter; you might imagine their damp muzzles were dripping blood. You could count the horses' ribs; they looked as if you could break them in half before the quarters. But they, too, knew they were being cheered; they threw their ears up and flung all the weight left them into the traces.

Through fire, water, and earth, the Dundee column had come home again.

IX.

THE STORY OF NICHOLSON'S NEK.

AN ATTENUATED MESS—A REGIMENT 220 STRONG—A MISERABLE STORY—-THE
WHITE FLAG—BOER KINDNESS—ASHAMED FOR ENGLAND.

LADYSMITH, *Nov. 1*.

The sodden tents hung dankly, black-grey in the gusty, rainy morning. At the entrance to the camp stood a sentry; half-a-dozen privates moved to and fro. Perhaps half-a-dozen were to be seen in all—the same hard, thick-set bodies that Ladysmith had cheered six days before as they marched in, square-shouldered through the mud, from Dundee. The same bodies—but the elastic was out of them and the brightness was not in their eyes. But for these few, though it was an hour after *reveille*, the camp was cold and empty. It was the camp of the Royal Irish Fusiliers.

An officer appeared from the mess-tent—pale and pinched. I saw him when he came in from Dundee with four sleepless nights behind him; this morning he was far more haggard. Inside were one other officer, the doctor, and the quarter-master. That was all the mess, except a second lieutenant, a boy just green from Sandhurst. He had just arrived from England, aflame for his first regiment and his first campaign. And this was the regiment he found.

They had been busy half the night packing up the lost officers' kits to send down to Durban. Now they were packing their own; a regiment 220 strong could do with a smaller camp. The mess stores laid in at Ladysmith stood in open cases round the tent. All the small luxuries the careful mess-president had provided against the hard

campaign had been lost at Dundee. Now it was the regiment was lost, and there was nobody to eat the tinned meats and pickles. The common words “Natal Field Force” on the boxes cut like a knife. In the middle of the tent, on a table of cases, so low that to reach it you must sit on the ground, were the japanned tin plates and mugs for five men’s breakfast—five out of five-and-twenty. Tied up in a waterproof sheet were the officers’ letters—the letters of their wives and mothers that had arrived that morning seven thousand miles from home. The men they wrote to were on their way to the prisoners’ camp on Pretoria racecourse.

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A miserable tale is best told badly. On the night of Sunday, October 29, No. 10 Mountain Battery, four and a half companies of the Gloucestershire Regiment, and six of the Royal Irish Fusiliers—some 1000 men in all—were sent out to seize a nek some seven miles north-west of Ladysmith. At daybreak they were to operate on the enemy's right flank—the parallel with Majuba is grimly obvious—in conjunction with an attack from Ladysmith on his centre and right. They started. At half-past ten they passed through a kind of defile, the Boers a thousand feet above them following every movement by ear, if not by eye. By some means—either by rocks rolled down on them or other hostile agency, or by sheer bad luck—the small-arm ammunition mules were stampeded. They dashed back on to the battery mules; there was alarm, confusion, shots flying—and the battery mules stampeded also.

On that the officer in command appears to have resolved to occupy the nearest hill. He did so, and the men spent the hours before dawn in protecting themselves by *schanzes* or breastworks of stones. At dawn, about half-past four, they were attacked, at first lightly. There were two companies of the Gloucesters in an advanced position; the rest, in close order, occupied a high point on the kopje; to line the whole summit, they say, would have needed 10,000 men. Behind the schanzes the men, shooting sparely because of the loss of the reserve ammunition, at first held their own with little loss.

But then, as our ill-luck or Boer good management would have it, there appeared over a hill a new Boer commando, which a cool eye-witness put at over 2000 strong. They divided and came into action, half in front, half from the kopjes in rear, shooting at 1000 yards into the open rear of the schanzes. Men began to fall. The two advanced companies were ordered to fall back; up to now they had lost hardly a man, but once in the open they suffered. The Boers in rear picked up the range with great accuracy.

And then—and then again, that cursed white flag!

It is some sneaking consolation that for a long time the soldiers refused to heed it. Careless now of life, they were sitting up well behind their breastworks, altering their sights, aiming coolly by the half-minute together. At the nadir of their humiliation they could still sting—as that new-come Boer found who, desiring one Englishman to his bag before the end, thrust up his incautious head to see where they were, and got a bullet through it. Some of them said they lost their whole firing-line; others no more than nine killed and sixteen wounded.

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But what matters it whether they lost one or one million? The cursed white flag was up again over a British force in South Africa. The best part of a thousand British soldiers, with all their arms and equipment and four mountain guns, were captured by the enemy. The Boers had their revenge for Dundee and Elandslaagte in war; now they took it, full measure, in kindness. As Atkins had tended their wounded and succoured their prisoners there, so they tended and succoured him here. One commandant wished to send the wounded to Pretoria; the others, more prudent as well as more humane, decided to send them back into Ladysmith. They gave the whole men the water out of their own bottles; they gave the wounded the blankets off their own saddles and slept themselves on the naked veldt. They were short of transport, and they were mostly armed with Martinis; yet they gave captured mules for the hospital panniers and captured Lee-Metfords for splints. A man was rubbing a hot sore on his head with a half-crown; nobody offered to take it from him. Some of them asked soldiers for their embroidered waist-belts as mementoes of the day. “It’s got my money in it,” replied Tommy—a little surly, small wonder—and the captor said no more.

Then they set to singing doleful hymns of praise under trees. Apparently they were not especially elated. They believed that Sir George White was a prisoner, and that we were flying in rout from Ladysmith. They said that they had Rhodes shut up in Kimberley, and would hang him when they caught him. That on their side—and on ours? We fought them all that morning in a fight that for the moment may wait. At the end, when the tardy truth could be withheld no more—what shame! What bitter shame for all the camp! All ashamed for England! Not of her—never that!—but for her. Once more she was a laughter to her enemies.

X.

THE GUNS AT RIETFONTEIN.

> A COLUMN ON THE MOVE—THE NIMBLE GUNS—GARRISON GUNNERS AT WORK—THE VELDT ON FIRE—EFFECTIVE SHRAPNEL—THE VALUE OF THE ENGAGEMENT.

LADYSMITH, *Oct. 26.*

The business of the last few days has been to secure the retreat of the column from Dundee. On Monday, the 23rd, the whisper began to fly round Ladysmith that Colonel Yule’s force had left town and camp, and was endeavouring to join us. On Tuesday it became certainty.

At four in the dim morning guns began to roll and rattle through the mud-greased streets of Ladysmith. By six the whole northern road was jammed tight with bearer company, field hospital, ammunition column, supply column—all the stiff, unwieldy, crawling tail of

an army. Indians tottered and staggered under green-curtained doolies; Kaffir boys guided spans of four and five and six mules drawing ambulances, like bakers' vans; others walked beside waggons curling whips that would dwarf the biggest salmon-rod

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round the flanks of small-bodied, huge-horned oxen. This tail of the army alone covered three miles of road. At length emerging in front of them you found two clanking field-batteries, and sections of mountain guns jingling on mules. Ahead of these again long khaki lines of infantry sat beside the road or pounded it under their even tramp. Then the General himself and his Staff; then best part of a regiment of infantry; then a company, the reserve of the advanced-guard; then a half-company, the support; then a broken group of men, the advanced party; then, in the very front, the point, a sergeant and half-a-dozen privates trudging sturdily along the road, the scenting nose of the column. Away out of sight were the horsemen.

Altogether, two regiments of cavalry—5th Lancers and 19th Hussars—the 42nd and 53rd Field Batteries and 10th Mountain Battery, four infantry battalions—Devons, Liverpools, Gloucesters, and 2nd King's Royal Rifles—the Imperial Light Horse, and the Natal Volunteers. Once more, it was fighting. The head of the column had come within three miles or so of Modderspruit station. The valley there is broad and open. On the left runs the wire-fenced railway; beyond it the land rises to a high green mountain called Tinta Inyoni. On the left front is a yet higher green mountain, double-peaked, called Matawana's Hoek. Some call the place Jonono's, others Rietfontein; the last is perhaps the least outlandish.

The force moved steadily on towards Modderspruit, one battalion in front of the guns. "Tell Hamilton to watch his left flank," said one in authority. "The enemy are on both those hills." Sure enough, there on the crest, there dotted on the sides, were the moving black mannikins that we have already come to know afar as Boers. Presently the dotted head and open files of a battalion emerged from behind the guns, changing direction half-left to cover their flank. The batteries pushed on with the one battalion ahead of them. It was half-past eight, and brilliant sunshine; the air was dead still; through the clefts of the nearer hills the blue peaks of the Drakensberg looked as if you could shout across to them.

Boom! The sound we knew well enough; the place it came from was the left shoulder of Matawana's Hoek; the place it would arrive at we waited, half anxious, half idly curious, to see. Whirr—whizz—e-e-e-e—phutt! Heavens, on to the very top of a gun! For a second the gun was a whirl of blue-white smoke, with grey-black figures struggling and plunging inside it. Then the figures grew blacker and the smoke cleared—and in the name of wonder the gun was still there. Only a subaltern had his horse's blood on his boot, and his haversack ripped to rags.

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But there was no time to look on that or anything else but the amazing nimbleness of the guns. At the shell—even before it—they flew apart like ants from a watering-can. From, crawling reptiles they leaped into scurrying insects—the legs of the eight horses pattering as if they belonged all to one creature, the deadly sting in the tail leaping and twitching with every movement. One battery had wheeled about, and was drawn back at wide intervals facing the Boer hill. Another was pattering swiftly under cover of a ridge leftward; the leading gun had crossed the railway; the last had followed; the battery had utterly disappeared. Boom! Whirr—whizz—e-e-e-e—phutt! The second Boer shell fell stupidly, and burst in the empty veldt. Then bang!—from across the railway—e-e-e-e—whizz—whirr—silence—and then the little white balloon just over the place the Boer shell came from. It was twenty-five minutes to nine.

In a double chorus of bangs and booms the infantry began to deploy. Gloucesters and Devons wheeled half left off the road, split into firing line and supports in open order, trampled through the wire fences over the railway. In front of the Boer position, slightly commanded on the left flank by Tinta Inyoni, was a low, stony ridge; this the Gloucesters lined on the left. The Devons, who led the column, fell naturally on to the right of the line; Liverpools and Rifles backed up right and left. But almost before they were there arrived the irrepressible, ubiquitous guns. They had silenced the enemy's guns; they had circled round the left till they came under cover of the ridge; now they strolled up, unlimbered, and thrust their grim noses over the brow. And then—whew! Their appearance was the signal for a cataract of bullets that for the moment in places almost equalled the high-lead mark of Elandslaagte. The air whistled and hummed with them—and then the guns began.

The mountain guns came up on their mules—a drove of stupid, uncontrolled creatures, you would have said, lumbered up with the odds and ends of an ironworks and a waggon-factory. But the moment they were in position the gunners swarmed upon them, and till you have seen the garrison gunners working you do not know what work means. In a minute the scrap-heaps had flow together into little guns, hugging the stones with their low bellies, jumping at the enemy as the men lay on to the ropes. The detachments all cuddled down to their guns; a man knelt by the ammunition twenty paces in rear; the mules by now were snug under cover. "Two thousand," sang out the major. The No. 1 of each gun held up something like a cross, as if he were going through a religious rite, altered the elevation delicately, then flung up his hand and head stiffly, like a dog pointing. "Number 4"—and Number 4 gun hurled out fire and filmy smoke, then leaped back, half frightened at its own fury, half anxious to get a better view of what it had done. It was a little over. "Nineteen hundred," cried the major. Same ritual, only a little short. "Nineteen fifty"—and it was just right. Therewith field and mountain guns, yard by yard, up and down, right and left, carefully, methodically, though roughly, sowed the whole of Matawana's Hoek with bullets.

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It was almost magical the way the Boer fire dropped. The guns came into action about a quarter-past nine, and for an hour you would hardly have known they were there. Whenever a group put their heads over the sky-line 1950 yards away there came a round of shrapnel to drive them to earth again. Presently the hillside turned pale blue—blue with the smoke of burning veldt. Then in the middle of the blue came a patch of black, and spread and spread till the huge expanse was all black, pocked with the khaki-coloured boulders and bordered with the blue of the ever-extending fire. God help any wounded enemy who lay there!

Crushed into the face of the earth by the guns, the enemy tried to work round our left from Tinta Inyoni. They tried first at about a quarter-past ten, but the Natal Volunteers and some of the Imperial Light Horse met them. We heard the rattle of their rifles; we heard the rap-rap-rap-rap-rap of their Maxim knocking at the door, and the Boer fire stilled again. The Boer gun had had another try at the Volunteers before, but a round or two of shrapnel sent it to kennel again. So far we had seemed to be losing nothing, and it was natural to suppose that the Boers were losing a good deal. But at a quarter-past eleven the Gloucesters pushed a little too far between the two hills, and learned that the Boers, if their bark was silent for the moment, could still bite. Suddenly there shot into them a cross-fire at a few hundred yards. Down went the colonel dead; down went fifty men.

For a second a few of the rawer hands in the regiment wavered; it might have been serious. But the rest clung doggedly to their position under cover; the officers brought the flurried men up to the bit again. The mountain guns turned vengeful towards the spot whence the fire came, and in a few minutes there was another spreading, blackening patch of veldt—and silence.

From then the action nickered on till half-past one. Time on time the enemy tried to be at us, but the imperious guns rebuked him, and he was still. At length the regiments withdrew. The hot guns limbered up and left Rietfontein to burn itself out. The sweating gunners covered the last retiring detachment, then lit their pipes. The Boers made a half-hearted attempt to get in both on left and right; but the Volunteers on the left, the cavalry on the right, a shell or two from the centre, checked them as by machinery. We went back to camp unhampered.

And at the end of it all we found that in those five hours of straggling bursts of fighting we had lost, killed and wounded, 116 men. And what was the good? asked doubting Thomas. Much. To begin with, the Boers must have lost heavily; they confessed that aloud by the fact that, for all their pluck in standing up to the guns, they made no attempt to follow us home. Second, and more important, this commando was driven westward, and others were drawn westward to aid it—and the Dundee force was marching in from the east. Dragging sore feet along the miry roads they heard the guns at Rietfontein and were glad. The seeming objectless cannonade secured the unharassed home-coming of the 4000 way-weary marchers from Dundee.

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XI.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

> LONG TOM—A FAMILY OF HARMLESS MONSTERS—OUR INFERIORITY IN GUNS—THE SENSATIONS OF A BOMBARDMENT—A LITTLE CUSTOM BLUNTS SENSIBILITY.

LADYSMITH, *Nov. 10.*

“Good morning,” banged four-point-seven; “have you used Long Tom?”

“Crack-k—whiz-z-z,” came the riving answer, “we have.”

“Whish-h—patter, patter,” chimed in a cloud-high shrapnel from Bulwan. It was half-past seven in the morning of November 7; the real bombardment, the terrific symphony, had begun.

During the first movement the leading performer was Long Tom. He is a friendly old gun, and for my part I have none but the kindest feelings towards him. It was his duty to shell us, and he did; but he did it in an open, manly way.

Behind the half-country of light red soil they had piled up round him you could see his ugly phiz thrust up and look hungrily around. A jet of flame and a spreading toad-stool of thick white smoke told us he had fired. On the flash four-point-seven banged his punctilious reply. You waited until you saw the black smoke jump behind the red mound, and then Tom was due in a second or two. A red flash—a jump of red-brown dust and smoke—a rending-crash: he had arrived. Then sang slowly through the air his fragments, like wounded birds. You could hear them coming, and they came with dignified slowness: there was plenty of time to get out of the way.

Until we capture Long Tom—when he will be treated with the utmost consideration—I am not able to tell you exactly what brand of gun he may be. It is evident from his conservative use of black powder, and the old-gentlemanly staidness of his movements, that he is an elderly gun. His calibre appears to be six inches. From the plunging nature of his fire, some have conjectured him a sort of howitzer, but it is next to certain he is one of the sixteen 15-cm. Creusot guns bought for the forts of Pretoria and Johannesburg. Anyhow, he conducted his enforced task with all possible humanity.

On this same 7th a brother Long Tom, by the name of Fiddling Jimmy, opened on the Manchesters and Caesar’s Camp from a flat-topped kopje three or four miles south of them. This gun had been there certainly since the 3rd, when it shelled our returning reconnaissance; but he, too, was a gentle creature, and did little harm to anybody. Next day a third brother, Puffing Billy, made a somewhat bashful first appearance on Bulwan.

Four rounds from the four-point-seven silenced him for the day. Later came other brothers, of whom you will hear in due course.

[Illustration: THE COUNTRY ROUND LADYSMITH.]

In general you may say of the Long Tom family that their favourite habitat is among loose soil on the tops of open hills; they are slow and unwieldy, and very open in all their actions. They are good shooting guns; Tom on the 7th made a day's lovely practice all round our battery. They are impossible to disable behind their huge epaulements unless you actually hit the gun, and they are so harmless as hardly to be worth disabling.

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The four 12-pounder field-guns on Bulwana—I say four, because one day there were four; but the Boers continually shifted their lighter guns from hill to hill—were very different. These creatures are stealthy in their habits, lurking among woods, firing smokeless powder with very little flash; consequently they are very difficult guns to locate. Their favourite diet appeared to be balloons; or, failing them, the Devons in the Helpmakaar Road or the Manchesters in Caesar's Camp. Both of these they enfiladed; also they peppered the roads whenever troops were visible moving in or out.

Altogether they were very judiciously handled, though erring perhaps in not firing persistently enough at any one target. But, despite their great altitude, the range—at least 6000 yards—and the great height at which they burst their time shrapnel made them also comparatively harmless.

There were also one or two of their field-guns opposite the Manchesters on the flat-topped hill, one, I fancy, with Long Tom on Pepworth's Hill, and a few others on the northern part of Lombard's Kop and on Surprise Hill to the north-westward.

Westward, on Telegraph Hill, was a gun which appeared to prey exclusively on cattle. I am afraid it was one of our own mountain guns turned cannibal. The cattle, during the siege, had of course to pasture on any waste land inside the lines they could find, and gathered in dense, distractingly noisy herds; but though this gun was never tired of firing on the mobs, I do not think he ever got more than one calf.

There was a gun on Lombard's Kop called Silent Susan—so called because the shell arrived before the report—a disgusting habit in a gun. The menagerie was completed by the pompons, of which there were at least three. This noisome beast always lurks in thick bush, whence it barks chains of shell at the unsuspecting stranger. Fortunately its shell is small, and it is as timid as it is poisonous.

Altogether, with three Long Toms, a 5-inch howitzer, Silent Susan, about a dozen 12-pounders, four of our screw guns, and three Maxim automatics, they had about two dozen guns on us. Against that we had two 47-inch—named respectively Lady Ann and Bloody Mary—four naval 12-pounders, thirty-six field-guns, the two remaining mountain guns, an old 64-pounder, and a 3-inch quickfirer—these two on Caesar's Camp in charge of the Durban Naval Volunteers—two old howitzers, and two Maxim-Nordenfeldts taken at Krugersdorp in the Jameson raid, and retaken at Elandslaagte,—-fifty pieces in all.

On paper, therefore, we had a great advantage. But we had to economise ammunition, not knowing when we should get more, and also to keep a reserve of field-guns to assist any threatened point. Also their guns, being newer, better pieces, mounted on higher ground, outranged ours. We had more guns, but they were as useless as catapults: only the six naval guns could touch Pepworth's Hill or Bulwan.

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For these reasons we only fired, I suppose, one shell to their twenty, or thereabouts; so that though we actually had far more guns, we yet enjoyed all the sensations of a true bombardment.

What were they? That bombardments were a hollow terror I had always understood; but how hollow, not till I experienced the bombardment of Ladysmith. Hollow things make the most noise, to be sure, and this bombardment could at times be a monstrous symphony indeed.

The first heavy day was November 3: while the troops were moving in and out on the Van Keenen's road the shells traced an aerial cobweb all over us. After that was a lull till the 7th, which was another clattering day. November 8 brought a tumultuous morning and a still afternoon. The 9th brought a very tumultuous morning indeed; the 10th was calm; the 11th patchy; the 12th, Sunday.

It must be said that the Boers made war like gentlemen of leisure; they restricted their hours of work with trade-unionist punctuality. Sunday was always a holiday; so was the day after any particularly busy shooting. They seldom began before breakfast; knocked off regularly for meals—the luncheon interval was 11.30 to 12 for riflemen, and 12 to 12.30 for gunners—hardly ever fired after tea-time, and never when it rained. I believe that an enterprising enemy of the Boer strength—it may have been anything from 10,000 to 20,000; and remember that their mobility made one man of them equal to at least two of our reduced 11,000—could, if not have taken Ladysmith, at least have put us to great loss and discomfort. But the Boers have the great defect of all amateur soldiers: they love their ease, and do not mean to be killed. Now, without toil and hazard they could not take Ladysmith.

To do them justice, they did not at first try to do wanton damage in town. They fired almost exclusively on the batteries, the camps, the balloon, and moving bodies of troops. In a day or two the troops were far too snugly protected behind schanzes and reverse slopes, and grown far too cunning to expose themselves to much loss.

The inhabitants were mostly underground, so that there was nothing really to suffer except casual passengers, beasts, and empty buildings. Few shells fell in town, and of the few many were half-charged with coal-dust, and many never burst at all. The casualties in Ladysmith during a fortnight were one white civilian, two natives, a horse, two mules, a waggon, and about half-a-dozen houses. And of the last only one was actually wrecked; one—of course the most desirable habitation in Ladysmith—received no less than three shells, and remained habitable and inhabited to the end.

And now what does it feel like to be bombarded?

At first, and especially as early as can be in the morning, it is quite an uncomfortable sensation.

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You know that gunners are looking for you through telescopes; that every spot is commanded by one big gun and most by a dozen. You hear the squeal of the things all above, the crash and pop all about, and wonder when your turn will come. Perhaps one falls quite near you, swooping irresistibly, as if the devil had kicked it. You come to watch for shells—to listen to the deafening rattle of the big guns, the shrilling whistle of the small, to guess at their pace and their direction. You see now a house smashed in, a heap of chips and rubble; now you see a splinter kicking up a fountain of clinking stone-shivers; presently you meet a wounded man on a stretcher. This is your dangerous time. If you have nothing else to do, and especially if you listen and calculate, you are done: you get shells on the brain, think and talk of nothing else, and finish by going into a hole in the ground before daylight, and hiring better men than yourself to bring you down your meals. Whenever you put your head out of the hole you have a nose-breadth escape. If a hundredth part of the providential deliverances told in Ladysmith were true, it was a miracle that anybody in the place was alive after the first quarter of an hour. A day of this and you are a nerveless semi-corpse, twitching at a fly-buzz, a misery to yourself and a scorn to your neighbours.

If, on the other hand, you go about your ordinary business, confidence revives immediately. You see what a prodigious weight of metal can be thrown into a small place and yet leave plenty of room for everybody else. You realise that a shell which makes a great noise may yet be hundreds of yards away. You learn to distinguish between a gun's report and an overturned water-tank's. You perceive that the most awful noise of all is the throat-ripping cough of your own guns firing over your head at an enemy four miles away. So you leave the matter to Allah, and by the middle of the morning do not even turn your head to see where the bang came from.

XII.

THE DEVIL'S TIN-TACKS.

THE EXCITEMENT OF A RIFLE FUSILADE—A SIX-HOURS' FIGHT—THE PICKING
OFF OF OFFICERS—A DISPLAY OF INFERNAL FIREWORKS—"GOD BLESS THE PRINCE OF WALES."

When all is said, there is nothing to stir the blood like rifle-fire. Rifle-fire wins or loses decisive actions; rifle-fire sends the heart galloping. At five in the morning of the 9th I turned on my mattress and heard guns; I got up.

Then I heard the bubble of distant musketry, and I hurried out. It came from the north, and it was languidly echoed from Caesar's Camp. Tack-tap, tack-tap—each shot echoed a little muffled from the hills. Tack-tap, tack-tap, tack, tack, tack, tack, tap—as if the devil was hammering nails into the hills. Then a hurricane of tacking, running round

all Ladysmith, running together into a scrunching roar. From the hill above Mulberry Grove you can see every shell drop; but of this there was no sign—only noise and furious heart-beats.

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I went out to the strongest firing, and toiled up a ladder of boulders. I came up on to the sky-line, and bent and stole forward. To the right was Cave Redoubt with the 4.7; to the left two field-guns, unlimbered and left alone, and some of the Rifle Brigade snug behind their stone and earth schanzes. In front was the low, woody, stony crest of Observation Hill; behind was the tall table-top of Surprise Hill—the first ours, the second the enemy's. Under the slope of Observation Hill were long, dark lines of horses; up to the sky-line, prolonging the front leftward, stole half-a-dozen of the 5th Lancers. From just beyond them came the tack, tack, tack, tap.

Tack, tap; tack, tap—it went on minute by minute, hour by hour.

The sun warmed the air to an oven; painted butterflies, azure and crimson, came flitting over the stones; still the devil went on hammering nails into the hills. Down leftward a black-powder gun was popping on the film-cut ridge of Bluebank. A Boer shell came fizzing from the right, and dived into a whirl of red dust, where nothing was. Another—-another—another, each pitched with mathematical accuracy into the same nothing. Our gunners ran out to their guns, and flung four rounds on to the shoulder of Surprise Hill. Billy puffed from Bulwan—came 10,000 yards jarring and clattering loud overhead—-then flung a red earthquake just beyond the Lancers' horses. Again and again,—it looked as if he could not miss them; but the horses only twitched their tails, as if he were a new kind of fly. The 4.7 crashed hoarsely back, and a black nimbus flung up far above the trees on the mountain. And still the steady tack and tap—from the right among the Devons and Liverpools, from the right centre, where the Leicesters were, from the left centre, among the 60th, and the extreme left, from Caesar's Camp.

The fight tacked on six mortal hours and then guttered out. From the early hour they began and from the number of shells and cartridges they burned I suppose the Boers meant to do something. But at not one point did they gain an inch. We were playing with them—playing with them at their own game. One of our men would fire and lie down behind a rock; the Boers answered furiously for three minutes. When they began to die down, another man fired, and for another three minutes the Boers hammered the blind rocks. On six hours' fighting along a front of ten or twelve miles we lost three killed and seventeen wounded. And, do you know, I really believe that this tack-tapping among the rocks was the attack after all. They had said—or it was among the million things they were said to have said—that they would be in Ladysmith on November 9, and I believe they half believed themselves. At any rate I make no doubt that all this morning they were feeling—feeling our thin lines all round for a weak spot to break in by.

They did not find it, and they gave over; but they would have come had they thought they could come safely. They began before it was fully light with the Manchesters. The Manchesters on Caesar's Camp were, in a way, isolated: they were connected by telephone with headquarters, but it took half an hour to ride up to their eyrie. They were

shelled religiously for a part of every day by Puffing Billy from Bulwan and Fiddling Jimmy from Middle Hill.

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Every officer who showed got a round of shrapnel at him. Their riflemen would follow an officer about all day with shots at 2200 yards; the day before they had hit Major Grant, of the Intelligence, as he was sketching the country. Tommy, on the other hand, could swagger along the sky-line unmolested. No doubt the Boers thought that exposed Caesar's Camp lay within their hands.

But they were very wrong. Snug behind their *schanzes*, the Manchesters cared as much for shells as for butterflies. Most of them were posted on the inner edge of the flat top with a quarter of a mile of naked veldt to fire across. They had been reinforced the day before by a field battery and a squadron and a half of the Light Horse. And they had one *schanze* on the outer edge of the hill as an advanced post.

In the dim of dawn, the officer in charge of this post saw the Boers creeping down behind a stone wall to the left, gathering in the bottom, advancing in, for them, close order. He welted them with rifle-fire: they scattered and scurried back.

The guns got to work, silenced the field-guns on Flat Top Hill, and added scatter and scurry to the assailing riflemen. Certainly some number were killed; half-a-dozen bodies, they said, lay in the open all day; lanterns moved to and fro among the rocks and bushes all night; a new field hospital and graveyard were opened next day at Bester's Station. On the other horn of our position the Devons had a brisk morning. They had in most places at least a mile of clear ground in front of them. But beyond that, and approaching within a few hundred yards of the extreme horn of the position, is scrub, which ought to have been cut down.

Out of this scrub the enemy began to snipe. We had there, tucked into folds of the hills, a couple of tubby old black-powdered howitzers, and they let fly three rounds which should have been very effective. But the black powder gave away their position in a moment, and from every side—Pepworth's, Lombard's Nek, Bulwan—came spouting inquirers to see who made that noise. The Lord Mayor's show was a fool to that display of infernal fireworks. The pompon added his bark, but he has never yet bitten anybody: him the Devons despise, and have christened with a coarse name. They weathered the storm without a man touched.

Not a point had the Boers gained. And then came twelve o'clock, and, if the Boers had fixed the date of the 9th of November, so had we. We had it in mind whose birthday it was. A trumpet-major went forth, and presently, golden-tongued, rang out, "God bless the Prince of Wales." The general up at Cove Redoubt led the cheers. The sailors' champagne, like their shells, is being saved for Christmas, but there was no stint of it to drink the Prince's health withal. And then the Royal salute—bang on bang on bang—-twenty-one shotted guns, as quick as the quickfirer can fire, plump into the enemy.

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That finished it. What with the guns and the cheering, each Boer commando must have thought the next was pounded to mincemeat. The rifle-fire dropped.

The devil had driven home all his tin-tacks, and for the rest of the day we had calm.

XIII.

A DIARY OF DULNESS.

THE MYTHOPOEIC FACULTY—A MISERABLE DAY—THE VOICE OF THE POMPOM—LEARNING THE BOER GAME—THE END OF FIDDLING JIMMY—-MELINITE
AT CLOSE QUARTERS—A LAKE OF MUD.

Nov. 11.—Ugh! What a day! Dull, cold, dank, and misty—the spit of an 11th of November at home. Not even a shell from Long Tom to liven it. The High Street looks doubly dead; only a sodden orderly plashes up its spreading emptiness on a sodden horse. The roads are like rice-pudding already, and the paths like treacle. Ugh! Outside the hotel drip the usual loafers with the usual fables. Yesterday, I hear, the Leicesters enticed the enemy to parade across their front at 410 yards; each man emptied his magazine, and the smarter got in a round or two of independent firing besides. Then they went out and counted the corpses—230. It is certainly true: the narrator had it from a man who was drinking a whisky, while a private of the regiment, who was not there himself, but had it from a friend, told the barman.

The Helpmakaar road is as safe as Regent Street to-day: a curtain of weeping cloud veils it from the haunting gunners on Bulwan. Up in the schanzes the men huddle under waterproof sheets to escape the pitiless drizzle. Only one sentry stands up in long black overcoat and grey woollen nightcap pulled down over his ears, and peers out towards Lombard's Kop. This position is safe enough with the bare green field of fire before it, and the sturdy, shell-hardened soldiers behind.

But Lord, O poor Tommy! His waterproof sheet is spread out, mud-slimed, over the top of the wall of stone and earth and sandbag, and pegged down inside the schanz. He crouches at the base of the wall, in a miry hole. Nothing can keep out this film of water. He sops and sneezes, runs at the eyes and nose, half manful, half miserable. He is earning the shilling a-day.

At lunch-time they began to shell us a bit, and it was almost a relief. At anyrate it was something to see and listen to. They were dead-off Mulberry Grove to-day, but they dotted a line of shells elegantly down the High Street. The bag was unusually good—a couple of mules and a cart, a tennis-lawn, and a water-tank. Towards evening the voice of the pompom was heard in the land; but he bagged nothing—never does.

Nov. 12.—Sunday, and the few rifle-shots, but in the main the usual calm. The sky is neither obscured by clouds nor streaked with shells. I note that the Sunday population of Ladysmith, unlike that of the City of London, is double and treble that of week-days.

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Long Tom chipped a corner off the church yesterday; to-day the archdeacon preached a sermon pointing out that we are the heaven-appointed instrument to scourge the Boers. Very sound, but perhaps a thought premature.

Nov. 13.—Laid three sovs. to one with the 'Graphic' yesterday against to-day being the most eventful of the siege. He dragged me out of bed in aching cold at four, to see the events.

At daybreak Observation Hill and King's Post were being shelled and shelling back. Half battalions of the 1st, 60th, and Rifle Brigade take day and day about on Observation Hill and King's Post, which is the continuation of Cove Redoubts. To-day the 60th were on Leicester Post. When shells came over them they merely laughed. One ring shell burst, fizzing inside a schanz, with a steamy curly tail, and splinters that wailed a quarter of a mile on to the road below us; the men only raced to pick up the pieces.

When this siege is over this force ought to be the best fighting men in the world. We are learning lessons every day from the Boer. We are getting to know his game, and learning to play it ourselves.

Our infantry are already nearly as patient and cunning as he; nothing but being shot at will ever teach men the art of using cover, but they get plenty of that nowadays.

Another lesson is the use of very, very thin firing-lines of good shots, with the supports snugly concealed: the other day fourteen men of the Manchesters repulsed 200 Boers. The gunners have momentarily thrown over their first commandment and cheerfully split up batteries. They also lie beneath the schanzes and let the enemy bombard the dumb guns if he will—till the moment comes to fire; that moment you need never be afraid that the R.A. will be anywhere but with the guns.

The enemy's shell and long-range rifle-fire dropped at half-past six. The guns had breached a new epaulement on Thornhill's Kop—to the left of Surprise Hill and a few hundred yards nearer—and perhaps knocked over a Boer or two,—perhaps not. None of our people hurt, and a good appetite for breakfast.

In the afternoon one of our guns on Caesar's Camp smashed a pompom. Fiddling Jimmy has been waved away, it seems. The Manchesters are cosy behind the best built schanzes in the environs of Ladysmith. Above the wall they have a double course of sandbags—the lower placed endwise across the stone, the upper lengthwise, which forms a series of loopholes at the height of a man's shoulder.

The subaltern in command sits on the highest rock inside; the men sit and lie about him, sleeping, smoking, reading, sewing, knitting. It might almost be a Dorcas meeting.

I won the bet.

Nov. 14.—The liveliest day's bombardment yet.

A party of officers who live in the main street were waiting for breakfast. The new president, in the next room, was just swearing at the servants for being late, when a shell came in at the foot of the outside wall and burst under the breakfast-room. The whole place was dust and thunder and the half-acrid, half-fat, all-sickly smell of melinite. Half the floor was chips; one plank was hurled up and stuck in the ceiling. All the crockery was smashed, and the clock thrown down; the pictures on the wall continued to survey the scene through unbroken glasses.

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Much the same thing happened later in the day to the smoking-room of the Royal Hotel. It also was inhabited the minute before, would have been inhabited the minute after, but just then was quite empty. We had a cheerful lunch, as there were guns returning from a reconnaissance, and they have adopted a thoughtless habit of coming home past our house. Briefly, from six till two you would have said that the earth was being shivered to matchwood and fine powder. But, alas! man accustoms himself so quickly to all things, that a bombardment to us, unless stones actually tinkle on the roof, is now as an egg without salt.

The said reconnaissance I did not attend, knowing exactly what it would be. I mounted a hill, to get warm and to make sure, and it was exactly what I knew it would be. Our guns fired at the Boer guns till they were silent; and then the Boer dismounted men fired at our dismounted men; then we came home. We had one wounded, but they say they discovered the Boer strength on Bluebank, outside Range Post, to be 500 or 600. I doubt if it is as much; but, in any case, I think two men and a boy could have found out all that three batteries and three regiments did. With a little dash, they could have taken the Boer guns on Bluebank; but of dash there was not even a little.

Nov. 15.—I wake at 12.25 this morning, apparently dreaming of shell-fire.

“Fool,” says I to myself, and turn over, when—swish-h! pop-p!—by the piper, it is shell-fire! Thud—thud—thud—ten or a dozen, I should say, counting the ones that woke me. What in the name of gunpowder is it all about? But there is no rifle-fire that I can hear, and there are no more shells now: I sleep again.

In the morning they asked the Director of Military Intelligence what the shelling was; he replied, “What shelling?” Nobody knew what it was, and nobody knows yet. They had a pretty fable that the Boers, in a false alarm, fired on each other: if they did, it was very lucky for them that the shells all hit Ladysmith. My own notion is that they only did it to annoy—in which they failed. They were reported in the morning, as usual, searching for bodies with white flags; but I think that is their way of reconnoitring. Exhausted with this effort, the Boers—heigho!—did nothing all day. Level downpour all the afternoon, and Ladysmith a lake of mud.

Nov. 16.—Five civilians and two natives hit by a shrapnel at the railway station; a railway guard and a native died. Languid shelling during morning.

Nov. 17.—During morning, languid shelling. Afternoon, raining—Ladysmith wallowing deeper than ever.

And that—heigh-h-ho!—makes a week of it. Relieve us, in Heaven’s name, good countrymen, or we die of dulness!

XIV.

NEARING THE END.

DULNESS INTERMINABLE—LADYSMITH IN 2099 A.D.—SIEGES OBSOLETE HARDSHIPS—DEAD TO THE WORLD—THE APPALLING FEATURES OF A BOMBARDMENT.

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November 26, 1899.

I was going to give you another dose of the dull diary. But I haven't the heart. It would weary you, and I cannot say how horribly it would weary me.

I am sick of it. Everybody is sick of it. They said the force which would open the line and set us going against the enemy would begin to land at Durban on the 11th, and get into touch with us by the 16th. Now it is the 26th; the force, they tell us, has landed, and is somewhere on the line between Maritzburg and Estcourt; but of advance not a sign.

Buller, they tell us one day, is at Bloemfontein; next day he is coming round to Durban; the next he is a prisoner in Pretoria.

The only thing certain is that, whatever is happening, we are out of it. We know nothing of the outside; and of the inside there is nothing to know.

Weary, stale, flat, unprofitable, the whole thing. At first, to be besieged and bombarded was a thrill; then it was a joke; now it is nothing but a weary, weary, weary bore. We do nothing but eat and drink and sleep—just exist dismally. We have forgotten when the siege began; and now we are beginning not to care when it ends.

For my part, I feel it will never end.

It will go on just as now, languid fighting, languid cessation, for ever and ever. We shall drop off one by one, and listlessly die of old age.

And in the year 2099 the New Zealander antiquarian, digging among the buried cities of Natal, will come upon the forgotten town of Ladysmith. And he will find a handful of Rip Van Winkle Boers with white beards down to their knees, behind quaint, antique guns shelling a cactus-grown ruin. Inside, sheltering in holes, he will find a few decrepit creatures, very, very old, the children born during the bombardment. He will take these links with the past home to New Zealand. But they will be afraid at the silence and security of peace. Having never known anything but bombardment, they will die of terror without it.

So be it. I shall not be there to see. But I shall wrap these lines up in a Red Cross flag and bury them among the ruins of Mulberry Grove, that, after the excavations, the unnumbered readers of the 'Daily Mail' may in the enlightened year 2100 know what a siege and a bombardment were like.

Sometimes I think the siege would be just as bad without the bombardment.

In some ways it would be even worse; for the bombardment is something to notice and talk of, albeit languidly. But the siege is an unredeemed curse. Sieges are out of date. In the days of Troy, to be besieged or besieger was the natural lot of man; to give ten

years at a stretch to it was all in a life's work; there was nothing else to do. In the days when a great victory was gained one year, and a fast frigate arrived with the news the next, a man still had leisure in his life for a year's siege now and again.

But to the man of 1899—or, by'r Lady, inclining to 1900—with five editions of the evening papers every day, a siege is a thousand-fold a hardship. We make it a grievance nowadays if we are a day behind the news—news that concerns us nothing.

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And here are we with the enemy all round us, splashing melinite among us in most hours of the day, and for the best part of a month we have not even had any definite news about the men for whom we must wait to get out of it. We wait and wonder, first expectant, presently apathetic, and feel ourselves grow old.

Furthermore, we are in prison. We know now what Dartmoor feels like. The practised vagabond tires in a fortnight of a European capital; of Ladysmith he sickens in three hours.

Even when we could ride out ten or a dozen miles into the country, there was little that was new, nothing that was interesting. Now we lie in the bottom of the saucer, and stare up at the pitiless ring of hills that bark death. Always the same stiff, naked ridges, flat-capped with our intrenchments—always, always the same. As morning hardens to the brutal clearness of South African mid-day, they march in on you till Bulwan seems to tower over your very heads. There it is close over you, shady, and of wide prospect; and if you try to go up you are a dead man.

Beyond is the world—war and love. Clery marching on Colenso, and all that a man holds dear in a little island under the north star. But you sit here to be idly shot at. You are of it, but not in it—clean out of the world. To your world and to yourself you are every bit as good as dead—except that dead men have no time to fill in.

I know now how a monk without a vocation feels. I know how a fly in a beer-bottle feels.

I know how it tastes, too.

And with it all there is the melinite and the shrapnel. To be sure they give us the only pin-prick of interest to be had in Ladysmith. It is something novel to live in this town turned inside out.

Where people should be, the long, long day from dawn to daylight shows only a dead blank.

Where business should be, the sleepy shop-blinds droop. But where no business should be—along the crumbling ruts that lead no whither—clatters waggon after waggon, with curling whip-lashes and piles of bread and hay.

Where no people should be—in the clefts at the river-bank, in bald patches of veldt ringed with rocks, in overgrown ditches—all these you find alive with men and beasts.

The place that a month ago was only fit to pitch empty meat-tins into is now priceless stable-room; two squadrons of troop-horses pack flank to flank inside its shelter. A scrub-entangled hole, which perhaps nobody save runaway Kaffirs ever set foot in before, is now the envied habitation of the balloon. The most worthless rock-heap below a perpendicular slope is now the choicest of town lots.

The whole centre of gravity of Ladysmith is changed. Its belly lies no longer in the multifarious emporia along the High Street, but in the earth-reddened, half-in visible tents that bashfully mark the commissariat stores. Its brain is not the Town Hall, the best target in Ladysmith, but Headquarters under the stone-pocked hill. The riddled Royal Hotel is its social centre no longer; it is to the trench-seamed Sailors' Camp or the wind-swept shoulders of Caesar's Camp that men go to hear and tell the news.

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Poor Ladysmith! Deserted in its markets, repeopled in its wastes; here ripped with iron splinters, there rising again into rail-roofed, rock-walled caves; trampled down in its gardens, manured where nothing can ever grow; skirts hemmed with sandbags and bowels bored with tunnels—the Boers may not have hurt us, but they have left their mark for years on her.

They have not hurt us much—and yet the casualties mount up. Three to-day, two yesterday, four dead or dying and seven wounded with one shell—they are nothing at all, but they mount up. I suppose we stand at about fifty now, and there will be more before we are done with it.

And then there are moments when even this dribbling bombardment can be appalling.

I happened into the centre of the town one day when the two big guns were concentrating a cross-fire upon it.

First from one side the shell came tearing madly in, with a shrill, a blast. A mountain of earth, and a hailstorm of stones on iron roofs. Houses winced at the buffet. Men ran madly away from it. A dog rushed out yelping—and on the yelp, from the other quarter, came the next shell. Along the broad straight street not a vehicle, not a white man was to be seen. Only a herd of niggers cowering under flimsy fences at a corner.

Another crash and quaking, and this time in a cloud of dust an outbuilding jumped and tumbled asunder. A horse streaked down the street with trailing halter. Round the corner scurried the niggers: the next was due from Pepworth's.

Then the tearing scream: horror! it was coming from Bulwan.

Again the annihilating blast, and not ten yards away. A roof gaped and a house leaped to pieces. A black reeled over, then terror plucked him up again, and sent him running.

Head down, hands over ears, they tore down the street, and from the other side swooped down the implacable, irresistible next.

You come out of the dust and the stench of melinite, not knowing where you were, hardly knowing whether you were hit—only knowing that the next was rushing on its way. No eyes to see it, no limbs to escape, no bulwark to protect, no army to avenge. You squirm between iron fingers.

Nothing to do but endure.

XV.

IN A CONNING-TOWER.

THE SELF-RESPECTING BLUEJACKET—A GERMAN ATHEIST—THE SAILORS' TELEPHONE—WHAT THE NAVAL GUNS MEANT TO LADYSMITH—THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

LADYSMITH, *Dec. 6.*

"There goes that stinker on Gun Hill," said the captain. "No, don't get up; have some draught beer."

I did have some draught beer.

"Wait and see if he fires again. If he does we'll go up into the conning-tower, and have both guns in action toge—"

Boom! The captain picked up his stick.

"Come on," he said.

We got up out of the rocking-chairs, and went out past the swinging meat-safe, under the big canvas of the ward-room, with its table piled with stuff to read. Trust the sailor to make himself at home. As we passed through the camp the bluejackets rose to a man and lined up trimly on either side. Trust the sailor to keep his self-respect, even in five weeks' beleaguered Ladysmith.

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Up a knee-loosening ladder of rock, and we came out on to the green hill-top, where they first had their camp. Among the orderly trenches, the sites of the deported tents, were rougher irregular blotches of hole—footprints of shell.

“That gunner,” said the captain, waving his stick at Surprise Hill, “is a German. Nobody but a German atheist would have fired on us at breakfast, lunch, and dinner the same Sunday. It got too hot when he put one ten yards from the cook. Anybody else we could have spared; then we had to go.”

We come to what looks like a sandbag redoubt, but in the eyes of heaven is a conning-tower. On either side, from behind a sandbag epaulement, a 12-pounder and a Maxim thrust forth vigilant eyes. The sandbag plating of the conning-tower was six feet thick and shoulder-high; the rivets were red earth, loose but binding; on the parapets sprouted tufts of grass, unabashed and rejoicing in the summer weather. Against the parapet leaned a couple of men with the clean-cut, clean-shaven jaw and chin of the naval officer, and half-a-dozen bearded bluejackets. They stared hard out of sun-puckered eyes over the billows of kopje and veldt.

Forward we looked down on the one 4.7; aft we looked up to the other. On bow and beam and quarter we looked out to the enemy’s fleet. Deserted Pepworth’s was on the port-bow, Gun Hill, under Lombard’s Kop, on the starboard, Bulwan abeam, Middle Hill astern, Surprise Hill on the port-quarter.

Every outline was cut in adamant.

The Helpmakaar Ridge, with its little black ants a-crawl on their hill, was crushed flat beneath us.

A couple of vedettes racing over the pale green plain northward looked as if we could jump on to their heads. We could have tossed a biscuit over to Lombard’s Kop. The great yellow emplacement of their fourth big piece on Gun Hill stood up like a Spit-head Fort. Through the big telescope that swings on its pivot in the centre of the tower you could see that the Boers were loafing round it dressed in dirty mustard-colour.

“Left-hand Gun Hill fired, sir,” said a bluejacket, with his eyes glued to binoculars. “At the balloon”—and presently we heard the weary pinions of the shell, and saw the little puff of white below.

“Ring up Mr Halsey,” said the captain.

Then I was aware of a sort of tarpaulin cupboard under the breastwork, of creeping trails of wire on the ground, and of a couple of sappers.

The corporal turned down his page of ‘Harmsworth’s Magazine,’ laid it on the parapet, and dived under the tarpaulin.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling! buzzed the telephone bell.

The gaunt up-towering mountains, the long, smooth, deadly guns—and the telephone bell!

The mountains and the guns went out, and there floated in that roaring office of the ‘Daily Mail’ instead, and the warm, rustling vestibule of the playhouse on a December night. This is the way we make war now; only for the instant it was half joke and half home-sickness. Where were we? What were we doing?

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“Right-hand Gun Hill fired, sir,” came the even voice of the bluejacket. “At the balloon.”

“Captain wants to speak to you, sir,” came the voice of the sapper from under the tarpaulin.

Whistle and rattle and pop went the shell in the valley below.

“Give him a round both guns together,” said the captain to the telephone.

“Left-hand Gun Hill fired, sir,” said the bluejacket to the captain.

Nobody cared about left-hand Gun Hill; he was only a 47 howitzer; every glass was clamped on the big yellow emplacement.

“Right-hand Gun Hill is up, sir.”

Bang coughs the forward gun below us; bang-g-g coughs the after-gun overhead. Every glass clamped on the emplacement.

“What a time they take!” sighs a lieutenant—then a leaping cloud a little in front and to the right.

“Damn!” sighs a peach-cheeked midshipman, who—

“Oh, good shot!” For the second has landed just over and behind the epaulement. “Has it hit the gun?”

“No such luck,” says the captain: he was down again five seconds after we fired.

And the men had all gone to earth, of course.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling!

Down dives the sapper, and presently his face reappears, with “Headquarters to speak to you, sir.” What the captain said to Headquarters is not to be repeated by the profane: the captain knows his mind, and speaks it. As soon as that was over, ting-a-ling again.

“Mr Halsey wants to know if he may fire again, sir.”

“He may have one more”—for shell is still being saved for Christmas.

It was all quite unimportant and probably quite ineffective. At first it staggers you to think that mountain-shaking bang can have no result; but after a little experience and thought you see it would be a miracle if it had. The emplacement is a small mountain in

itself; the men have run out into holes. Once in a thousand shots you might hit the actual gun and destroy it—but shell is being saved for Christmas.

If the natives and deserters are not lying, and the sailors really hit Pepworth's Long Tom, then that gunner may live on his exploit for the rest of his life.

"We trust we've killed a few men," says the captain cheerily; "but we can't hope for much more."

And yet, if they never hit a man, this handful of sailors have been the saving of Ladysmith. You don't know, till you have tried it, what a worm you feel when the enemy is plugging shell into you and you can't possibly plug back. Even though they spared their shell, it made all the world of difference to know that the sailors could reach the big guns if they ever became unbearable. It makes all the difference to the Boers, too, I suspect; for as sure as Lady Anne or Bloody Mary gets on to them they shut up in a round or two. To have the very men among you makes the difference between rain-water and brine.

The other day they sent a 12-pounder up to Caesar's Camp under a boy who, if he were not commanding big men round a big gun in a big war, might with luck be in the fifth form.

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“There’s a 94-pounder up there,” said a high officer, who might just have been his grandfather.

“All right, sir,” said the child serenely; “we’ll knock him out.”

He hasn’t knocked him out yet, but he is going to next shot, which in a siege is the next best thing.

In the meantime he has had his gun’s name, “Lady Ellen,” neatly carved on a stone and put up on his emplacement. Another gun-pit bears the golden legend “Princess Victoria Battery,” on a board elegant beyond the dreams of suburban preparatory schools. A regiment would have had no paint or gold-leaf; the sailors always have everything. They carry their home with them, self-subsisting, self-relying. Even as the constant bluejacket says, “Right Gun Hill up, sir,” there floats from below ting-ting, ting-ting, ting.

Five bells!

The rock-rending double bang floats over you unheard; the hot iron hills swim away.

Five bells—and you are on deck, swishing through cool blue water among white-clad ladies in long chairs, going home.

O Lord, how long?

But the sailors have not seen home for two years, which is two less than their usual spell. This is their holiday.

“Of course, we enjoy it,” they say, almost apologising for saving us; “we so seldom get a chance.”

The Royal Navy is the salt of the sea and the salt of the earth also.

THE LAST CHAPTER

BY

VERNON BLACKBURN.

I will give no number to the last chapter of George Steevens’s story of the war. There is no reckoning between the work from his and the work from this pen. It is the chapter which covers a grave; it does not make a completion. A while back, you have read that surrendering wail from the beleaguered city—a wail in what contrast to the humour, the vitality, the quickness, the impulse, the eagerness of expectation with which his toil in South Africa began!—wherein he wrote: “Beyond is the world—war and love. Clery

marching on Colenso, and all that a man holds dear in a little island under the north star.... To your world and to yourself you are every bit as good as dead—except that dead men have no time to fill in." And now he is dead. And I have undertaken the most difficult task, at the command—for in such a case the timorous suggestion, hooped round by poignant apologies, is no less than a command—of that human creature whom, in the little island under the north star, he held most dear of all—his wife, to set a copingstone, a mere nothing in the air, upon the last work that came from his pen. I will prefer to begin with my own summary, my own intimate view of George Steevens, as he wandered in and out, visible and invisible, of the paths of my life.

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“Weep for the dead, for his light hath failed; weep but a little for the dead, for he is at rest.” Ecclesiasticus came to my mind when the news of his death came to my knowledge. Who would not weep over the extinction of a career set in a promise so golden, in an accomplishment so rare and splendid? Sad enough thought it is that he is at rest; still—he rests. “Under the wide and starry sky,” words which, as I have heard him say, in his casual, unambitious manner of speech, he was wont to repeat to himself in the open deserts of the Soudan—“Under the wide and starry sky” the grave has been dug, and “let me lie.”

> “Glad did I live, and gladly die,
> And I laid me down with a will.”

The personality of George Steevens was one which might have been complex and obscure to the ordinary acquaintance, were it not for one shining, one golden key which fitted every ward of his temperament, his conduct, his policy, his work. He was the soul of honour. I use the words in no vague sense, in no mere spirit of phrase-making. How could that be possible at this hour? They are words which explain him, which are the commentary of his life, which summarise and enlighten every act of every day, his momentary impulses and his acquired habits. “In Spain,” a great and noble writer has said, “was the point put upon honour.” The point of honour was with George Steevens his helmet, his shield, his armour, his flag. That it was which made his lightest word a law, his vaguest promise a necessity in act, his most facile acceptance an engagement as fixed as the laws of motion. In old, old days I well remember how it came to be a complacent certainty with everybody associated with Steevens that if he promised an article, an occasional note, a review—whatever it might be—at two, three, four, five in the morning, at that hour the work would be ready. He never flinched; he never made excuses, for the obvious reason that there was never any necessity for excuse. Truthful, clean-minded, nobly unselfish as he was, all these things played but the parts of planets revolving around the sun of his life—the sun of honour. To that point I always return: but a man can be conceived who shall be splendidly honourable, yet not lovable—a man who might repel friendship. Steevens was not of that race. Not a friend of his but loved him with a great and serious affection for those qualities which are too often separable from the austerity of a fine character, the honour of an upright man. His sweetness was exquisite, and this partly because it was so unexpected. A somewhat shy and quiet manner did not prepare men for the urbanity, the tolerance, the magnanimity that lay at the back of his heart. Generosity in thought—the rarest form of generosity that is reared among the flowers of this sorrowful earth—was with him habitual. He could, and did, resent at every point the qualities in men that ran counter to his principles of honour, and he did not spare his keen irony when such things crossed his path; but, on the other side, he loved his friends with a whole and simple heart. I think that very few men who came under his influence refused him their love, none their admiration.

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Into all that he wrote—and I shall deal later with that point in detail—his true and candid spirit was infused. Just as in his life, in his daily actions, you were continually surprised by his tenderness turning round the corner of his austere reserve, so in his work his sentiment came with a curious appeal, with tender surprises, with an emotion that was all the keener on account of the contrast that it made with the courage, the hope, and the fine manliness of all his thought and all his word. Children, helplessness of all kinds, touched always that merciful heart. I can scarcely think of him as a man of the world, although he had had in his few and glorious days experience enough to harden the spirit of any man. He could never, as I think of him, have grown into your swaggering, money-making, bargaining man of Universal Trade. Keen and significant his policy, his ordering of his affairs must ever have been; but the keenness and significance were the outcome, not of any cool eye to the main chance, but of a gay sense of the pure need of logic, not only in letters but also in living.

There, again, I touch another characteristic—his feeling for logic, for dialectic, which made him one of the severest reasoners that it would be possible to meet in argument. He used, in his admirably assumed air of brag, an attitude which he could take with perfect humour and perfect dignity—to protest that he was one of two or three Englishmen who had ever mastered the philosophical systems of Germany, from Kant to Hegel, from Hegel to Schopenhauer. Though he said it with an airy sense of fun, and almost of disparagement, I am strongly inclined to believe that it was true. He was never satisfied with his knowledge: invariably curious, he was guided by his joy in pure reasoning to the philosophies of the world, and in his silent, quiet, unobtrusive way he became a master of many subjects which life was too brief in his case to permit him to show to his friends, much less to the world.

This, it will be readily understood, is, as I have said, the merest summary of a character, as one person has understood it. Others will reach him from other points of view. Meanwhile Ladysmith has him—what is that phrase of his?—“You squirm between iron fingers.” Fortunate he, so far that he is at rest, squirming no longer; and with the wail on his lips, the catch in the throat, he went down in the embrace of a deadlier enemy than the Bulwan horror, to which he made reference in one of the last lines he was destined to write in this world. He fell ill in that pestilent town, as all the world knows. His constitution was strong enough; he had not lived a life of unpropitious preparation for a serious illness; but his heart was a danger. Typhoid is fatal to any heart-weakness, particularly in convalescence; and he was caught suddenly as he was growing towards perfect health.

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I have been privileged to see certain letters written to his wife by the friend with whom he shared his Ladysmith house during the course of his illness. “How he contracted enteric fever,” says Mr Maud, “I cannot tell. It is unfortunately very prevalent in the camp just now. He began to be ill on the 13th of December, but on that day the doctor was not quite sure about its being enteric, although he at once commenced with the treatment for that disease. The following day there was no doubt about it, and we moved him from our noisy and uncomfortable quarters in the Imperial Light Horse Camp to our present abode, which is quite the best house in Ladysmith. Major Henderson of the Intelligence Department very kindly offered his own room, a fine, airy, and well-furnished apartment, although he was barely recovered of his wound. At first I could only procure the services of a trained orderly of the 5th Dragoon Guards lent to us by the colonel, but a few days later we were lucky enough to find a lady nurse, who has turned out most excellently, and she takes charge at night.... I am happy to tell you that everything has gone on splendidly".... After describing how the fever gradually approached a crisis, Mr Maud continues: “When he was at his worst he was often delirious, but never violent; the only trouble was to prevent him getting out of bed. He was continually asking us to go and fetch you, and always thought he was journeying homewards. It never does to halloa before one gets out of the wood, but I do really think that he is well on the road to recovery.” Alas!

Not so much as a continued record of Steevens’s illness, as in the nature of a pathetic side-issue to the tragedy of his death, I subjoin one or two passages from a letter sent subsequently from Ladysmith by the same faithful friend before the end: “He has withstood the storm wonderfully well, and he is not very much pulled down. The doctor thinks that he should be about again in a fortnight”—the letter was written on the 4th of January—“by which time I trust General Buller will have arrived and reopened the railway. Directly it is possible to move, I shall take him down to Nottingham Road.... There has been little or nothing to do for the last month beyond listening to the bursting of the Long Tom shells.” That touch about General Buller’s arrival is surely one of the most strangely appealing incidents in the recent history of human confidence and human expectation! Another friend, Mr George Lynch, whose name occurred in one of his letters in a passage curiously characteristic of Steevens’s drily incisive humour, writes about the days that must immediately have preceded his illness: “He was as fit and well as possible when I left Ladysmith last month.” (The letter is dated from Durban, January 11.) “We were drawing rations like the soldiers, but had some ’74 port and a plum-pudding which we were keeping for Christmas Day.... Shells fell in our vicinity more or less like angels’ visits, and I had a bet with him of a dinner. I backed our house to be hit against another which he selected; and he won. I am to pay the dinner at the Savoy when we return.”

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There is little more to record of the actual facts at this moment. The following cable, which has till now remained unpublished, tells its own tale too sadly:—

“Steevens, a few days before death, had recovered so far as to be able to attend to some of his journalistic duties, though still confined to bed. Relapse followed; he died at five in the afternoon. Funeral same night, leaving Carter’s house (where Steevens was lying during illness) at 11.30. Interred in Ladysmith Cemetery at midnight. Night dismal, rain falling, while the moon attempted to pierce the black clouds. Boer searchlight from Umbala flashed over the funeral party, showing the way in the darkness. Large attendance of mourners, several officers, garrison, most correspondents. Chaplain M’Varish officiated.”

When I read that short and simple cablegram, the thought came to my mind that if only the greater number of modern rioters in language were compelled to hoard their words out of sheer necessity for the cable, we should have better results from the attempts at word-painting that now cumber the ground. And this brings me directly to a consideration of Steevens’s work. In many respects, of course, it was never, even in separate papers, completed. Journalist and scholar he was, both. But the world was allowed to see too much of the journalist, too little of the scholar, in what he accomplished. ‘The Monologues of the Dead’ was a brilliant beginning. It proved the splendid work of the past, it presaged more splendid work for the future. And then, if you please, he became a man of action; and a man of action, if he is to write, must perforce be a journalist. The preparations had made it impossible that he should ever be anything else but an extraordinary journalist; and accordingly it fell out that the combination of a wonderful equipment of scholarship with a vigorous sense of vitality brought about a unique thing in modern journalism. Unique, I say: the thing may be done again, it is true; but he was the pioneer, he was the inventor, of the particular method which he practised.

I began this discussion with a reference to the spare, austere, but quite lucid message of the cablegram announcing the death of Steevens; and I was carried on at once to a deliberate consideration of his literary work, because that work had, despite its vigour, its vividness, its brilliance, just the outline, the spareness, the slimness, the austerity which are so painfully inconspicuous in the customary painter of word-pictures. Some have said that Steevens was destined to be the Kinglake of the Transvaal. That is patently indemonstrable. His war correspondence was not the work of a stately historian. He could, out of sheer imaginativeness, create for himself the style of the stately historian. His “New Gibbon”—a paper which appeared in ’Blackwood’s Magazine’—is there to prove so much; but that was not the manner in which he usually wrote about war. He was essentially

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a man who had visions of things. Without the time to separate his visions into the language of pure classicism—a feat which Tennyson superlatively contrived to accomplish—he yet took out the right details, and by skilful combination built you, in the briefest possible space, a strongly vivid picture. If you look straight out at any scene, you will see what all men see when they look straight out; but when you inquire curiously into all the quarters of the compass, you will see what no man ever saw when he simply looked out of his two eyes without regarding the here, there, and everywhere. When Tennyson wrote of

> "flush'd Ganymede, his rosy thigh
> Half-buried in the Eagle's down,
> Sole as a flying star shot thro' the sky
> Above the pillar'd town"—

you felt the wonder of the picture. Applied in a vastly different way, put to vastly different uses, the visual gift of Steevens belonged to the same order of things. Consider this passage from his Soudan book:—

"Black spindle-legs curled up to meet red-gimleted black faces, donkeys headless and legless, or sieves of shrapnel; camels with necks writhed back on to their humps, rotting already in pools of blood and bile-yellow water, heads without faces, and faces without anything below, cobwebbed arms and legs, and black skins grilled to crackling on smouldering palm-leaf—don't look at it."

The writer, swinging on at the obvious pace with which this writing swings, of course has no chance to make as flawless a picture as the great man of leisure; but the pictorial quality of each is precisely the same. Both understood the fine art of selection.

I have sometimes wondered if I grudged to journalism what Steevens stole from letters. I have not yet quite come to a decision; for, had he never left the groves of the academic for the crowded career of the man of the world, we should never have known his amazing versatility, or even a fraction of his noble character as it was published to the world. Certainly the book to which this chapter forms a mere pendant must, in parts, stand as a new revelation no less of the nobility of that character than of his extraordinary foresight, his wonderful instinct for the objectiveness of life. I believe that in his earliest childhood his feeling for the prose of geography was like Wordsworth's cataract—it "haunted him like a passion." And all the while the subjective side of life called for the intrusion of his prying eyes. So that you may say it was more or less pure chance that led him to give what has proved to be the bulk of his active years to the objective side of things, the purely actual. Take, in this very book, that which amounts practically to a prophecy of the difficulty of capturing a point like Spion Kop, in the

passage where he describes how impossible it is to judge of the value of a hill-top until you get there. (Pope, by the way—and I state the point not from

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any desire to be pedantic, but because Steevens had a classical way with him which would out, disguise it how he might—Pope, I say, in his “Essay on Criticism,” had before made the same remark.) Then again you have in his chapter on Aliwal the curiously intimate sketch of the Boer character—“A people hard to arouse, but, you would say, very hard to subdue.” Well, it is by the objective side of life that we have to judge him. The futility of death makes that an absolute necessity; but I like to think of a possible George Steevens who, when the dust and sand of campaigns and daily journalism had been wiped away from his shoon, would have combined in a great and single-hearted career all the various powers of his fine mind.

His death, as none needs to be told, came as a great shock and with almost staggering surprise to the world; and it is for his memory’s sake that I put on record a few of the words that were written of him by responsible people. An Oxford contemporary has written of him:—

“I first met him at a meeting of the Russell Club at Oxford. He was a great light there, being hon. sec. It was in 1890, and Steevens had been head-boy of the City of London School, and then Senior Scholar at Balliol. Even at the Russell Club, then, he was regarded as a great man. The membership was, I think, limited to twenty—all Radical stalwarts. I well remember his witty comments on a paper advocating Women’s Rights. He was at his best when opening the debate after some such paper. Little did that band of ardent souls imagine their leader would, in a few short years, be winning fame for a Tory halfpenny paper.“He sat next me at dinner, just before he graduated, and he was in one of those pensive moods which sometimes came over him. I believe he hardly spoke. In ’92 he entered himself as a candidate for a Fellowship at Pembroke. I recollect his dropping into the examination-room half an hour late, while all the rest had been eagerly waiting outside the doors to start their papers at once. But what odds? He was miles ahead of them all—an easy first. It was rumoured in Pembroke that the new Fellow had been seen smoking (a pipe, too) in the quad—that the Dean had said it was really shocking, such a bad example to the undergraduates, and against all college rules. How could we expect undergraduates to be moral if Mr Steevens did such things? How, indeed? Then came Mr Oscar Browning from Cambridge, and carried off” Steevens to the ’second university in the kingdom,’ so that we saw but little of him. Some worshipped, others denounced him. The Cambridge papers took sides. One spoke of ‘The Shadow’ or ‘The Fetish,’ *au contraire*: another would praise the great Oxford genius. Whereas at Balliol Steevens was boldly criticised, at Cambridge he was hated or adored.“A few initiated friends knew that Steevens was writing for the ‘Pall Mall’ and the ‘Cambridge Observer,’

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and it soon became evident that journalism was to be his life-work. Last February I met him in the Strand, and he was much changed: no more crush hat, and long hair, and Bohemian manners. He was back from the East, and a great man now—married and settled as well—very spruce, and inclined to be enthusiastic about the Empire. But still I remarked his old indifference to criticism. Success had improved him in every way: this seems a common thing with Britishers. In September last I knocked up against him at Rennes during the Dreyfus trial. As I expected, Steevens kept cool: he could always see the other side of a question. We discussed the impending war, and he was eagerly looking forward to going with the troops. I dare not tell his views on the political question of the war. They would surprise most of his friends and admirers. On taking leave I bade him be sure to take care of himself. He said he would."

What strikes me as being peculiarly significant of a certain aspect of his character appeared in 'The Nursing and Hospital World.' It ran in this wise—I give merely an extract:—

"Although George Steevens never used his imperial pen for personal purposes, yet it seems almost as if it were a premonition of death by enteric fever which aroused his intense sympathy for our brave soldiers who died like flies in the Soudan from this terrible scourge, owing to lack of trained nursing skill, during the late war. This sympathy he expressed to those in power, and we believe that it was owing to his representations that one of the most splendid offers of help for our soldiers ever suggested was made by his chief, the editor of the 'Daily Mail,' when he proposed to equip, regardless of expense, an ambulance to the Soudan, organised on lines which would secure, for our sick and wounded, *skilled nursing on modern lines*, such nursing as the system in vogue at the War Office denies to them."The fact that the War Office refused this enlightened and generous offer, and that dozens of valuable lives were sacrificed in consequence, is only part of the monstrous incompetence of its management. Who can tell! If Mr Alfred Harmsworth's offer had been accepted in the last war, might not army nursing reform have, to a certain extent, been effected ere we came to blows with the Transvaal, and many of the brave men who have died for us long lingering deaths from enteric and dysentery have been spared to those of whom they are beloved?"

Another writer in the 'Outlook':—

"As we turn over the astonishing record of George Warrington Steevens's thirty years, we are divided between the balance of loss and gain. The loss to his own intimates must be intolerable. From that, indeed, we somewhat hastily avert our eyes. Remains the loss to the great reading public, which we believe that Steevens must have done a vast deal to educate, not to literature so much as to a pride in our

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country's imperial destiny. Where the elect chiefly admired a scarcely exampled grasp and power of literary impressionism, the man in the street was learning the scope and aspect of his and our imperial heritage, and gaining a new view of his duties as a British citizen."A potent influence is thus withdrawn. The pen that had taught us to see and comprehend India and Egypt and the reconquest of the Soudan would have burned in on the most heedless the line which duty marks out for us in South Africa. Men who know South Africa are pretty well united. Now Steevens would have taken all England to South Africa. Nay, more, we are no longer able to blink the truth that all is not for the best in the best of all possible armies, and the one satisfaction in our reverses is that, when the war is over, no Government will dare to resist a vigorous programme of reform. Steevens would not have been too technical for his readers; he would have given his huge public just as many prominent facts and headings as had been good for them, and his return from South Africa with the materials of a book must have strengthened the hands of the intelligent reformer. That journalism which, in a word, really is a living influence in the State is infinitely the poorer. And so we believe is literature. There is much literature in his journalism, but it is in his 'Monologues of the Dead' that you get the rare achievement and rarer promise which made one positive that, his wanderings once over, he would settle down to write something of great and permanent value. Only one impediment could we have foreseen to such a consummation: he might have been drawn into public life. For he spoke far better than the majority of even distinguished contemporary politicians, and to a man of his knowledge of affairs, influence over others, and clearness of conviction, anything might have been open."Well! he is dead at Ladysmith of enteric fever. Turning over the pages of his famous war-book we find it written of the Soudan: 'Of the men who escaped with their lives, hundreds more will bear the mark of its fangs till they die; hardly one of them but will die the sooner for the Soudan.' And so he is dead 'the sooner for the Soudan.' It seems bitter, unjust, a quite superfluous dispensation; and then one's eye falls on the next sentence—'What have we to show in return?' In the answer is set forth the balance of gain, for we love 'to show in return' a wellnigh ideal career. Fame, happiness, friendship, and that which transcends friendship, all came to George Steevens before he was thirty. He did everything, and everything well. He bridged a gulf which was deemed impassable, for from being a head-boy at school and the youngest Balliol scholar and a Fellow of his College and the very type of rising pedagogue, with a career secure to him in these dusty meadows, he chose to step forth into a world where these things were accounted lightly, to glorify the hitherto contemned

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office of the reporter. Thus within a few years he hurried through America, bringing back, the greatest of living American journalists tells us, the best and most accurate of all pictures of America. Thus he saw the face of war with the conquering Turk in Thessaly, and showed us modern Germany and Egypt and British India, and in two Soudanese campaigns rode for days in the saddle in ‘that God-accursed wilderness,’ as though his training had been in a stable, not in the quad of Balliol. These thirty years were packed with the happiness and success which Matthew Arnold desired for them that must die young. He not only succeeded, but he took success modestly, and leaves a name for unselfishness and unbumptiousness. Also he ’did the State some service.’“‘One paces up and down the shore yet awhile,’ says Thackeray, ’and looks towards the unknown ocean and thinks of the traveller whose boat sailed yesterday.’ And so, thinking of Steevens, we must not altogether repine when, ‘trailing clouds of glory,’ an ’ample, full-blooded spirit shoots into the night.’”

I take this passage from ‘Literature,’ in connection with Steevens, on account of the grave moral which it draws from his life-work:—

“His career was an object-lesson in the usefulness of those educational endowments which link the humblest with the highest seats of learning in the country. If he had not been able to win scholarships he would have had to begin life as a clerk in a bank or a house of business. But he won them, and a good education with them, wherever they were to be won—at the City of London School, and at Balliol College, Oxford. He was a first-class man (both in ‘Mods’ and ’Greats’), *proxime accessit* for the Hertford, and a Fellow of Pembroke. He learnt German, and specialised in metaphysics. A review which he wrote of Mr Balfour’s ’Foundations of Religious Belief’ showed how much more deeply than the average journalist he had studied the subjects about which philosophers doubt; and his first book—’Monologues of the Dead’—established his claim to scholarship. Some critics called them vulgar, and they certainly were frivolous. But they proved two things—that Mr Steevens had a lively sense of humour, and that he had read the classics to some purpose. The monologue of Xanthippe—in which she gave her candid opinion of Socrates—was, in its way, and within its limits, a masterpiece.“But it was not by this sort of work that Mr Steevens was to win his wide popularity. Few writers, when one comes to think of it, do win wide popularity by means of classical *jeux d’esprit*. At the time when he was throwing them off, he was also throwing off ’Occ. Notes’ for the ‘Pall Mall Gazette.’ He was reckoned the humorist *par excellence* of that journal in the years when, under the editorship of Mr Cust, it was almost entirely written by humorists. He was one of the seceders on the occasion of Mr Cust’s

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retirement, and occupied the leisure that then presented itself in writing his book on ‘Naval Policy.’ His real chance in life came when he was sent to America for the ‘Daily Mail.’ It was a better chance than it might have been, because that newspaper did not publish his letters at irregular intervals, as usually happens, but in an unbroken daily sequence. Other excursions followed—to Egypt, to India, to Turkey, to Germany, to Rennes, to the Soudan—and the letters, in almost every case, quickly reappeared as a book.“A rare combination of gifts contributed to Mr Steevens’s success. To begin with, he had a wonderful power of finding his way quickly through a tangle of complicated detail: this he owed, no doubt, in large measure to his Oxford training. He also was one of the few writers who have brought to journalism the talents, and sympathies, and touch hitherto regarded as belonging more properly to the writer of fiction. It was the dream of Mr T.P. O’Connor, when he started the ‘Sun,’ to have the happenings of the passing day described in the style of the short-story writer. The experiment failed, because it was tried on an evening paper with printers clamouring for copy, and the beginning of the story generally had to be written before the end of the story was in sight or the place of the incidents could be determined. Mr Steevens tried the same experiment under more favourable conditions, and succeeded. There never were newspaper articles that read more like short stories than his, and at the same time there never were newspaper articles that gave a more convincing impression that the thing happened as the writer described it.”

A more personal note was struck perhaps by a writer in the ’Morning Post’:—

“Few of the reading public can fail to be acquainted with the merits of his purely journalistic work. He had carefully developed a great natural gift of observation until it seemed wellnigh an impossibility that he should miss any important detail, however small, in a scene which he was watching. Moreover, he had a marvellous power of vivid expression, and used it with such a skill that even the dullest of readers could hardly fail to see what he wished them to see. It is given to some journalists to wield great influence, and few have done more to spread the imperial idea than has been done by Mr Steevens during the last four or five years of his brief life. Still it must be remembered that, in order to follow journalism successfully, he had to make sacrifices which he undoubtedly felt to be heavy. His little book, ’Monologues of the Dead,’ can never become popular, since it needs for its appreciation an amount of scholarship which comparatively few possess. Yet it proves none the less conclusively that, had he lived and had leisure, he would have accomplished great things in literature. Those who had the privilege of knowing him, however, and above all those who at one period or another in his career

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worked side by side with him, will think but little now of his success as journalist and author. The people who may have tried, as they read his almost aggressively brilliant articles, to divine something of the personality behind them, can scarcely have contrived to picture him accurately. They will not imagine the silent, undemonstrative person, invariably kind and ready unasked to do a colleague's work in addition to his own, who dwells in the memory of the friends of Mr Steevens. They will not understand how entirely natural it seemed to these friends that when the long day's work was ended in Ladysmith he should have gone habitually, until this illness struck him down, to labour among the sick and wounded for their amusement, and in order to give them the courage which is as necessary to the soldier facing disease as it is to his colleague who has to storm a difficult position. Those who loved him will presently find some consolation in considering the greatness of his achievement, but nothing that can now be said will mitigate their grief at his untimely loss."

Another writer says:—

"What Mr Kipling has done for fiction Mr Steevens did for fact. He was a priest of the Imperialist idea, and the glory of the Empire was ever uppermost in his writings. That alone would not have brought him the position he held, for it was part of the age he lived in. But he was endowed with a curious faculty, an extraordinary gift for recording his impressions. In a scientific age his style may be described as cinematographic. He was able to put vividly before his readers, in a series of smooth-running little pictures, events exactly as he saw them with his own intense eyes. It has been said that on occasion his work contained passages a purist would not have passed. But Mr Steevens wrote for the people, and he knew it. Deliberately and by consummate skill he wrote in the words of his average reader; and had he desired to offer his work for the consideration of a more select class, there is little doubt that he would have displayed the same felicity. His mission was not of that order. He set himself the more difficult task of entertaining the many; and the same thoroughness which made him captain of the school, Balliol scholar, and the best note-writer on the 'Pall Mall Gazette' in its brightest days, taught him, aided by natural gifts, to write 'With Kitchener to Khartum' and his marvellous impressions of travel."

* * * * *

This record must close. Innumerable have been the tributes to this brave youth's power for capturing the human heart and the human mind. The statesman and the working man—one of these has written very curtly and simply, "He served us best of all"—each has felt something of the intimate spirit of his work.

Lord Roberts cabled from Capetown in the following words:—

“Deeply regret death of your talented correspondent, Steevens.
ROBERTS.”

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And a correspondent writes:—

> “To-day I called on Lord Kitchener, in compliance with his request, having yesterday received through his aide-de-camp, Major Watson, the following letter:—
>
> > “’I am anxious to have an opportunity of expressing to you personally my great regret at the loss we have all sustained in the death of Mr Steevens.’
>
> “Lord Kitchener said to me:—

“’I was anxious to tell you how very sorry I was to hear of the death of Mr Steevens. He was with me in the Sudan, and, of course, I saw a great deal of him and knew him well. He was such a clever and able man. He did his work as correspondent so brilliantly, and he never gave the slightest trouble—I wish all correspondents were like him. I suppose they will try to follow in his footsteps. I am sure I hope they will.

> “’He was a model correspondent, the best I have ever known, and I should like you to say how greatly grieved I am at his death.’”

Some “In Memoriam” verses, very beautifully written, for the ’Morning Post,’ may however claim a passing attention:—

> “The pages of the Book quickly he turned.
> He saw the languid Isis in a dream
> Flow through the flowery meadows, where the ghosts
> Of them whose glorious names are Greece and Rome
> Walked with him. Then the dream must have an end,
> For London called, and he must go to her,
> To learn her secrets—why men love her so,
> Loathing her also. Yet again he learned
> How God, who cursed us with the need of toil,
> Relenting, made the very curse a boon.
> There came a call to wander through the world
> And watch the ways of men. He saw them die
> In fiercest fight, the thought of victory
> Making them drunk like wine; he saw them die
> Wounded and sick, and struggling still to live,
> To fight again for England, and again
> Greet those who loved them. Well indeed he knew
> How good it is to live, how good to love,
> How good to watch the wondrous ways of men—
> How good to die, if ever there be need.

And everywhere our England in his sight
Poured out her blood and gold, to share with all
Her heritage of freedom won of old.
Thus quickly did he turn the pages o'er,
And learn the goodness of the gift of life;
And when the Book was ended, glad at heart—
The lesson learned, and every labour done—
Find at the end life's ultimate gift of rest."

There I leave him. Great-hearted, strong-souled, brave without a hesitation, tender as a child, intolerant of wrong because he was incapable of it, tolerant of every human weakness, slashing controversialist in speech, statesman-like in foresight, finely versed in the wisdom of many literatures, a man of genius scarce aware of his innumerable gifts, but playing them all with splendid skill, with full enjoyment of the crowded hours of life,—here was George Steevens. In the face of what might have been—think of it—a boy scarce thirty! And yet he did much, if his days were so few. "Being made perfect in a little while, he fulfilled long years."

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[Illustration: MAP OF THE SEAT OF WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA]