

A WOMAN IN THE AFRICAN DIGGINGS.



THE discovery of the vast diamond-mines of South Africa in 1870, in the locality indicated by an old Portuguese map, led to researches for gold guided by similar authorities, and always

with the result of proving that the information was based on definite premises. Through the efforts of Mr. Thomas François Burgers, who was elected President of the Transvaal Republic in 1872, the Boers of that territory were induced to relax the severity of their laws against prospecting for gold, and rewards were offered for its discovery. These Boers had settled their republic across the Vaal River, through a long tempest-tossed career that is unique in history. They carried the legacy of their sturdy Netherland forefathers to Africa, where, through half a century, they took to the wilds in preference to submission to the injustice which they characterized as the rule of their English conquerors; and the intensity of their determination gained its object at last, when a British charter was granted to them recognizing their independence. In their tranquil domestic surroundings,—their multiplied flocks and herds browsing on the wide undulations of their limitless acres,—the word ambition effaced from their vocabulary, they could view with sentiments only akin to dread the prospective immigration of a foreign element into their country. Mr. Burgers, an educated man from the same stock, made the first break in the crust of their prejudices, and gave the impetus to the search for mineral wealth.

As the result of rewards offered for the discovery of payable gold, some alluvial fields were opened in 1873. The diggings were situated in the precipitous gorges of the high plateau-like formation which extends from the east, and crosses the entire breadth of the Transvaal, and it is an index to the rugged character of the locality that "The Devil's Hills," "The Devil's Knuckles," and other similar appellations, have been given to the most prominent elevations. It is no exaggeration to say that while you watch the descent of a wagon down the succession of precipitous terraces, your hair bristles with electricity, and literally fulfils the travesty of "standing on end." The span, sometimes of sixteen, sometimes of eighteen, oxen, is detached, with the exception of two, and, preceded by these, the wagon descends the almost perpendicular incline; its tendency to impetus being checked

by a struggling band of Kafirs, who hang on from the back to ropes and chains attached to the several wheels. Only their extraordinary nerve averts an immediate disaster; yet the greatest caution is not always proof against a sudden impetus.

No one did more to establish the notoriety and success of these gold-fields than my own sister, and she must, in the history of South Africa, rank as one of the pioneers of the enterprise. She was not only the first white woman to set foot in the little settlement, but probably the first white woman who had ever looked on those deep, broken heights. She was always imbued with a spirit of adventure, and her youth was marked by many laughable and eccentric experiments, which bore the presage of strong individuality of character. At the period when the first discoveries of gold were agitating people's minds, and rumors and contradictions conflicted between truth and untruth, she was a young girl, teaching in a little Boer town in the Orange Free State, the sister republic of the Transvaal. She heard enough to kindle within her a desire to go, and she began to form plans to that end, writing home for counsel and encouragement; but her scheme met with cold opposition, and was regarded as one of utter madness. My father was steeped in the traditional prejudices of the Englishman against a woman who should venture to step out of the sphere of domesticity. The country where the diggings were situated was a *terra incognita*, an uninhabited wilderness. It could be reached only over bridgeless rivers and roadless mountains; but with these facts all set before her in their most uninviting aspect, and conventional scruples whispering sinister threats against the defiance of time-honored prejudices, she deliberately went on making preparations to carry out her purpose. In her leisure time she cut out and sewed together the tent which was to be her home at the diggings; and shortly she realized on the few effects she possessed in connection with her scholastic occupation, hired a Boer with his wagon to take her and her necessary outfit, implements, and provisions to El Dorado, and, with a younger brother, set out.

From the point at which they took their departure there was no road or direct route for their guidance, and they had to steer their course by such casual information as they could occasionally glean from natives, and by a dependence on the sun, which embodies a



DRAWN BY WALTER SHIRLAW.

LETTING THE WAGONS DOWN.

chart which the denizens of new countries interpret with peculiar aptitude. Some days, however, they wandered about in dire uncertainty, with no satisfaction but the idea that they were getting somewhere. The Boer grew disheartened with what he had undertaken to do, and was disposed to turn back; but he was dissuaded from this by my sister's determination. Other delays were encountered by swollen rivers, and by stick-fasts in low *vleys*, where a rich, black loamy soil possesses some extraordinary power of tenacity that literally threatens engulfment. Game was abundant through the country they traversed, and the Boer marked many a noble wildebeeste for the sport of his *roer*, so that no threat of want ever appalled them; and in this way six weeks went by in the *veldt*, until at length my sister saw the goal of her hopes.

Deep down in the midst of mountains varying in altitude from 3000 to 8000 feet above the level of the sea lay the creek called Pilgrim's Rest, along which, as its tortuous course could be traced, were dotted here and there the fleecy spots that in the distance were all that represented the diggers' tents. The country was enveloped in an atmosphere of peculiar rarity and lightness, and the wooded ravines, the luxuriance of the vegetation, and the wealth of blossoms that mantled nature at this season of the year, marked the first view with an impression of delight the memory of which no subsequent disappointment could mar.

The advent of a woman marked an epoch in the history of Pilgrim's Rest (so called because of the rest it suggested when the almost unconquerable task of reaching it had been accomplished), and there were among the diggers men who, long unaccustomed to the sight of such a phenomenon, could not overcome their self-consciousness sufficiently to approach within speaking distance; and yet, consumed with curiosity, they made observations from the shelter of friendly rocks, envying more fortunate comrades who found presence of mind to face the unfamiliar spectacle. The privations and mutual dependence which are part and parcel of the digger's life call into action the best phase of human character, and the genial interchange of kindly aid conduces to frank social relations that are undeniably charming.

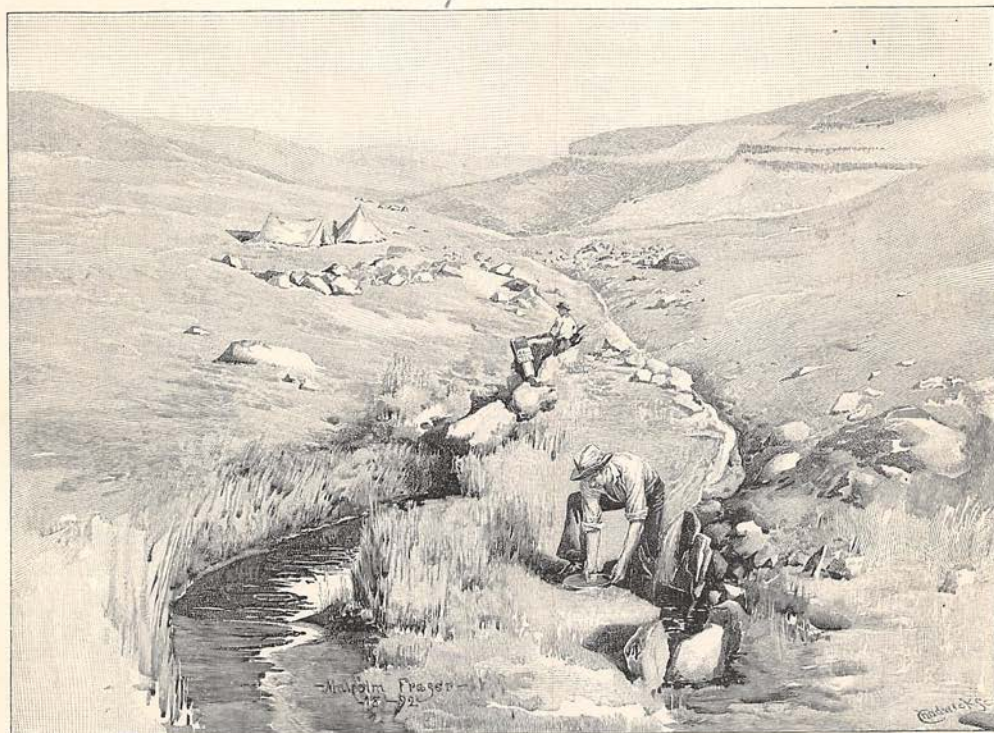
The most cordial assistance was rendered my sister in every detail: her tent was pitched in a quiet, secluded spot; she was advised in the selection of a claim; initiated into the formalities of pegging-out and registration; and thus found many anticipated difficulties considerably ameliorated. The cheapness of native labor lessened in a great degree the hardships of living at these gold-fields. The Amaton-

gas, a very intelligent tribe on the east coast, came in freely to work, offering their services at the rate of £1 per month, with the usual rations of mealie meal; and having paid the digger's tax of 5 shillings for the month, and hired several of these natives, my sister found herself settled down to the life of a digger. She superintended the work of her claim herself, and in the process of washing the disintegrated soil she personally took part. The Kafirs were immensely amused at the odd spectacle of a woman displaying such eagerness for what they merely characterized as "stones"; but they were by no means devoid of an intelligent sympathy, and the tact which knows how to draw this out is always sure of getting better work done. Besides this, their zeal was stimulated by the discovery of gold being made the occasion of a feast of meat, or an extra length of tobacco, without which narcotic in some form or another they are unable to exist.

My sister lived for two years in her little canvas tent on the creek, which she had in the mean time inclosed by means of a fence of laced boughs and planted about with vegetables. She found gold for the most part steadily, but only in small quantities of a few ounces at a time. It existed very indefinitely, and there were no indications that proved of the slightest value in searching for it. At one time she hit upon the expedient of meeting her expenses by making ginger-beer and pastry, a difficult task where kitchens are not, and with cooking utensils of the most primitive kind. The sight of such delicacies raised the liveliest emotions in the diggers, whose life condemned them to a monotonous and sorry fare, and the Kafir who became the itinerant vender on these occasions grew inflated with the importance it conferred on him. He was hailed in all directions, and when he could no longer meet the demands of importunate customers, he would toss the basket into the air with a smile of ironical pity. In the mean time, several claims had passed through my sister's hands, and the last of these realized some of the expectations the hope of which gives a flavor of excitement to the monotony of gold-digging. This claim contained a rich lead, from which some very fine nuggets of almost pure gold were taken, solid lumps of metal averaging in weight from eight ounces to four pounds. She was now in possession of a moderate competency, and her success was the theme of considerable comment throughout the entire press of South Africa. But at this juncture she laid down her laurels, discarded pick and shovel, bade adieu to Pilgrim's Rest, and to some of the happiest days of her life, which she claims to have spent there, and, uniting her fortunes to those of Mr. Cameron, a gentleman who had also been success-

ful as a miner, the two visited America, where at the Philadelphia Exposition they exhibited about fifty pounds' weight of virgin gold from Pilgrim's Rest. One nugget in the collection — from my sister's claim — attracted special notice; it was worn away in the center so as almost to form a cup. It weighed somewhat over four pounds, and a model of it is now in

camp life. Mr. Burgers, anxious to secure the intelligent coöperation of the new community in advancing the best interests of the country, persuaded his Government into granting them concessions that were constitutionally limited. To obviate the difficulties the language presented, English candidates were appointed to fill official positions, while the nomination of



DRAWN BY MALCOLM FRASER.

WASHING GOLD, "PILGRIM'S REST."

ENGRAVED BY C. W. CHADWICK.

the mint at Philadelphia, where it was coined. During the few years in which the diggings at Pilgrim's Rest were worked, the population at one time was enumerated at 800, and though my sister was relieved of the honor of being the solitary representative of her sex, her position as the only woman miner remained undisputed.

No statistics were ever ascertained of the exact quantity of gold produced from these mines, and the only facts in regard to this that were obtained were derived from the banks, through whose agency an amount valued at £680,000 was exported; but in a general way miners carried away their finds with them. Their freemasonry observes a strict secrecy with regard to furnishing information respecting their finds, the dread of any influx of population being a sort of nightmare with them.

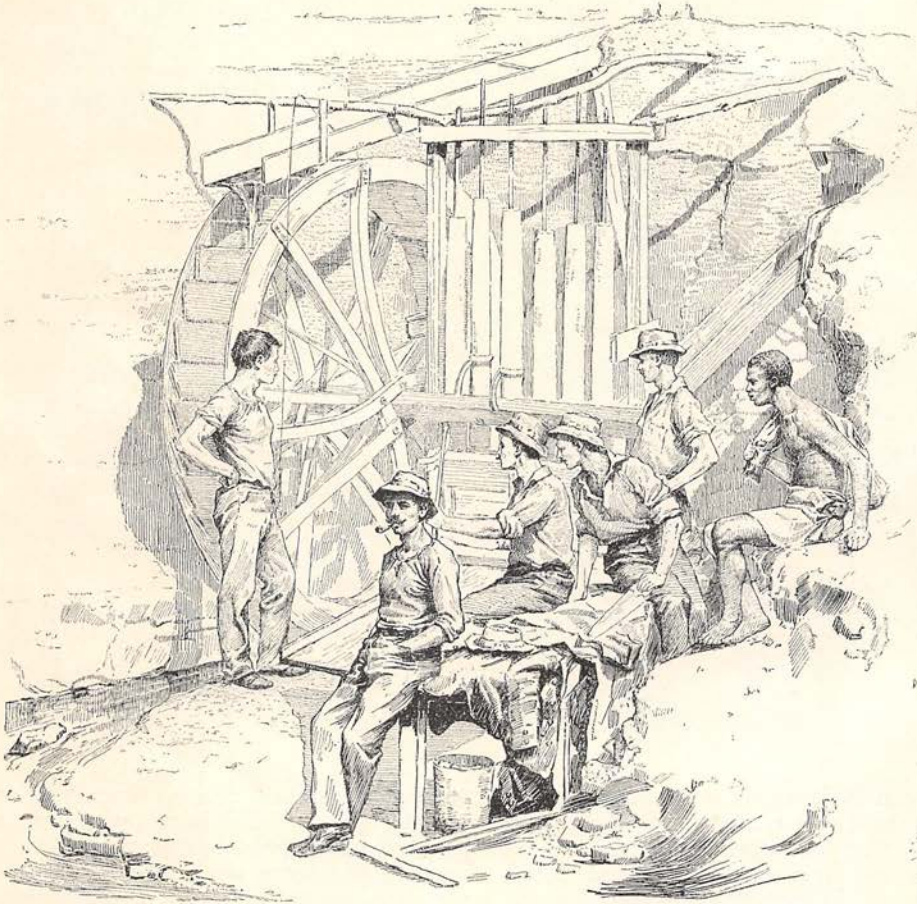
The population was almost entirely composed of English, and stores, banks, a newspaper, temporary places of worship, had brought some of the amenities of civilization into the

two members from their own community to represent them in the Volksraad was another liberal measure passed in their favor. Thus they were almost constituted into a self-government. Mr. Burgers had entered into a treaty with the Portuguese government for the construction of a railway, which was to link Delagoa Bay and Pretoria; but the diversion of trade this would have created to their detriment excited the antagonism of the British colonies, and political animosities were generated through the agency of the community at Pilgrim's Rest, which, under a total misrepresentation of facts, induced England in 1877 to annex the Transvaal. An exaggerated value was attached to the new acquisition; it was forecast that the mining industry would be a source of great revenues, and hence a perfectly indiscriminate expenditure was sanctioned by the British treasury. Troops necessarily were stationed in the country, and almost on the heels of the annexation the Zulu war was perpetrated, an act associated

with the same policy which enunciated the confederation of the South African states for the conservation of British interests.

This succession of events provided a readier means of making money than gold-mining, while it produced a simulated prosperity the results of which were demoralizing, and tended

in Europe, which threw a pall of depression over every avenue of enterprise. Yet in time the reports of gold prospectors once more assumed an interest. The only hope for the future lay in the country itself. The promise of further discoveries of alluvial fields gave no hope; occasional small deposits were found,



DRAWN BY MALCOLM FRASER.

A HOME-MADE QUARTZ-CRUSHING MACHINE.

to the stagnation of all true industry, culminating in a retrogression of years, and only retrieved by the inherent vitality of the resources of the country. The Boers disclaimed all grounds for the English occupation of their country, and lived in a state of passive disaffection toward the Government. Ultimately they took up arms to throw it off, in the memorable war of 1880-81, when, after several defeats of their troops, the British government entered upon a reconsideration of their policy, which led to their restoring to the Boers their independence.

Induced by these unsettled political conditions, a mistrust of South Africa now prevailed

but they proved fallacious as indications on which to base any certain prospects, and the source of these erratic pockets of gold has baffled the keenest scientific research. The fact that gold existed in the quartz formation throughout a wide area of country was generally known, but the fact that the deposit differed with preconceived theory led to skepticism on the score of its paying for the outlay necessary for its extraction. The efforts of several individual miners wrecked this hasty conclusion. Mr. Bray, who had been mining and prospecting for many years in the Transvaal, was one of the first men who conceived the idea of testing the quartz-reef formation, existing extensively

to the north of Pilgrim's Rest. The experiment was made on merely speculative theory, for the evidence of gold was not visible; but the analysis gave a yield of six ounces to the ton, and, encouraged by this, he secured some coöperation which enabled him to send several parcels of the quartz to well-known assayists in London, and the yield from these was in some cases twelve ounces, and in others forty-seven ounces, to the ton. It will be sufficient for my purpose to relate that this mine was taken in hand by influential capitalists, and has since proved the counterpart of the Mount Morgan of Australia, being literally a mountain of gold. This mine, which has been named "The Sheba," owing to its inaccessibility, was developed under extraordinary difficulties; but it has averaged a monthly production of gold amounting to £10,000, which with increased facilities of machinery may be doubled or tripled.

The excitement which followed on one or two successes parallel with the Sheba induced a fever of speculation that, while it lasted, seemed to turn all men mad. Farmers, merchants, professional men, clerks, tradesmen, all abandoned their vocations and set out for the new gold-fields. Hundreds of claims were taken up, and companies were floated on little more than shadows of reality. The reaction attendant on this state of things might have struck a fatal blow to the new prospects awakened but for the timely discovery of another gold-field in a totally unexpected quarter. Three hundred miles to the southwest of Pilgrim's Rest is the district of Witwatersrand, situated on the high, undulating tableland before referred to as stretching from the east. Bleak and treeless, and occupying an altitude 6000 feet above the sea, the value of the lands here was almost unconsidered except as healthy summer grazing-fields; yet in a

¹ These results have no index value; they are abnormal. The Sheba mine has given results of four ounces to the ton. The Johannesburg formation is estimated to yield an average of one ounce to the ton.

stratum, and under conditions, so unique as to confute science and all Australian experience, gold was found to exist over an area of so vast an extent that no definite boundaries can be assigned as its limit. The incredulous spirit of former times had given way to the idea that there was nothing too good to expect, and several capitalists from Pretoria essayed some experiments on claims which they took up. The results were remarkable: 100 tons of the quartz crushed by the Jubilee Company yielded 327 ounces, and 100 tons from the Wemmer Company's claims gave 1300 ounces of gold.¹ The publication of these facts attracted an immediate rush of population, and, with a rapidity that is without a parallel, the town of Johannesburg sprang into flourishing existence as the precursor of other towns in the centers of other gold-mines north and south in the Transvaal. The primitive life, which was all that had been known in the republics, gave place to civilizing influences which drew the Boers out of their apathetic content. Many of them, raised to sudden affluence through the values acquired by their property, were eager to secure to their children the boon of education. The homely lawgivers of the Transvaal exhibited a remarkable foresight and discretion in dealing with the altered conditions of their country. They made liberal disposition of the handsome revenues of their treasury toward education, institutions, and works of a public character, and they acted with generosity and firmness toward the English population settled under their flag.

Pretoria, situated thirty-five miles northeast of Johannesburg, is the capital of the Transvaal. A very intelligent society exists in this far inland center, composed in part of English, Germans, Hollanders, and Cape Dutch people, who are frank, hospitable, and peculiarly susceptible to social enjoyment. The climate produces a tendency to exhilaration, and life glides along with the dreamy ease of summer shadows.

Annie Russell.

A GLIMPSE OF THE SEA.

ALL day I rode through lands snow-ridged,
Whose hill-slopes showed no sign of spring,
Past smoking towns, streams iron-bridged,
O'er which the train went echoing.

At last, ere twilight closed the day,
Far eastward, underneath the dark,
A glimpse of ocean's bosom gray,
Bright-heaving, boundless, without mark.

The vision faded, yet all night
My fancy kept alive for me
The steel-bright waves, the fading light,
That picture of the winter sea.

William Prescott Foster.