

CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

A HOLIDAY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

By M. KELLY.

Illustrated by TOM KELLY.



It may not be inappropriate, now that the affairs of South Africa are attracting so much public attention, to recall a few impressions acquired in that part of the world a short time ago. If I recount them with seeming partiality, the reader must attribute this freedom to holiday influences, the point of view under such conditions having generally a bias towards a universal sympathy.

Our vessel bore a human freight not altogether of an heroic type, for the majority appeared to be incessantly wishing to bid each other a long farewell. We had, amongst other passengers less remarkable, a bishop, learned and benign, two Roman Catholic priests, who sang gloriously together on deck while hemming red bandana pocket handkerchiefs, and a handsome girl, whose unchanging expression nothing altered, except the bill of fare, which she always contemplated with as much pathos as if she were looking for the last time on the dead face of a beloved friend.

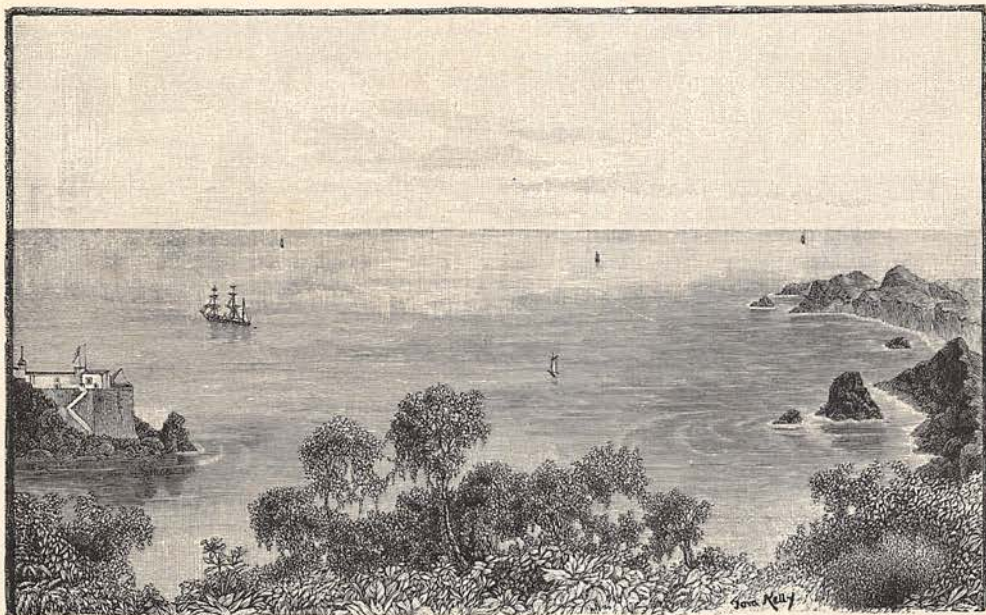
Four days after leaving London we sighted Madeira and Las Desertas, looking in the mysterious dawn like some vague dream-islands in summer seas: the high hills were wreathed with white mists that, as we approached, softly and gradually rose and faded in cloudless skies. The colour of the water surrounding Madeira was of a pale, rare blue, and so exquisitely clear, that the naming of a colour does not convey any sense of its indescribable beauty.

Near the shore small olive-tinted urchins swam round the ship, and silver coin was dropped by the passengers and could be seen glittering far down in the water while these infants dived after the spoil, and never failed to rescue it. The wealth of colour on land was soon discernible, gigantic flowering shrubs, and verandahs overgrown with fuchsias, geraniums, and clematis of every conceivable hue. We landed amongst a motley gathering of dark faces that crowded round, offering birds, monkeys, walking sticks, articles made of inlaid wood, baskets, chairs, chaperonage and advice all for sale; and is it not recorded in every history of travel, that the English victim has always to pay exorbitantly to rid himself of the vendor of things he requires not? The inhabitants of Madeira powerfully enforce this universal law. The numerous tropical fruits we saw perplexed the choice with their ripeness and profusion. The quaint streets paved with cobble stones, their pointed ends turned upwards, soon tired the pedestrian, and I was glad to hire the only kind of carriage obtainable, a wheelless, covered sleigh, which was drawn by oxen noiselessly up steep roads that seemed sleeping in endless sunshine, where, from every bend, could be seen lovely glimpses seawards, through a luxuriant and terraced shore.

At St. Helena we had to remain for repairs. The only landing on this rock-bound isle is at the steps of the pier in St. James's Town. A small boat rides close to the shore when a wave or the swell heaves it forward, and any passenger intending to

land must be alert to jump vigorously, without a moment's delay, or be immersed. The town is picturesquely situated at the foot of a huge hill of sheer rock, on the top of which is the fort where the garrison is stationed, and there is a most wearisome ascent by hundreds of steps to the summit. The kind hospitality of Lady Ross of Maldivia made my sojourn delightful. In her gardens I saw hybiscus trees grown to the height of English hawthorns, lilies of marvellous shapes and colours, and the "night blowing Ceres," the large cactus that opens its silver blossoms only in the moonlight. The interior of the island is full of luxuriant vegetation, and many are the birds of bright plumage that flit from tree to tree. The impregnable natural walls which surround St. Helena are grandest on the north side, where the precipices of Sandy Bay are full of caves and giant cliffs. Though little known this is a scene of lonely grandeur. Down hundreds of feet below the jutting crags lies a stretch of sand enclosed by the sea, and a semicircle of impassable rocks, but when the tide is in no bay is seen.

My hostess showed me, among other curios, two silver hairs that were once part of a lock cut from Napoleon's head after death. The precious relic had dwindled down



MADEIRA COAST.

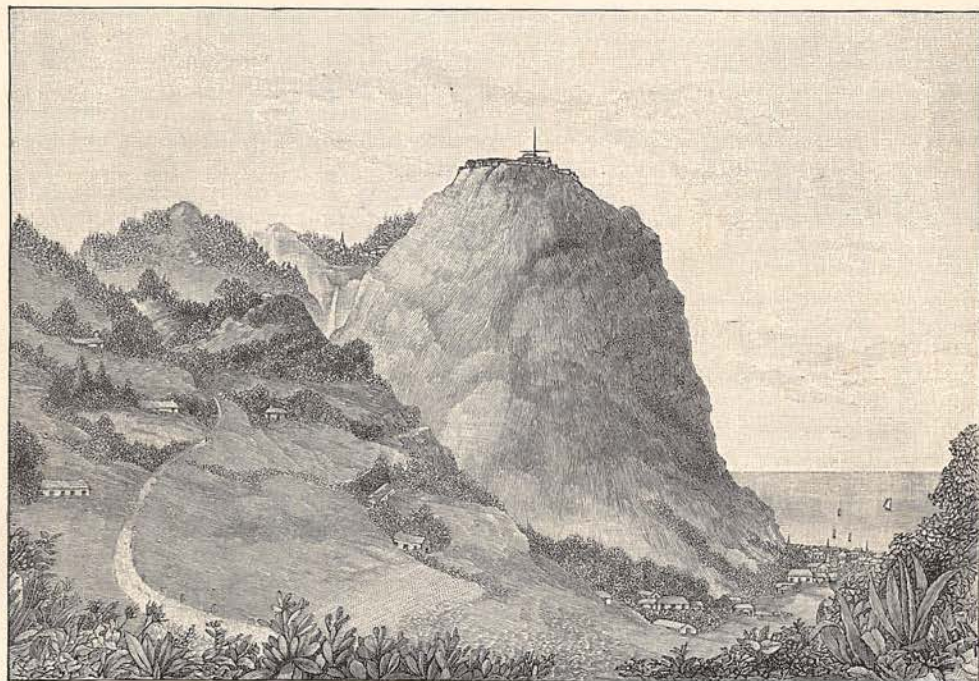
to two solitary hairs secured by sealing wax! for the frequent and pathetic requests from old French veterans, who, with tearful eyes, had begged for "just one hair"! and who left their medals and orders on their hero's grave, had always overcome the generous chatelaine of Maldivia, for had she not herself been carried in her nurse's arms to see his first interment, and years afterwards had she not watched the ceremony when his remains were taken in triumph to France?

Seven days of "rolling down to the Cape" and then the coast range of hills is seen far out at sea. On approaching land Table Mountain appears to rise straight out of the bay. It is a grand bluff, three thousand feet high, and no wonder the inhabitants are proud of their Lion's Head and Devil's Peak, and the fine level sweep between these picturesque summits. Sometimes this range is shrouded by mists for days, and then woe betide those vessels which are near the coast, for this mist is the precursor of a "black south-easter," a wild storm whose loud gusts often blow for fifty hours with no lull, causing disaster at sea, and discomfort on land, clouds of sand and even grit and gravel filling the air during the fury of the gale. Bad as these storms are, however, Cape Colony is not as greatly afflicted in that respect as Natal, where it thunders at brief intervals six months out of the twelve, and where for three days every year a tropical wind sweeps over the country which is the dread of every living creature. The docks at Cape Town have a world-wide reputation, and there are many important buildings

in the town, among them a most valuable and comprehensive library, several fine churches, a Roman Catholic cathedral, a Lutheran church, and a mosque for Malay worship.

Rondebosch, Claremont, Wynberg, and other charming places within easy daily driving distance, attract most of the richer population, very few of whom live in the town, the scarcity of water in summer being a great drawback, both to humanity and vegetation. There are many short drives through oak avenues to woods filled with pine, fir, and the silver tree, whose leaves are pale, and smooth like satin; and there grow also the syringa, the hydrangea, and the olive. Great white arum lilies grow in all the ditches, while wild geranium, heather, and perplexing varieties of gladiola and cacti greet the sight at every turn. During the fruit season, in the market, one can procure for a few pence things for which in Covent Garden one expects to be charged for even asking the price, fruit, fish, and vegetables being very cheap in Cape Town.

Cape society has always been remarkable for its generous hospitality, and in it one



ST. HELENA.

finds many charming girls who at fourteen or fifteen have as much *aplomb* as English maidens acquire five or six years later; the daughters of the colony are clever and self-reliant, rarely acknowledging emergency, their ready wit and capacity making them independent both in habit and manner. A light-hearted cheerfulness seemed to me to be the most striking characteristic of the people with whom I associated. The typical Briton is grave and serious, in most circumstances appearing to live under the dread that quite inconceivable results will be produced by his very action. In vivid contrast is the ordinary South African colonist who has a ready laugh at will, and goes on his way blithely, often as if he had many lives yet to live, and as if this one was merely a trial trip. Clear skies, for the most part invariable sunshine, may induce this temper, but it is certainly a marked characteristic both of the men and the women.

The Boer presents another distinct type in the human family. No superfluous cheerfulness ever disturbs his uniform stolidity, his manners and customs are centuries old, and in this unchanging condition of mind the progressive energy of the colonist has an unassailable enemy. The land between the sea and the undeveloped resources up the country is principally owned by the Boers, and co-operation, to facilitate transport, is constantly required from a people who in the aggregate are content with

things as they are. If there be no running water near him, the Boer will use that which is stagnant uncomplainingly. I remember in my wanderings going to the house of a Boer who had lost three children in a week from diphtheria, and though the fourth was then dying, he remained quite heedless of the advice to seek the aid of a doctor, as it would have necessitated a walk of ten miles, nor, though his own life was in jeopardy, would he remove the cause of the epidemic. For a great many decades the Boers have ignored sanitary improvements, and have regarded aids to labour as innovations. The unshaded and scant pasture of hundreds of miles of Boer property, as well as the uncertain harvests lured out of an unwilling and unwatered soil, are pathetic contrasts to the vine-covered slopes of the Paarl, and the rich, luxuriant growth of the Knysna forests, but the Boer is satisfied with his monotonous existence; isolation, immunity from taxation, and irresponsibility have greater charms for him than the inroads of civilization. Capital, labour, and machinery are wanted more and more every year in South Africa. The discovery of diamonds and the subsequent work on the Fields, the copper mines of Namaqualand, and ostrich farming, all gave an impetus to the trade of the country, and even the Boer waked from his apathy in the case of the diamond business; but there are untold riches yet to be developed and unearthed, coal, sugar, wine, wood, and gold in the Transvaal and elsewhere. Emigrants bound for the Cape should be capable, young, hardy, and, above all, free from habits of self-indulgence. The temptations to drink are very great, the climate is said to induce an "eternal thirst," and it is almost impossible to remain temperate where hospitality and inclination drag in another direction.

At Kalk Bay I made a brief sojourn. A low cottage on a rocky headland was my habitation, three sides of it gave on the sea when the tide was in, and great Pacific rollers alone stretched between me and the South Pole. It was a quiet fishing village where for hours I watched miles of sea birds wandering in Indian file above the waters, where a cobra lurked beside me one day, and the next evening when the tide went down, it left an octopus to wriggle at will in a shallow basin of the rock beside the house. The morning after my arrival, a basket containing twenty-four bunches of superb grapes was sent to me from a neighbour, who was, like most of the people who visit Kalk Bay, staying for a few weeks of recreation by the sea, and with whom I had no acquaintance whatever. When I went to thank the good old gentleman for his gift, he cut me short in the kindest manner by saying: "Lor, you wouldn't think it worth while if you only saw the peaches and things we give to the pigs!"

The sunrises and sunsets on the range of mountains terminating in Cape Agulhas were daily wonders to me. At dawn this range was generally purple, and often covered by mists that moved mysteriously as the light ascended. The sea was always a darker colour, a dull grey, till the first shaft shot from the uprising sun through a valley, and then a crimson glow would spread over the level seas, and be followed by a golden radiance which illumined land and sea alike. When at length the sun showed above the highest peak, the transformation scene would merge into an opal splendour that reigned all day long. A veritable Cape of Good Hope proved this never-to-be-forgotten scene to me. Looking westward Simon's Bay glittered in the morning light, and its little town nestled in a background of hills. Sometimes a breeze off the land would flutter the surface of the water into a ripple that made all the bay the deepest, freshest green.

My next experience was six days in a covered waggon on leather springs, drawn by ten horses, two and two abreast, fresh relays at every twelve or fifteen miles, till the distance of six hundred miles from our start to Kimberley was accomplished. The well-arranged transport service of the old days had plenty of work, but a railway to the Fields would have been a great boon then when the trade of the Colony was at its best, and when every pound of grain, sugar, or salt cost a shilling for transport, in addition to its own value. During the whole of the good times at the Fields, everything, except beef and mutton, was bought at famine prices.

We careered along at a mad rate, round dangerous bluffs in Bain's Kloof, where, when I was not holding my breath in dread of upsetting on the edge of a steep precipice, I saw ravines and heights whose wild grandeur recalled the craggy ridges of the Cuchullins and some of the finest passes of Scandinavia.

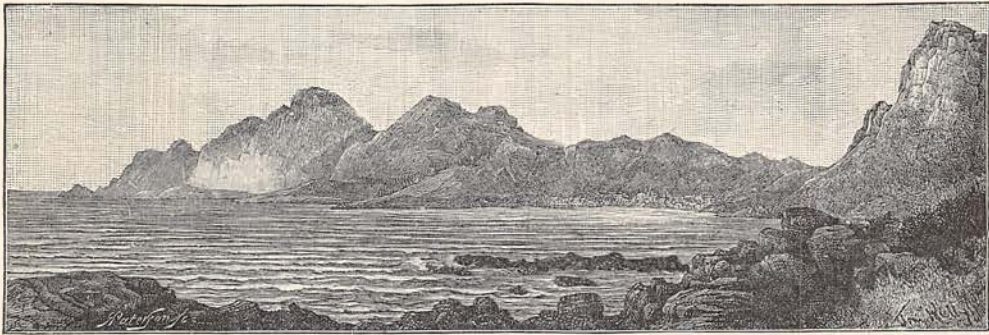
Hour after hour I dozed as we seemed to be galloping through the Karoo; we had no hindrances, the rainy season not yet having commenced, the uncanny river beds were all dry. A curious custom gives the horses an occasional breathing space in a

long track; a peculiar low whistle, hardly discernible to the passengers, is made by the driver, and at this signal even the farthest horses will break from the fastest trot and stand perfectly still; very soon, however, the respite ends and the horses are started off. This excellent plan is universally adopted in the Colony, but the sudden halt has a most perplexing effect on the dozing traveller, the dead silence suggesting nothing but interruption. It was during one of these brief stoppages that I turned to my fellow-passenger who had previously informed me that he was going back, after a short absence, to the Fields. I now asked him what was his occupation there.

"Digging," he replied, "and driving the hope business, for a man, ef he is wise, when he finds diamonds, he up and goes afore he loses them, and he never comes back again. You'll hev to do a bit in my line onless you are, so to speak, born with a Kohinoor in your mouth, but I reckon you're a bit misfortunate?"

"Doubtless," I answered, "we all get a wrong turn now and again."

"C'rect you are," he said confidentially. "I've hed heaps of ups and downs sence I was raised, other folks makes the money and I git the experience, so the honours is equal; but it's not true es folks picks up diamonds anywhere without stooping."



SIMON'S BAY.

My arrival at New Rush (Kimberley) remains in my memory as a kind of dull nightmare. Everything I saw had such a gratuitously temporary appearance, all the erections being composed of wattle and daub, or wood and corrugated iron, while shadeless sandy tracks did duty for roads. Innumerable piled-up heaps of sorted refuse signified plainly enough that the children of luck who formed the community, held each other blameless for thinking of nothing but digging and sorting, eating and sleeping, for luck and release would come to-morrow! I soon procured a piece of ground, for in those days everybody expected to find "It" in a claim. "It" being the synonym for a colossal diamond of purest water that each digger hoped to unearth.

The impression that the Diamond Fields were at any time the rendezvous of rowdyism is false; self-government was at first the only law, and men trusted each other; many of the diggers were gentlemen; and they had a strong influence upon those who were inclined to careless behaviour. In the migratory gathering from all nations there was the inevitable number of the morally halt, maimed, and blind order, but these met with scant encouragement; the majority were intent and industrious, and often lightened their hardships and toil with humour and self-sacrifice. The health of new-comers could not always adapt itself to the climate, and in the early days fever was rampant in the camp, and sunstroke too, and many a shattered wreck drifted away before the luck came. Conveniences or comforts were not procurable; besides a tent, a chair, and a stretcher, all else was considered luxury, though some possessed a few odds and ends, with perhaps a flute or fiddle to make night hideous, and set the innumerable curs howling, but musical instruments would sometimes suddenly break in pieces, the effect of heat and drought. I had been digging four months with my patient gang of Zulus when I began to grow tired of mischance and loss. I never found anything at New Rush, though the finds round about me were extraordinary, and the day after I sold my claim, the owner picked up a thirty-carat white stone a foot from where I had left off. I then went over to the Vaal River, and on the Klipdrift bank set my Zulus to work, and made my head-quarters there, enjoying the odd tent life and occasional trips up country. My chief chums at this

time were two most interesting individuals, each of whom made his waggon his home. One was an astronomer who had trekked 24,000 miles in twelve years in Central and South Africa for scientific purposes, and who, in that time, had only twice slept under a roof. My other acquaintance was a carpenter, a very old man with a beautiful face, and whose eyes shone with the brightness of boyhood. Night after night I used to see him sitting in front of his waggon, his fine profile silhouetted against a star-lit sky. One evening I disturbed his reverie by calling out loudly when no one was near :

“What are you doing, Nestling?”

“Only minding the stars, sir,” he answered in a gentle tone.

“Do you never care to have a talk with any of the diggers after sundown?” I asked.

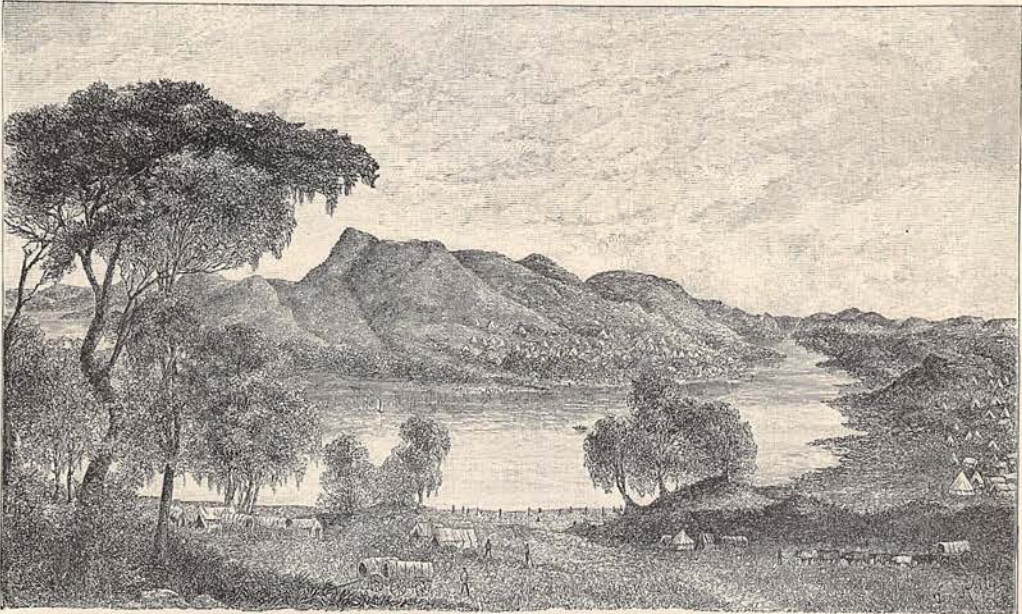
“No, sir,” he replied; “they are mostly in too great a hurry to waste time over me, they want nothing but diamonds, and expect to find them faster than diamonds is made;” then assuming an expression of dignified reserve, he added, “No, me and them diggers we don’t talk. I like the stars best.”



OLD NESTLING MINDING THE STARS.

The hot season was followed by the rains; at an altitude of 5,000 feet above sea-level we had tempests of great violence and long duration on the banks of the Vaal, often two or three distinct storms thundering in different horizons, but never without marvellous grandeur in these vast skies, and lightnings of strange and vivid colours. I took a waggon up country and had good sport, and did a little in the “smouse” line, bartering for skins (karooses) which the Kaffirs soften by rubbing patiently till the backs become like chamois leather, and which they sew together in an exquisitely neat manner by boring holes for passing fine threads of gut. The method of preparing skins in South Africa is admirable, nothing being employed for this purpose but the heat of the sun and persevering handiwork. Everywhere I found the natives obliging and unsophisticated. Inroads from native tribes need not be so greatly dreaded for interfering with the welfare of the Colony as the results of inconsiderate speculation. Of the plagues which afflict this continent—and they number in their train locusts, horse disease, droughts, sand storms, snakes, and pests of insects—the foreign human plague may prove the worst, unless the intending Colonist be of the industrious class who will influence the natives for good, instead of degrading them by the introduction of habits, of which, in their isolation, they are ignorant.

Oxen have a habit of straying, and in the desert where landmarks are rare it is sometimes extremely difficult to recover them. My worst experience of this was on the twenty-fifth of December of which the following is the record in my journal. "How human ambition dwindles down under physical discomfort. At this moment my imagination is capable of no loftier flight than a burning desire for a cup of cold water, for I am athirst! The earth is dried up, and while the 'boys' and I were asleep the cattle strayed, doubtless to some far-off river bed, but they will find no water, there can be no streams anywhere in the world to-day. Even my memory is dried up. This extreme effort, scribbling my sensations in order to forget them—forget this!—appears to me to be as sublime a farce as Madame Roland asking for pencil and paper on her way to the guillotine. How I envy the camel's adaptability! Far off, miles and miles away, beyond leagues of desert, lies a blue lake, blue as the smoke from shielings I wot of (the smell of peat would be incense now!), but I never hated anything in nature before as I hate that lake with its smiling gleam, for it is only a mirage, and we are far from succour, and the hyena's laughing bark mocks me as I listen for the chimes I cannot hear. This is Christmas Day! 'What's Christmiss



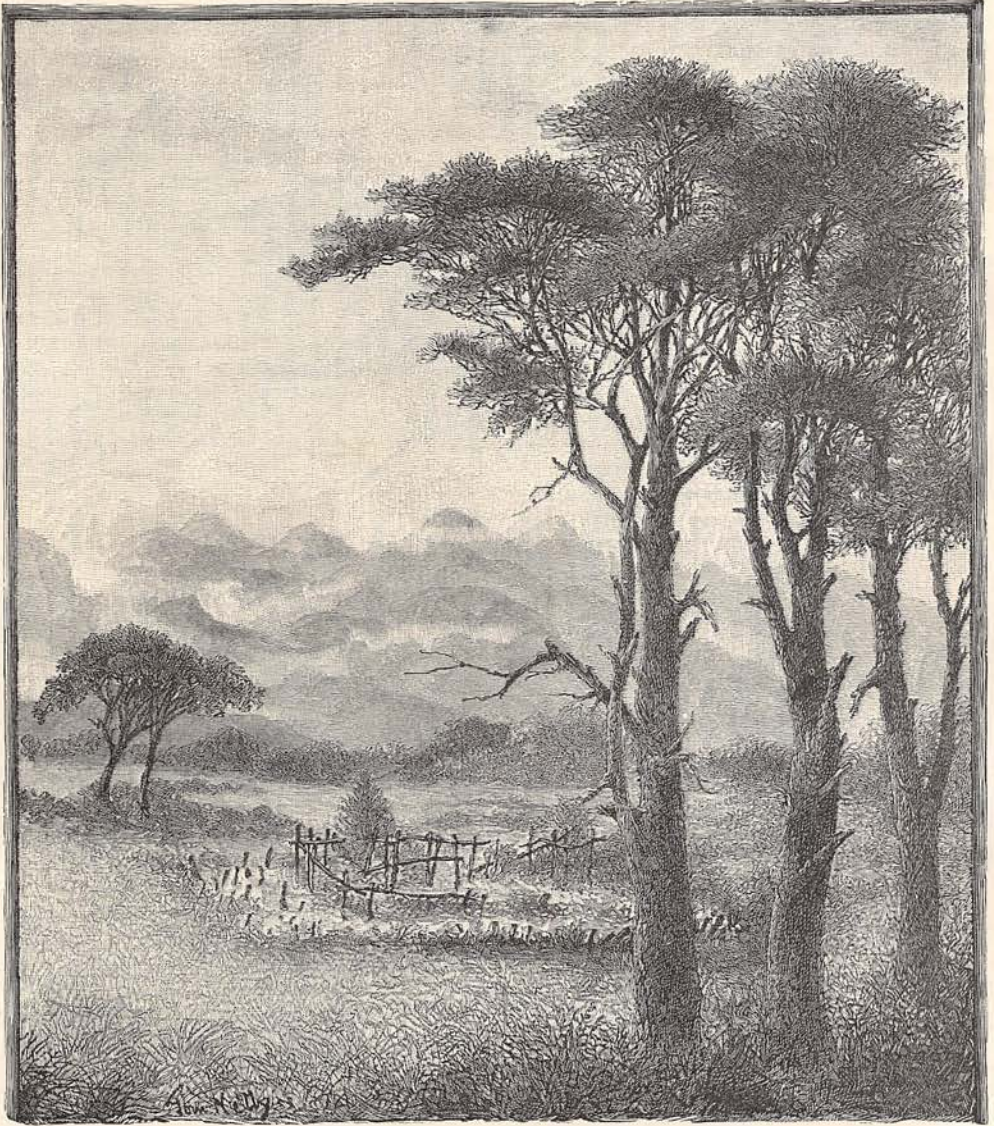
VAAL RIVER DIAMOND DIGGINGS.

anyway?' asked little Johnny. 'Peace, goodwill toward men!' I have my Bible and my Bret Harte in the waggon, but, ah me! I cannot read. I will sleep, and perchance in the mirage of dreams I shall not feel this parching thirst."

A few weeks later I returned to Pinel; after several months of solitary wandering it was pleasant to be again among English-speaking people. I found many new arrivals and also some familiar faces in the camp. The population of Pinel, as well as that of Klipdrift on the opposite side of the river, was changing and migratory; numerous invalids went in search of health from the dry diggings where water was scarce, and where nature provided nothing above ground but sandstorms, some remained to work at the river, but the majority returned to push their fortunes at the New Rush. There appears to be no really adequate reason for altering the primitive names of places which are generally characteristic; Klipdrift and New Rush signify much more than Barkley and Kimberley, except to a few official persons. There were several other Koppjes on the Vaal only a few miles apart, where diamonds had been found; after a flood stones of value would sometimes be picked up from among the loose gravel on the river banks, but these camps were of much less importance, and even more nomadic, as some of their names, Moonlight Rush, Forlorn Hope, Gong Gong, and Bad Hope, would indicate. The "boys," especially the Zulus, greatly preferred digging at the river, for daily, after labour ended, at a

signal from the "Boss," each gang would scamper down into the water and swim about like a shoal of fish.

The instances of kindness volunteered to new-comers were innumerable, and often humour and pathos were strangely blended in the mode of giving help. One case was pathetic enough as related to me. A young married lady told me that she and her husband were travelling north, and arriving at the inn at Klipdrift, having previously



A KAFFIR BURYING GROUND.

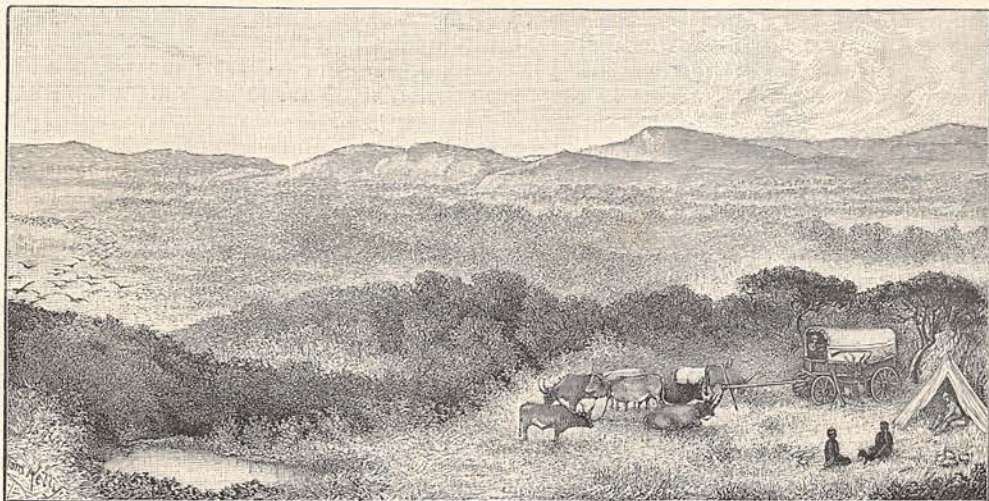
written to the landlord to ask for accommodation, she was much gratified by finding a very well furnished room, detached from the main building, appointed for her use. Every evening for three weeks at *table d'hôte* she sat next to a handsome bright young fellow with whom she chatted gaily. Two months afterwards this boy died of sun-stroke, and the lady was then told that the room she had occupied, as well as the furniture, had belonged to him, and that he had offered to the landlord to sleep on the billiard table (which he did) and give up his quarters to the new-comers, on condition that they should not be put under any obligation by being told of the circumstance! For the sick there was no lack of such care as was possible in a new camp, and

diffidence was not often a barrier to the claiming of sympathy when a comrade was in need, as the following incident will prove. An amateur band was organized, but only one member could execute any kind of recognizable tune, the others usually accompanied him in recklessly different keys. "Tune" was out of luck and became ill, and was not present on a special occasion when the performers met to celebrate a public demonstration. They tried in vain to get on without their leader, when a rich young tenor voice trolled out above the inevitable chaff of the crowd :

"For the chap that's sick must be seen to,
And you'll all subscribe, for you mean to,
And you'll find Kohinoors in the morning!"

Quick as thought the singer's cap was sent round the gathering, and a considerable sum was soon collected for "Tune," who lay very much in need of the welcome aid.

At length the day arrived for leaving Pinel; my Yankee acquaintance and I had



AN AFRICAN OUTSPAN.

arranged to go south together, and we stood at dawn on the hill looking back on the valley of the Vaal. The eastern sky was scrolled across with great bars of gold, and a radiance was stealing over the brown Kopjés, strangely transfiguring the bare stones, and all the beauty was reflected in the river. The clear glitter of the early day was upon everything, and we gazed down in silence upon the camp where we were leaving so many hopeful ones who meant to stay till they had conquered fortune, or forced her hand. As we were turning to go, my companion said in an awed voice :

"To think es how sometimes we've not been able to see that river for sand and lightning, nor to hear ourselves speak for thunder and hail, and now here's a dawn quiet and holy enough for Resurrection morning!"

The oxen slowly traversed the twenty-five miles of sandy track which led to the dry diggings. We found there that the mine had immensely increased in circumference and depth, and that hundreds of diggers were working all round its sides in hourly danger of their lives, for, in going to and from the claims, they had to pass along slight wooden galleries from which buckets were constantly drawn up and lowered, but there appeared to have been no other object in the construction of these galleries than their immediate erection. It was not until after it had become a recognized fact that digging was not always successful, and that luck did not come suddenly to every one alike, that the camp developed into a town, and New Rush was called Kimberley, then houses were built, places of business established, and official management introduced, and a commonplace character inevitably given to the adventurous multitude, whose conduct in the early days of the Diamond Fields did not lack the dignity which is inseparable from hardy living and industry. Where there was so great an assemblage, composed of many different races, disagreement would doubtless often arise, and there being no watch on the empty tents when their owners were at work, articles of property

and even diamonds would be sometimes missing, but in most disputes the strong usually took the part of the weak, and the free swagger of the gentleman digger produced a dread of the consequences of the mischievous employments, which tradition tells us a certain person has always ready for idle hands.

After many months of life up country, where sterile barrenness is rarely interrupted by lake or stream, I wandered down to the valley of the Ex River, upon which the traveller comes suddenly after days in the Karoo, where he has seen no growth except the *wagt een beetji*, that perplexing shrub whose big white thorns tear his clothes and try his patience—for once caught by a branch a friendly hand must always come to the rescue before he can be extricated, hence the name, which signifies "wait a while!" A quick descent from a sandy plain and there the world changes its aspect to luxuriant woods and orchards, separated only by stretches of flower-covered veldt. We halted and outspanned at the first farm, and I, being strangely impressed by the surrounding beauty, stole out alone. It was evening, and a warm summer breeze full of songs and memories made the scene homelike and familiar. Seeing a wicket gate which led into a garden, I opened it stealthily almost fearing to be denied entrance. And what a garden it was! Nothing but roses—bushes, hedges, and trees all aglow with roses of every hue. I don't know whether I laughed, or sang, or wept, or prayed, but I do know that as I was returning to the house I met my Yankee comrade and he said to me:

"You've been a spoilin' your feelin's over them roses, and perhaps you'll admire to hear es how you ain't the only chap coming from that blessed Karoo as hes been fetched by them homely little critturs; I reckon it's on account of their homeliness that we can't, so to speak, put up with them!"

How innumerable are the pictures I can recall of little Dutch towns and Puritan looking villages, where the streets were lined with long rows of trees, and the white houses all thatched with rushes, that coolest of roofs in summer, and certainly the warmest in winter; and the orange groves and their kindly owners (can any one eat oranges elsewhere after having enjoyed them in South Africa?) and the great vine farms and their hospitable proprietors! The English stranger was always welcomed as if he had really been among his own people, and he often heard "home" claimed by men whose parents had been born in Britain, but who themselves had never been out of the Colony, and everywhere our social and political questions were discussed with so broad a sympathy and intelligence that had it not been for the clear skies and sunny atmosphere, I could not have believed we were so far from the scenes of discussion, for frequently every point of view seemed to have been obtained by the speakers.

But the hour came when I was conscious of having exhausted every conceivable excuse for absence from the routine which I feared would prove doubly monotonous to me after having wandered in South Africa long enough to know its people, the variety of its interests, and the exhilaration of its climate, but I, like many others who joyously remember the keen sport and days of Bohemian pleasure a sojourn at the Cape has yielded, look forward to the renewal of the associations that were all too reluctantly broken. Bridging over the long distance, echoing through the years, cheery voices are heralding a time when we shall meet again, the voices of friends who would not say "good-bye" still ring with genuine Colonial heartiness in my memory, and, in conclusion, I re-echo the hopeful words of their quaint but invariable valediction: "God bless you. So long!"