

## WHERE THE DIAMONDS COME FROM.

By ROBERT M. SILLARD.

A short description of the Diamond Mines and inhabitants of Kimberley.

**T**HIRTY years ago a South African ostrich-hunter named O'Reilly sought shelter one winter's evening at a solitary farmhouse near the banks of the Orange River. As he entered he overheard a dispute between the children,

was so unlike any other stone they had ever seen that the mother made an arrangement with O'Reilly that he should try to sell it at Graham's Town, and then share the profits with her. The stone proved to be a magnificent diamond, of  $21\frac{1}{4}$  carats,



A COMMON SIGHT IN THE STREETS OF KIMBERLEY.

which was being settled by their mother. While playing on the banks of the river close by, they had picked up some pretty pebbles, and it was the possession of one of these which gave rise to the quarrel. It shone and sparkled by candle light, and

which O'Reilly sold for £500. On the site of this farmhouse now stands the prosperous little town felicitously named Hopetown. A few months later a Hottentot came wandering towards the same place with a brilliant stone, which he offered for sale

to a certain Boer, who gave him what he asked for it—£200 in money and £200 worth of goods. Next day the astute Dutch farmer parted with his bargain

to-day, it is hard to realise that thirty years ago it was a wind-swept, bleak desert.

Kimberley is six hundred and seventy miles by train from Cape Town, and as



A KIMBERLEY GRAND ORCHESTRA.

for £12,000 in gold, bought a larger piece of land and troubled himself about diamonds no more. This diamond was the famous 83-carat "Star of South Africa," and is now known as the "Dudley," as it afterwards became the property of the Countess of Dudley. It is now worth about £50,000.

A great stir took place in the colony when the news of these valuable finds got abroad. A rush of diggers to the dry, desolate region of Griqualand West took place in 1870, and soon the miners' camp became a town, and the town a city, and that city is now called Kimberley, with a population of close on thirty thousand. Diamonds were discovered daily, and proved to be almost as "plentiful as blackberries." In November 1871 the British Government took over the whole district, and as one walks through its broad open streets

dreary a thirty hours' journey as one could imagine. It is some four hundred feet above sea-level, and, as a consequence, is what is considered fairly well situated for a city. The streets are mostly well planned, and there are quite a number of good shops. The houses are not like those at home; very few of them are more than one storey high, and all are roofed with iron. Every house has a verandah to protect it from the heat, and it is there that all free time is spent. Half of the entire population is coloured, and these live in what are called locations or villages outside the town, where they must remain during the night. Any coloured gentleman or lady found away from his or her "location" after nine o'clock p.m. is forthwith arrested and accommodated with lodgings for the night, and the following

morning is introduced to the magistrate, and without fail gets a month in prison with hard labour. During the day-time these coloured folk cannot use the footpaths in the town, they must keep to the roadway and leave the side-walk free for their white brothers and sisters. It can be gathered from this "arrangement" that a Darkie's life—no more than a policeman's—is not a very happy one. The sable portion of the population is made up of almost every nationality—Kaffirs, Hottentots, Zulus, Indians, with any number of Chinese, Japanese, as well as Moors, Arabians, and Persians, and each one dresses (and undresses) after the fashion of his own country, so that a motley crowd is constantly passing to and fro.

We depict a group of Zulu "warriors" arrayed in "full dress." The two on the left appear somewhat handicapped with their fantastic costume, and altogether lack the light and airy appearance of their two companions on the right. Most of the attention of the gentleman on the extreme right would appear to be devoted to balancing his somewhat peculiar-looking head-dress, which seems to partake of the nature of a Grenadier's busby which had seen better days. Men in this and similar costume are to be met in the streets of Kimberley as frequently as the more orthodoxly garbed civilian.

The ten fine-looking fellows arranged *à la* Christy Minstrel band are labourers

in the De Beers mines, and, like all their tribe, are passionately fond of music—or, rather, musical sounds—and when opportunity offers, "nothing can bob them out of their melody." It is quite evident that some English wag had a hand in labelling their primitive "instruments," and it is very doubtful if our celebrities—Brinsmead, Collard, or Erard—would be altogether flattered by such an advertisement; but as the all-sustaining liquor for which Dublin is famous has found a "haven" in the Dark Continent, we are sure that Messrs. Guinness will not fail to



GOING DOWN AN OPEN MINE.

appreciate the prominent position which one of their barrels (deprived of its original lining) occupies in this native orchestra.

There is no need to tell our readers that diamond-mining is the only industry in and about Kimberley. The country around is most unattractive and unproductive. The soil is good, but owing to the scarcity of rain it is useless either for tillage or grazing; vegetables are brought from Natal, where there is more rain, and manufactured goods are all imported, and are heavily laden with duty. It will thus be seen that everything depends on the diamonds. Should they fail, Kimberley will be added to the list of lost cities; but experts say that the supply of the precious stones is inexhaustible. So far, at any rate, ten tons' weight have been found, representing a value of about eighty million pounds. It reads like romance to say that De Beers

along the bank. The soil is dug up and carried in buckets to the river, and there washed in boxes of zinc pierced with holes. This is called a "cradle." It is rocked to and fro under a stream of water. When all the earth is washed, the boxes are examined, and in a "fair claim," about one diamond will be found in every ten bucketfuls of earth. But the "dry diggings" are the most important mines now, and are several hundred feet deep. They were formerly known as the Du Toits Pan, Bultfontein, De Beers and Kimberley Central. They are now amalgamated into one huge company, known as the De Beers Consolidated Company, with a share capital of many million pounds sterling.

In working the old open mines, the trolley



KAFFIR CONVICTS SEARCHING FOR DIAMONDS.

Company exported over two million pounds'-worth last year.

The diggings are of two kinds—the wet and the dry. At the river diggings the diamonds are found among the pebbles

was rolled on wire cables a sloping distance of one thousand feet, and a perpendicular depth of five hundred feet. The open mines are not worked now. They are fenced in, and, as can easily be imagined

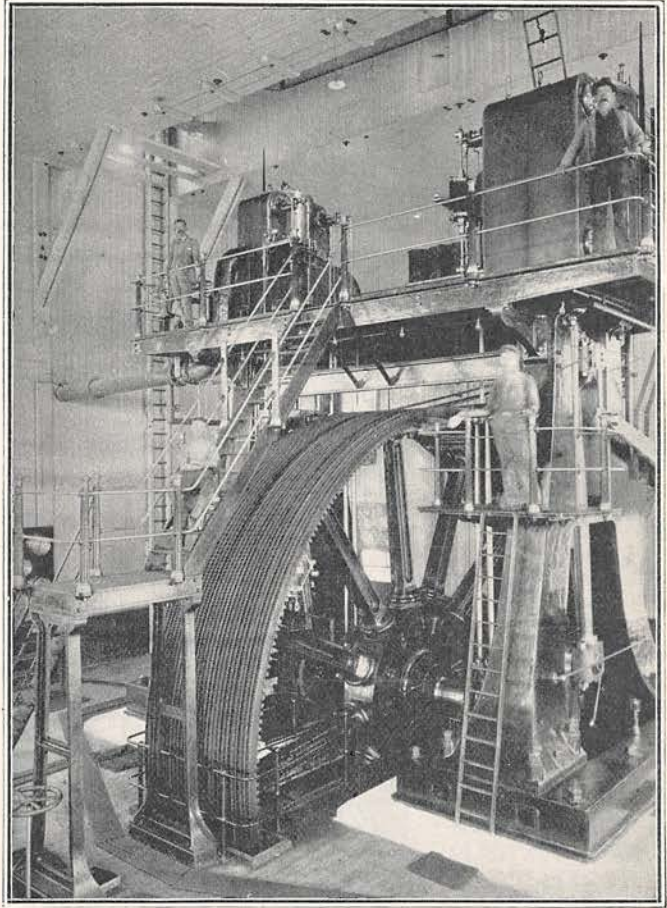
by looking at the Illustration, are tremendous chasms.

In these old diggings the grit was first riddled through a coarse sieve, then through a finer one, and so on, until the whole had been carefully examined. Now, however, most of the diamonds are obtained from mines more than a thousand feet deep. They are found in a serpentinous breccia, known as "blue ground." This is first pulverised and crumbled, and then passed through rotary machines, where the lighter particles are washed away and the heavier remain. Another picture shows four Kaffirs, convicts, engaged in searching for diamonds. The material on the table has passed through all pulverising processes.

Some idea of the perfection of the machinery in use can be obtained from the picture on this page. This is the largest wheel used for mining purposes in the world, and was cast by the De Beers Company at their mines in Kimberley.

There are over twelve thousand coloured men employed in the various mines, with a staff of nearly three thousand white men engaged as officers, tradesmen, engineers, etc. The work goes on day and night, Sundays included, without intermission. Two thousand men are employed below for eight hours at a time. The remainder live on the surface, and while awaiting their turn are enclosed in what is called the compound, resembling a vast barrack-square, and surrounded on the inside with

sheds, where the coloured folk sleep on the bare ground. The cooking is carried on by each one in front of his shed in the open air. Most of them have on as little



LARGEST MINING WHEEL IN THE WORLD.

clothing as one likes to imagine. They are entirely cut off from the outer world for three months, then anyone who wishes to leave his work (except the convicts) is kept in a room by himself for a week, where all his clothing is taken from him, and he is compelled to take medicine of no delicate nature, lest he may have swallowed some of the coveted gems. That such precaution is necessary can be gathered from the fact that some time ago one fellow had a sore leg and had it well bandaged just as he was leaving. The defective limb was examined, and

in a self-inflicted wound were found nine small diamonds, value for about sixty pounds.

Visitors are occasionally allowed down the mines, and it is a sight never to be forgotten. They are first provided with a full rig-out of waterproof clothing, boots, etc. They are then brought to the hauling gear, and put into a cage-like lift, or elevator, which immediately descends at a very rapid rate through dense darkness for a distance of fifteen hundred feet or more. When the visitors are "landed" they find themselves in a vast chamber brilliantly illuminated with electric lights, and a thousand coloured men at the searching work. They are next conducted through a tunnel half a mile long to where the diamond-bearing material is being dug up. Along this tunnel are two lines of rails with many hundreds of trolleys; one set

of rails conveying full, and the other empty trolleys, and all propelled by the same endless wire cable. The "blue ground" which bears the diamonds is brought to the surface in astonishing quantities. It is spread on floors, about five hundred acres in extent, for several months, after which water reduces it to dust, when the precious gems are collected. All round these floors are placed guards at short distances, who keep watch day and night, and on an eminence is a sort of observatory furnished with powerful telescopes, search-lights, etc., so that even on the darkest night any part of the floors, or any of the guards or workmen, can be inspected instantly.

It may be easily gathered from this short sketch that there are few places of more interest on our planet than a Kimberley diamond mine.

