

The Relief of Mafeking, by Filson Young

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THE RELIEF OF MAFEKING

**HOW IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED BY
MAHON'S FLYING COLUMN; WITH
AN ACCOUNT OF SOME EARLIER
EPISODES IN THE BOER WAR OF
1899-1900**

BY

FILSON YOUNG

WITH PORTRAITS AND PLANS

METHUEN & CO.
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FIELD-MARSHALL LORD ROBERTS, K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C.

TO
M. C. D.

PREFACE

The proprietors of the *Manchester Guardian* have kindly allowed me to make use of their copyright in the letters written by me to that newspaper during the first half of the year. The substance of the letters has been reproduced in the hope that home-staying folk may find in them something of the atmosphere that surrounds the collision of armed forces. It is a strange and rude atmosphere; yet it pleases me at this moment to remember not so much the strangeness and rudeness as the kindness and good-fellowship that made a dreadful business tolerable and the memory of it pleasant. Many friends of these brave days I may not see again, but if their eyes should ever light on this page I would have them know that it contains a greeting.

FILSON YOUNG

LONDON, *July 31st, 1900*

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MR. G. LENTHAL CHEATLE, F.R.C.S., CONSULTING SURGEON TO HER MAJESTY'S FORCES
IN SOUTH AFRICA

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL P.S. LORD METHUEN, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.M.G.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL BRYAN MAHON, D.S.O.

MAP OF MAHON'S MARCH [Transcribers note: This map, although listed, did not appear in the original and therefore does not in this copy]

PLAN OF THE BATTLE ON THE MOLOPO ON MAY 16TH

FACSIMILE OF SIGNED MENU OF THE RELIEF DINNER AT MAFEKING

PART I

ENGLAND IN TIME OF WAR

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I

HOW THE RESERVES CAME UP

From a seat in the paymaster's office of the depôt barracks at Bury one afternoon in November, 1899, I could look either into the barrack yard or out along the Bolton Road. A four-wheeler clove its way through the crowd surrounding the gates, and the sentries presented arms to it. It contained my friend, the paymaster, who presently came upstairs carrying a bag in which were several hundred pounds sterling—the real sinews of war. This was the man whose business it was to call up the Reservists, and he had a very simple way of doing it. He had several books containing large forms divided by perforation into four parts. The first was a counterfoil on which was written the Reservist's name and the date of posting the order; the second was a railway warrant requesting the railway company to furnish him with a ticket available by the most direct route from his place of residence to the depôt; the third was the order requiring him to present himself at the barracks on or before a certain date; and the fourth was a money-order for three shillings, officially called an advance, but virtually a present from a considerate Government. On the 11th of the month the paymaster at Bury had signed about six hundred of these notices, and had seen them posted; on Sunday and Monday they had begun to fall like bombs on the breakfast tables of prosperous civilians all over the country; and soon the pieces of blue paper had made a sad disturbance in several hundreds of cottage homes, and added several hundred men to the strength of the 2nd Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers. The business of the pay office, or at least my friend's part of it—a few subalterns rushing up in a hurry to get money for their various companies; eighty pounds for A, a hundred pounds for D, and so on—was soon over, and then

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he told me something of how the Reserve system works.

All the men in the Reserve have put in at least seven years' service. They go into the Reserve first for a term of five years at sixpence a day, and then (if they wish) for a term of four years at fourpence a day. Of course when the Reserves are called out they receive the same pay as regular soldiers, and their wives have separation allowances. As everyone knows, this was the first time that any considerable number of the Reserves had been called up, and the system has worked admirably. About 98 per cent, in some districts presented themselves, the small remainder being either ill or in gaol. A small proportion of those who came up were rejected by the doctor, but on the whole the men were tough and fit. In this district they were allowed eight days in which to settle their affairs and present themselves at the depôt, but most of them did not come until the last minute, and several not until after the last minute of the time allowed by the order.

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The crowd outside the barrack gates was composed chiefly of women and loafers, but every now and then it opened to admit a handful of reluctant-looking men, who had probably stayed outside until their money was exhausted. And many of them were hanging about outside the gates having nothing to do and no money to spend, but deferring to the last moment the final step of self-submission to the iron hand of discipline. For once the Reservist was inside the barrack yard he could have no more liberty, probably, for many a long month—unless, indeed, he gained an endless liberty on the battlefield. The scene through the opposite window looking on to the barrack yard was very different from the rather sombre picture without. The yard was gay with the wonderful red that has done so much to make the army popular. For movement there were a few squads of Militia recruits being drilled by the trumpet-voiced sergeants; and for music there was the ring of a hundred rifle-butts striking the ground together, the tramp and click of many feet, and the clatter of the colonel's horse as he rode across the yard.

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But the most interesting people were the Reservists and their friends, who dotted the yard in many-coloured groups. Here was a party of girls and women taking a farewell of some engaging blade whose course of gallantry had been suddenly interrupted. There was a father standing with his wife and small family grouped round him, no one saying very much, but everyone feeling a good deal. And another group would be laughing and singing, not quite recovered from the means they had taken to drown regrets.

Sitting in the window, one could trace the Reservist's progress from his entrance at the gate to his disappearance into quarters. The square was filled with little processions containing six or eight men each; first from the orderly-room to the hospital, in all kinds of civilian raiment: black, grey, brown, green, blue, drab—anything but red; hatless, capless, black-hatted, cloth-capped, shabby, spruce, dirty, soiled, clean, pretty clean, white-faced, red-faced, unkempt, well-groomed, hungry, well-fed, thin, fat—every class between clerks and tramps; every condition between prosperity and destitution. A procession was also constantly flowing from the hospital to the quartermaster's stores—the same procession, with one military touch; for this time the men did not straggle, but were marched single file in charge of a sergeant. The next procession was from the stores to the men's quarters; but now each man had a great bundle under his arms containing his entire kit wrapped up in an overcoat.

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The quartermaster, not without pardonable pride, took me over the stores in which the men's kits are prepared. There were hundreds of racks containing bundles so cunningly rolled that you could see at a glance what was in each. And beside each bundle was a valise already packed with everything that a campaigner could need; indeed, when I read the printed list showing what was in each my heart warmed with the same joy that I felt when I first read *Robinson Crusoe*. Government, who is rigorous and unyielding as a disciplinarian to her soldiers, is a mother to them in her provision for their wants. Each bag contained a knife, fork, spoon, tin canteen, shaving brush, soap, razor, boot brushes, clothes brush, hair brush, pipeclay, button polisher, cleaning paste, and a dozen other things just as interesting and as useful. Out of curiosity I opened a housewife, and my heart was touched with the almost feminine consideration that it

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indicated; for there, cunningly folded up, were skeins of wool and cotton in many different shades, as well as half a dozen sizes of needles. Surely the War Office is human, and not the strange machine that some of us esteem it, for how else could it provide that Tommy shall not have to darn his socks with scarlet, nor his tunic with grey, nor his trousers with white wool? As the men came into the stores each one received his share of these excellent things, and the quartermaster's sergeants displayed quite a genius in estimating and fitting the various proportions of the men. And the men's eyes brightened at the sight of the glorious new red cloth; I believe that, although they wore it for a few days only, it did much to reconcile them with the inconvenience and hardship that some of them endured in rejoining. Khaki uniforms were served out later.

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All round the barrack square the men stood in groups as I have described, and in one corner were clusters of men arrayed in their new garments. One could read pretty easily in their faces the story of the last few days. One saw several men who had evidently risen in the world since they had left the army. They had an air of sleekness and delicacy that made them seem out of place. Others had evidently been going down in the social scale, and wore their new clothes like fine feathers. Some were evidently glad at the prospect of action and excitement, and fell back into the regimental routine as a man sits down in a comfortable chair. To others, not a few, all this hustle was an act in a domestic tragedy. Sometimes it was a comedy, as in the case of one man who had built up a "nice little butchering business," snatching his profits from the niggard hand of competition; and now he must go forth to kill men, leaving his rival master in the field of domestic butchery. But the comedies were few, or else I did not come across them, for it was the serious side of this business that impressed me the most. Men caught away from new-found family joys, not for personal advancement or glory, but to take their places as units in the huge war-machine that is fed with human bodies. It is so easy to speak and think of "losses" when we count them by the hundred; it is so hard and bitter to think of one death and all that it means when one stands and speaks to a soldier. I found one man standing apart by himself—a young man, with a good, clean, hardy face—and there were tears in his eyes. As I was passing he asked me what time it was, and in a few minutes he told me his story. He had been married two years; he had one little child; he had left his wife dying of pneumonia. That was all; but I think one can hardly realise how much it meant. I should like some civilians who do their soldiering in an armchair, and who really seem to like a war for the spice with which it flavours their newspaper, to have seen that man and heard his short tale of misery.^[1] He is, of course, one of the few on whom an admirable system inflicts a fearful wound; but he is an example (if one were needed) of the matchless discipline that can teach a man to obey without question or complaint a command that has two edges for death. I am glad to say that I met no other man in half so dreadful a plight as his, but there were dozens of men to whom the order came as an ending of happiness, and of course one knew, although the thought was not dwelt upon, that many of the little homes of which these men had been the centre and support would have that support no more. Yet of one thing I am very sure. Not one of the men to whom I spoke but was willing and anxious to serve his country; not one but looked proud to be wearing the old uniform again. The sadness and trouble was all in the retrospect, not in the outlook. Tommy Atkins, with his great, simple, conspicuous vices and his obscure, surprising, and enduring virtues was unconsciously putting into practice the precept of a certain Old Buccaneer: *No regrets; they unman the heart we want for to-morrow.*

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[1] This man's wife died a week after he had sailed.

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II

HOW THE ARMY LEFT ENGLAND

The few days that elapsed between rejoining and embarkation were spent by the Reservist at the depôt barracks of his regiment, where he received his kit and underwent the small amount of drill necessary to remove the rust of civilian life. After that, the sound of reveille in the depth of a winter night; the sudden awakening; the hasty breakfast, eaten like a Passover feast; the long and noisy railway journey; the faint, salt smell of the sea, and the first sight of it through the rainy dawn. In the early days of the war I was present at many embarkations at Liverpool and Southampton, and they left an impression on my mind which will not easily be effaced. For, even to an onlooker, the embarkation of troops, with its sights and sounds of tragedy, is an affair that burns itself into the memory; one is dazzled and confounded by the number and variety of the small dramas that are enacted before one's eyes; and the whole is framed in a setting of military system and circumstance that lends dignity, if that were needed, to the humble tragedies of the moment.

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Only a few of the thousands who came to watch the departure of the *Canada* from Liverpool one December morning were allowed inside the dock shed; nearly all of those within the gate were sweethearts and wives and children of soldiers who had contrived to procure passes for them. Even in the shed the scene was one of extraordinary confusion. At intervals of about half an hour detachments were marched in and formed up at one end of the shed, where they left their bundles and heavy kit, and whence they were marched in single file up the gangway of the ship. With the exception of the Manchesters, all the troops were in khaki, and were easily distinguishable from the dark-coloured mass of civilians. Thus there was always a yellow pool of colour in the midst of the black mass, and all the morning a thin yellow line flowed from the pool to the ship's gangway. As often as one looked, during the whole morning, there was a line of men in the act of ascending the gangway. One felt as though one had fallen asleep for a moment and dreamed, and waked again to find the same men in the same position, so little did the appearance of things change. It was really a picture that one looked at, for the colours and bold outlines remained constant; the eye at times grew used to the minute movement, and refused to notice that the picture was preserved only because the same things were being done over and over again by hundreds of different people. The same greetings as friends recognised the newly-arrived man, the same hurried words, the same faltering voices, the same desperate embraces, the same endless tramp from the formed ranks to the ship, the same tears. The absorption of so many acute personal emotions into one revolving routine was the most amazing part of it; the stream of discipline and system ran swift and deep here, drawing into its flood even the most sacred and intimate of human experiences, and turning into a pattern the parting of husband from wife and father from child. When at length one became used to the picture one began to notice the elements of its composition, and only in watching them could one gain relief from the overburdening sense of personality submerged in a system. The little dramas were very strange and very affecting. I can only give a few examples out of dozens that I watched.

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As the troops came in at the door, marching four deep, the crowd formed on each side, and those who had friends in the detachment tried to get a prominent place in the front rank of the crowd, where they could attract the attention of the soldiers as they passed. The men were not hurried, and they were marching at ease, so there was generally time for a few words and a kiss or a hand-clasp before they were moved on. One wife, who was little more than a girl, had taken a good place on the edge of the crowd when her husband's detachment began to file in. I heard her telling a friend that she had not said good-bye to "her lad," as she wanted to see the last of him; it had been arranged that she was to be near when he passed so that he could give her a parting kiss. Oh, how anxiously she scanned the faces of the men as they swung into sight, throwing all her soul into her eyes!

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Presently, "There he is!" she cried; "here, Jim, I'm here!"

The young man's fine honest face had a look no less intent than hers, but it was turned away from her; he was searching as eagerly as she, but on the wrong side of the lane of people; and by one of those impish tricks that Fate plays upon us in acute moments, he never saw her, nor heard her voice above the cheers of the people and the blare of the band. It was a cruel thing; she was fast wedged in the crowd. Someone ran after the man and told him where she was, but before the sympathiser could reach him his company had been drawn up and he could not be allowed to fall out. And long before she was clear of the tightly packed throng he had passed on to the ship, where she could not follow him.

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Another incident of another kind. The North Lancashires were marching in, and an old man in the crowd was on the look-out for his son. He explained to everybody near him what a fine boy his son was, and how keen a soldier; how it had nearly broken the old man's heart that his boy should leave him and go to the war, but how it would "do un good and make a mon of un." Presently two soldiers appeared, half-carrying and half-dragging between them a young man who was so drunk that he could neither stand nor walk. His helmet was jammed over his eyes, but as he was dragged past us it fell off and rolled to the old man's feet. I heard him draw in his breath sharply and murmur something as his face flushed; and then all the people round began to point and say, "That's his son there, him that's being carried"; and some—God forgive them!—laughed and joked at the old man. And he who had a moment ago filled our ears with the praises of his boy gazed after him with a look of bitter amazement and then went silently away. Another man who had missed seeing his wife before he had embarked caught sight of her from the ship's deck as she stood upon the quay with tears in her eyes. There was no chance of his being allowed to pass down the gangway. But the husband in him knew no obedience to the stern order, and he dived clean off the stern of the steamer into the filthy water and swam, khaki and all, to the steps at the side of the dock. And you may be sure his wife was there to help him out, and she forgot her grief in her pride at his daring. So he held her in his arm for a moment (and had three ringing cheers from his mates into the bargain) before he was collared and marched back to restraint, dirty but glorious.

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Here and there one saw men much the worse for liquor; and I have no words to describe the folly of those friends who thrust bottles of spirits into the soldiers' hands as they passed through the streets. They did them a double cruelty, for the poor fellows, all unstrung by their partings, gulped the raw spirit thinking they drank courage; and so once or twice I saw poor women saying good-bye to staggering maniacs—grim mockeries of the husbands they might never see again, the poor fools themselves at present oblivious indeed, but doomed to I know not what horrors of remorse on awaking. Happily, however, there were not many in this sad condition. Most of the men behaved with a fortitude and gentleness that was most touching. Indeed I find it hard to express my admiration of their bearing. There was none of the bluster of the armchair Jingo, none of the loud hectoring and swaggering and bravado that distinguish the carpet warrior. On the contrary, when they were talking of the war amongst themselves they had an air of quiet determination, of good-humoured banter, and of easy, serious confidence far more ominous for an enemy than any amount of fluent rant. After the world of politics, with its hair-splitting and word-mincing, it was good to be with soldiers—the men who do the work. They knew no fine political shades, they bandied no epithets; England was at war and they were going to fight—that was enough. And the spirit in which they fought all the world knows: every day during the war one read tales of devotion and heroism that became almost commonplace; it is even a commonplace to praise them. Yet one could not see the soldiers in this most trying duty of all, the laying down of home ties and interests (for I think the heroism of mere fighting is nothing to it), without feeling a pride in the moral discipline that makes it all possible, and under the authority of which Tommy is content to be as a child. And this childlike submission to discipline has its pathetic side, as when one saw the little family of mother and children grouped to see the last of its head. The children stood in wide-eyed amazement to see daddy the Reservist, who in the little household had been the emblem of all authority, now in the place of obedience, and taking directions from another man (not so big and strong as he) as to how he should stand and

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into what hole he should put the buckle of his strap. Thus even the father and the husband are absorbed in the soldier. It is a great price; and the way in which it was paid by so many was perhaps our firmest assurance of the stuff that is in our soldiers.

Early on the morning of departure a few hundred people—mostly women—stood on the pierhead of Canada Dock, watching the transport as she lay a short distance off in the stream with the Blue Peter at her fore and the St. George's ensign hanging astern. The rain beat steadily down, loading the raw wind that blew out of the morning twilight, and the brown water broke sullenly to the send of a setting flood tide. The faces of nearly all the women were worn with weeping; now they wept no longer, but looked dully out to sea, while the rain ran down their soaking garments and splashed on the ground. A drunken soldier who had somehow got ashore the night before reeled helplessly on his wife's arm, his head bruised and cut and his new uniform torn and filthy. But in the woman's face there was a kind of fearful joy; she had rescued him from his pot-house satellites, and she thought she could keep him. Presently a tug came off from the transport with a picket to collect deserters—he had to go. She sobbed and wailed, imploring the sergeant in vain; and she clung to her poor senseless husband as though she would never leave him. He hardly knew her; he laughed vacantly in her face when with streaming eyes she begged him to speak her name; then they took him away from her. As the tug steamed out I heard him singing. [Pg 20]

A little while afterwards the *Canada's* siren began to wail and squeal with a horrible mockery of painful cries. The tugs backed clear of her, and lent their shrill voices to the discordant concert. Presently the water astern of the transport turned from brown to foaming white, and her masts began to move past the farther shore. There was a faint sound of cheering from her, but she was soon out of sound and sight, and still the women stared into the mist that had enfolded her, as though their wishes might draw her back again. But in a little while they turned towards home and a world that had changed its face. [Pg 21]

On another day I went down to Liverpool to see the *Majestic* depart with troops for the front. The weather was consistently unkind. The *Canada* had sailed in a whirl of rainy fog, and the departing passengers of the *Majestic* looked across a little inky strip of water to a land that was cloaked with snow. It was bitterly cold on the landing-stage, and all the interest of the scene could not keep the bitter wind from whipping one's face and numbing the feet. The wooden planks resounded not more with the tramp of marching feet than with the hard stampings of people who were trying to restore circulation. There were no very poor people on the stage. The space opposite to the ship was occupied chiefly by the friends of officers and by the troops themselves, and certainly it seemed kinder to the men to prevent the dreadful scrambling for farewells that took place when the *Canada* sailed. But a sea of anxious faces pressed against the barriers at either end of the reserved space, and no doubt there was much bitter envy of us in the enclosure, who had so much better an opportunity, and perhaps so much less reasonable a claim to the front places. [Pg 22]

Outwardly this departure seemed very different from that of the *Canada*. It was not so sordid, if one may use the term; the vessel did not slip away furtively from a dock in the small hours of the morning, but departed in open day from the more accessible landing-stage; and although the weather was chill and bitter, it had not that infinitely dreary effect upon the spirits that one associates with a soaking downpour. Here were all the pomps and circumstances of farewell—the blowing of bands and wavings of caps and great shouts of a multitude that must give vent to acute emotions. Yet, different though the outward circumstances were, they only accentuated the likeness that lay beneath. Good-bye is good-bye, whether we say it at a carriage window or shout it across a strip of harbour water; whether a crowd sings "Auld Lang Syne" or a mother whispers "Don't forget me." And at the sailing of the *Majestic*, with all its dignity, one saw the same tragedies repeated over and over again, until one's heart sickened of it all, and one would gladly [Pg 23]

have come away. Of course it was not among the officers and their wives that one saw these things; people used to self-control keep their griefs to themselves, and perhaps a very inexperienced person would have been deceived by the smiles on women's faces and the cheery chaff of men. Even here there were things to be seen at the last moment, but I confess that I turned my back when the saloon gangway was about to be removed; some things are sacred even from the man whose business it is to describe what he sees.

It was after the two thousand troops had all been embarked that the friends of the men were admitted to the stage, and the dismal, though enthusiastic, part of the affair began. Before that everything was business and order. As the men arrived they were provided with hot coffee and meat pies, which they drank and ate with every sign of pleasure. Some of us who were very cold envied them for that moment. The forward gangway was for about an hour occupied by men who did nothing but pass rifles from the quay to the ship; it was a formidable sight, this stream of deadly weapons that flowed on board. Up another gangway enough cordite to blow up the whole of Liverpool was being gingerly carried in small cases. But this hour or two of embarkation, in which so much really happened, left little impression on my mind. It simply was one more illustration of the admirable efficiency of discipline for which our army is famous. It was when the gangways were removed and the crowd began to pour on to the stage that the affair became human; and the half-hour that elapsed between that time and the moment when the mist finally hid the ship wrote itself much more deeply on my memory.

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One gangway was left open, and stragglers and men who at the last moment had stayed away for an hour with their wives and children were hunted out and hurried up it. At the shore end there were many painful scenes, which people with a little imagination may picture for themselves. Fortunately a farewell is a brief thing, and leaves only aching hearts; people could not stand a sustained agony like that of the last moment. It is the price we pay for our powers of memory and forethought; the charger, going perhaps to a bloody and cruel death, steps willingly enough up plank; the drunken man sings his good-bye; only the sober and alert taste the fearful sting of parting. Even the people who had kept up a great show of callousness had the mask suddenly and for the moment plucked from their faces; young subalterns with rather watery eyes and very loud voices ran swiftly up the plank, and brave women who had a smile even to the last for their husbands turned a different face shorewards. One could not help contrasting the weight of the burden for those who went away and those who stayed behind; for the men and for the women; for those who were going to fight, to die perhaps, but still to *do* something, and for those who had nothing but their thoughts to be busy with. Pessimistic as this view may seem, it is the true one; the event described as an "enthusiastic send-off" is essentially a melancholy function, and the relief afforded by the antics of a few intoxicated men does not make it less so. It is strange, indeed, how important a part is played by the whisky-bottle in the farewells of the poor. I have seen it passed round family circles at the last moment like some grotesque sacrament; have even overheard husband and wife almost quarrelling in their desire to press the comforter each upon the other. "Here, take it with you, Sam." "No, Missus, you 'ave it; I can get some off Tom." "No, lad, take it—I'll throw it after you if you don't." Chance generally stepped in to kill the ghost in the bottle, throwing it to the ground and spilling the contents. I saw one little boy, aged about four, run up to his daddy at the last moment with a gorgeous present in the shape of a glass pistol (a delicate reference to his profession) full of spirits; it had a cork in the barrel, and I suppose you fired it down your throat. Amid all these scenes the officers displayed an unvarying tact, coaxing the men on board and not unduly hastening their farewells; but for all that there were many violent and tragic scenes.

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Just before the last gangway was run ashore a little woman came up, crying and almost breathless, and begging to be allowed to say good-bye to her husband, who was at the other end of the gangway, not allowed to come down. The orders were absolute—no one must go up to the ship. Then the woman broke out into a great wailing and sobbing, praying the quartermaster on her knees that he would let her go half-way up the gangway; but he was as firm as a rock. Then she came to the edge of the landing-stage and cried quietly, all alone in that vast crowd, now and

then calling broken words of endearment to the man who stood a dozen yards away from her across the strip of black water. Discipline is heavy, and crushes; it is also sharp, and sometimes cuts cruelly and deeply. But in the midst of her amazing grief she found time to call some cheering words across to her husband: "Keep your heart up, lad, and think of me and the children as loves you." He, poor soul, looked thunder at his sergeant, and raged and swore; but he was a unit in a mass—he kicked against the pricks, and he knew it.

At last the gangway was removed, and a kind of quietness fell upon the crowd, waiting for the next harrowing sensation. It came in a succession of those minute incidents that burn themselves into the memory of people whose nerves are on the rack. The splash of a hawser into the dock; the deep notes of the engine-room telegraph, and the clicking reply upon the bridge; the spinning of the wheel as a quartermaster tests the steering engine; the clack and spit of winches, and finally the thrilling shout of the foghorn, whose echo leaves you trembling—all these things have a painful significance, and they bite and grip into the heart. As the ship began to move a band on the shade-deck struck up "Auld Lang Syne," and immediately the floodgates were unlocked. Tears started again into bitterly dry eyes, handkerchiefs were waved, people shouted, sang snatches of song—everyone made a sound of some kind, and contributed to the great unrestrained noise of human beings in distress and excitement. Above it all rose the hooting of foghorns and sirens, while the band made its noise too—thump and throb of drums, scream of pipes, and red-hot flare of brass instruments. Sea-birds, seeing the ship about to depart, flapped and hovered about it by the score, adding their shrill cries to the tumult; and high on his flying-bridge stood the captain, shifting his telegraph from "stand by" to "ahead," holding up or moving his hand, but not uttering his voice. It was a striking picture, in which he stood as an image of a Fate by which all men were for the moment helplessly crushed down.

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It was at this moment that something happened which I, for one, had been expecting. One of the many men who were perched in the rigging or outside the rails lost his hold, and in the same second was wriggling in the water. It conveys some idea of the pitch to which the crowd was strung up to say that the noise did not increase and hardly changed its character. I suppose people turned from cheering to shouting, but the big sound was still the same, and since the bands-men were high up and in the middle of the deck they saw and knew nothing and went on playing. But something else impressed me far more deeply; indeed, I think that I can never forget it. Quite close to me was standing the man's wife holding a baby, and as the man's face turned towards us in his floundering she said calmly, "God, it's my George." And the little boy, not understanding, repeated gleefully and senselessly, "It's dadda; it's dadda."

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I looked at the woman's face; her cup had been full before; she had drunk her fill of grief; and this new horror, her husband struggling like a mouse in the bitter cold water, could not add a pang to her torture. All that I have described happened, of course, in a few seconds; the man had barely gone under before one of the ship's butchers, in his white clothes, was in after him. Let no one belittle the race of butchers. The life-taker knew how to save life, and Master Butcher had his man in a moment, turned him on his back, and began to swim ashore; indeed, there was no fear of the man's drowning, for there were half a dozen men in the water within half a minute of the accident. The man was brought ashore, and his wife helped to rub him down; only to go through her parting again on the deck of a tender a few minutes afterwards. But there was a cheerier note in the cheering that broke out when the ship again began to move, and when the band struck up "God Save the Queen" everyone who had a croak in him or her joined with a will. The shape of the ship grew dim in the mist, but still the sea-birds cried and hovered like winged prayers and wishes between her and the shore.

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In the Thames and at Southampton similar scenes were enacted almost daily. Here is an account of a "Specimen Day" at Southampton—one of the busiest that had been known there since the

beginning of the war, for Lord Roberts's grand army was being hurried out to repair the fortunes shattered at Magersfontein, Stormberg, and Colenso.

All day long crowded troop-trains had been steaming into the station, where small pilot engines waited to receive them and drag them, groaning and squealing, round the curves and across the points that lead to the docks. The first train arrived at about nine, and the last at two. Between those hours there was a constant succession of trains. Three steamers were waiting to receive the troops; the Peninsular and Oriental liner *Assaye*, the Union Steamship Company's *Goorkha*, and the Castle liner *Braemar Castle*. The *Assaye* was a new boat, and this was her maiden voyage. She carried two regiments, the 2nd Norfolk and the 2nd Hampshire, and the fact that the Hampshire is the territorial regiment of the port, accounted for the unusually large crowd that assembled on the wharf beside which the *Assaye* lay. The business of despatching transports had become so commonplace at Southampton that unless there was some special interest attached to the embarkation there was no crowd at all. Only the town loafers would assemble in any strength. But many of the Southampton people had friends in the Hampshire Regiment, so there were some thousands pressing round the barriers that surrounded the dock shed into which the trains on arriving were drawn.

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It was on board the *Assaye* that I spent the greater part of the morning and afternoon, piloted by a naval lieutenant who was in charge of the embarkation. I perched myself high up on the flying-bridge and watched the busy scene below. In the next dock was the *Goorkha*, into whose commodious maw were pouring the 2nd Lincolnshire Regiment, the 9th Field Company Royal Engineers, the 14th Brigade Staff, the Cavalry Brigade Field Hospital, the Fifth Division Field Hospital, and No. 12 Company Army Medical Corps. Further away, alongside the dock extension jetty, the *Braemar Castle* was receiving the 1st King's Own Scottish Borderers, No. 7 Bearer Company, and No. 19 Company Army Medical Corps. In the *Assaye*, however, were men of only two colours, the Norfolks and the Hampshires. The Norfolks arrived first, and were promptly embarked. The 'tween-decks of the *Assaye*, having been constructed specially for the purpose, were more commodious than those on most other transports, and certainly they were better ventilated, for a great open shaft ran right up from the bottom of the ship to the upper deck, and round this were grouped the tables at which the men, in messes of sixteen, were to be accommodated. The men seemed pleased with their quarters and with the general arrangements made for their comfort, but they were almost laughably critical. The fact was that the soldiers were in great danger of being spoiled by the fuss that had been made of them before they embarked. It is well that we should cheer the soldiers up by our enthusiasm, but, as everyone knows, the British public did much more than that. "Tommy Atkins" was the rage for the moment, and what may be called "Absent-minded Beggarism" was rampant. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm found a vent too often in silly and thoughtless squandering of money on the soldiers. They were banqueted before they started; their friends used to ply them with drink; mayors were waiting upon them at every turn with pipes and tobacco, and total strangers showered money on them quite recklessly. For example, while I was on the *Assaye's* bridge I saw a civilian, standing quite apart from the crowd, with his hat full of copper and small silver coins. No one seemed to be watching him. He could have no thought of making an impression. But in an ecstasy of enthusiasm he kept throwing showers of money to the troops on deck. It is an excellent thing that the people at home should be touched with such gratitude to the men who fight for them, but, like all great public movements which have more heart than head in them, this kind of thing was sometimes overdone, and failed in its object. One saw the men sometimes arriving drunken, grumbling, and impudent; criticising the quality or quantity of the refreshments which the steamship company had thoughtfully provided for them, and generally behaving in a way most unlike what one would expect. No one seemed to lack money, although so much was spent in drink. Several times that day I heard men at the canteen calling for whisky and soda or brandy and potash, and grumbling heartily when they were not supplied.

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With regard to the way in which men got drink one or two things fall to be said. Every effort was made by the authorities to prevent drunkenness. One of the naval embarkation officers told me

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that drink was not supplied to the men at the canteen, that they were forbidden to bring any on board, and that they were forbidden to buy or receive any from civilians; yet it had been found that certain tradesmen at Southampton had deliberately smuggled whisky on board by heavily bribing some of the crew. In the face of this kind of thing the officers could do little. They spoke very bitterly of the cruelty to the men involved in such practices, for the soldiers are necessarily packed pretty close together when hammocks are slung, and when the effects of drunkenness are added to the horrors of sea-sickness the result is awful, and almost unendurable by a man who cherishes any self-respect. I mention this at some length because, although it was not prominent on the day of which I am writing, it had happened terribly often, and on the day before it had made the scene at the embarkation of an Irish regiment a really horrible one. The two regiments which embarked on the *Assaye* happened to be the soberest I had yet seen. Indeed, there was hardly one case of drunkenness amongst them. I think this was partly because the outside public was not allowed near the ship. The men passed from the train directly on board, and did not come in contact with their friends. It was kinder to the friends too. I saw none of those heartrending tragic scenes of parting, none of the wild grief that grows so much wilder for being indulged. From the officers' deck the picture of embarkation appeared in outline rather than in detail. The constant movement of people far below, the orderly disorder, the shouts and cries of officers and stevedores, the waving arms of cranes and the general excitement produced in a mere onlooker a strange sense of isolation. One felt like Gulliver observing the Liliputians in some great effort of maritime preparation, and the longer one looked the smaller and more like toy soldiers seemed the men. Such an endless stream of them poured from the dock shed to the ship. I heard their cries faintly. "Bring back old Kroojer's whiskers" was the burden of them, and this was indeed the chief trophy, the chief spoil of war which the average soldier pictured for himself. It was strange to think that this army of Liliput which tramped and cried down there conceived its mission so vaguely and imperfectly that it could depart light-heartedly.

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The deep note of the *Goorkha's* foghorn sounded close at hand. The tops of her masts glided past the roof of the dock shed; in five minutes she was out of sight, and her departure seemed to have been almost uncelebrated. She got away at about two, and an hour later the *Braemar Castle* also departed.

The only thing which now delayed the departure of the *Assaye* was the embarkation of the horses. There were eight chargers belonging to officers of the two regiments, and they made the utmost objection to being enclosed in narrow boxes and swung in mid-air. In particular a magnificent grey belonging to the colonel of the Hampshire Regiment gave any amount of trouble. It took her groom ten minutes to coax her into the box, and as soon as it began to move upwards she snorted and trembled with fear, and finally sat down on her haunches, with her neck hanging over the door. The colonel, who was standing near, seemed rather proud of this exhibition, but when the mare was almost beside herself with terror, and while she was yet swinging in mid-air, he spoke reassuring words—"Woa, Bunny! Steady, old girl!" The beast could not see him, but she heard the voice in the air, and became suddenly quiet. May she live to need the same assurance on her homeward journey, was one's involuntary thought. The sight of these fine horses was very pitiful, in the light of their possible destiny. One looked at the glossy coats and saw them torn and bloody. One watched the nervous wild eye and the twitching ears, and heard the whistling bullets and the shells bursting round them, who know no reason for the commotion, holding themselves bravely in check until the steadying voice behind them ceases and the load suddenly lightens, or until a stray bullet ends both fears and endeavours.

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After many delays the last horse was on board. And now there remained only the inspection by the naval embarkation officers, an interval for the crowd of half an hour, which the band on the quay did its best to pass agreeably. There were many false alarms of departure. Every patriotic song and tune had been played and cheered, but after "Auld Lang Syne" had been hammered out for the third time the ship began to move. As she left the quay the younger men at one end of the ship made a great commotion. One held up a flag which he proposed to plant on "Kroojer's Hill." (Some authorities might read Majuba.) These men, recruits for the most part, made in their

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ignorance of war a joyful noise, but the Reservists and old hands looked grave and sad, and hardly joined in the singing or cheering. They were thinking.

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III

HOW THE WOUNDED CAME HOME

Going down Southampton Water on January 5th to meet the *Aurania* with her company of sick and wounded, one enjoyed a wonderful study of sober tints in land and sea under a winter sky. The little steamer clove light green waters that were hardly rippled by the breeze. This green sea she divided in two long curling lines that seemed to reach the shore on either hand, merging their light colour with a dark green of fields waiting for spring. The fields in their turn faded into the bluish black of leafless trees, and the trees bounded a sky of soft banks shading from blue to grey. The waters seemed almost deserted, except for a ship that now and then might meet us, stealing up on the tide and gently heeling to the breeze. Sometimes a yacht would pass us, sometimes a fishing-smack; but it was a lonely journey. The air was soft and sweet—not like that of spring, but like that of a world which lives in the promise of a coming spring and can wait. There were no sounds but one sweet and familiar—the whisper, swelling and diminishing but never dying, of foam at the cutwater.

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Little Hythe seemed to have retired into itself for the winter. Its pier was deserted by boats and men when we passed. Lower down on the other side was Netley Hospital, with how many pains and agonies hidden behind its long, imposing front. Opposite Netley the sea eats and bites like an acid into a kind of mossy grass of rare and vivid green, making a wonderful coast-line on a small scale, with bays and channels and sounds.

We made for West Cowes, where the sea brims up to the streets and the spray sometimes sprinkles the shop windows. Here the telegraph was set in motion, asking Hurst Castle for news of the *Aurania*. But there was no news, so, as it would take her two hours to reach Southampton after passing the Castle, we went on past green promontories that dip into the sea, right up to where the trees clothe them, past the towers of Osborne, to Ryde. Again the telegraph asked the question, and again there was a negative answer. Then we cut across the Solent towards Southsea, watching the weird evolutions of a 35-knot torpedo-boat. It darted about, annihilating the small distances of the Solent and making a strange, buzzing noise like some foul fly. Vomiting flames and sparks, it trailed a cloud in the air and snow upon the water. While we were crawling across the river it had made a dozen journeys. Now it would be down near Cowes, and now half-way up Southampton Water, and when one looked again a few minutes afterwards it would be close astern, overtaking us with the speed of a nightmare. I escaped from it at Southsea, for there the wires told me something that sent me doubling to the railway station, and thanking my stars that I was in time for a fast train to Southampton. It arrived at half-past three, and at four the *Aurania* showed her nose round the corner of a dock shed. Ten minutes later she was alongside and berthed, and the disembarkation began.

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The total absence of any kind of popular demonstration was most impressive. There was no crowd at all, and the barriers that had been provided were not needed. This neglect of a welcome seemed sadly to discount the value of the great hysterical demonstrations made when the troops departed. They were men who were perhaps going to suffer for their country. These invalids had suffered for it, and no one came to cheer them up. Of course some of the men's own friends were there, and the few strangers who were present shook hands with the men as they came limping and hopping and stumbling down the gangway. But it was all very quiet, very sad, very tame from a spectator's point of view, but deeply significant. One could hardly imagine a greater

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contrast than was presented by the same shed on a day of departure and on a day of arrival like this. In the one case great crowds hurraing and shouting and cheering, bands playing, and bottles going busily round. In the other a great quietness, a few people standing in little knots and speaking almost in undertones. And the men themselves were very different. No excitement, of course; no drunkenness; no yelling for "Kroojer's whiskers." Oh, no!—something very different from that. About a hundred men with pain-worn faces, bandaged arms and legs, slings and splints everywhere, and talking, when they talked at all, of the horrors of the war, of the death of comrades, and of the seriousness of the news we gave them, in the light of their own experiences at the front. The men were speedily disembarked and taken into the dock shed where a train with some ambulance coaches was waiting, but they preferred to stand and talk for a little while before taking their seats. A really kind and useful work was done by members of the Southampton branch of the "Absent-minded Beggars" relief corps, who provided hot coffee and buns for the men, and in addition provided each with a stamped telegraph form, so that he might reassure his friends at home.

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Of course there was another beside the serious aspect of this scene. Nothing could exceed the interest in their ailments displayed by the men who had partly recovered from them, and those whose wounds had healed could not tire of giving demonstrations to their friends and relations, or even to strangers. An illness or a wound is often the first view an ignorant man gets of Nature's ingenuity displayed in the construction of his own person, and when one of these invalids got hold of some medical or surgical word he would cherish and roll it on his tongue like a man tasting wine. One of them—a man who looked as strong as a horse—was explaining to an admiring group how he came to be alive at all. A bullet had passed through the rim of his helmet, entered his left temple, passed behind his nose, through the roof of his mouth, and out through the lower part of his right cheek. First he would show us the dent in his temple; then describe, with many strange words, the inward passage of the bullet; and then, emerging into the sphere of common things, wind up with, "and came out of my blooming cheek." Then he would show the dent in his cheek, and pass his helmet round for all to see, as a conjurer does. I moved round with this man and heard him recite his tale three times, and every time he used just the same form of words, which he repeated pat like a lesson. His corruption of "cerebral" was amusing. "Nearly scattered the cerveral nerve, so help me!" he said. One could have understood it if he had been in the Spanish-American war. Another soldier used a word which I cannot explain. He was showing a mate how a bullet had entered his shoulder, "and," said he, "it penetrated me agamemnon." What is an agamemnon? It has been puzzling me ever since.

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Only a few of the more robust men were going on in this way, and there was enough of the pathetic even in the man with the "cerveral" nerve and him with the "agamemnon." The men looked tired and serious, and seemed to lack interest in anything but their own afflictions. It is almost a pity that the public will not witness such scenes as this, for I fear that it is still sadly in need of having even the most elementary fruits of war brought home to it. One might, of course, easily overdraw the picture of the men's condition; it is difficult to describe it faithfully. Many of them seemed happy and contented to be home again, and forgot past pains in present joy. As I turned away from the carriage window I heard a confused drone of conversation, in which such terms as "ligature," "suppuration," "cavity of the hear'ole," "styptic," and "prelatic" were prominent. The last thing I heard was—"He hadn't got no fraxur at all, leastways only a simple un. Mine was a compound fraxur." One can understand these things. But what is an "agamemnon"?

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It was dark when the train went away, and there was nothing more for me to see on that day, but I had another sensation and a memorable one. After dinner a little group, composed mainly of naval and military officers on embarkation duty, was established round the smoke-room fire in the South Western Hotel. We were all talking about the war, and all wishing that we were out in the thick of it. In the midst of this chorus of aspiration a telegram was handed to me inviting me to go to South Africa as a war correspondent for the *Manchester Guardian*. The chorus continued while I read, but it sounded far away; I was trying to realise what acquiescence in the request

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contained on the pink paper might mean. When I had decided I handed the telegram to my neighbour, and in a moment it had made the circuit of the group, trailing exclamations in its wake and changing the melancholy chorus to one of whole-hearted envy. I went to bed in some doubt as to whether I had received congratulations or condolences. In a few hours I was on my way to London; in a few days the flying wheels had carried me back to Southampton; but I thought that the busy docks wore a different face.

PART II

IN THE WAKE OF THE ARMY

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IV

THE LONG SEA ROAD

In the terms of the street, you make for Madeira from the Needles as straight as Ushant and Finisterre will permit, keep to the left until you catch the flare of the solitary light on Cape Verde, go on past that for about ten days, and Cape Town is the last place on the left. In the terms of the sea, your course is west-south-west until the Bay is open, then south-south-west, then south, and then south by east a half-east for the long stretch. But for most of us the way to the war lay through a stranger region than that. Years ago (as it seems) on a rainy winter evening, we watched the buoys of the Solent Channel streaming past us all aslope on the strong ebb-tide, and as the Trinity Brothers began to open their eyes for an all-night watch on the south coast, we closed ours to the world behind.

A day and night of dust and tumble in the Bay, and we awoke on a summer morning to find the wind blowing softly through the open ports and the water chiming on the ship's side. After that we lived in a world all our own; ourselves the sum and centre of it; a blue world that slid through degrees of latitude and longitude, but held us, its inhabitants, at ever the same distance from realities. The past was miles away at the end of the white path astern; the future did not yet so much as smudge the forward horizon; we were adrift, lost in the present.

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Since we were, for the most part, Englishmen, we played games. At first we had walked about eyeing one another mistrustfully; but Time, the surest of teachers, soon convinced us of the essential harmlessness of our fellows. And then we played quoits, and danced and listened to the band, forgetting the things which were behind and disregarding (for the moment) the things which were before. Disregarding, but not quite forgetting. When the last game was over and the last pipe lighted, and the good, cool hours drew on, men used to sit in little groups watching the flash of waves tripping and spilling over smooth black furrows; and then they talked. The C.I.V. officers talked of Lee-Enfields, trajectories, mass and volley firing; the Indian Staff Corps men, who were going out on special service, spoke of commissariat and transport, of standing patrols and Cossack posts, of bivouacks, entrenchments, vedettes, contact squadrons, tactical sub-units, demolitions and entanglements. In those dark hours, while alien stars were rising and swinging westward over the masthead, hard, fit, clear-headed young men talked coolly and with common sense of the big business before them. The evening consultations were all that we gave to the future. The past was even less openly recognised; but it proclaimed itself eloquently in the withered bunches of flowers on this and that cabin table, in the demand for the ship's notepaper,

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in the women's trinkets worn by men who, under ordinary circumstances, would rather wear sack-cloth than jewellery: emblems, all of them, of thoughts that travelled the white road between the rudder and the horizon.

In that strange detached world of ours, energy alone was unsuspected. It was even stimulated, and in a race and class of men not accustomed to look inward for recreative resources manifested itself in a violent and unrelenting pursuit of artificial amusements. In this pursuit all our days were passed. The morning sun streams into the port-cabins, the diligent quartermaster brings our toys on deck and gravely arranges them; throughout the day we play with them until we are tired, when they are flung aside untidily; again the quartermaster returns, and, like a kind nurse, puts them away. The sun slants through the starboard windows and is quenched in the waters; a little talking, a little dancing, a little music, and we are all asleep. Such were our days. And ever before, behind, around and beneath us the moving, mysterious sea, wrinkled and old as the world, but blowing airs of eternal youth from its crumbling ridges. Down below iron floors stokers and trimmers were sweating, engineers were watching and nursing and feeding the great steel bondagers that drove us along; but how many of the light-hearted passengers ever thought of them? They were out of sight and mind, hidden away in their stifling holes, where in their relation to us they completed the satire of our miniature society.

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I might give you a dozen pictures of our life, and yet mislead you as to its uncommonness; it was really commonplace life in strange and unfamiliar circumstances. Here is an example. At the first concert it was noticed, not without surprise, that the Captain's name was down for a song. Now for days the Captain had tramped alone up and down the deck—a large man, with a heavy face and drooping eye, and a head set forward on the shoulders by reason of long hours of staring into the sea dust; a man past middle-age, silent and (as we thought) surly. Therefore something like a sensation was produced when it was announced that the Captain would sing "Mary." I think I see and hear it now. The saloon filled with people; the windows framing faces of deck hands and firemen, with a background of moving blue; the heavy central figure, the kindly (we saw that now) Scotch face; the worn voice, unused to sustained utterance, gasping for breath in the middle of a line, and sometimes failing to be ready in time ("I lost the run of it," he explained to us in the middle of a temporary breakdown); the quaint simplicity of the words, "Kind, kind and gentle is she, kind is ma Ma-ary"; the thunder of applause that greeted the close; the immediate and unassailable popularity of the Captain. If I have described it as I saw it, you will understand why I shall always like to remember that scene. Here is another glimpse.

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On a Sunday, when the church bells at home were jangling and the streets were (for a guess) streaming with rain and mud, it was Sunday with us also, three thousand miles away. The sun was lighting the lazy sea until it shone like a big blue diamond, the whales were spouting, the porpoises plunging and blowing, and here and there a shark lay basking near the surface with a wicked, wriggling, black fin exposed. It was very hot and still; the great sea people seemed to be revelling in some sort of Sabbath of their own, and the waters lay quiet and shining under the eye of Heaven. Here and there a drove of small flying-fishes rose and skimmed over the surface like swallows, but they too soon plunged into the blue and sought below that the cool green depths. Into this tranquil scene steamed the *Kinfauns Castle* in a triangle of snow, a big porpoise rolling and rollicking along beside her, now rising on this side, now on that. When he came very close he could see into the saloon windows, and presently he saw the Captain standing at the end of a table spread with the Union Jack and a great crowd of people sitting round the tables.

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"Dearly beloved brethren," began the Captain, and then the porpoise's tail came up and his head went down with a "pflough!"

When he came up again near enough to see, all the people were muttering and gobbling over the Psalms, the Captain rolling out his short alternate verses as though he were directing his own quartermaster on a course. While the porpoise was very close to the ship and listening hard the ash-shoot was emptied almost on his head, which scared him so badly that he dived deep, and

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did not come up again for a long time. When he did rise the people were singing, "On, then, Christian soldiers, on to victory"; again he dived, and again came up with a snort, to hear them singing with equal vigour, "Make wars to cease and give us peace." But just then the third engineer opened the exhaust of the waste condenser water, and my black friend got such a shock when the cloud of steam and hot water burst from the ship's side that he altered his course three points, and I saw him plunging and rolling away to the west of south. One thing the porpoise did not hear, for he was below at the time. In his course through the Liturgy the Captain had reached the Collect for the day. I will warrant he was trained in a sterner school of theology than the Anglican; his voice and tones were never meant for the smooth diction of the Prayer-book; but that is neither here nor there. The "Coollect for the fourth Sunday after 'Pithany'" rolled from his tongue. I never hope to hear it in a more appropriate time or place; there was something almost startling in the coincidence that brought it round on such a day, and there was significance in the words—"O God, Who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright; grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through, all temptations." Thus prayed the Captain, the Chief Officer standing beside him; and none knew so well as those two how many and great were the dangers that lurked in our smiling environment.

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As we drew nearer to our journey's end the desire for news became acute. At Madeira, on the 24th of January, we heard that the situation in Natal was practically unchanged, and up to February 3rd we had not seen another ship pass nearer than five miles. But then it was thought probable that we should meet the *Dunottar Castle* on her way home, and a bright look-out was kept. In the afternoon I was up on the bridge discussing celestial angles with the Chief Officer; we were snoring into the south-east trade, and the strong sun-warmed wind was a thing to bathe in; the bridge binoculars diligently swept the sharp blue line of horizon. Presently the Third Officer put his glass down. "There she is," said he, "two points on the starboard bow." We all looked, and we saw the tiny smear of smoke on the line. How strange it was; both of us coming up from nowhere and meeting on this roadless waste! In a quarter of an hour we raised her masts and funnel, and then we perceived it was not the *Dunottar*. Our course was altered two points, and the three of us stood up there in the wind and sun watching the growing speck. Down below they had just seen her, and glasses were levelled by the hundred. In a little while we could see a red cross on her bow, and we made her out to be a hospital ship carrying home wounded—Buller's wounded, we said, from the Tugela fight.

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"BWF, HLF, WBQ," fluttered out our signal flags in a bravery of scarlet and blue and white, which is, being interpreted, "What news since the 24th?"

She was abeam now, a mile away; how slow they were in running up an answer! We pictured their signal quartermaster racking the pigeon-holes to spell "Ladysmith," and expected a gaudy display. Presently the coloured stream blew out from her main topmast stay. Only four flags!

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"DFPC," reported the Third Officer, and there was a scramble for the Code-book. "Nothing important since last accounts."

Could anything be more exasperating? We ran up another question, I do not know what, but we waited in vain for the answering flutter, and the hospital ship *Princess of Wales* rolled along on the blue swell.

"South by east-a-half-east," snapped the Chief Officer; the wheel spun and the steering engine hissed, and the *Kinfauns Castle* drove her stem into it again, while from the promenade deck rose the sound of many voices.

And so we went driving along again through a wonderful sea of deep blue rollers jousting on a grey ground. It did not yet appear where we should go or what would be our lot; to-night or to-morrow we should know; but to-day it was enough that the sun shone and that the waters were wide.

V

SCENES AT CAPE TOWN

When at last the *Kinfauns Castle* carried us on a sunny evening out of blue emptiness into Cape Town harbour and dumped us down on dry land, about thirty of us who were on our way to the front took elaborate farewells—only to meet again twelve hours later in the vestibule at headquarters.

No one was in the least excited by our arrival. If we were special service men, we were told that there were no instructions for us, and that we had better turn up three or four times a day and look at the order-board. If we were correspondents, heads were shaken, and smooth-spoken people with stars and crowns on their shoulder-straps said they doubted very much whether Lord Roberts would grant any more passes. If we were nobodies who had come out (with more or less direct encouragement from the officials) in the hope of getting commissions, we were turned away like tramps, and told that there was "nothing for us." It was all rather flattening and dispiriting.

When we turned up again at headquarters next morning we found the place empty but for a Kaffir charwoman snuffling over her brushes: Lord Roberts gone, Lord Kitchener gone, all the staff gone, stolen away like thieves in the night, gone "to the front." No one was left in authority, no one knew anything about us; so we went to the barracks and worried irresponsible officers who would have moved heaven and earth for us if they could, but they "had no instructions." At last, in a remote corner of the barrack buildings, someone discovered a major who was in charge of the Intelligence Department. Didn't we all fall upon him like birds of prey! In half an hour the telegraph that connected Cape Town with the Commander-in-Chief was thrilling all our wants northward; in six hours half the special service men were flying about the town collecting sardines and whisky and ink; in twenty-four hours only a few of us were left, still worrying the unfortunate major. Then the wires began to come back from Lord Roberts saying that no licence must be granted to this man and that; that there were more than enough correspondents at the front; and at this news some of us began to quake. At this critical point, when I was wandering in the corridor of the post office, I found the Press Censor, all alone and unguarded; so I fastened upon him and drove him, the kindest and most amiable of men, into his office, and stood over him while he wrote a long telegram to the chief, in which many reasons were given why I should go to the front. The result was that I received the desired privilege, but when I left Cape Town many men were still haunting the barracks and the post office.

My week of waiting was a busy time, but in the intervals between sitting down before staff officers, interviewing possible—and impossible—servants, and trying horses, I contrived to see a little of the Cape Town life in those martial days.

One seemed to be no nearer the war there than in London or Manchester. Troops marched to the station and disappeared into the night; so they did at home. There were hospitals there, filled with wounded men; none so large or so full as Netley. There was a big camp there; not so big a camp as Aldershot. And the place was full of officers, coming and going, even as Southampton had been crowded with officers pausing on their way to or from the war. Then there was at Cape Town something like a famine of news; by far the latest and most trustworthy came from London. Things that thrilled us out there and were cabled home in hot haste were found to be stale news in England. As the storm blows over the cliff far out to sea, but leaves the hamlet on the shore in absolute peace, so Cape Town seemed to be sheltered by the big, dominating

mountain from all the home-going news, and to abide in peaceful ignorance while the telegraph-rooms resounded to the talk of the needles.

I rather dreaded the hospitals, but they were magnificent. To see so many men bearing pain bravely and cheerfully were privilege enough; but to find men who had undergone the most dreadful tortures soberly begging and hoping to be sent back to the front showed one what can be accomplished by discipline and an ideal of conduct. Here is an example. Two men lay side by side in the Wynberg hospital. One had five holes in his body, made during a charge by as many bullets. He had nearly recovered. The other had been shot while lying down, and the bullet had passed along his back and touched the base of his spine, paralysing him for ever. Both men were almost weeping; the first with joy because there was a chance of his returning to the front, the second with grief because he was powerless to help his comrades any more. I could cite a hundred examples of the astounding spirit that such men displayed. I do not think that we at home ever doubted their bravery on the field, but the kind of endurance that is seldom bred but by long habit and early training was to be found no less universally in these hospital beds. The people of Cape Town had done well in the matter of hospitals, and fully half the accommodation was provided by public subscription. But Government hospitals were far from efficient in their equipment, as well as far from sufficient in their accommodation. Many things that would be regarded as necessaries in a pauper hospital at home had to be provided at Cape Town for the Government hospitals by private bounty.

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I walked over to the infantry camp at Sea Point one morning with Mr. Rudyard Kipling. As we neared the camp we overtook a private carrying in his hand a large pair of boots. Mr. Rudyard Kipling asked if we were on the right road, and the man said—

"Yes; are yer goin' there? Then yer can tike these boots. I 'av to entrine at twelve o'clock, and I ain't goin' ter miss it fer no blessed boots. 'Ere, tike 'old," he continued, thrusting the boots into Mr. Kipling's hand, "and give 'em to Private Dickson, B Company; and mind, if yer cawn't find 'im, jest tike 'em back ter Williams, opposite the White 'Orse."

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Mr. Kipling promised faithfully, and gave a receipt, which he signed; but the man did not notice the name.

"My friend," said Mr. Kipling, "you'll get your head chaffed off when you get back to the guard-room."

"What for?" vainly asked the man, and departed, while we continued our way towards the camp.

No sooner were we inside the railings than Mr. Kipling was accosted by a military policeman.

"What are you doing here? You must get out of here, you know, sharp!"

"I'm taking these boots to Private Dickson," said Mr. Kipling.

"Well, you ought to take them to the guard tent, and not go wandering about the camp like this. Out of it, now!"

Now Mr. Kipling had a pass from the Commander-in-Chief to go wherever he pleased in South Africa, and, besides that, he is Rudyard Kipling, whom private soldiers call their brother and father; so the situation was amusing.

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Just then a police sergeant rode up and said, "Please, sir, I lived ten years with the man as you get your tobacco from in Brighton; anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Mr. Kipling, "I want this man taken away and killed!"

The youth was much confused, but he had done his duty; so Private Dickson had his boots, and great was the mirth and loud the cheering about the tents of B Company.

This police protection of the camps was surprisingly close, but one learned the reason when one had moved about for a little while among the military authorities. For here, even in the heart of British territory, the Boer spy was feared; he was thought to be the servant of an agency hardly less invisible and powerful than the Open Eye of the Mormons; and one was told that his machinations were as patent as his secrecy was perfect. One morning a section of the railings surrounding picketed horses would be found demolished; on another the whole milk supply of a camp would be infected by some poisonous bacillus. It seems almost incredible, but it is true that all such mishaps were attributed to Boer treachery. In the popular imagination the Boer agent moved undiscovered amid the daily life of Cape Town; at noon in the busy street; in the club smoke-room; in the hotel dining-room—a woman this time, arrayed in frocks from Paris, and keeping a table charmed by her conversation. And yet the objects of this superstitious dread were allowed to have qualities that made some of our officers dislike their business. An English officer said to me one night:

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"One can't say it here without being misunderstood, but I love the Boers, even though I am fighting them. My father was a colonist, and these men were like brothers of his. I have been in houses here where I knew there were guns stored for the enemy, and where the sons would probably be fighting me in the field, and the people have almost cried when I have been going away; neither of us talked about it, but each knew what was in the other's mind. People say they're like animals, and perhaps they are; at least they're like animals in this, that once you make them distrust you, you'll never win their confidence again. And they don't trust us."

That officer is well enough known, and universally admired as a smart soldier; but not everyone who sees the keen soldier, anxious above all things for his own country's success, realises with what conflicting emotions he goes to the fight.

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I was anxious to see a real live Boer, as I thought it quite improbable that I should see one at the front; half the officers and men who had been wounded had never seen one of the enemy. So, having heard that our Boer prisoners—450 in number—had been landed from Her Majesty's ship *Penelope* and encamped at Simonstown, I went there to visit them.

From Cape Town the land stretches an arm southward to the Cape of Good Hope and Bellows Rock, where it divides the Atlantic from the Indian Ocean. The mainland runs about as far southward, so that the arm partly encloses the waters of False Bay; and in the hollow of its elbow nestles Simonstown. This is a cluster of white houses on the sea-beat foot of a hill that sweeps upward to the giddy white clouds. All day long at that season the hill is steeped in sunshine; all day long its lower slopes reverberate to the assault of the rollers while the summit is folded in the silence of the upper air. Close in-shore half a dozen cruisers were lying like rocks among the deep moving waters; the St. George's ensign floated from the shore flagstaffs, and an air of whiteness and tidiness proclaimed the naval station.

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The railway from Cape Town runs so close to the shore of the bay that you cannot hear yourself speak for the noise of bursting surf. It brought me to Simonstown in the full glare and heat of the afternoon. The prisoners were encamped about a hundred yards out of the town, and as we walked through the street we spoke with pity of men imprisoned on such a day. What we expected I do not quite know—dungeons perhaps, or cells hewn out of the rock—but it was with something like a shock of disappointment or relief (according to our notions of appropriate treatment for prisoners) that we caught our first view of the encampment. Just beyond the town the hillside takes a gentler slope, dipping a lawn of sea-grass into the water; and it was upon this charming spot, enclosed with a double fence, that the prisoners were quartered. We pressed our faces against the wires and stared, much as one stares in the Zoo at a cageful of newly-arrived animals that have cost a great deal of money and maybe a life or two. Fine, big men, stalwart and burned brown by the sun; stern-looking, but with that air of large contentment they wear who live much alone and out of doors; massive of jaw and forehead, moulded after a grand pattern. They were lying on the grass, standing in little groups, sauntering up and down in the hot sunshine,

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playing cricket with ponderous energy, bathing and sporting in the clear apple-green water. It was not their contentment that surprised me, but the perfection of their circumstances. They were encamped on such a spot as people pay large sums for the privilege of pitching tents upon; they were numerous enough to make themselves independent of alien company; the sun was shining, the sea breeze blowing; they had food and drink, and tobacco to smoke; where they bathed an eight-oar gig from the *Powerful* swung on the swell, not so much to prevent escape as to render assistance to tired swimmers.

So our prisoners blinked in the sun and listened to the organ-note of the surf, and brooded on the most beautiful picture I have ever seen: masses of bare rock towering into the bright sky, and an endless pageant of seas rolling grandly homeward from the south, from the infinite purple and blue of the Indian Ocean, grounding at the edge of the green lawn and showering snow upon the hot rocks.

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VI

IN THE EDDIES OF A GREAT WHIRL

When I arrived at Modder River Camp, on February 17th, the guns were being hauled back from the hills into camp, tents were being struck, and waggon transport organised. The plain was a cloud of hot, whirling sand that shrouded near objects as closely as a fog, but, instead of the damp coldness of a fog, the plain was radiating heat that sent the thermometer inside one's tent up to 135 degrees. The place that a few days before had been resounding with artillery was now silent and (by comparison) deserted; buck waggons took the place of gun carriages, and the ambulance cart carried mails from home. One thought of Modder River as being surely at "the front," but here was the place, here were the troops, the guns, the hospitals, the sand-enveloped cemetery, and yet one seemed to be no nearer than before to actual war. As for news, there was less even than at Cape Town. A few telegrams, days old, fluttered from the notice-board, and in at headquarters I found that we who had been sixty hours on the journey from Cape Town were hailed as newsbearers. There was a press censor, yet one could not send press telegrams; headquarters had moved on to Jacobsdaal; telegrams must go through headquarters, and the wire to Jacobsdaal was only to be used for military purposes. This was something like a block, so Mr. Amery, of the *Times*, and I, resolved to ride over to Jacobsdaal and see if we could get any news.

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MR. G. LENTHAL CHEATLE, F.R.C.S.
Consulting Surgeon to Her Majesty's Forces in South Africa

We crossed the Riet and Modder drifts, and passed over the island where the shells and bullets had been singing so shrilly on the day of the big fight. When we passed the birds were singing instead, sending down with the cooing pigeons a chorus from the trees. No one could tell us whether or not the twelve miles to Jacobsdaal were free from the enemy; people thought so, but they were not quite sure. So we rode along, observing the dry veldt not without interest, but the lonely road heaved up and down over the plain and revealed little sign of human occupation. Once we passed a convoy carrying stores to the front, and at about the eighth mile a little Boer camp of about a dozen tents, all deserted, and apparently in haste, for there were half-emptied tins of provisions and a few cooking utensils scattered about, and a dead horse lay by the roadside. The heat was very great, and was only supportable when one kept a drenched handkerchief under one's hat. Indeed, officers who had come straight out from India protested that they never felt there anything like the heat of that South African drought.

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Jacobsdaal, a little white town or village near the river, appeared at last from a ridge of the plain. It contained an inn, and the inn contained cups of tea—a fact in connection with Jacobsdaal that I shall long remember. In about an hour we were ready to look about a little, but at headquarters we could only learn that the front had again moved forward. We could not advance without transport, and we could get no quarters, so we lay down in a stony field under the stars, and made a poor shift at sleeping through a concert of complaining oxen and cocks cheering all night long, with an undertone of rumbling wheels on the distant road.

Next morning early I rode back to Modder, where I collected with difficulty two sorry but useful nags and a Cape cart. On my way out I passed a sentry, who brought me up with the usual cry, "Halt! who goes there?"

"Friend," said I.

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"Advance, friend, and give the countersign."

Now I did not know the countersign, and I had to tell him so. The private soldier is sometimes zealous and often stupid, and occasionally both; and in the pause that followed my answer I heard the click of his rifle. In that second of time I remembered a story which I had heard the day before of a sentry at Modder, who, when the guard came up in the dark to relieve him, made the usual challenge. "It's only us, old man," said the sergeant. "None of your blooming us," said the sentry, and shot the sergeant dead.

However the sentry was soon persuaded, and when I passed the outpost, the sentry who should really have stopped me and examined my passport treated me as a field-officer and presented arms, so I rode away back to the dust of Modder. There I collected as much forage as possible, and the next day rode back with my caravan to Jacobsdaal. Once more there was a block. The front forty miles away; no more forage, no rations even; and I starved officially, but was entertained privately by the commandant. The front was reaching away forward along the road to Bloemfontein; and as telegrams had to be censored there and handed in at Modder River, fifty miles away, and as I had no despatch riders, I decided that the game was up on this line. A dose of fever helped my decision, and held me afterwards at Modder when great things were happening at Paardeberg. But for the day during which I stayed in Jacobsdaal I studied the little town and its alien inhabitants.

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Jacobsdaal stands four-square on the northern bank of the Riet River, eleven miles east-south-east from Modder; and the manner of its occupation, as described to me by General Wavell (who captured it on the 15th of February and remained in it as commandant), seems to have been surprisingly neat and effectual. General Chermiside, commanding the 14th Brigade, left Enslin on the 11th and marched to Ramdam, where he was joined by General Wavell, commanding the 15th Brigade, who had moved from Graspan. From Ramdam the two brigades marched almost due east to Dekiel's Drift, which they were delayed in crossing during the whole of the 13th. They started again on the next evening and made a night march to Wegdraai, where they arrived at four o'clock on the morning of the 15th. An officer of the North Staffordshire Regiment told me that he never saw anything so impressive as that night march. The horizon was level all round like the sea, and all night long it was alive with streams of lightning that lighted up the plain with the brigade crawling across it through the thunder. On the 15th General Wavell's brigade was detached, and at midday started to march upon Jacobsdaal. The brigade was strengthened by about seventy men of the C.I.V. (who acted as scouts) and by a battery of artillery. The North Staffordshires acted as advance guard, the South Wales Borderers and the Cheshire Regiment formed the main body, and the East Lancashires brought up the rear—half a battalion as reserves and half as rear-guard with the baggage.

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The position was an admirable one for the enemy. General Wavell had the town ahead and the river on the left parallel with his line of march; and as he approached, the Boers (about 400 strong) opened a brisk fire on his flank from the river-bed. The fire was directed at the C.I.V.'s, who were advancing on the right bank of the river; but it had a double objective, since what missed the C.I.V.'s had a fair chance of finding the Staffordshires, who were advancing on a parallel ridge still further to the right. The C.I.V.'s had a good many horses killed, and many of the men were wounded and "dropped," but I believe only one was killed. Finding the attack was coming from the left, the General showed his force on that side, at the same time shelling the south-east corner of the town. He would do no more because of the women and children in the place; and, considering his disadvantage, the Boers with a little more determination might have held the town. After showing on the left General Wavell swept round on the right, sending the North Staffordshires towards the north side. There they entered, and the place was, so to speak, nipped between the two arms of the brigade, with the artillery in the middle ready to speak. The Boers now broke and fled south-west and north-west, followed by showers of shrapnel. "It was an awfully pretty sight," the General remarked to me, "to see the shrapnel bursting all round in showers; one of the prettiest things I have ever seen." The enemy had open country and soon got away, but in the meantime the Union Jack was blowing bravely over Jacobsdaal, and we were in possession of a most important square on the big chessboard of the Orange Free State.

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green lawns, no twisted yews, no weeping willows; the few fir trees hold themselves stiffly up, as though in pride at this triumph of the vegetable over the animal; and the great bushes of faded geranium only throw into relief the regular lines of limestone mounds, each with its prim wooden cross of advertisement. Always an ugly and a dreary place, it was, when I saw it a few days after the relief, more dreary than ever; for the sun, whose presence makes the difference of a season in this bare land, was hidden behind dark stacks of cloud flying westward before a cold gale.

From a sandbag protection at one corner of the cemetery there is a view on all sides to the horizon. The town, the empty railway station, the hospital, the network of shelter trenches, connecting earth-works, redans, redoubts, forts, and emplacements; the straight line of railway-ruled across the plain to the horizon—these make the view. Hardly anything is moving except the white flag on the hospital and the colours on the forts. Sometimes a figure crosses the open stretch between the hospital and the town, but outside the cemetery itself hardly a man is to be seen. The wind hums in the empty hearth of a locomotive, through the stiff trees of the cemetery, past the signal, standing like a sentinel gone to sleep with his head sunk on his breast, waiting in an attitude of invitation for the train that is seven months overdue.

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One's eye returns along the shining rails until it rests again within the yard, in a far corner of which a couple of orderlies detailed for burial fatigue are hacking with picks at the hard, white earth. The graves are in prim, uniform rows—the soldiers' graves, I mean, for even here the military element swamps the civilian, and one hardly takes note of the private graves, they are so few. But the soldiers' graves are arranged with military precision, row behind row, each row containing twenty graves or more. And at least seven or eight rows of graves are marked by the regulation cross, while there are many rows on which as yet no crosses have been erected. The painted words on the crosses become monotonous as one reads from the head of the first row down to where the mounds give place to gaping caverns—five or six—prepared for the dying, whom even now the doctor is plying with physic in the hospital. Trooper A, Private B, Colour-Sergeant C; the names vary, indeed, but there are only three versions of the manner of death—"Died of wounds," "Died of enteric fever," "Killed in action"—the three epitaphs for soldiers in South Africa.

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It was strange, amid the dreariness and stagnation of this place, to think of the jubiliations at home. What cheering, what toasting, what hilarity! But here the sparkle in the wine had died, leaving the cup that had brimmed flat and dull and only half full after all. Food was scanty and of the plainest quality, there was no news from the outside world, disease was still busy; and here, set forth in the hard limestone, was the bill for all the glory and excitement. The bill, but not the payment; that was being made at home by the people who cared for what lies beneath the limestone.

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The evils of a war are so direct and obvious that they are apt to be discounted or accepted as Fate, and classed among the thousand unavoidable ills beneath which we must patiently sit. But are they? In a war, the necessity and even justice of which are doubted honestly by many, where all share the responsibility and few the personal cost, it is hard to see the hand of an impartial Fate.

A strange place, you may say, in which to attempt the adjustment of mingled impressions. Yet in the midst of our crude existence at Mafeking, where life was shorn of all the impalpable things that make it real and reduced to a simple material level of food and sleep and noise, it was a kind of relief to spend an hour in the place where men had gone down into rest and silence. In normal circumstances one may avoid such places, but after the din of arms and the shout of victory there was a sense of companionship to be found in the place that stood for the ending of disputes. Peaceful, yes; but how was the peace gained? It is sweet and seemly to die for one's country; but blood and fire, grief and anguish had filled the vestibule of this sleeping-chamber; and peaceful though it be, the graveyard of Mafeking is a place to induce in Englishmen some searchings of heart.

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"Oh, surely not," says the music-hall patriot; "the brave fellows who lie there have died a glorious death, and the glory is ours as their fellow-countrymen"; and he drops a tear and a shilling into the particular tambourine which happens at the moment to be raising the loudest clamour, and honestly believes himself to have achieved some nobility at second-hand.

Our glory? Hardly that. Those who, justly or unjustly, place the martyr in his last predicament do not wear his crown; and the glory of Trooper A's death does not rest with you or me, but with those in whose hearts his memory is quick and real. To count these scores of deaths, as it were, to our credit in the war, to esteem them merely as things for which more vengeance must be taken, would be the last and greatest mistake. Surely they lie in the scale of responsibility, they are things for which an account must be rendered, by which an obligation is incurred to use well the fruits of victory.

There is no need that the wind should moan over this desolate patch, or that the tattered geranium should scatter its withered leaves on the unlovely ground. Were it as sweet as a garden in Delos, were the ground carpeted with violet and primrose and shadows of laburnum, the burying-ground of Mafeking would still be a sad spot on the chart of British South Africa. [Pg 276]

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XXVI

GOOD-BYE TO MAFEKING

A sudden order from General Hunter; a morning of preparation; a commotion of dismantling, packing, harnessing, saddling; handshaking and well-wishing; cheers ringing, hoofs clattering, dust rising beneath wheels and many feet, a backward glance along the road, and—Good-bye to Mafeking. An episode in the lives of men, and one which, in spite of the excitement that went before it, will probably leave a small though deep impression. Life there was dull beyond words, perhaps because there must be a reaction after seven months of excitement, and because the nature of man is elastic, springing quickly back to the commonplace when an unusual element in its circumstances has been withdrawn. I tried hard to fancy that the people of the garrison bore in their faces or manners some sign of the strain which they had undergone. But the months seemed to have left no traces except on the buildings and on the cemetery; or perhaps their mark upon the besieged men was set beneath the surface scanned by a casual observer. At any rate, the people of Mafeking could not successfully be exhibited in a show of wonders, and they took less interest in their food than did we, their deliverers, who lived with them for a while in what might be called "poor circumstances." Strange to say, the only way in which to secure an ample meal in Mafeking was to give a dinner-party, when all sorts of things were produced from secret reserves and—charged for. [Pg 278]

Brigadier-General Mahon's column left Mafeking on Monday, May 28th, taking the road that runs southward beside the railway, and I think that everyone breathed a sigh of satisfaction when we were once more fairly on the road. "The Happy Family" someone called Mahon's force, and there was certainly never a more united company. He is the kind of leader—considerate, strict, careless of unessential formalities, careful of all essential details, jolly of face, kind of eye, a good companion on the road, a rock of strength and confidence in the field—who is obeyed in the spirit as well as the letter, and for whom men would gladly march their feet to blisters. It need hardly be said that he is an Irishman—"Ould Pat Mahon God bless 'um!" as a friend of mine said that morning; and the remark was strangely apt, in spite of the Brigadier's youth and the fact that his name is Bryan. [Pg 279]

For four days we marched southward in easy stages across a stretch of country that was almost

well and shared your dangers, if not your alarms, is to suffer a new and painful damage to the affections. It was here, also, that I had to say good-bye to Major Pollock, with whom I had been living for the last five months. Some correspondents live always alone, and some like to join with several of their fellows in a large mess; but I think that our arrangement (when one is so fortunate in one's companion as I was) is by far the best. Of course the newspaper correspondent has to remember that he is the rival and not the ally of all his fellows; but in the South African war there were many occasions when two correspondents might work together to the advantage of both newspapers, and there were few occasions when a correspondent could obtain any advantage or information which was not shared by all the rest. At such times, of course, when they did arise, we used to become very silent as to our immediate intentions, and the subject which was uppermost in both our minds was shunned. But so long as my companion was with me I never lacked a home on the veldt.

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The happiest endings and the lightest farewells are indeed serious; they punctuate life, and set a period upon chapters that may not be revised. Out of the dust of preparation rose once more the pillar of cloud that had hovered over the column for hundreds of dusty miles; and soon to an accompaniment of stamping feet and jingling harness it moved on, leaving me behind as it had left so many others—not all to go home, but some to sleep beneath the roadside bushes. General Mahon waited, chatting, until the last waggon had passed, and then he also, who had been the pleasantest of companions as well as the most respected of commanding officers, rode away with that stiffening of the back with which your true soldier ever turns from private to public affairs. I looked after the vanishing column, and felt as though every prop of existence had been knocked from under me. I had been one amongst a thousand, a mere molecule in a large mass, moved hither and thither without reference to my desires or efforts; and I resented the restoration of independence. Strange contradiction! We crave and struggle for individuality; here was mine restored to me, and I looked at it askance. The tail of the column disappeared round a bend in the road. Was this indeed the end of the chapter?

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Not quite the end. As I set out on the westward road I met a half-battalion of the Scots Fusiliers returning to camp from exercise, marching at ease. Each company was headed by a piper who swung and swaggered, blowing deep into the lungs of his instrument. As one company passed, the measured bleat and squeal of the pipes faded and merged into a sound heralding the approach of another. The gorgeous uniforms were absent; but even the shabby khaki, stained with the soil of long marches and hard fights, could not obliterate that perfect harmony of movement which marks the first-class regiment.

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I stood to watch them go by. The last company approached; the piper, his head thrown back, so deeply drunk of sound that his soul seemed to float on the steady hum of the chanter, set the rhythm to ranks of men stepping out to the inspiring discord. I turned my horse's head; before me the road stretched long and lonely; behind was the bustle and stir of the camp. A file of officers marching behind the column hailed me with envious congratulation when they heard where I was going. But they did not know that, just for one moment, I would have given the world to turn and follow the piper.

PLYMOUTH
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON
PRINTERS