

gave me most concern and anxiety, about which I was apprehensive, has commanded marked favour. I thought that perhaps the shifting of the story to South Africa and the scenes of war might prove dangerous to the continuity of interest. I was also fearful that the war-scenes themselves might not grip, and that the change of atmosphere might, as it often does, produce a chill. But having been conscious of all this long before I put pen to paper, I tried to get the atmosphere of South Africa into the book from the first page, and to have the South African note beat through every chapter, like the *motif* in the overture of an opera, so that the reader would be caught by it long before the story shifted below the Zambesi. Also I had taken care to pass the South African part of the book through the hands of four officers who had been through the Boer War,—artillery, cavalry, infantry, and mounted infantry—and these chapters had thus been under fire before the critics or the public saw them first. Added to this, I put the whole book through the hands of a South African expert—a native of Natal, who, as had his father before him, had written much on South African history, customs, life, and so on; and I was thus sheltered from obvious errors. To my great pleasure I found that the critics gave especial praise to the South African portion of the book—almost invariably did so, whatever the criticism of the book as a whole.

More than one critic, however, while praising the book judiciously, said that it was in parts too long, and that there were pages which might be skipped without loss. Perhaps I may be permitted to say here that, to my mind, I chose the lesser of two dangers. I think I was born a dramatist, and I have always been conscious of the peril of bringing close together, without quiet spaces between, the highly dramatic episodes which belong to so many of my novels and which very particularly belong to *The Judgment House*. Most authors have the defects of their qualities, and if the dramatic quality is (as I think it is) an advantage, it may also, as the young collegians colloquially