
The Elusive Element

By NOLL AYTON.

A LITTLE more than fifteen years ago, just after our friends the Boers had caught General Buller at Colenso, held White in a ring of iron at Ladysmith, and had Kimberley and Mafeking invested all right, General Gatacre was snapped in the Stormberg "disaster" as we termed it that awful Sunday in December, 1899. We heard the news as we came from church that some fearful catastrophe had happened "along the line" (Stormberg being the railway junction leading from West to North and South-East), and we were hurriedly called from the quiet of our Sabbath rest to guard the bridges and the outer range of hills. It was only a week and a day before that we had seen the gallant Royal Irish Rifles leave the base at Queenstown (Cape Colony). Only ten days previously we had joined in a Gymkana and knew the splendid spirit of the men. On that fearful Sunday and for the next three days the poor fellows, shattered, maimed, and bleeding, were brought to the little town among the hills—"Old Queen," after Grahamstown, probably the most "English" of all the settlements in the Colony—and there in Town Hall, schools, warehouses and stores, and in private homes they were laid on hastily improvised beds and mattresses, everything of the kind having been hurriedly "commandeered" and willingly offered immediately the call was heard for supplies. The worst cases were sent to the local hospital, though already full with Refugee patients from the harassed North—Orange Free State and Transvaal—for Queenstown had suddenly been called upon to house and provide for three times her normal population (apart from 11,000 troops), and typhoid was rife in her midst.

When the first anxious rush was over and pressure of work subsided we had time to ask "the reason why" of the "disaster" and were not a little chagrined to know that the guide had led our soldiers into the treacherous