

sected by deep ravines, in which the undergrowth was so thick that it provided splendid hiding for the enemy, while the bush itself, seemingly impenetrable to the unaccustomed eye, lent itself as a natural fortress to the children of the wilderness, who had been reared in its midst.

Towards sunset, on a hot, stifling day, Clement Ayre and his friend were riding a little in advance of their company, in the direction of the broad river Tugela, which separated the hostile country of the Zulus from Natal, which they threatened to invade and annihilate. It had been a very hot day, and now heavy masses of copper-coloured clouds hung on the horizon when the blood-red sun was slowly sinking out of sight. During the past four and twenty hours no sign of the enemy could be seen, not even a stray Zulu lurking in the bush, consequently the order of vigilance had been slightly relaxed, and the troops were allowed to move slowly, and in what order they pleased. It had been a long and toilsome march, and the soldiers were very weary, and looking forward with some degree of impatience to be allowed to light their camp fires and rest for the night.

The Colonel in command, however, decided that the river must first be crossed. The two friends were riding a little in advance, as I said, and on the brow of a gentle hill they paused and looked back. It was a picturesque sight, the large, well-equipped regiments in their bright uniforms, the glittering trappings of the cavalry, and the long, straggling line of transport wagons with their patient oxen. The landscape itself, seen from that slight eminence, was not without its wild and rugged attractions. The green thickets of the bush, relieved by many strange flowers of novel shape and gaudy hue, the thorny spikes of the giant cactus, the graceful aloe and mimosa, and the swift-rushing river with its woody banks, all combined to make a picture new and pleasing to their unaccustomed eyes.

"It's rather a pretty country, isn't it, Clem?" said Raybourne, carelessly.

"A nasty country for soldiering, I think," retorted Clem, as his horse sent his foreleg into a broken, swampy hole. "Just look at that long string of heavy wagons, and then forward to the ground we've to go over. I'll tell you what, Harry, if there's no other means of transport for supplies, Cetewayo will easily keep the advantage he has got. It's a serious matter fighting a savage enemy in his own country."

"It's rather exciting, though; one never knows what is to happen next," said Raybourne, with a smile. "It's amusing to see how these black Zulus pop out of the scrub and then disappear, goodness knows where. I suppose they are their scouts and spies; ugly fellows they are, too."

"You're right. Glyn seems to think that we might have a brush with them to-morrow. The enemy isn't far ahead, and they say he is 20,000 strong."

Once more Raybourne glanced back at the troops toiling wearily on, and a slight shadow crossed his face.

"I don't presume to set up an opinion, Clem, but don't you think we're not just exactly too fit to receive 20,000 in the way we should like? We are only a few hundreds. It would be a good thing to us if we could come up with the other columns before we fight."

"Oh, well, they are not very far away. It wouldn't be difficult to send messages to the camp at Ekowe, and I heard the Colonel say this morning that Lord Chelmsford could only be about ten miles in advance."

"Don't you remember, Clem, how persistently we were taught concentration in our plans of campaign at Sandhurst? A handful of infantry, and a few scores of cavalry scattered here and there over a treacherous country like this haven't a chance to boast of; that's what I think."

"Cadets fresh from Sandhurst usually think their newly-gotten wisdom as good as the experience of their elders," said Clem, with a laugh. "I'm quoting Glyn. I said something of the same kind to him yesterday, and he let me down gently. All we have got to do is to shut up, Harry, and do what we are bid. Supposing, now, that you were

the commander, what would you do? Let me hear how you would proceed."

"Well, I'd find out immediately, by fair means or foul, exactly where the enemy is, and what he is good or bad for. Then I would gather my whole force together; send a column to watch the river, and prevent any of the enemy crossing; keep another in reserve to harass him in the rear; and march upon him till I forced him to fight in open field."

"You cannot force savages into fair warfare; that's where the difficulty lies," said Clem, musingly. "Their cunning teaches them that in their native fastnesses their strength lies. They'll pour out upon us from some confounded ravine, perhaps some night when we are in camp and disarmed. Besides, they're well armed. Doesn't it seem an awful thing to you, Harry, that the Zulus should have been provided with the implements of war by ourselves?"

"Is that the case?"

"Yes, I had a long talk with Chard the other day, before we left him at Rorke's Drift. It seems that after the diamonds were found in the South, native labour was employed, and paid for, at their own request, in guns and rifles. Why, man, the thing carried its own meaning on the face of it. It was awful folly, perfect madness on the part of the Government to allow it—literally signing their own death-warrant."

"It was certainly a want of sense, if it's true."

"It's as true as Gospel. How else could they be so well armed? I tell you there was a gun factory at Kimberley, and the Kaffirs began the system of working for firearms and ammunition, and, of course it soon spread from the Colony into Zululand. We have no means of knowing what reserve stores they have, but they must be enormous, Chard says, for the trade has been going on for years, under the sanction of the Government."

"I suppose they know how to use them, too?"

"Trust them; they'd soon find out. But I see we're going to call a halt, and I'm not sorry, for I'm both tired and hungry, and I don't want to see Cetewayo's sweet face for another twenty hours at least. What are you thinking of to make you look so sober, Harry?"

"Oh, not of much. Isn't it odd, though, Clem, that your first campaign should be so like that Indian business which cost your father his life?"

"It's more like his first campaign. He won his spurs in Abyssinia, you know."

CHAPTER XXVIII.—ISANDHLWANA.

Early next morning an order was received from the Commander to march on to Isandhlwana, and on the mountain go into camp. The summit had been explored and found suitable for the purpose. The enemy was supposed to be in the near vicinity, although keeping hidden, his presence not betrayed even by a stray shot. This fact somewhat allayed the anxiety of the invaders, because they thought it proved that the numbers must have been greatly exaggerated. It seemed an impossibility that so vast a force could be successfully and so completely hidden, even though the wild nature of the country lent itself admirably to such manoeuvres. The camp at Isandhlwana was situated on a mountain, which commanded an unbroken view of the surrounding country, and whose weakest point for attack was a narrow neck on the western side, crossed by a wagon road. So complete was their ignorance of the enemy's movements, that immediately the camp was struck the column was divided, and a part under Colonel Glyn advanced to assist in attacking a place called Matyana's Stronghold, where the Zulus were supposed to be entrenched.

The utmost activity prevailed in the camp, and the troops being infected by the apparent unconcern of their officers, were glad to rest and amuse themselves after the toils of the march across the broken and swampy ground on the Zululand side of the river Tugela. About nine o'clock a scouting party was sent out to scour the adjacent country in search of the enemy, and returned before the dinner hour, reporting nothing in sight. The whole company settled themselves to wait in a state of readiness, however, expecting an hourly order to advance to the assistance of the Com-

mander, whom they supposed to be in action with the enemy about twelve miles distant. Clement Ayre, with some other ardent spirits, was chafing at the inaction of the day, and impatient for the order to advance, little dreaming that it was reserved for them to contend against the whole body of the Zulus. The day passed quietly by, and the dull, heavy night fell without giving warning of the awful tragedy the dawn of another day was destined to witness.

"I say, Clem, are you asleep?" Raybourne whispered, leaning over his comrade in the dead of night.

Yes, Clem was sound asleep, with his arm under his head, and his face upturned to the lowering sky. Raybourne sat up, and leaning his elbows on his knees, let his head drop on his hands, and gave himself up to thoughts of home. He was strangely wakeful, every sense seemed sharpened to its keenest capacity—he could hear the soft, cautious tread of the farthest outpost as he moved to and fro to keep himself from feeling drowsy. As a rule, Raybourne was of a solid, even temperament, not given to excitement or freaks of imagination, yet for many days past his usually calm mind has been filled with strange forebodings, which he could not understand. Although they were on the eve of an engagement with a vast and savage army, he was not visited by fear of personal consequences, nor any wish to draw back. He did feel, however, that this campaign was to have important issues for him; again and again he passionately regretted having left England without making Evelyn Ayre his wife. His thoughts in that strange, solemn, midnight stillness were wholly of her and of home. Perhaps his was not a very brilliant intellect; perhaps he had disappointed the proud hopes with which his father and mother had welcomed his birth, but he was a good, honest, true-hearted soul, who, at four-and-twenty could look back upon the white page of an unblemished youth, of which there was nothing of which he, or any belonging to him had need to be ashamed. How many of the hot and restless hearts slumbering under the midnight stars on that African mountain side could have said as much? After a time he forgot his surroundings, the measured tread of the sentries and the pawing of the horses seemed to die away, and he saw only the sweet landscapes of his English home, and the dear faces of those he loved. And then came to Harry Raybourne a sudden, swift intuition, which told him that the very nearness to him, the vividness of his vision, signified that they and he should meet on earth no more. It was a strange experience, a vague uncertainty suddenly becoming a certainty in his mind, and the strangest part of it all was that he felt no inclination to rebel, but a deep sense of peace and calmness, just as if all difficulties and anxieties had come to an end. So while an anxious mother was lying awake in her bed at home, the boy for whom she was praying bowed his head and prayed too, the first time, perhaps, in his short, merry, uneventful life that Raybourne prayed in real earnest, because it was the first and only time he had need of prayer. Then he lay down beside Clement in the tent, and slept till the reveille sounded at daybreak. And almost immediately a mounted messenger rode in hot haste into the camp with the intelligence that the enemy was within a few miles, and advancing on the camp. This rumour was, however, disbelieved, and immediately after breakfast a forward movement was made by an officer and a detachment of native troops to investigate the cause of the alarm. Meanwhile, however, the camp held itself in readiness for attack, and each officer and man was busy seeing that their arms and ammunition were in order.

"I do believe, Clem, that on the whole it was wiser to leave Evelyn free," said Raybourne, as they sat together on a grey boulder attending to their rifles.

Clement stared at him in astonishment mingled with the concern which had never wholly left him since their talk on board the Tamar. His mind was so full of the stirring interest of the hour, on the *qui vive* for marching or fighting orders, that he could not understand what he thought Harry's