

## THE BATTLE OF THE ECLIPSE.

BY E. B. BIGGAR.

THE Zulu war had been determined on. The supposed menace to the peace of South Africa, which existed in the Zulu king and his people, was to be ended by the subjugation of the savage nation, and the deposition of their ruler. That king had always shown himself to be an ally of British power in South Africa, and it must now be said that the arm lifted to deal the blow that struck him from his throne was raised with hesitation and sorrow, as far as the Imperial will was concerned. But those responsible for the native policy of South Africa decided that the Zulu kingdom should have an end, and gathered troops to "roll back the tide of barbarism," as expressed in a phrase current at the time.

And so it was, that early in January, 1879, the roads leading over the undulations of sunny Natal towards the land of the Zulus resounded with the clatter of commissariat carts, and glistened with the bayonets of British troops. For the first time in my life I saw the quays of Table Bay and Simon's Bay dotted with red-coats loading their stores and munitions on the transport ships to ascend the coast on the dread mission of real war. Already the 24th had moved up to the front; and little did I think, as I witnessed the alacrity of these cheery fellows in their preparations for the field, that not a man of that detachment would ever return to this quiet garrison.

Cetywayo (pronounced Ketch-wy-o) saw that "evil was determined against him," and what could a savage ruler, with a love of independence, do but defend himself, as he did, after protesting his innocence of any conscious act of unfaithfulness to the British

Government. The British army advanced in three divisions by the three roads leading from Natal (pronounced Na-tal) to Zululand, all three roads converging upon Ulundi, the capital. General Thesiger (Lord Chelmsford), who was the general commanding the invasion, was in person at the head of the upper division, which entered Zululand by way of Rorke's Drift, a ford over the Buffalo River, called after one Jim Rorke, whose old stone house was to be the scene of one of the bravest fights made in modern warfare against overwhelming odds. Cetywayo, when he heard of the approach of the upper column, addressed his army with Caesar-like brevity, as follows: "I am sending you out against the whites, who have invaded Zululand, and driven away our cattle. You are to go against the column at Rorke's Drift, and drive it back into Natal, and if the state of the river will allow, follow it up through Natal, right up to the Drakensberg. You will attack by daylight, as there are enough of you to eat it up." The force sent out on this mission consisted of over 20,000, selected out of the 25,000 which made up the total effective strength of the Zulu army. They were told to advance by easy marches, and thus, taking a few days' provision, consisting of mealies (Indian corn), and a herd of cattle, which were driven with them, the army of naked warriors moved forward leisurely at the rate of nine or ten miles a day.

The common arm of the Zulu is an assegai, or spear, and a large shield made of native ox or buffalo hide, cut in an oval shape, three or four feet long, and so thick and tough when dried that a bullet will scarcely pierce it. The regiments of married men

were distinguished by white shields, and by heads that are shaved except a circle of short hair, in which is embedded a ring of gum, hardened, and black, and polished. Their only dress is a strip of the skin of some wild beast, such as the leopard, around the hips, or a strip of fur dangling, as an ornament, from the knees. While the assegai was the common weapon of the Zulu, a large proportion were armed with breech-loading and other rifles, bought, as the reward of labor, on the diamond fields of Griqualand West, or smuggled, through the Portuguese, at



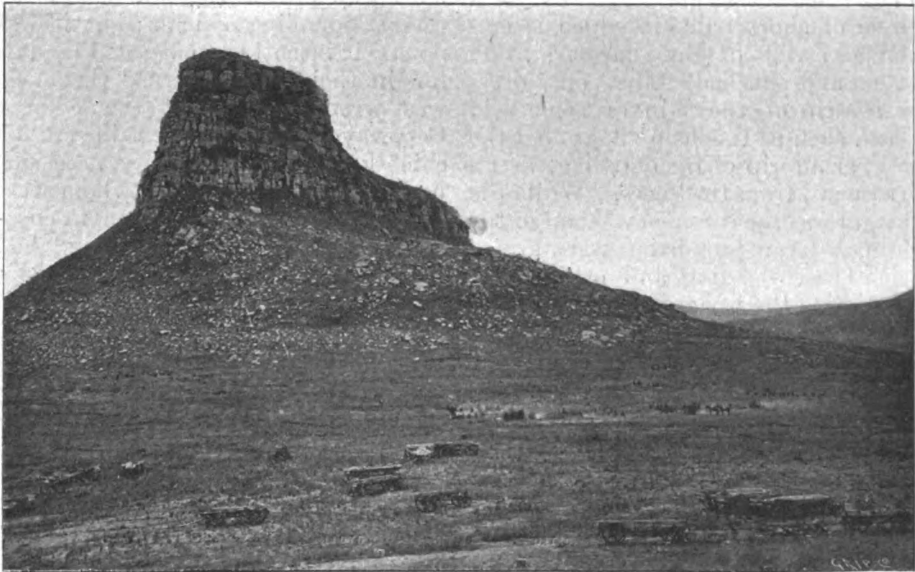
LORD CHELMSFORD.

Delagoa Bay. On the night of the 21st January, the Zulu army had encamped in a valley, under the spurs of the Ngutu hills, about 14 miles beyond them, towards the borders, rose the weird head of Isandhlwana—a grim, bald crag of mysterious aspect, resembling from some points of view a crouching lion, and from others the sphinx-head, which, strange to say, was the emblem of the 24th regiment, the fated detachment of which encamped the next day under its lofty brow and around its bleak neck.

On the 22nd, the Zulu regiments moved forward to the dull rumble of their resounding shields; but it was not their intention to attack that day, for in their superstition, "the moon was wrong,"—just at the change. Cetywayo himself had remained at his chief kraal, and the army here was under four leaders, two of whom were sons of Sihayo, whose action in chasing a runaway wife into Natal had been the immediate cause of the war. It had been intended that one of these chiefs, Matyana, should be in supreme command in the attack, but he being a Natal Kafir, the others were jealous of the glory, and contrived a plan by which he was to go forward to the Upindo to reconnoitre, and they were to follow.

Instead of doing so, they took another road, and so, without designing it, either as to time or place, came upon the British at Isandhlwana. They intended resting a day in the valley where they were camped, the moon being unfavorable for a battle, but during the afternoon firing was heard over the hill, and drew one or two of the Zulu regiments to the top to see what was going on. At first it was said that Matyana's men were engaged, but on reaching the hill-tops they saw a body of British horse coming up the hill from the Isandhlwana side, endeavoring to cut off a herd of cattle which were being driven in by Zulu scouts for security. This led one of the regiments out to drive back the British skirmishers, and so other regiments were drawn in.

The Zulu style of attack is to throw out a horn on either side of the enemy, with the object of closing them in and cutting off their retreat; and in this form closed in the Zulu host upon the British force, which consisted of only about 700 men, 500 belonging to the 24th Regiment, and the balance made up of Natal native mounted infantry and a few of the Natal Carbineers, a colonial volunteer corps. This handful of men had been



ISANDHLWANA, FOUR MONTHS AFTER THE BATTLE.

left by the general to guard a valuable convoy of stores, arms, and ammunition. In South African war tactics, a camp is protected by a "laager," or fort, formed of the bullock wagons locked end to end into each other, and although there were over a hundred wagons available for such a laager, instructions had been given not to form one. Thus, on the exposed camp the Zulus swarmed, pouring over the "neck" of the hill and up the slopes with their booming war-shout, "Islulu," piling battalion on battalion, and reckless of the hundreds that were being cut down by the artillery or dropped by the sharp-shooting of the infantry.

The British had moved out of their cantonment at the opening of the contest, and they fought every inch of ground in the face of the overwhelming host, as they retired again to the camp to make their final stand. The mounted natives of Natal had left their horses in a donga (a natural ditch formed by the freshets of the rainy season), and fought on foot with the regulars.

One party formed about the commissariat wagons and maintained their ground till their ammunition failed, and then they stood there to be stabbed one by one, by assegais hurled at close distance, but out of bayonet reach. A small remnant of this party reached the main body, which now formed in a solid square in the "neck." And here, with their backs to their comrades and faces to their foes, they fought out the hopeless fight. From every side pressed the dark mass of Zulus, in no regular formation, but with a perfect thicket of weapons, and with wild visages that had no feature of either mercy or fear. When again the thundering shout of "Islulu" (literally "the Heavens!") went up, the very heavens themselves that were addressed heard, but seemed to avoid the spectacle of carnage, for a veil of darkness overspread the face of the sun in the midst of a cloudless sky. It was a total eclipse, and the period of greatest obscuration corresponded with the most awful phases of the conflict!

The battle could have but one result. A band of soldiers, seeing that all hope was gone, essayed a retreat towards Rorke's Drift, but—bootless flight—they were overtaken and shot or assegaid by twos and threes, and bodies afterwards found two miles from the camp, showed the limit reached by the last fugitive. A half-dozen or so, had indeed, by some means reached the river, and among them Lieuts. Melville and Coghill, who met their fate in the river in their desperate attempt to save the colors of the regiment. When ammunition was gone, the soldiers took to their revolvers, and even when these could no longer be used, their ranks could not be broken. The heroic remnant were, for the most part, picked off one by one with assegai thrusts, till the little band were simply exterminated, for the Zulus take no prisoners, and neither give nor expect quarter in a fight.

All these details were unknown then, and for months afterwards; in fact, the fullest and most trustworthy accounts we have received—saving for the melancholy story told in the position of the bodies and the wreckage of this rueful field—have been from the lips of the Zulus themselves. Lord Chelmsford camped the very next night on the battle field, and men of the 24th slept among their dead comrades, yet he left next day without burying them. The Zulus had looted the stores, carrying off the arms and every trophy they fancied, and thousands of them then dispersed to their homes, for the double purpose of purifying themselves, according to their custom, after shedding blood, and of securing their plunder. Many of these warriors returned no more to the field. Some had got helplessly drunk on the liquor found in the commissariat wagons, and when the British came up next day, were first supposed to be dead, but when they began to stir were shot or bayoneted where they lay.

Archibald Forbes, visiting the bat-

tlefield some months after, gives a vivid picture of the scene "On the sky-line of the neck of high ground were visible the abandoned wagons of the destroyed column. The line of the retreat towards Fugitives' Drift, along which, through a gap in the Zulu environment, our unfortunate comrades, who thus far survived, tried to escape, lay athwart a rocky slope to our right front, and a precipitous ravine at its base. In this ravine dead men lay thick. All the way up the slope could be traced the fitful line of flight—single bodies and groups, where they seemed to have made a hopeless, gallant stand to die. On the edge of the gully, a gun-limber was jammed, the horses hanging there in their harness down the steep face of the ravine. A little further on was a broken ambulance wagon, with its train of mules dead in their harness, and around were the dead bodies of the poor fellows who had been dragged from their intercepted vehicle. On the crest the dead lay thick, many in



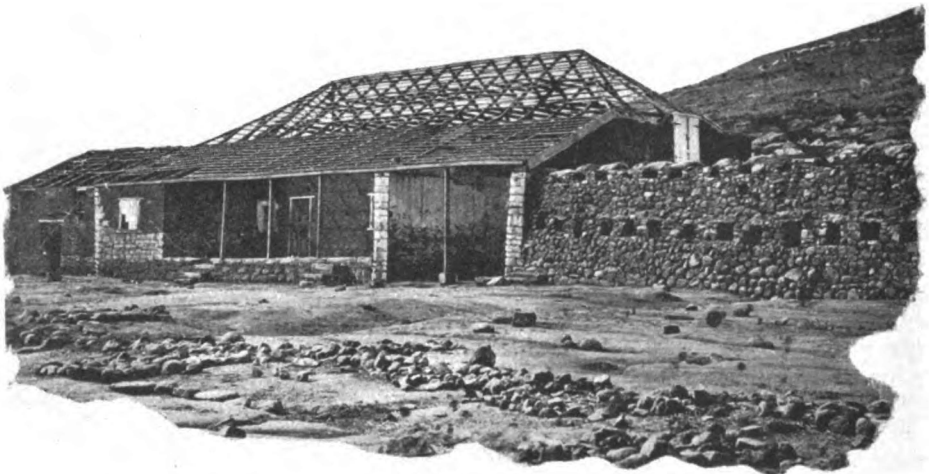
OHAM, CETYWAYO'S BROTHER.

the uniform of the Natal Mounted Police. On the slope beyond, the scene was sadder and more full of weird desolation than any I had yet gazed



upon. There was none of the horror of a recent battlefield; nothing of all that makes the scene of yesterday's battle so rampantly ghastly. A strange, dead calm reigned in this solitude; grain had grown luxuriantly round the wagons, sprouting from the seed that dropped from the loads, falling on soil fertilized by the life-blood of gallant men. So long in most cases had grown the grass, that it mercifully shrouded the dead. \* \* \* In a patch of long grass near the right flank of the camp lay Col. Durnford's body, a central figure of a knot of brave men who had fought it out around their chief to the bitter end.

though interrupted and awful characters, by the remains found resting near the neck. Could it have been guessed that while human recollection failed so utterly to convey to the world a history of the events of that too memorable day, Nature herself would have taken the matter in hand, and told us such a story as no one who hears will ever forget? Four months, all but a day, had elapsed since the defenders of the field stood facing the Zulu myriads,—four months of rain and sun, of the hovering of slow-sailing birds of prey, and of predatory visits of unregarding enemies. Four months! and during all



RORKE'S HOUSE.

A stalwart Zulu, covered by his shield, lay at the Colonel's feet. Around him lay fourteen Natal Carbineers and their officer, Lieut. Scott, with a few mounted police. Clearly they had rallied around Col. Durnford in a last despairing attempt to cover the flank of the camp, when they might have essayed to fly for their horses, close by their side at the piquet line."

At last, after four months, the 24th got permission to go up and bury their dead comrades, on which occasion a correspondent of the *Natal Witness* made these eloquent reflections:—

"Turn to the story of the field of Isandhlwana as now told in plain,

that time, while the world was ringing from one end to the other with the news of a terrible disaster \* \* the dead slept quietly on, waiting, almost consciously one might think, for the revelation which was to establish their fame, and, where necessary, relieve their unjustly sullied reputation. \* \* A sleep unbroken by the noise of war that rolled to the south and north. The defeat of Indhlobane had been suffered; the victory of Kambulu had been gained; the defenders of Rorke's Drift had been rewarded with a nation's praise; the imprisoned column had been relieved from Etshowe; all the roads in Natal had rung to the

tread of men and the rolling of wagon wheels as the force which was to wipe out Isandhlwana moved up to the front \* \* Only the grasses that waved around them whispered of the coming resurrection ; only the stars that looked down when the night winds had ceased, and the hills looked black and silent, bade them be patient and wait. \* \* At last the moment arrived when they were to be identified by their comrades. If the features of the dead were past identification, there was the letter from a sister, the ornament so well known to companions, the marks of rank or the insignia of office. \* \* A black cloud has by these revelations been lifted from the rocks of Isandhlwana and many we deemed dead are living again—living as examples, never to be forgotten, of the honor which tradition has so fondly attached to a British soldier's fame."

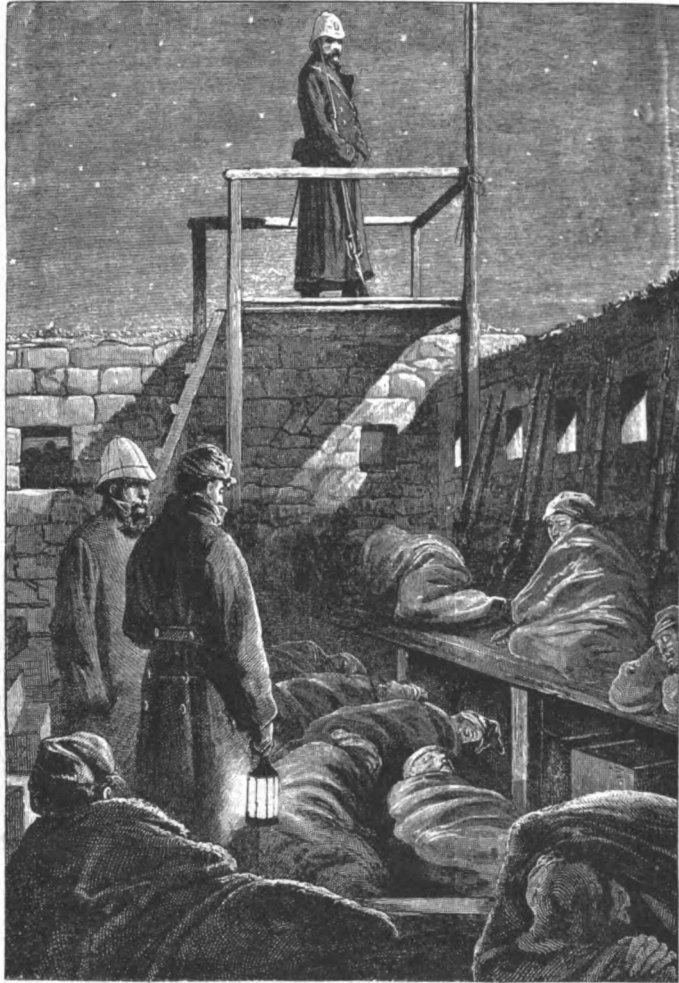
The traveller to the field of Isandhlwana will find even yet numbers of relics of this dreadful day, but the memories of the conflict are now softened by time. An English missionary station—the best and most fitting monument ever built on a battle-field—now stands on the site of the camp, and there, in a language unexcelled for melody, the voices of Zulu worshippers or of Zulu school children may now be heard, with the laughter of Zulu women and girls as they return from their cornfields, or bring home their calabashes of water.

When the Zulus had surrounded the British camp, a division broke off to pursue the fugitives towards the boundary river ford, which henceforth was to be known as Fugitives' Drift, while two regiments, the Undi and Udhloko, made their way more leisurely down to plunder the fort. Rorke's Drift was held on this day by a company of the 24th with some casuals, numbering in all 139. The fort was on the Natal side of the Buffalo River and in command of Lieuts. Chard and Bromhead. It consisted of two build-

ings, close together, one of which was used as a hospital, and the other as a commissariat store. On the afternoon of the 22nd, Lieut. Adendorff, of the Natal Native Contingent, and a carbineer, came galloping up to the river from Zululand, bringing tidings of Isandhlwana and of the advance of the Zulus towards Rorke's Drift. Chard at once gave orders to secure the stores and prepare for the defence of the fort, which he had been instructed to hold at all hazards. Working like beavers, the men secured everything outside, building a passage between the store building and the hospital with bags of mealies, and then commenced an inner defence which they built up of biscuit boxes. While these preparations were going on, an officer with 100 of Durnford's Horse came up and were asked to check the enemy at the drift, retiring when they advanced ; but these men, when their leader was lost, became dispirited and left the scene and retired to Helpmakaar, some miles away. A number of the native contingent also deserted, and the little garrison were left to themselves. The biscuit box defence had not yet been finished when, about half-past four, 600 Zulus appeared over the slope, and soon were dashing with impetuous speed against the south wall. They were met by a steady fire, but, in spite of their loss, came within 50 yards when they were checked by a cross fire from the front of the storehouse. They then swung round to the hospital and made a rush at the mealie bags ; but after a desperate fight they were driven back with heavy loss to seek the shelter of a bush near by. And now the hills were black with the main body of the Zulus, who, swarming up, lined the ledges of rock which overlooked the fort 400 yards away, and occupied the neighboring garden and bush in great numbers. From this bush they rushed out time after time in rapid and reckless assaults, each onset being met with a telling fire and repelled at

the point of the bayonet. The Zulu fire from the rocks took the garrison at a disadvantage, however, and it was so galling that towards sunset they were obliged to retire behind their biscuit boxes. Meantime the Zulus, repeatedly storming the hospital, man-

light on the Zulus sufficient to enable the garrison to mark them out and see all their movements. While the house burned, another entrenchment had to be made, the workers exposed all the while to the assaults and fire of the enemy. The story of this night



ON GUARD AT RORKE'S DRIFT.

aged to set the roof on fire. All the sick that could be brought out were rescued, and the defenders held the door with the bayonet when their ammunition gave out. The building was burnt, but its destruction had this compensation, that it shed a glare of

was a repetition of wild assaults, repelled with a determination that never flagged. Though the defenders were all forced into the inner defences, they still held on, and by daylight next morning the Zulu army had retired beaten. At seven o'clock they were

again seen swarming over the hills, but when they beheld a British column advancing from Helpmakaar they disappeared. Through all this heroic fight the garrison had only fifteen officers and men killed and twelve wounded; while the Zulus had 350 men killed, besides an unknown number of wounded. And thus were the Zulus first taught of what material British soldiers were made.

## A NOVEMBER EVENING.

(*In the Woods and Fields.*)

How sad, how still, seem these lone woods !  
 No stir is in the air :  
 Save for the rustling of the leaves,  
 There's silence everywhere.  
 The glory is departing fast  
 From grove and forest now,  
 But beauty lingers, loth to leave,  
 On every leafless bough.

The cattle, straggling slowly by,  
 A ghostly aspect wear.  
 Like spectres tall, the poplars rise :  
 The elms, all black and bare,  
 Stand grim, with giant arm outstretched,  
 Against the western sky :  
 That spirit world, eye ne'er hath seen,  
 In this weird light, seems nigh.

The wizard gloom of eventide,  
 Tinged by the sun's last ray,  
 Over the fading landscape casts  
 Its mantle dark and grey.  
 Down where the brown reeds fringe the stream,  
 Dim, dusky forms appear ;  
 But, through the shades of gathering night,  
 The light of home shines clear.

Dunnville, Ont.

—THOS. L. M. TIPTON.