

MEMOIRS OF GRANNIE (KIRK) BLAKE 1823 to 1906

AS TOLD TO HER GRANDDAUGHTER, HELEN ROSA MORONEY (nee Kirk)

CHAPTER I.

I can hardly say I remember landing in South Africa, as I was only three years old at the time, but the story of the 1820 settlers has been repeated to me so often; and of a second party, "Shepherd's Party" of 1826, that I almost fancy I could remember our arrival here, hut that is hardly possible at that early age. However, here is the story as I remember it.

Mr. Shepherd first came out with the settlers of 1820; he remained out here about six years and then went back to England. Not to stay there long however, as he returned to South Africa with a second party of settlers - always known afterwards as "Shepherd's Party".

My father, Samuel Webber with his wife and family, four girls and two boys, being of the party.

Land had been promised these settlers on condition that they paid their own passages out, but on landing Earl Bathurst informed them that there was no more land to be given out free: anyone wishing to obtain land would have to buy it.

So this was a first disappointment in a life which you will see proved to be full of difficulties and hardships.

My father then decided to start business in a public-house in Grahamstown called the Commercial Tavern, in Bathurst Street. But this being only a managership he soon got a place of his own in New Street. This business was chiefly managed by my mother while my father went trading beyond the Orange River, towards Bechuanaland, called Mohuro's country in those days.

In one of these journeys he reached Livingstone's Mission Station - the father-in-law of the famous Dr. Livingstone.

For the goods my father bartered to the Natives he would receive cattle and native curios of all descriptions, such as beautiful karosses, wooden spoons, etc., which in turn were sold to the officers of different regiments stationed in Grahamstown.

These officers were fond of visiting the little inn in New Street and listening to father's "sailor yarns", (he had been a sailor in his youth, but mere of that anon).

We continued in this way for about seven years. I was now beginning to remember distinctly all that happened here-after. In 1833 we moved to Sunday's River, where once more father tried his luck at a wayside inn. But he was one of the most generous men who ever lived: we did not make a fortune, life went on as "before, lots of callers, lots of friends, all treated in his usual hospitable way.

Here our first great trouble befell us. The Native War of 1834 to 1835 came like a thunderbolt. Though the natives had been quietly preparing for months, no one suspected in the least what was so near. On Christmas Day of 1834 the bolt fell.

Near Grahamstown was a farm called the Clay Pits, then owned by Andersen and Mahoney, who were the first to suspect that all was not well. These men with their families hurried away in waggons. These unfortunate people were overtaken, both men killed in cold blood, the waggons were searched and looted, but the women were left unharmed, and they eventually found their way into Grahamstown on foot. A servant belonging to the party ran away in her terror with the youngest child, and was away for several days in the bush, before a patrol which had been sent out, found them also unharmed.

Quickly the uprising spread - farm after farm was raided, all the men were killed, though the women were surprisingly unmolested. Our own experience was as painful as any.

Sir Harry Smith came up to take command, and my father was asked, with the field cornet, Pieter Niekerk, to supply horses and act as guides through the Adder Bush, a dense » forest of about fourteen miles.

Hearing that a farm at the top of the bush had been raided my father and Mr. Niekerk returned to make some safer arrangement about their own families, and this is what followed:-

A Native boy was sent to collect the horses of the farm. He returned to report that no horses could be found, but that the prints of horses hoofs could be seen with Native spoor following them, my father reported this to a party of Boers who were at Pieter Niekerk's acting as a patrol for the district. This patrol went out but evidently kept to the main road, as they returned without any success. Then my brother Sam, a lad of only eighteen, was sent out accompanied by a Hottentot boy.

As they were crossing a drift with thick bush on either side, the Hottentot said, "Baas, don't let your horse stop to drink, I can hear kaffirs whistling." But the poor lad answered : "It is only birds." Just then a shower of assegais fell. The Hottentot having a fresh horse raced away, but my brother, he said, stopped to fire a shot. It was hopeless of course as he was completely outnumbered.

When we heard from the boy what had happened, a patrol went out and brought my brother's body in. It had sixteen assegai wounds.

After this the Field Cornet Niekerk advised my father to bring us all over to his place which had been made into a sort of laager with about forty men, twenty Boers and twenty Hottentots in defence. The night after we joined them the Natives attacked the place, and got so near that four or five held the outer door, so that if anyone dared to open it, in came a shower of bullets.

This was a very one sided game, so one of the Hottentots managed to creep out unseen and got his gun onto them, and this dispersed them. This sort of skirmishing continued for several months, the Natives keeping to the bush and raiding solitary farms, doing no end of damage and looting, as well as murdering any unfortunate white men they came across.

However, Sir Harry Smith with a motley army of commandeered men - burghers, Hottentots, regular soldiers, and even the sailors from any passing vessel managed to quell the disturbances. Not before, however, most of the unfortunate settlers had lost nearly all the little possessions they had gathered together by hard work, much suffering and many drawbacks.

So the country settled down, and once more we had to begin afresh. The homes that had been burnt down had to be rebuilt, and life started just where we had begun seven or eight years before.

CHAPTER II.

It was just after the events in the preceding chapter that my mother, the most devoted of wives, was afflicted by a paralytic stroke which took away the use of her right side. Through this, our inn at Sunday's River was let, and we went into Fort Elizabeth for medical assistance.

Here we remained for twelve months, My father went for several long trading expeditions into the "interior" as it was then called, but known later as the Orange Free State. His partner in these expeditions was a certain Joe Hubbard.

We now returned to our former home at Sunday's River, but my mother now a cripple, we found the place more than we could manage, so my sister Mary's husband, Mr. Henry Harvey, took over the Wayside Inn, and we lived, in a small cottage on the farm.

After three more years, about the year 1840, my brother-in-law having given up the inn, a strange thing happened that decided my father to sell the farm. The farm was overrun by a plague of "thousand leg" insects. They were as bad as a swarm of locusts. Great heaps of them would gather in the houses and kraals, in thousands and millions. We tried destroying them with boiling water, but nothing made the slightest difference. So my father sold out in sheer disgust.

Among one of the events most vivid in my mind of our stay, here, was seeing Lady Smith who accompanied her husband Sir Harry, on his way to Grahamstown. She was a charming lady to our childish minds. Later on I became acquainted with the romantic and interesting way in which she became Sir Harry's wife. She was a beautiful Spanish girl, and during some campaign in which Sir Harry was an officer, this lovely lady appealed to his protection. He rescued her and afterwards married her. They had no children but travelled with a number of Spanish dogs, Lady Smith's pets.

I also remember some other important visitors : General Napier and his wife, who passed by at the time of the "thousand leg" plague, and to prove how serious the plague was, these people were actually afraid to sleep in the inn, but preferred to stay in their waggons.

There were any number of wild animals all over the country at this time: elephants, lions, tigers, baboons. Often have I watched elephants in stately procession stalking down to the river to drink, looking like tented waggons in the distance. We were not troubled much by these wild beasts, but had to keep a strict guard on our own animals, as occasionally if any happened to be left out at night they would come rushing home in wild alarm driven by some wild beast. I have known cows to be chased to the gate of the kraal and there have their udders torn out before our eyes.

One day I had ridden to a neighbouring farm to take a Dutch girl home. Returning home, I had to pass Zwarts Drift, the place where my poor brother had been killed. There I saw the remains of a cow which had just been eaten by lions. But on the whole we were not much worried by wild animals; this is the more remarkable considering the wild and overgrown state of the country, we being practically surrounded by dense bush.

We now once more "trekked", to a place called Mill River near Grahamstown which was to be our home for about four years.

But before I enter into any more of our personal history I would like to tell of a sad episode in Boer history before I get too far away from it. It was about the year 1838 during our stay with my invalid mother in Port Elizabeth, that one of the worst massacres took place among the early Boer pioneers, I mean the tale of Dingaan's treachery. A number of Boer emigrants under Pieter Retief left various parts of the Cape Colony to seek a new home. After weary months of trekking in waggons, they eventually reached Zululand and arranged a friendly meeting with the great Native Chief Dingaan, who met them to all intents and purposes in the same spirit, to discuss the possibility of procuring land and forming a settlement. This treacherous Chief invited Retief and his sixty men into his private "skerm", bade his young warriors bring kaffir beer and dance a war dance, in the midst of which the old warriors rushed upon the defenceless white men and assegaied every one of them. For the sake of "etiquette" the Dutchmen had left all their guns outside and so were entirely at the mercy of Dingaan. After this horrible murder Dingaan sent out his -warriors at night to the different laagers the emigrants had made, and "before they heard the alarm many men, women and children were murdered.

When however the state of affairs became generally known, the remainder of the Boers turned out bravely and attacked their merciless enemy and actually succeeded in driving them off.

The troubles and hardships this little band of voortrekkers must have undergone is not easily imagined in these days of peace and tranquillity. Beset by savages on every side with only their rifles to defend themselves and their small possessions against tremendous odds, one marvels at the spirit of endurance, and can understand how their descendants after a hundred years still show the same love of pioneering.

It is all ancient history now how these brave pioneers came down into Natal as far as Pietermaritzburg, and there left a memorial to themselves for all time, but not many people are living today (1906), who actually saw these emigrants trekking along in companies of waggons of thirty or forty in number, each with a little box of fruit trees tied firmly on, to start new gardens in that far off colony they were seeking.

CHAPTER III. -

Mill River.

This, our new home, was a large well-watered farm, half of it belonging to a Mr. Webb, commonly called "Webb the pump-maker" to distinguish him from various other Webbs. Here we led a quiet life, farming with sheep, while my father did transport riding to and from the "Bay" as Port Elizabeth was usually called in those days. We girls were very happy here, dancing two or three times a week, to the music of an old violin, which my father provided.

After four years however we found we were not prospering, and sorry as we were to leave, father decided to move once more.

About this time a Mr. John Vaughan, of Fort Beaufort, persuaded him to go there and join him in a butchers business So everything was sold and we moved to Fort Beaufort. This partnership did not prove a success and was soon dissolved.

My father then bought a small trading business in the village which my widowed sister, Mrs. James, and I managed, while father took on a contract for bricks for numerous buildings that were in construction. Among others some barracks, were to be built for a regiment of dragoon guards - "The seventh or Princess Royal Dragoon Guards" to give them their proper title. Later it was my fate to marry one of these dragoons.

We came to Fort Beaufort about 1842, and the following year I met young Sergeant Adam Alexander Kirk of the 7th Dragoon Guards. We became friends and later on he asked me to marry him. He was an extraordinarily shy man, as the following tale will tell.

On the night of our engagement he was late getting back to barracks having been receiving the congratulations of his friends at a neighbouring inn. Consequently he was confined to barracks for several days, and as a result was too shy to meet me again or to explain the affair to me. So we did not meet for a year afterwards when we made it up and decided to get married on October the 11th, 1844. After we had been married about five months, March of 1845, two troops of the Dragoon Guards, the Infantry and the Artillery, were called out to move up to Philippolis district to assist Adam Kok, chief of the Griquas, subjects of the British, who were asking for help against the Boers who were attacking them.

My father came up with his waggons in Government employ, so in this way I was able to follow my husband.

We reached Philippolis at the end of March, we made quick progress having no drawbacks on the way.

On the first of April the Dragoons mustered and marched out. I remained in Philippolis. On the second or third of April our soldiers met the enemy at a place called Zwartkoppies. The Dragoons opened fire, and then charged with swords drawn, at once the enemy surrendered - an easy victory. It was, however, at least two months before terms of peace were arranged.

Andrew Hudson Bain Esq. was our mediator.

This gentleman had come from India. Years later he had the honour of entertaining Prince Alfred on the occasion of his visit to South Africa, at his beautiful farm near Bloemfontein called "Bainsvlei". It may not be generally known that the chief Morroco of Taba'Nchu sent out his men to collect all the game of the district on to Mr. Bain's farm to enable the Prince and his retinue to have a good day's hunting.

This same Mr. Bain was the soul of hospitality, and no one of any consequence ever visited the country without being entertained by him. And yet such is the uncertainty of this life that he died in great poverty and had a pauper's funeral.

We left Philippolis in June of the same year, and reached Fort Beaufort on the 15th of July, after a tedious journey through snow-covered hills. Once when it was thought too dangerous for me and a Mrs. Nicholson, the only other woman with the waggons to ride, we had to wade knee-deep through a snow-covered pass.

You will understand how thankful I was to get home when I tell you that my first child, a son, Edwin, was born on the 2nd of August, 1845.

CHAPTER IV

It was shortly after this that my father left me, always to return to me at intervals, and at the very last to end his days with me. He now joined his son-in-law, Mr. Henry Harvey in the Orange Free State. I feel that this is a fitting opportunity to give a little sketch of the life of, to my mind, a grand old character.

Though a strict, yet a very just father; and we, his children, loved and honoured him. Born in London in 1785, he went to sea as cabin-boy at the early age of twelve on the man o' war "Aboukir", under Admiral Parker, leaving his pay for his mother. After going through the usual course of training, he became Captain's steward, in which capacity he remained until he finally left to marry and settle in London.

Among some of the tales he used to tell, were two I remember best. One incident of interest was that their vessel was sailing off the Texel the time Napoleon made his escape from Elba. And the other was that at some time when Queen Catherine was on the Continent, she invited Admiral Parker to dinner, and my father was taken as the Admiral's special attendant. He used to tell of a little quiet smuggling he used to do for his brother, a watchmaker in Woolwich. He would carry little French watches in the heels of his Wellington boots - evidently made hollow for the purpose.

Of his life in London we did not know very much. He carried on a small business for several years, in fact till the emigration fever started in England, when as I have already said, he came out to South Africa with his family.

He was a fine man in every sense, well liked and respected, by all; his one fault, if it can be called a fault, was that he was too generous. He was famous for his unbounded hospitality to his friends and even strangers, consequently he was never much possessed of the goods of this world. To give some idea of his extreme good nature: During our residence at the inn at Sunday's River, my father one day had occasion to put a man out-of-doors as he was drinking too much and making himself objectionable. The man retaliated by striking the old man; My father was then obliged to have him arrested and taken to the Uitenhage jail twenty-four miles off. The case came off and the offender was fined £1, and as he was penniless, my father lent him the money to release himself.

My husband's troop F. of the 7th Dragoon Guards was now ordered to Grahamstown to take the place of D. troop which had been sent to Bloemfontein. The mention of D. troop brings an interesting story to my mind. A certain Sergeant Moffat of this troop had married a beautiful woman with a unique history. Years before in England a little girl persuaded a boy to change clothes with her. She got a barber to cut off her hair and then ran away and joined some ship's crew. She hid her identity until quite a grown young woman. Then one day by accident she fell overboard, and was almost taken by a shark. Being in a fainting condition when rescued, the sailors partly guessed there was something suspicious about the "boy". But she knocked down the doctor who was told to examine her, and only by strategy did some ladies on board manage to find out that the "cabin-boy" was a young woman.

On arriving at Port Elizabeth the Captain of the ship left her there. Later on she went to Grahamstown, and was engaged in Mr. Shepperson's store. Here Mary Ann Arnold, as the sailor-girl was called, met Sergeant-Major Moffat and was married to him.

Sir Harry Darrel, Captain of the troop, gave the bride away. As I said before, we were new settled in Grahamstown, this was the year 1846 just before another Kaffir rising.

Grahamstown, as it was then, is perhaps worth describing. A scattered straggling place, the even mostly enclosed with sod walls, with prickly pears planted on the top. Everyone in High Street knew everyone on Settlers' Hill. The Drostdy, a sort of Courthouse built by the Boers, and used by them for their Raad, was the most important building in the town. It was built on a plot called Drostdy Field with an embankment around. This place was later on altered and used as a barracks, with officers quarters and hospital added.

The lovely gardens which I believe have since grown were not dreamt of then, but a place called Government Garden was used as a nursery for raising trees for the streets, and perhaps some of the old oak trees growing in the streets now are some of the same I saw planted then.

CHAPTER V.

We were now settled in the old Cape Corps Camp on the outskirts of Grahamstown, towards Dale's Kloof.

Suddenly on Christmas Day the Natives began to massacre the settlers. The country was wholly unprepared for this out-break, so a motley army of regulars, Dutch, Malays and Indians, were called upon to take part. Any vessels passing by were stopped, and sailors landed to come to our assistance. The old 50th regiment on its way from China was stopped and brought up also.

I remember a little incident so well that caused much amusement.

A sergeant of this company came to a dance, for though we were in a state of war we still made merry in a gorgeous Chinese dress of the most lovely silk, a startling sight.

The war proved a troublesome affair to settle, for the simple reason that the Natives kept to the bush, and never gave our men the opportunity of meeting them in the open. Only on one occasion was there a proper fight. All day the poor soldiers had been trying to get at the enemy in the bush, when suddenly both sides came out into the open on a plain called the Gwanga. The Dragoons rushed at them with their swords, killing numbers; the Natives were of course panic-stricken and fled directly they realised what was happening.

The following episode is worth recording, if only to prove that the officers of those early days blundered just as sadly as they do today. These officers decided that as they had had a very rough time in the 1845 war, they would fight in comfort this time, so silver plate, full kits and all the rest of their paraphernalia as well as all regimental records and books, were taken on active service. A convoy of sixty waggons started out escorted by only a few men with dense bush to travel through. The result is easily imagined. The Natives waylaid the convoy in the first bush, shot down the oxen in the first waggon, killed and robbed and burnt all they wished to, in fact destroyed everything they did not want, and to my amazement I saw an advertisement by the 7th Dragoons while they were out during the Boer war of 1900, for this very same silver-plate, lost by the regiment ever fifty years before.

This war lingered on to the end of 1847, when Sir Harry Smith came and arranged terms of peace. He also wished to form a militia but there was such an outcry against it, especially in Fort Beaufort, that he is said to have remarked in his rather forceful manner, "Damn you, if you will not have a militia, you shall have no troops." So he withdrew all the troops, and told the people of the town that they would soon see the grass

growing in the streets. I had occasion to return there after the war and saw Sir Harry's words come true, for the town looked deserted and soon became overgrown.

CHAPTER VI.

We remained at Fort Beaufort for a time, and the country settled down once more to peaceful occupations, but very distressing was the devastation to property and the sad loss of life. Before leaving here for the Orange Free State our future home, I wish, to tell of an exciting and, in the end, rather fearsome experience.

Towards the end of January 1848, a heavy rain set in. We rather enjoyed it at first, but when it had lasted a week without a break it became monotonous, and when it still continued day and night we became alarmed. The town of Fort Beaufort is surrounded by the Kat River on three sides, and on the remaining side by the Brakspruit, so we feared a washout. And that is just what happened.

At the end of the second week's rain the whole place was in flood. The town being on a hillock the people living on the lower slopes were first to have to move. We got cut just in time, as the water was pouring in at the doors. To give some idea of how the river rose, there was a wooden bridge above the stone one, and the former was swept over the latter.

On the 14th February my second son Charles was born, and a month later we moved up to Adam Kok's land, my husband being one of the men who had taken his discharge. Many more Dragoons remained and settled on what was called "Military Settlements", as well as many other men who had served in the Cape Corps.

My dear old father comes into my life again at this time. He came down to Fort Beaufort with his waggons on business, and we were only too glad to take the chance of getting to Philippolis, then under Adam Kok, in his waggons. After a tedious journey we reached our destination, where we hoped to settle.

Meanwhile we stayed with a friend, Mr. Harvey.

It was not long though before we again heard rumours of war. This time between the Boers and English. By June my husband decided to re-cross the Orange River as it was apparent that the Boers had made up their minds to clear all Britishers out of the country. This was not a difficult matter as the Dragoons who had been stationed there had been recalled after the Kaffir war was over.

A Boer commando went into Bloemfontein and turned out Major Warden, the British Resident, and every English person in the place. Then we had to wait for good old Sir Harry Smith to come and settle the quarrel. Unfortunately the river was in flood before Sir Harry could get across. The soldiers tried crossing in a punt, but this wretched thing got stuck on a rock in the middle of the river. Then a pontoon bridge had to be sent for and fixed up before a crossing could be effected. The Boers meanwhile moved off to a place called "Boomplaats", of historical fame.

We moved into Colesburg, and managed to get two rooms to live in, while my father put his waggons into Government employ. This seemed the most practical thing to do, as there was no telling how long the present unsettled state of affairs would last.

We had a most trying time to get to Colesburg with only one Native boy to help drive the two waggons. However a Dutchman kindly agreed to assist us. The first waggon started to cross the river, and as no one seemed to know the drift, it got stranded on a rock. My husband stood for hours in the water struggling with the oxen, but in vain, and in this plight our "kind" friend the Dutchman wanted to leave us. No persuading could persuade him to stay and help us out of this predicament. My sister Ann, who was generally a match for anyone tried to induce him to stay even to taking his horse away, but it made no difference, he left-us to our miserable fate.

However, the next morning a good Samaritan, a Mr. Colby, the son of a missionary, was passing by and helped us by advising us to pull the waggon back and cross by the punt, which of course we did, and finally reached Colesburg in a practically starving state. By this time the British had got over the river and found the Boers at Boomplaats, but as that tale is a matter of old history I need not repeat. Our two waggons had gone with the troops, and after Boomplaats the one was kept as a hospital waggon. The troops now took possession of Bloemfontein, only two men being killed in the occupation, a Boer and a deserter. My husband told me the latter was a splendid looking fellow by the name of Quigley.

I remained in Colesburg for about three months after the Boomplaats affair. During this time my husband, who had been with the waggons, got two billets in Bloemfontein after everything was settled. Through the kind influence of Sir Harry Smith he got the job of market-master and also that of commissariat issuer. So when I joined him I found him very cheerful although he had to camp out in the store tents.

Bloemfontein consisted in those days of one street with very few houses, and it was quite impossible for newcomers to get a house of any description. I also had to live in these tents until some erven were sold, when we bought one and moved down to it, still having to live in tents. Although we were a large family we managed to make ourselves quite comfortable. There was my father and sister Ann as well as my husband, myself, and two young children. My father, ever ingenious, turned the tent of the waggon into a comfortable room for himself.

If things could have gone on in this way we should have managed well enough. But unfortunately Kirk had a slight disagreement with a farmer about some cheese that had been sold on the market, and overlooked in the market accounts. Someone who was anxious to run the market advised the farmer to report the matter to Major Warden, who was back as British Resident. The latter was very insulting to my husband, who tried to explain that it was a mistake. But Major Warden seemed to doubt this, so Kirk being hot-tempered, threw down the market books and said he would have nothing more to do with it. Of course it was not long after that he was politely told that his services as commissariat issuer were no longer required.

Before this happened we had managed to put up some sort of a house on our erf on the market square, opposite to where the Dutch Church has since been built. These erven were sold at seven or eight pounds at that time.

I worked harder here than I had ever worked before in my life, taking in boarders. The money used then was dollars, valued at one shilling and sixpence, and the charge for boarders was thirty dollars a month; not a fortune by any means. On the other hand living was cheap. The best Boer meal was only £1. a bag, and slaughter 14 dollars each. The Boers used to bring in plenty of wild buck "biltong", which could be bought very cheaply.

CHAPTER VII

Kirk being now out of a billet decided to go trading. This was about the year 1849. So with a waggon loaded with goods he set out to cross the Vaal River. Much as I should have liked joining my husband on this trip, I did not feel I should leave old father, so my husband set out with a young friend called Fletcher. Imagine my surprise when at the end of a week the 'boy' came back to say that the waggon had broken down. So I just had a little mare saddled and set off with the Native boy on a six hours ride, to catch up the waggon, to see if I could give any advice. I was dog-tired when I got there, and easily persuaded Kirk that I should go on with them. I might as well say here that my husband was never anything else but a soldier, and very much of a "rooinek" and always depended on my advice.

First I had to ride back home to pack some things for the trip; my sister Ann took the two little boys to stay with relatives, and my father went to a Mr. Geddy's Mission Station at Plaatberg in Basutoland. I then got a Boer waggon to take me to Mud River where Kirk was waiting for me.

This trip did not prove at all a success, and after four months trekking we found ourselves rather the losers than otherwise. The first trouble was that when we reached Mooi River we found that the licence taken out in Bloemfontein was no good, and we required another one out here, and to our annoyance and disgust the same thing happened at Daniel Pretorius' farm so we decided to go no further than this.

This was close to Magaliesburg. We sold the goods mostly in exchange for ivory, the price of which was twelve shillings and sixpence per pound, and oxen at three pounds fifteen shillings each. We sold the ivory at the same price in Bloemfontein, but were only offered seventeen dollars each for the oxen.

The Boers were very "slim" at this form of trading. Arriving at a farm you were asked to unpack your goods, they would get the various prices and then bring in their herds, and put their prices on them. If you wished to exchange well and good, if not you could just pack up and go on.

The country was wild and sparsely populated, with any amount of game everywhere. It was a wonderful sight one day to see about fourteen lions, young and old, romping about like cats with each other. We noticed the herd-boy rushing the cattle close to the waggon and on asking him why he did it, he simply said "Look there", and to our surprise there, not very far away, was this wonderful yet terrifying spectacle.

I had rather a narrow escape myself when we reached the eye of the Mooi River, as the fountains that form the source of the river are called. This is really a beautiful sight, fountains bubbling all about with tall grass between. I had heard that there were beautiful pebbles to be found here, so I went and had a good look around. I afterwards told Mrs. Pretorius what I had done, and she said, "Good heavens, woman, I would not have done that for all the money in the world. Don't you know the place swarms with lions?"

Returning home by a slightly different route, we crossed the Mooi River two farms below the "eye" on a very make-shift bridge, logs laid over with other logs across. Fortunately the river is not very wide so we crossed in safety.

The farm we stayed at here was a very beautiful property, with a huge garden, the fruit from which we much enjoyed. The old lady and her husband were anxious to sell and no doubt if we had had a few hundred dollars to spare we might have got a property which has since proved to be worth thousands of pounds. But, as I said before, the country was so wild then that one felt beyond the bounds of everything. So after resting here a day, we travelled homewards and nothing further happened.

Our house in Bloemfontein still being let we moved down to our brother-in-law, Mr. Henry Harvey's farm in Phillipolis, and Kirk took the cattle we had got down to Grahamstown. They were the cattle we had traded for on our trip. That was the only condition we could sell them on; a Mr. Monach consenting to buy them on these terms.

After my husband's return, we returned to Bloemfontein, and found my father there also, and it was at this time he got hold of rather a remarkable old violin. His nephew, Tom Webber, had got it somewhere in the Cape Colony, and sold it to my father for a double-barrelled gun, on condition that it should revert to him on my father's death. This he never did, so it was left to my youngest son, Samuel, and is still in the family. On the inside of the violin are the names: Paola Albani, Pece in Palvana 1769; also some other name like Recommodcre 1877.

My third son, Adam Alexander, was born while I was at Philipopolis in April 1850, and here my sister and the other two little boys joined me again.

From Bloemfontein, where we could see no way of making a living we went to Plaatburg with my father, and by his advice. Mr. Geddy, as I have already said, had a mission here in Moshesh's country. It was a very good district for trading, so we started in a small way to try our luck in this line. We found a fairly comfortable house, the property of Capt. Corrolus Bytjes, Captain of the Bastards, as the Griqua race was then called.

But war clouds seemed never to be very far away. We had not been settled many months, when Major Warden found it necessary to come out with some troops to quiet the Basutos. These latter were constantly thieving from farmers on the border, and as there were complaints being lodged, it was necessary to take some steps in the matter so Major Warden had a consultation with the Bastards' Chief, Corrolus Bytjes. The result of this was that Bytjes and his people joined Major Warden, and left with him; so Mr. Geddy the missionary, Mr. Clarey a trader, and ourselves, were the only white people left. Because of the war scare, two other families from Basutoland joined us, so we were five families in all.

The same night that Major Warden and the Bastards left, Mr. Charles Green, Brother of the Commissariat Officer in Bloemfontein arrived at Plaatberg to join Major Warden, but found he had already gone. Mr. Green's Bullocks were stolen by Natives so he was stranded there with us as well.

Major Warden with his mixed troops of white men, Bastards and Baralonga, came to a mountain called "Viervoet", and here the wily Native laid a neat trap for them. On the top of the mountain was a large herd of cattle and not a Native to be seen anywhere, so our troops were allowed to swarm up the mountain on the narrow and only pathway there was. One of our cannons had stuck at the foot of the mountain so it was out of action. When all our troops were well up the mountain, the Basutos rushed from all directions, closed the only pathway, and simply Butchered our Native troops, throwing them over the krantzies. Our troops made the best retreat they could, and at dawn Major Warden with his attacking force was well on the way back to Bloemfontein. The chief Moshesh told me afterwards in these very words, "Major Warden got into his little cart, and 'he run away." Goodness knows where he learned sufficient English to express himself like that.

CHAPTER VIII.

Our men-folk, Messrs. Geddy, Clarey and my father now had a consultation and decided we should ask old Moshesh, the Chief, with whom we were on excellent terms, to give us some protection from his people, so he kindly sent one of his chief headmen, a churchman too, and we felt quite safe.

For three months or more we were entirely isolated, having no intercourse with the outer world whatever. During that time we never saw a white caller, as everyone shunned this part of the country, and though we were under Moshesh's special protection we had to put up with a great deal of impudence from some of the Natives.

Moshesh enquired at one time if there was a white man who could carry a letter into Bloemfontein to Major Warden. Mr. Clarey and my husband decided to go together, and informed Moshesh to this effect. The letter arriving, these two men started the following day at dawn on the long journey.

During the time we were so isolated at this station, the Basutos had trekked in and settled quite peaceably all round us in the hills. The Bastards after the fight at "Viervoet" had been settled at Mud River. They made up a Commando, as we only learned afterwards, and came down and attacked these Natives. So our surprise can be imagined when, the night after our two men had left with Moshesh's letter, we woke up at night hearing shots being fired all round us, and on rushing to my window I could see the flash of shots clearly in the moonlight. Being taken wholly unaware, the Bastards had it all their own way, they opened the kraals, and making a good haul of stock, cleared off again. The Basutos, however, quickly recovered from the shock, and followed up. They swarmed by in hundreds, and we could hear the firing until ten o'clock the next day. It proved an unsuccessful chase however, as we saw them return later without their herds of stock, Mr. Geddy took his waggon out to fetch in two wounded men the Bastards had shot. These he tended and cared for. The next day a party of fully-armed Basutos arrived, assegais and knob-kerries in great evidence, quite determined, I feel sure, to murder us all.

It was all Mr. Geddy and old Abraham the headman, could do to run backwards and forwards and persuade them to be quiet and not harm us. Our houses being a little distance from each other made it more difficult. They would flourish their weapons first at one house and then at another. They seemed to think that as the Bastards had attacked them the same night Clarey and Kirk had gone to Bloemfontein, that we must have given them the tip to catch the Basutos unaware. It required the greatest persuasion to get this idea out of their heads, but they finally moved off home again, and we were most thankful to see the last of these indignant warriors.

My husband and Mr. Clarey arrived safely in Bloemfontein with the letter from Moshesh, and Major Warden wanted someone else to return with them with despatches to Moshesh. A man name Ringlow Thompson, a clever fellow, volunteered to come. This same gentleman was in command of a Native contingent brought up from Natal, to assist Major Warden.

An unfortunate report reached Bloemfontein that all the Europeans at Plaatberg had been massacred, and poor old Clarey always a little fond of drinking, gave way entirely on hearing this, and was unable to return. Ringlow Thompson and Kirk then started back without him. As they drew near the station, Thompson said he would go first to see if everybody had really been killed. Poor Kirk's feelings can be imagined thinking we were all dead. Mr. Thompson arranged to wave his hat if he saw anyone, and to Kirk's delight he saw his hat go up.

Thompson and Moshesh had a meeting which proved quite satisfactory, for the roads were soon opened and peace restored. It had been a most trying time for the little band of Europeans, cut off from all association with their own kind, in the midst of hordes of Natives, who, although promising us protection, were only primitive in their ideas and therefore not reliable.

We had some narrow escapes and fully realised our precarious state. The day after the Battle of "Viervoet" for instance, the Natives came passing by with their blood stained weapons, fierce and almost unmanageable. They tied Mr, Charles Green to his waggon ready for stabbing, but good old Abraham ran to his rescue. They thought nothing of walking into our homes and taking anything they wanted, but my fearless old father could not stand it sometimes, and he would rush and take away anything he thought too valuable to allow them to carry off. One day he had a fall out with a Native doctor, and the latter pointed his gun at my father, when Abraham saved him by knocking the gun up. The doctor then turned and aimed the gun at a pig walking near.

CHAPTER IX

After things had settled down more quietly, Ringlow Thompson returned to Bloemfontein with the good news that we had not all been killed at the station, so poor old Clarey who had been drowning his sorrow all this time decided to go home to his family. He and a man named Gleeson started off together, and when only half way back one of the horses knocked up. Clarey, no doubt feeling very ill, was glad of an excuse to rest, and sent Gleeson on ahead with a message to his wife to send a waggon to fetch him. This naturally took time to arrange, and when the waggon reached the spot on the big Lieuvre River where Clarey had waited, he was nowhere to be seen. After a considerable search his corpse was found. He had taken off his clothes, made a pillow of them, placed his boots beside him, and then had lain down, never to wake again.

After we got Clarey home and buried, my father took ill. He had made the coffin, working very hard in a draught, and caught a severe cold. Kirk had gone over the river trading with grain, so one evening I had a most exciting time. Mrs. Clarey had got a room from us for storing grain, and no doubt the scare I had was due to a Native knowing that this grain was stored with us. I and an old Hottentot woman we had, were sitting sowing late into the night with a darkened window (I always darkened the window not to attract passers-by). Suddenly there was a bang on the window and crash went a pane of glass in the room with the grain. We rushed out to find that the glass had broken near the catch, but we had frightened away anyone who intended robbery. I went to my father's room, an outside one, to tell him; so he insisted on coming to sleep in the dining-room. This must have given him a second chill, as he got very very bad after this, and we nearly lost him.

Next morning I went across to Mrs Clarey, to tell her our experience and found that she had had a similar one. She said she had heard noises in the place, but being rather deaf, she just called out "Cats, Cats." And next morning she found that it must have been one or more Natives, judging from the number of things she missed, even her husband's boots had been stolen. These were the sort of things we might expect any day or night, yet we were unable to get away.

Father as I said was very ill indeed, and a Dutchman calling one day, asked me if the old man was dead or alive. I explained his case. He then asked if Mr. Geddy had not done anything for him, and seemed

astonished to hear that the Rev. gentleman had not been to see him. On leaving us the Dutchman evidently called at Dr. Geddy's and spoke to him, for the same evening he and a Reverend Schreiner, a missionary from Basutoland and father of "Olive Schreiner" called, and after a chat with my father, Mr. Geddy went home and sent the old man some powders, which certainly did him good, for shortly after he took a turn for the better.

We were still very isolated. The Natives were afraid of each other and we had little opportunity of intercourse with the Free State, and not much of any moment happened at this time.

Poor Brown died. He was one of the men who had come to our station when the war started. Wood was so scarce that, ingenious as my father was, he found the greatest difficulty in making a coffin. Then we had few pall-bearers. The two or three men available would straggle to get the coffin onto a waggon and thus take it to its resting place.

One or two more unpleasant incidents come back to my mind of our stay at Plaatberg. Old Nell, my Hottentot servant, had a row with a young Kafir one day. The usual crowd was hanging about, and losing her temper, the old woman struck the Native with an axe. Then the fat was in the fire. The Natives stormed and jumped around swearing they would kill her. I was busy in the kitchen and the first I knew about it was the old woman rushing in and taking shelter behind me. In rushed the Natives as well, assegais in the air. They did not attempt however to force themselves past me, but clamoured for the woman to come out. You can imagine my relief when Mr. Geddy and good old Abraham came and talked to them. It took a considerable parley to settle the matter and persuade them to go away.

Some of Mr Geddy's family went to visit the Rev. Daniel's Missionary to chief Sinkinyela. They took with them as leader a Native boy I had in my employ as a gardener for a short time. He had one day demanded his pay before the term he was engaged for had expired. On my refusing to pay him, he went into the kitchen, took some of my tin dishes and was making off with them. When I found out his intentions I took up an old pistol I had, and threatened to shoot him if he did not return the dishes and finish his work. This had the proper effect and I had no more trouble. When I tell you what he did later on it is surprising that he did no injury at that time. It seems that when the Geddy family reached Mr. Daniels, young Geddy and this same boy had a quarrel. Mr Daniels interfered and took young Geddy's part, and before anyone could guess what he was going to do, the Native grabbed an assegai and stabbed Mr. Daniels, not fatally fortunately, and then the culprit ran away. But the chief Sinkinyela took the matter up, had the young Native followed up and killed.

It was now the year 1852 and on the fourth of October of this year my fourth son, Alfred, was born. Before this, I had assisted and helped to nurse three other women who had babies in our camp, besides working hard from morning till night, and sitting up late at night sewing for the new baby to come.

CHAPTER X.

Things up our way were fairly quiet now, But meanwhile the war in the Cape Colony was still going on. There had been a Kafir war on all the time we had been unsettled. General Cathcart was organising that affair, and when it was settled he came up to Plaatburg with three thousand troops and some cannon. Here they encamped and sent for Moshesh to hold a parley. The old chief refused to come, but sent his son.

This did not suit General Cathcart who sent again for Moshesh. So this time the old man thought he had better come, especially as the cannon were in full sight.

At the meeting it was decided that Moshesh should pay an indemnity of one thousand cattle. Five hundred were sent and then the Natives refused to pay any more. General Cathcart now very indignant, moved out with one thousand, five hundred men to take the remainder of the cattle. Sad to say he fell into the same trap the Natives had laid for Warden. On the top of the Berea could be seen a fine herd of cattle, and these General Cathcart made up his mind to have. He moved forward with Lancers, Cape Corps, Infantry, and the Artillery to cover their advance. They all ascended the mountain by the only pathway. The mountain was surrounded by high cliffs at the top as the mountains there usually are. The General and his staff were up as well, and it looked as if the haul was going to be a complete success, when suddenly hundreds of Natives seemed to spring up from nowhere, swarming round the utterly surprised British forces. Soon a fierce and desperate fight was raging. The Natives quickly placed themselves in possession of the only path, so our men had to fight their way through hordes of the enemy. Our troops of course won the day, but at a high price. At one time the General and his staff were nearly cut off, and they would have been killed to a man if their predicament had not been noticed. Some troops were sent to their assistance, but not before poor Captain Faunce was carried off alive and killed at the foot of the mountain. The missionary buried him, but the tale was told of the Natives taking him up again, cooking and eating him, the heart being the share of Moshesh and his sons.

Our fellows got off the mountain the best way they could, losing many Brave comrades. It was hard to hand fighting, as I heard the Natives even tried to drag the Lancers from their horses, and I saw one Native myself with a lance thrust through both cheeks.

General Cathcart made his camp on the plain away from the Berea, and here a little desultory firing went on all night. Next day the troops joined the rest at Platberg. Cathcart made the best of a bad job by patching up matters as best he could and getting away in as dignified a manner as possible. Needless to say he had not got the other five hundred cattle.

It was decided for all the troops to march back on the 24th of December (1852), and my father decided it would not be advisable to remain at the station as we felt the Natives would be more troublesome than they had been after Major Warden's affair, so we got two waggons from the camp, and by packing all night long were ready to leave at dawn with the troops. A convoy of Cape Corps were taking the five hundred cattle to Bloemfontein, so we travelled in good company.

The other troops went back to the Cape Colony. My husband had been away all this time across the Vaal River trading, so had heard nothing of all my trials. The end of the eventful year 1852 now found us settled on a comparatively civilised part of the world - Bloemfontein.

My old father now left me to visit a distant relative, taking with him my two little sons, Charles and Adam, and it was quite twelve months before I saw them again. Soon after our arrival in Bloemfontein my husband returned not having been very successful in his trading among the Boers. Money was very scarce at this time, and we could see no possible way of making a living, so after only two months of being settled, we decided to go trading again, this time among Sikcnyela's people, as far in Basutoland as the part now known as Thlotse Heights.

We reached the old chief's kraal, and here a wheel of the waggon broke, making it impossible to go further. Mr. Daniels the missionary however, used his influence with the chief and got him to lend us a wheel to take us back to Bloemfontein, without having sold many of the goods we were so anxious to trade with. Nothing daunted us however; we now engaged another waggon and sent a friend of ours, a Mr. Allington, trading for grain. This man succeeded in bartering the goods for grain, but on the homeward journey the weather turned bitterly cold. The oxen were thin and starved, so one whole span died at Morrocas Port. Here the waggon stood still till we could barter the grain for one mare! Later we got the waggon to Plaatberg where we went later on.

It was October of 1853 that we went to Plaatberg again, taking the opportunity of traders waggons returning there. We were eleven days on the journey, which should only have taken three under ordinary circumstances, so this tells a tale in itself of the state of the country from drought and hardships. Here we had snow on the 11th of October. Our former little home was occupied by someone else so we had to pitch a small tent, and manage the best way we could with that and the waggons.

When chief Moshesh heard of us being in his neighbourhood, he at once sent for us to come and live nearer his kraal and be his trader. Of course we were only too glad of this opening so got him to send oxen to take us over. Here we pitched the small tent again. I also made another large one : 15 feet by 9 feet of coarse waggon canvas, so we found ourselves quite comfortable with two canvas rooms, bedroom, living-room, and shop in one. My husband had now to go to Burghersdorp for fresh goods, also a special order from Moshesh for very good clothing. It was the old chief's custom to come and look at the goods he wanted, choose them, and leave them in our care an indefinite period of time perhaps. So after seeing this fine cloth clothing, he agreed to pay six oxen for it and as usual left it in our charge. One morning we woke up to find a long slit cut in our canvas house and these articles stolen. We could not trace the thief nor could we induce the chief to make us any amends, though I frequently walked up the big mountain where he lived to persuade him to do something in the matter.

At this time a very interesting affair took place. Chief Sikonyela, whom I have mentioned before, had organised a big hunting party, so he and most of his warriors and men were away from home. Moshesh's people then went and raided their kraals, taking women, children, and stock. For three days and three nights these prisoners and cattle were passing our tents. After this Sikonyela left the country and came to "No Man's Land" - as East Griqualand was called in those remote times - having only recovered the women of the tribe.

CHAPTER XI.

This was the most prosperous venture we had made so far, and after a year of trading we found ourselves possessed of a nice herd of cattle. The old chief was a hard nut to deal with, always ready to buy but never anxious to pay. It was always "to-morrow" with him when there was talk of a settlement. It was a lonely life, the only other White people being a few traders like ourselves. About a year after we had been here, I determined to fetch my two little boys back from the long visit they had been on with my father, set out by waggon to do so. We had rather a nerve-racking experience on the return journey. We found the Caledon river very full, and I was doubtful of the advisability of crossing. However some Natives offered to swim the oxen over, so I consented to the venture.

We had no sooner got into the water than the oxen were swept downstream, and no doubt we should have had an accident if I had not called to the man to set the oxen free. Finding he had no knife I threw him a pocket knife I had myself, and fortunately he caught it and freed the oxen from the waggon. These were then brought safely out and hitched to the back of the waggon, which was then dragged back to dry land. I did not attempt a crossing again until fully a week later.

In 1854 we suddenly heard that a small legacy had been left me by an old aunt in England, widow of a certain Dr. Paul, a Russian. I shall give the interesting story of her life a little later on. This legacy of £700. decided us to leave the trading station, so we started for Smithfield with the nice herd of cattle we had accumulated. These, alas, we had to part with almost at once and at a very low rate, 30 dollars each as lung-sickness had broken out in the Free State, so the price of cattle naturally dropped.

We now settled on a farm near Smithfield and the Mission of Carmel belonging to the French. This farm belonged to a friend, Mr. Coleman, who lent us the place for an indefinite period. Our first investment in sheep was a sad failure. We found the man who sold them to us had palmed off all his old stock on us. However we were able to insist on him taking these back, and we later got another lot from another source.

We were fairly successful here, but Kirk who was never anything but a soldier at heart, and never much interested in farming, was persuaded to go to Commissie Drift by a Mr. Montgomery, who was in business in Smithfield, and he, Mr. Montgomery, stocked a shop which we were to manage at £7.10.0. per month. We could also open a wayside hotel on our own account.

But here bad luck overtook us once more. Our stock did nothing but die. Of the five hundred lambs born that year not one lived, besides losing many of their mothers. Mr. Montgomery became insolvent soon after, so the shop was not stocked, and to get back some of the money that this man owed us for goods which we had supplied for the shop ourselves, we took over a punt he had on the river for £250.

Nothing we did succeeded here, as for instance, after we had the punt, the river did not rise for months and months, then at last it came down in a sudden flood and turned the punt on its side. The men on the farm tried to right it, also my son Edwin, who, with several of the men got into a boat to try to tug it over with ropes. While hauling, the punt lurched over the wrong way and just grazed the boat, then settled down in the river, face downwards. The boat righted itself, but being filled with water it had to be floated down the river and gradually get to the side, and eventually put on a sledge and brought back to its proper place. Later on, with the assistance of our neighbours, we tried again to raise the punt, but the woodwork gave way and it sank for good and all, so there lay £250. at the bottom of the river. I must add though that we sold the wood to a Jew some months later for about £60.

We came to this place with 800 sheep and after two seasons we left with only 100, being a great deal worse off for the two years we had spent at Commissie Drift.

My only little daughter was born in 1855; but before continuing my personal story, I would now like to tell the history of the old aunt who had left our family the legacies.

This lady was my mother's sister, a Miss Neuman. She went out to Russia as mother's help to a Government Official's family. My aunt had not been long in Russia, when a certain Prince of the Imperial family lost his wife, and the lady who had taken my aunt out, recommended her as a suitable person to take charge of the Prince's little daughter. This, my aunt was engaged to do, also teaching her English.

When this little girl eventually married, she made her former governess a very handsome present of a whole establishment, including servants as well. Then it was that Dr. Paul, physician to the Prince, married her. A plague of cholera breaking out after a few years, carried off the old doctor. He, having made no will, his people claimed most of the property. The Russo-Franco war now pending, the widow, advised by her brother, an excise officer in England, sold what property she had and returned to England. She died not long afterwards, leaving us, as I said, the very welcome legacy.

Now to continue our adventures. The year 1857 finds us once more dreaming of trading. Jeremiah Moshesh, son of the chief, who was well-known to us, came over and asked us to open a store at his location, and as this had been our most lucrative way of making money, we did not hesitate to move all our belongings to "Elandsberg" where the chief Jeremiah held sway over his clan. Though we had to pitch tents again to live in, till such time as a house of some sort could be put up, I was glad to get back to this life though so isolated, for the very good reason that at any rate we were assured of a livelihood, even although the fear hung over us that at any time there might be tribal fights, or even a more serious quarrel with the Natives' old enemy - the Boers.

For about six months all went well, when one day the Boers got aggravated beyond usual, at the constant thieving of the Natives all along the border, and declared "war!" In no time laagers were made all along the border, but in spite of the serious look of things my husband would not hear of us leaving this place, so I took it upon myself to write to Mr Coleman at Smithfield, and ask his advice. He strongly recommended us to move. Even then, Kirk hesitated, and decided to go and see the chief Jeremiah first: and his advice by the way, was that we should send all our stock to his care. Needless to say we did not accept this offer, but while my husband was still away, I started to pack as much as I possibly could on the two waggons we had. Unfortunately for me when I had packed most of the trading goods, two traders came from the chief Letsie's station and offered to buy everything. So this meant not only unpacking, but measuring every yard of stuff they bought, so the end of the day found me with most of the packing of our household belongings still to be done. We went to bed early as I was so tired out, but at about two o'clock in the morning when the moon had risen, I was up and with the help of the Native servant did all the packing necessary, so we were able to trek off as the sun rose, for Aliwal.

The first day's trek brought us to a place called "The Kraals", about six miles from the village of Rouxville. My husband and son Edwin followed up with the stock, and we had to stay the night at the above place. The first thing to do was to prepare a meal. I had had a lot of fowls killed at the station the night before and we had rice as well, but the problem was how to cook the meal as there was not a stick or any kind of fuel to be seen. But we were desperately hungry, and "where there is a will there is a way", so we cooked the pots and kettle with grass and tar, using the tar which belonged to the waggons. We spent a fearful night here. The "kraals", very small and broken, could not shelter the stock in safety, so to keep the animals from straying we all sat round in the various gaps, and kept watch all night.

The next night we arrived at the Orange River, and the following morning we crossed to the Aliwal side, intending to pitch our tents there for a time anyway, while we looked around to find a home, but a Mr. Bergman who knew us well, offered us an empty cottage. Here we remained for a few weeks until we arranged to go to a farm called the "Dam" belonging to Mrs. Harbin, and here in a little "hartebeeste" cottage consisting of long poles tied together and thatched with straw, my fifth son John was born in June 1858.

CHAPTER XII

This Boer and Kaffir war was not a very serious matter as it was ever in a very short time. The Boers reached Letsia's station, had a fight there, looted the traders chiefly, But when they tried to get up Moshesh's mountain it proved the same difficult task; in fact they got disheartened and patched up a peace treaty. The traders and French missionaries were the chief sufferers and losers. They, hearing the Boers were near Letsia's, climbed up Moshesh's mountain to get a good view of the fight, never thinking that the Boers would get the best of it and get into the station. However, they did, and as I said before, looted the white people's places of everything, so the traders and missionaries had to make the best of things and cleared off walking all the way to Aliwal. They had only one horse and this was used to carry a sick daughter of the missionary. One of the traders, a Mr. Allington, had left his wife down at the station, and she was carried off by the Boers, no doubt for her safety. Of course he got her back again.

The country quickly settled down to peace, and we were glad to get back to our station at "Elandsberg".

My sister, Mary, came to see us at this place. She was married to Mr. Henry Harvey, and it was the last time I ever saw her, as her sudden death took place not long after. This death was a great shock to all of our big family, but perhaps it was for the best, for we realised afterwards when the rumour got round, that she had not been too happy. Her husband was away at the time. She went to bed one night apparently quite well but was found dead by the people of the house the next morning. Poor Mary, she had loved too well.

We now made a comfortable home at the station intending to make this a settled home. My old father now came back to live with me, and remained for the rest of his life. He was about eighty years of age at this time, a strong hearty man, always at work.

Life went on quite smoothly for a long spell, and we got on well trading and bartering. The boys were growing up however, and we felt something must be done to educate the older ones: (the youngest one, Sam, had now arrived, in 1860), so my husband on one of his journeys to Aliwal, met a Mr, Whitelaw, a clerk, who agreed to come and be tutor to the boys for £60. per annum. Unfortunately Kirk made an agreement for three years at this salary, and if it was broken by us before the time had expired, we should have to pay the full amount. Well, he started operations, and the chief one seemed to be to whack the boys. It was whack, whack, all day long. They went to bed crying, got up crying, in fact seemed to do nothing else a dreadful state of affairs and we were powerless in the matter. But luckily in a sense, he proved to have a weakness - drinking -and this is how we got rid of him. Kirk had gone to Smithfield to consult a doctor as he was very poorly and Mr. Whitelaw ask permission to go also. My sister Ann who was visiting me, saw what was likely to happen, and advised me to let him go, so I consented and wrote to Kirk to be on the watch and find out how he behaved. Just what we expected and hoped did happen. Mr. Whitelaw got drunk, and remained so, long enough to be dismissed. I think my sister Ann would have given him a horse-whipping had he stayed on any longer and ill-used the boys. When Ann left for home in Bloemfontein, she took my little daughter with her for a change. The child was so strangely eager to go, it seemed like the working of providence, as she never could before be persuaded to leave me, as she was only six years old. She never came back to us again, but that story comes later.

This was a year of sad partings for me. Kirk came back from Smithfield no better in health, and after only two weeks at home I took him to Aliwal, leaving my baby Sam of only seven months old, in the care of a good girl I had, Nonnie Roche. But my husband's case proved hopeless, heart disease in its worst form, and after two weeks more of suffering in Aliwal he passed away, a happy release to him, but a sad loss to me.

This happened in April 1861, and marked the first of a series of deep troubles for me. Towards the end of May I was growing very restless about my little daughter and longing to have her home again. In fact, the very night before I got news of her, I remarked that if my sister Ann did not send her back soon, I would send for her. Next day we saw a waggonette coming and I quite expected to see my child. It turned out to be my brother George and his family from Bloemfontein. The wife was crying as I reached the waggon, and when I asked for my girlie, she only cried the more, so I learned the sad news that my only little daughter was dead. An epidemic of diphtheria had broken out in Bloemfontein, and my brother's child and mine, had taken it, and both died. So she was dead and buried before I heard anything of it.

My Brother had brought his only other child with him on this visit and she developed the dread disease too, though it did not prove fatal in her case. Unfortunately she infected my house, and not very long after my brother's family had left, my eldest boy Edwin was laid up with this horrible complaint. We were so far from a doctor that it can well be imagined the hard and anxious time I had nursing him. But thank God he was spared to me, and by October he was just beginning to walk about again, after several months of illness. Adam, my third son, was seriously ill too with fever during this time. A Mr. Crawley, the second tutor we had, proved the kindest of friends to me, and helped at this trying time. Charles, my second son, I had sent one day on horseback into Aliwal for medicine, and he had a bad accident on the way, was thrown from his horse and suffered concussion. He was brought home after three anxious days by a friend, Mr. Hayward, in a trap; and for weeks I had to nurse that boy as well. These troubles were added to by financial worries, business to be attended to and creditors claiming their accounts from my late husband's estate. So it was not to be wondered at, that I found it a great struggle to manage with my young family, my eldest son being only sixteen years old, so I decided eventually to marry again. My choice was not a happy one, But this alas I found out too late.

Mr. Blake, my second husband, then took charge of the trading station, which prospered fairly well for a time, until once more we were disturbed by trouble between Boers and Kaffirs. This was due to the same cause, Natives stealing from the Boer-farmers on the Border; the Boers retaliating. And the position was aggravated by certain poor whites taking the opportunity to rob their more wealthy neighbours, knowing that the blame would be laid on the Natives. This caused the Boers to declare war about the year 1865.

Mr. J. H. Brand was President of the Free State at the time and most popular Both with his own people and the British.

When war was again proclaimed, laagers as usual were formed all along the Border for the safety of the people. We took away all we possibly could and made for Aliwal again.

The Basutos made several big raids into the Free State, carrying off a considerable amount of stock, the greater part of which, however, was recovered. The Boers now decided to attack the Natives at Thaba Bosigo, a most impregnable mountain. The Natives simply massed on the top of this precipitous mountain and awaited the enemy. They had also taken a great amount of stock up with them.

The Natives, using their usual tactics, as soon as the Boers approached and attempted to climb the mountainside, rolled rocks down upon them, and only at one point where there was a cattle track, did they manage to gain the summit. Here the chief attack launched was led by General Wepener, who was unfortunately killed just as he reached the top. When the Boers saw their leader fall, they decided to retreat. The body of the General was taken by the Natives, but they buried it respectfully, and later on allowed the Boers to take it away.

After the death of General Wepener an Englishman named Robert Finlay was appointed to command the Boer forces, and at a meeting held by the troops it was decided to Besiege Thaba Bosigo. The Boers then surrounded the mountain, and this siege was then carried on for three months. The Natives, having taken up a considerable amount of grain as well as stock, managed to hold out. The commissariat of the Boers was their weak point, as their lines of communication with the Free State were constantly interrupted by raiding bands of Natives, so they were much more in danger of starving than the Natives; so much so, that they were reduced to shooting Native cattle that fell over the rocks, or strayed down the mountain for food.

My eldest son Edwin was in this campaign, and took part in the attack and siege of Thaba Bosigo.

After three months vainly besieging the mountain, the Boer Commander decided to parley with chief Moshesh with a view to making peace. The Boer conditions were that the boundary of Basutoland should be a certain portion of their country from the junction of Pampoen Spruit to a certain mountain close to Letsia's location, leading right across the Caledon River. My son Charles was commandeered later to assist in erecting the beacons of this new territory.

This gave the Orange Free State a very large additional stretch of Land. When most of this had been surveyed, the Natives, evidently regretting their loss of land, kept returning to the old border with the result that this led to new disagreement, so the Boers were forced to take up arms to emphasise their determination to stick to the terms of peace.

We had meanwhile settled back again on the station which was now Free State territory, hoping to remain there in peace, but it can be understood that we did not feel very secure while this dispute was on. It lasted for about another twelve month until Sir Philip Woodhouse, the Governor of the Cape, acting as arbitrator settled the matter by making a new boundary which gave the Basutos back a considerable portion of the land they had seceded to the Boers. This satisfied both parties and has remained the boundary ever since.

We remained at Elandsberg until the year 1866, when my husband decided to go into Basutoland to trade. My sons Edwin and Charles were farming on the farm Elandsberg and I remained with them till about the year 1870, when I joined my husband again with my youngest son, Sam. My third son Adam had bought a farm from the Free State Government, as the elder boys had done, and was settled near Wepener. John was at school in Smithfield. Sam, as I said, was assisting us at the store: and I had one other small boy then, a son called Walter, by my second husband. This new station was situated near Mafeking, and here we lived and prospered for some years.

My son Edwin got married in the year 1871, to Sarah, the daughter of my old friend Mrs. Harbin. In fact, our families became very much united as both Charles and Adam married two other daughters of hers later on. Edwin's life was cut short early, as after only a few years of happy married life, he met with a sad accident, and left his wife a widow with three children.

CHAPTER XIII

As was well known, the Kimberley diamond mines were discovered in the years 1870/71, and in view of the fact that these diamond fields have become world famous, it would no doubt be of interest to relate the

part played by my sons Edwin and Charles in the very beginning of the mines, before the big rush to Kimberley took place.

When Edwin first heard rumours of diamonds being discovered at Klip Drift on the Vaal River, he and several friends determined to go and try their luck. They set forth with two waggon loads of grain to be sure of having food. They got to the river and started operations. They found great difficulty in their search among the gravel and deposit of the river-bed, and only small stones were found. Becoming rather discouraged, especially as their rations were giving in, at the end of about six months hard work they decided to return home. At this time the alluvial diggings at Dutoits Pan, de Beers, and Kimberley had not yet been discovered.

Edwin and his party, on their way home, happened to outspan one day on a farm called Dutoits Pan, the property of one Van Wyk. Hearing from someone on the farm that Van Wyk had discovered a diamond in the mud plaster of his house, they naturally became tremendously interested, and then went to call on Van Wyk, to ask permission to search. This was promptly refused. However they were not discouraged, and decided to steal a march on the owner of the farm, by getting up very early and digging without permission. Van Wyk soon discovered what they were doing, and after trying in vain to stop them, he rode off into Boshof, the nearest town, and returned with the sheriff thinking this would intimidate the mine jumpers. After much arguing, and many threats from the sheriff, who also demanded to know their names, which they refused to give, in the end the "jumpers" produced a bottle of brandy, under the persuasive influence of which they gained a complete victory. The sheriff then rode off and left them to their operations.

In a few days, more diggers arrived, and soon the owner of the farm gave way, and threw open the diggings to the public at seven shillings and sixpence per claim of thirty square feet. My son was not able to carry on here for long on account of the lack of supplies, so after finding only a few small diamonds (which I later had set in a ring), he and his party returned home.

Charles, the next son, with his brother Adam, next set out to try their fortunes at Dutoits Pan diggings, the journey, as usual in those days, was done by waggon, a slow and laborious undertaking occupying at least nine days from the border of Basutoland where we lived.

On arriving there, Charles and his party at once went to the Diggers' Committee and applied for claims. These were granted at the small fee of seven and sixpence per month per square of thirty feet. The boys started at once, though under great difficulties, having to buy all the water they needed from a well in the vicinity. The digging was entirely on the surface, no one dreaming that stones could be found deeper than from one foot to eighteen inches. After working a claim to that depth, a digger would then apply for a fresh one. This was done all over a large area, until one syndicate, which had got tired of taking out fresh licences continually, decided to dig deeper. Mr. Doble, the first man to try the experiment, excavated to the depth of six feet, his neighbours wondering what he could possibly be doing. His answer was "Digging for diamonds of course after a couple of days digging he found a six-carat stone, larger than any stone that had been found on the surface, so this gave the diggings a new aspect entirely. Everybody then started digging deeper instead of taking out new claims.

My two sons had not been very successful on their claims. One day while out walking in the direction of De Beers farm called "Vooruitsegcht", they came upon De Beers himself. The farm joined Du Toits Pan Diggings, and was in a way considered to be diamondiferous. On the way to the house they fell in with two

waggons and a tent pitched between them, evidently a camp. This turned out to be Mr. De Beers himself with his wife and family, and stock, about three miles from the homestead.

The old man had about three hundred sheep and thirty head of cattle. He asked in the usual way who they were, and after learning their names and that they were diggers from Dutoits Pan he promptly said: "I don't want any diggers on my farm. They are a nuisance and they use up the stock water, and they are very cheeky about it too." Then pointing to the disselboom of the waggon he said: "I have diamonds on this farm. Do you see that little hole close to the disselboom? Well, my son-in-law found two diamonds there" and he repeated "I don't want any diggers here." So my son suggested to the old man that it would be advisable to allow him and his party of two other men to remain there and work the diamonds on half shares, and also assist him to keep other diggers away.

After consulting his wife and son-in-law, the farmer fell in with my son's proposal, and said they were to come in very quietly from a different direction with their digging outfit and mention the matter to no one at Dutoit's Pan. My son and his party now set to work with as little delay as possible. After finding a few small diamonds my son Adam fell ill with a prevalent fever that so many of the miners suffered and died from. The other member of the party got scared and ran off. They then had to stop all work and decided that as soon as the patient was well enough they would trek back home. Provisions were both scarce and expensive. There was no money about and miners were exchanging diamonds for necessary supplies so the difficulties were almost insuperable.

My sons had not very good luck, for after paying out old Mr. De Beers, they had only sufficient to get back home with.

After only one month at home, however, my son Charles, who evidently could not resist the lure of the diggings, started off again, this time on horseback, taking about four days to do the journey. On arrival he joined a syndicate on De Beers farm, which by that time had been rushed by the miners. He worked with this syndicate until he could get supplies from home. Having taken out two claims, one for himself and one for his brother, who was coming up with the waggon of supplies. With two Native Boys continually at work he only had the luck to get a few small stones.

Daring this period, he was one day walking out to a spot where some large trees were growing on a kopjie. There he came across a gentleman and his family also out walking. His name was Albert Ortlipp, the secretary of the Diggers' Committee, a man my son knew quite well. As my son was passing, Mr. Ortlipp called to him to come and look at something, saying "Look what my children have just picked up under those trees." His little boy and girl had been playing there and picked up diamonds. This was therefore the first discovery of diamonds at the present Kimberley mine.

My son then walked to the trees, and found two small poles planted in the ground. These had evidently been used to hold a sifting apparatus, evidence that someone had been prospecting there quite recently. On the following day this kopjie was rushed and pegged out, and the next day it was surveyed. My son could not take a claim here as he already had two at De Beers.

Now this was the original start of the famous Kimberley mine. The kopjie was called Colesburg's Kopjie at this time, because the Colesburg Syndicate working at De Beers, had given their Native herd boy a sifting apparatus to prospect wherever he herded, and it was the herd-boy who was supposed to have sifted on

this kopjie and found the first stones, for the Colesburg Syndicate. I mention this story which my son told me, as there has since been a good deal of controversy as to who really did find the first diamond at Kimberley.

CHAPTER XIV

Now I will resume my own personal story, which at this time deals with a very tragic occurrence. This is the terrible accident that befell my eldest son Edwin, which left his young wife a widow with three small children (the youngest being born two months after his death). He had taken two waggons loaded with grain to the mill at Jammerburg Drift, and in drawing them up close to the mill, he ran between the waggons to direct the oxen, when suddenly he found the waggon closing in on him. He tried to raise himself between them, but being very tall he was caught just about the waist, and crushed between the rails. He lingered for several days full conscious that there was no hope for him. This happened in winter of 1874, and in 1875 having done very well at the station at Mafeking, we decided to buy a farm in the Free State - just over the border, called McNaughtonsdale.

My husband arranged with a Mr Yeaman to manage the station on half shares, and my son Sam, remained as his assistant. We built a comfortable home on the farm, and made a fine orchard, gardening being a hobby of my husband's. But stock and agriculture was the chief business. We sold the trading station in 1878 to a Mr. Payn, who suffered greatly the Basuto war of 1880, commonly called the Gun War, by having the place burnt down by the Natives.

As is well known this war was caused by the Disarmament Act brought in by the Government of the Cape Colony, to disarm all Natives under Cape rule. The Basutos, being the strongest tribe, were chosen to be the first, to be disarmed. This they naturally resented. There were several meetings called by the different magistrates to inform them that they were required to give up their guns, assegais and battle-axes. The Natives wanted to know the reason why, and were told that an Act of Parliament had been passed to enforce this.

Now it is necessary to go back a little to explain how the Basutos became possessed of guns. When the Kimberley diamond fields were first discovered, the Free State government was under the impression that it was Free State territory, and they had allowed no selling of arms to Natives. However, it was discovered that it was Griqualand West, about three years later and therefore belonged to the Cape Colony. Nevertheless the Free State government had the benefit of all revenue during that time. The President, Sir John Brand, went to Cape Town in connection with the matter, and it was satisfactorily proved to him that his government had no legitimate claim to the territory.

Directly after Cape rule was established on the mines, Basutos and other Natives working there were allowed to purchase guns. These were smuggled through the Free State to their homes, by hiding by day and walking only at night. That is the chief way Natives got guns.

It can now be understood why they failed to see the justice of being asked to give up their arms. They also protested that they had been exceptionally loyal up to then, by assisting also in capturing Langelebalele, chief of the Shlubi race, who had escaped from near Zululand; and by assisting the Cape Government in Moroshi's war in 1878. They declared they had not bought the guns to free themselves from British rule, but to protect themselves from other races, and offered to pay a licence for each gun so as to be allowed to keep it, until such time as they committed an act of disloyalty, when the Government would have just cause

to disarm them. Some even asked the question, that, in the event of them giving up their arms, would the Government protect them against other tribes? But they were informed that the Government could not undertake any policy of protection. The Basuto were not told at any of the meetings that all Native tribes were to be disarmed, so they got the idea that they were the only ones to be treated in this way, so they naturally felt nervous and resentful. Hence the war of 1880.

My son Sam was present at all the meetings that took place at Mafeking so we had first-hand information.

This gun war is ancient history now, and everyone knows the huge expenditure and loss of life it cost, and with no result. Two of my sons were volunteers with others, who protected D. and D. H. Fraser's store at Mafeking, and were besieged there about a month. On the strength of the assurance of the authorities that the Basutos would hand in their guns without any fuss this firm got in about ten thousand pounds worth of goods which were packed in a separate store, in a situation that could not be protected. This place was looted and burnt down. After a month's siege, my sons got back to the Free State, and placed their waggons in Government employ. This war had no ill effect on the Free State. In fact, it was a great benefit to many of us. For instance, wood was sold at ten pounds a load fetched from the farms, and most of the transporting of commissariat was done by English farmers living in the Free State.

This was the last Native war I was in any way associated with, as about four years later, in 1884, I decided to trek over to East Griqualand (No Man's Land).

All my sons had already settled in this new part, which promised to be, and has proved to be, one of the best parts of South Africa, both for stock farming and for agriculture.

This journey was accomplished by ox waggon, which took about 30 days if one had no delays such as illness or snowstorms. The Drakensberg had to be crossed at Barkly East. The journey was usually undertaken in May or June to avoid swollen rivers. Then travellers were usually overtaken by snow-storms. We were held up at Langkloof for several days, and the discomfort can well be imagined, especially when the are children in the trek who insist on getting out in the snow for a romp, and then crawling back into the waggon to warm up

I had the three children of my son Edwin, which I had adopted.

Some of the parties coming over took as long as three months, being held up half way down Barkly Pass with an outbreak of measles among the children, which lasted about 24 days, and although they were living in tents and waggons, there were no deaths.

East Griqualand had few inhabitants at this time, and the village of Matatiele, which we settled near, consisted of a magistracy, a small hotel, and one or two little Native stores. The country looked wild and rather fearsome, but we were fully justified in thinking that it would prove a desirable habitation, where most careful farmers have prospered, the only drawback being the lack of railway facilities.

I have, seen Matatiele grow into quite a fair-sized village with a municipality and a fine water scheme. Many trees have been planted and there are fine residences to be seen. But as I said before, the country cannot progress as it would, for want of railway facilities. When Sir Hely Hutchens visited East Griqualand some years ago, he called at my son Sam's farm, Drummcdn Elliot where I was living, and I asked Sir Hely when we could hope to have a railway as I told him "I have never seen a railway and would very much like to before I die."

But I have not much hope of seeing this great blessing to the country before I pass away. I am now over 83 years old, and life has been hard. I am very tired and ready to go to rest. While one is of use in the world it is good to live, but to be confined to a bath-chair as I have been for many months now, is wearisome and sad. I am proud to think that it has been in my power to help so many people in sickness and in other ways in the days when I was strong and hearty. Doctors were practically unknown luxuries in those pioneering days, and so anyone who was willing to act as midwife to the young mothers was greatly filling a much-needed service. Many was the poor mother I helped through that trying period.

Reading has been the chief recreation of my life. When my family was growing up it was my habit to read aloud at night. This was particularly enjoyed by my old father. Dickens was my favourite author. It was so satisfactory to read a book in which all the characters completed their lives. I have not much time for the present-day writers who leave one guessing half the time as to the fate of many of the characters. News papers have also given me much interest in life, and for years I subscribed to the "Review of Reviews", "Truth", and of course our colonial papers.

But I have got beyond even that pleasant pastime now, and so I live the long day through in tender reminiscences, just waiting for the call to go to rest.

FINIS.

The following obituary is taken from the "Matatiele Mail" of June 21st, 1906 :-

THE LATE MRS. BLAKE.

In the death of Mrs. Blake (born Martha Jane Webber), vanishes another of the few links left with the early pioneer days of South Africa. When she was only three years of age her father, Mr. Samuel Webber, came out with Shepherd's Emigration Party in 1826, and her earliest recollections were of the hard ships and vicissitudes of pioneer life. Living at first in near Grahamstown (in those days a scattered village, where one in High Street knew everyone in Settlers' Hill), she was closely connected with the various Kaffir wars, losing as much as the early settlers did, not only property but near and dear ones as well.

Few are now living who saw the great Boer Trek into Natal in 1838 as she did, knowing personally some of the brave old Voortrekkers.

Fate seemed to decree that she should always live on the outskirts of civilisation, for by the time the Cape Colony was growing more civilised and peaceful, she and her first husband, Sergeant Adam Kirk of the 7th Dragoon Guards, thought to find a kinder fortune in moving North to the Orange Free State. But here again were wars and hardships unendurable except to the bravest of hearts. Mrs. Blake saw this colony pass from a hopelessly poverty-stricken state, at war continuously with British or Kaffir's, to a prosperous, peaceful, and independent land.

A great part of her later life was spent in or on the borders of Basutoland, and many are the tales she could tell of the midnight flights from undesirable neighbours amongst the people of Moshesh. Leaving at times most of their worldly goods, she and her family would be glad to escape with their lives.

Mrs. Blake saw East Griqualand too in its earliest days. More than twenty years ago she first came here to join her sons, when the country was very young and few inhabitants, as yet, had come.

This brings us to the last chapter of a long and noble life, full of and overflowing with hardships, and self-sacrifices of loving kindness and brave endurance. A strong yet tender loving woman, impressing all who knew her with her selflessness and quiet strength of character.

Those who knew of her suffering in the past few months (though her patience and kindly consideration for others never failed) will feel only joy at her happy release.

And so, at last, surrounded by her children and her children's children, the brave old life has found rest.

Years of toil and hardship had done their work, but the mind was unclouded, and time could not wither that which welled from the great heart.