An hour or so later Hans came in flogging the chestnut, and here I may add that both it and the roan recovered. Indeed I rode them for many years, until they were quite old. When I had eaten, or tried to eat something and rested awhile, I went to the bank, succeeded in explaining the state of the case to the manager, and after some difficulty, for gold was not very plentiful in Port Elizabeth, procured three hundred pounds in sovereigns. For the other two he gave me a bill upon some agent in Delagoa Bay, together with a letter of recommendation to him and the Portuguese governor, who, it appeared, was in debt to their establishment. By an afterthought, however, although I kept the letters, I returned him the bill and spent the £200 in purchasing a great variety of goods which I will not enumerate, that I knew would be useful for trading purposes among the east coast Kaffirs. Indeed, I practically cleared out the Port Elizabeth stores, and barely had time, with the help of Hans and the storekeepers, to pack and ship the goods before the Seven Stars put out to sea.

Within twenty-four hours from the time I had left the Mission Station, Hans and I saw behind us Port Elizabeth fading into the distance, and in front a waste of stormy waters.

CHAPTER VIII. THE CAMP OF DEATH

Everything went well upon that voyage, except with me personally. Not having been on the ocean since I was a child, I, who am naturally no good sailor, was extremely ill as day by day we ploughed through seas that grew ever more rough. Also, strong as I was, that fearful ride had overdone me. Added to these physical discomforts was my agonising anxiety of mind, which I leave anyone with imagination to picture for himself. Really there were times when I wished that the Seven Stars would plunge headlong to the bottom of the deep and put an end to me and my miseries.

These, however, so far as the bodily side of them was concerned, were, I think, surpassed by those of my henchman Hans, who, as a matter of fact, had never before set foot in any kind of boat. Perhaps this was fortunate, since had he known the horrors of the ocean, much as he loved me, he would, I am sure, by one means or another, have left me to voyage in the Seven Stars alone. There he lay upon the floor of my little cabin, rolling to and fro with the violent motion of the brig, overcome with terror. He was convinced that we were going to be drowned, and in the intervals of furious sea-sickness uttered piteous lamentations in Dutch, English, and various native tongues, mingled with curses and prayers of the most primitive and realistic order.

After the first twenty-four hours or so he informed me with many moans that the last bit of his inside had just come out of him, and that he was now quite hollow "like a gourd." Also he declared that all these

evils had fallen upon him because he had been fool enough to forsake the religion of his people (what was that, I wonder), and allow himself to be "washed white," that is, be baptised, by my father.

I answered that as he had become white instead of staying yellow, I advised him to remain so, since it was evident that the Hottentot gods would have nothing more to do with one who had deserted them. Thereon he made a dreadful face, which even in the midst of my own woes caused me to laugh at him, uttered a prolonged groan, and became so silent that I thought he must be dead. However, the sailor who brought me my food--such food!--assured me that this was not so, and lashed him tight to the legs of the bunk by his arm and ankle so as to prevent him from being rolled to bits.

Next morning Hans was dosed with brandy, which, in his empty condition, made him extremely drunk, and from that time forward began to take a more cheerful view of things. Especially was this so when the hours for the "brandy medicine" came round. Hans, like most other Hottentots, loved spirits, and would put up with much to get them, even with my father's fiery indignation.

I think it was on the fourth day that at length we pitched and rolled ourselves over the shallow bar of Port Natal and found ourselves at peace for a while under shelter of the Point in the beautiful bay upon the shores of which the town of Durban now stands. Then it was but a miserable place, consisting of a few shanties which were afterwards

burnt by the Zulus, and a number of Kaffir huts. For such white men as dwelt there had for the most part native followings, and, I may add, native wives.

We spent two days at this settlement of Durban, where Captain Richardson had some cargo to land for the English settlers, one or two of whom had started a trade with the natives and with parties of the emigrant Boers who were beginning to enter the territory by the overland route. Those days I passed on shore, though I would not allow Hans to accompany me lest he should desert, employing my time in picking up all the information I could about the state of affairs, especially with reference to the Zulus, a people with whom I was destined ere long to make an intimate acquaintance. Needless to say, I inquired both from natives and from white men whether anything was known of the fate of Marais's party, but no one seemed even to have heard of them. One thing I did learn, however, that my old friend, Pieter Retief, with a large following, had crossed the Quathlamba Mountains, which we now know as the Drakensberg, and entered the territory of Natal. Here they proposed to settle if they could get the leave of the Zulu king, Dingaan, a savage potentate of whom and of whose armies everyone seemed to live in terror.

On the third morning, to my great relief, for I was terrified lest we should be delayed, the Seven Stars sailed with a favouring wind. Three days later we entered the harbour of Delagoa, a sheet of water many miles long and broad. Notwithstanding its shallow entrance, it is the

best natural port in Southeastern Africa, but now, alas! lost to the English.

Six hours later we anchored opposite a sandbank on which stood a dilapidated fort and a dirty settlement known as Lorenzo Marquez, where the Portuguese kept a few soldiers, most of them coloured. I pass over my troubles with the Customs, if such they could be called. Suffice it to say that ultimately I succeeded in landing my goods, on which the duty chargeable was apparently enormous. This I did by distributing twenty-five English sovereigns among various officials, beginning with the acting-governor and ending with a drunken black sweep who sat in a kind of sentry box on the quay.

Early next morning the Seven Stars sailed again, because of some quarrel with the officials, who threatened to seize her--I forget why. Her destination was the East African ports and, I think, Madagascar, where a profitable trade was to be done in carrying cattle and slaves. Captain Richardson said he might be back at Lorenzo Marquez in two or three months' time, or he might not. As a matter of fact the latter supposition proved correct, for the Seven Stars was lost on a sandbank somewhere up the coast, her crew only escaping to Mombasa after enduring great hardships.

Well, she had served my turn, for I heard afterwards that no other ship put into the Bay for a whole year from the date she left it. So if I had not caught her at Port Elizabeth I could not have come at all, except,

of course, overland. This at best must have taken many months, and was moreover a journey that no man could enter on alone.

Now I get back to my story again.

There was no inn at Lorenzo Marquez. Through the kindness of one of his native or half-breed wives, who could talk a little Dutch, I managed, however, to get a lodging in a tumble-down house belonging to a dissolute person who called himself Don José Ximenes, but who was really himself a half-breed. Here good fortune befriended me. Don José, when sober, was a trader with the natives, and a year before had acquired from them two good buck wagons. Probably they were stolen from some wandering Boers or found derelict after their murder or death by fever. These wagons he was only too glad to sell for a song. I think I gave him twenty pounds English for the two, and thirty more for twelve oxen that he had bought at the same time as the wagons. They were fine beasts of the Afrikander breed, that after a long rest had grown quite fat and strong.

Of course twelve oxen were not enough to draw two wagons, or even one. Therefore, hearing that there were natives on the mainland who possessed plenty of cattle, I at once gave out that I was ready to buy, and pay well in blankets, cloth, beads and so forth. The result was that within two days I had forty or fifty to choose from, small animals of the Zulu character and, I should add, unbroken. Still they were sturdy and used to that veld and its diseases. Here it was that my twelve trained beasts

came in. By putting six of them to each wagon, two as fore- and two as after-oxen, and two in the middle, Hans and I were able to get the other ten necessary to make up a team of sixteen under some sort of control.

Heavens! how we worked during the week or so which went by before it was possible for me to leave Lorenzo Marquez. What with mending up and loading the wagons, buying and breaking in the wild oxen, purchasing provisions, hiring native servants--of whom I was lucky enough to secure eight who belonged to one of the Zulu tribes and desired to get back to their own country, whence they had wandered with some Boers, I do not think that we slept more than two or three hours out of the twenty-four.

But, it may be asked, what was my aim, whither went I, what inquiries had I made? To answer the last question first, I had made every possible inquiry, but with little or no result. Marie's letter had said that they were encamped on the bank of the Crocodile River, about fifty miles from Delagoa Bay. I asked everyone I met among the Portuguese--who, after all, were not many--if they had heard of such an encampment of emigrant Boers. But these Portuguese appeared to have heard nothing, except my host, Don José, who had a vague recollection of something--he could not remember what.

The fact was at this time the few people who lived at Lorenzo Marquez were too sodden with liquor and other vices to take any interest in outside news that did not immediately concern them. Moreover, the natives whom they flogged and oppressed if they were their servants, or

fought with if they were not, told them little, and almost nothing that was true, for between the two races there was an hereditary hate stretching back for generations. So from the Portuguese I gained no information.

Then I turned to the Kaffirs, especially to those from whom I had bought the cattle. They had heard that some Boers reached the banks of the Crocodile moons ago--how many they could not tell. But that country, they said, was under the rule of a chief who was hostile to them, and killed any of their people who ventured thither. Therefore they knew nothing for certain. Still, one of them stated that a woman whom he had bought as a slave, and who had passed through the district in question a few weeks before, told him that someone had told her that these Boers were all dead of sickness. She added that she had seen their wagon caps from a distance, so, if they were dead, "their wagons were still alive."

I asked to see this woman, but the native refused to produce her. After a great deal of talk, however, he offered to sell her to me, saying that he was tired of her. So I bargained with the man and finally agreed for her purchase for three pounds of copper wire and eight yards of blue cloth. Next morning she was produced, an extremely ugly person with a large, flat nose, who came from somewhere in the interior of Africa, having, I gathered, been taken captive by Arabs and sold from hand to hand. Her name, as near as I can pronounce it, was Jeel.

I had great difficulty in establishing communication with her, but

ultimately found that one of my newly hired Kaffirs could understand something of her language. Even then it was hard to make her talk, for she had never seen a white man, and thought I had bought her for some dreadful purpose or other. However, when she found that she was kindly treated, she opened her lips and told me the same story that her late master had repeated, neither more nor less. Finally I asked her whether she could guide me to the place where she had seen the "live wagons."

She answered: "Oh, yes," as she had travelled many roads and never forgot any of them.

This, of course, was all I wanted from the woman, who, I may add, ultimately gave me a good deal of trouble. The poor creature seemed never to have experienced kindness, and her gratitude for the little I showed her was so intense that it became a nuisance. She followed me about everywhere, trying to do me service in her savage way, and even attempted to seize my food and chew it before I put it into my own mouth--to save me the trouble, I suppose. Ultimately I married her, somewhat against her will, I fear, to one of the hired Kaffirs, who made her a very good husband, although when he was dismissed from my service she wanted to leave him and follow me.

At length, under the guidance of this woman, Jeel, we made a start. There were but fifty miles to go, a distance that on a fair road any good horse would cover in eight hours, or less. But we had no horses, and there was no road--nothing but swamps and bush and rocky hills. With

our untrained cattle it took us three days to travel the first twelve miles, though after that things went somewhat better.

It may be asked, why did I not send on? But whom could I send when no one knew the way, except the woman, Jeel, whom I feared to part with lest I should see her no more? Moreover, what was the use of sending, since the messengers could take no help? If everyone at the camp was dead, as rumour told us--well, they were dead. And if they lived, the hope was that they might live a little longer. Meanwhile, I dared not part with my guide, nor dared I leave the relief wagons to go on with her alone. If I did so, I knew that I should never see them again, since only the prestige of their being owned by a white man who was not a Portuguese prevented the natives from looting them.

It was a truly awful journey. My first idea had been to follow the banks of the Crocodile River, which is what I should have attempted had I not chanced on the woman, Jeel. Lucky was it that I did not do so, since I found afterwards that this river wound about a great deal and was joined by impassable tributaries. Also it was bordered by forests. Jeel's track, on the contrary, followed an old slave road that, bad as it was, avoided the swampy places of the surrounding country, and those native tribes which the experience of generations of the traders in this iniquitous traffic showed to be most dangerous.

Nine days of fearful struggle had gone by. We had camped one night below

the crest of a long slope strewn with great rocks, many of which we were obliged to roll out of the path by main force in order to make a way for the wagons. The oxen had to lie in their yokes all night, since we dared not let them loose fearing lest they should stray; also lions were roaring in the distance, although, game being plentiful, these did not come near to us. As soon as there was any light we let out the teams to fill themselves on the tussocky grass that grew about, and meanwhile cooked and ate some food.

Presently the sun rose, and I saw that beneath us was a great stretch of plain covered with mist, and to the north, on our right, several denser billows of mist that marked the course of the Crocodile River.

By degrees this mist lifted, tall tops of trees appearing above it, till at length it thinned into vapour that vanished away as the sun rose. As I watched it idly, the woman, Jeel, crept up to me in her furtive fashion, touched me on the shoulder and pointed to a distant group of trees.

Looking closely at these trees, I saw between them what at first I took for some white rocks. Further examination, as the mist cleared, suggested to my mind, however, that they might be wagon tilts. Just then the Zulu who understood Jeel's talk came up. I asked him as well as I could, for at that time my knowledge of his tongue was very imperfect, what she wished to say. He questioned her, and answered that she desired to tell me that those were the moving houses of the Amaboona (the Boer

people), just where she had seen them nearly two moons ago.

At this tidings my heart seemed to stand still, so that for more than a minute I could not speak. There were the wagons at last, but--oh! who and what should I find in them? I called Hans and bade him inspan as quickly as possible, explaining to him that yonder was Marais's camp.

"Why not let the oxen fill themselves first, baas?" he answered. "There is no hurry, for though the wagons are there, no doubt all the people are dead long ago."

"Do what I bid you, you ill-omened beast," I said, "instead of croaking of death like a crow. And listen: I am going to walk forward to that camp; you must follow with the wagons as fast as they can travel."

"No, baas, it is not safe that you should go alone. Kaffirs or wild beasts might take you."

"Safe or not, I am going; but if you think it wise, tell two of those Zulus to come with me."

A few minutes later I was on the road, followed by the two Kaffirs armed with spears. In my youth I was a good runner, being strong of leg and light in body, but I do not think that I ever covered seven miles, for that was about the distance to the camp, in quicker time than I did that morning. Indeed, I left those active Kaffirs so far behind that when I

approached the trees they were not in sight. Here I dropped to a walk, as I said to myself--to get my breath. Really it was because I felt so terrified at what I might find that I delayed the discovery just for one minute more. While I approached, hope, however faint, still remained; when I arrived, hope might be replaced by everlasting despair.

Now I could see that there were some shanties built behind the wagons, doubtless those "rude houses" of which Marie had written. But I could not see anyone moving about them, or any cattle or any smoke, or other sign of life. Nor could I hear a single sound.

Doubtless, thought I to myself, Hans is right. They are all long dead.

My agony of suspense was replaced by an icy calm. At length I knew the worst. It was finished--I had striven in vain. I walked through the outlying trees and between two of the wagons. One of these I noticed, as we do notice things at such times, was the same in which Marais had trekked with his daughter, his favourite wagon that once I had helped to fit with a new dissel-boom.

Before me were the rough houses built of the branches of trees, daubed over with mud, or rather the backs of them, for they faced west. I stood still for a moment, and as I stood thought that I heard a faint sound as of someone reciting slowly. I crept along the end of the outermost house and, rubbing the cold sweat from my eyes, peeped round the corner, for it occurred to me that savages might be in possession. Then I saw what

caused the sound. A tattered, blackened, bearded man stood at the head of a long and shallow hole saying a prayer.

It was Henri Marais, although at the time I did not recognise him, so changed was he. A number of little mounds to the right and left of him told me, however, that the hole was a grave. As I watched two more men appeared, dragging between them the body of a woman, which evidently they had not strength to carry, as its legs trailed upon the ground. From the shape of the corpse it seemed to be that of a tall young woman, but the features I could not see, because it was being dragged face downwards. Also the long hair hanging from the head hid them. It was dark hair, like Marie's. They reached the grave, and tumbled their sad burden into it; but I--I could not stir!

At length my limbs obeyed my will. I went forward to the men and said in a hollow voice in Dutch:

"Whom do you bury?"

"Johanna Meyer," answered someone mechanically, for they did not seem to have taken the trouble to look at me. As I listened to those words my heart, which had stood still waiting for the answer, beat again with a sudden bound that I could hear in the silence.

I looked up. There, advancing from the doorway of one of the houses, very slowly, as though overpowered by weakness, and leading by the hand

a mere skeleton of a child, who was chewing some leaves, I saw--I saw Marie Marais! She was wasted to nothing, but I could not mistake her eyes, those great soft eyes that had grown so unnaturally large in the white, thin face.

She too saw me and stared for one moment. Then, loosing the child, she cast up her hands, through which the sunlight shone as through parchment, and slowly sank to the ground.

"She has gone, too," said one of the men in an indifferent voice. "I thought she would not last another day."

Now for the first time the man at the head of the grave turned. Lifting his hand, he pointed to me, whereon the other two men turned also.

"God above us!" he said in a choked voice, "at last I am quite mad. Look! there stands the spook of young Allan, the son of the English prédicant who lived near Cradock."

As soon as I heard the voice I knew the speaker.

"Oh, Mynheer Marais!" I cried, "I am no ghost, I am Allan himself come to save you."

Marais made no answer; he seemed bewildered. But one of the men cried out crazily:

"How can you save us, youngster, unless you are ready to be eaten? Don't you see, we starve, we starve!"

"I have wagons and food," I answered.

"Allemachte! Henri," exclaimed the man, with a wild laugh, "do you hear what your English spook says? He says that he has wagons and food, food, food!"

Then Marais burst into tears and flung himself upon my breast, nearly knocking me down. I wrenched myself free of him and ran to Marie, who was lying face upwards on the ground. She seemed to hear my step, for her eyes opened and she struggled to a sitting posture.

"Is it really you, Allan, or do I dream?" she murmured.

"It is I, it is I," I answered, lifting her to her feet, for she seemed to weigh no more than a child. Her head fell upon my shoulder, and she too began to weep.

Still holding her, I turned to the men and said:

"Why do you starve when there is game all about?" and I pointed to two fat elands strolling among the trees not more than a hundred and fifty yards away.

"Can we kill game with stones?" asked one of them, "we whose powder was all burnt a month ago. Those buck," he added, with a wild laugh, "come here to mock us every morning; but they will not walk into our pitfalls. They know them too well, and we have no strength to dig others."

Now when I left my wagons I had brought with me that same Purdey rifle with which I had shot the geese in the match against Pereira, choosing it because it was so light to carry. I held up my hand for silence, set Marie gently on the ground, and began to steal towards the elands. Taking what shelter I could, I got within a hundred yards of them, when suddenly they took alarm, being frightened, in fact, by my two Zulu servants, who were now arriving.

Off they galloped, the big bull leading, and vanished behind some trees. I saw their line, and that they would appear again between two clumps of bush about two hundred and fifty yards away. Hastily I raised the full sight on the rifle, which was marked for two hundred yards, lifted it, and waited, praying to God as I did so that my skill might not fail me.

The bull appeared, its head held forward, its long horns lying flat upon the back. The shot was very long, and the beast very large to bring down with so small a bullet. I aimed right forward--clear of it, indeed--high too, in a line with its backbone, and pressed the trigger.

The rifle exploded, the bullet clapped, and the buck sprang forward

faster than ever. I had failed! But what was this? Suddenly the great bull swung round and began to gallop towards us. When it was not more than fifty yards away, it fell in a heap, rolled twice over like a shot rabbit, and lay still. That bullet was in its heart.

The two Kaffirs appeared breathless and streaming with perspiration.

"Cut meat from the eland's flank; don't stop to skin it," I said in my broken Zulu, helping the words out with signs.

They understood, and a minute later were at work with their assegais. Then I looked about me. Near by lay a store of dead branches placed there for fuel.

"Have you fire?" I asked of the skeleton Boers, for they were nothing more.

"Nein, nein," they answered; "our fire is dead."

I produced the tinder-box which I carried with me, and struck the flint. Ten minutes later we had a cheerful blaze, and within three-quarters of an hour good soup, for iron pots were not wanting--only food to put into them. I think that for the rest of that day those poor creatures did little else but eat, sleeping between their meals. Oh! the joy I had in feeding them, especially after the wagons arrived, bringing with them salt--how they longed for that salt!--sugar and coffee.