

VI--THE PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

"Notwithstanding all that we had gone through, perhaps indeed on account of it, for I was thoroughly worn out, I slept that night as soundly as poor Gobo, round whose crushed body the hyænas would now be prowling. Rising refreshed at dawn we went on our way towards Nala's kraal, which we reached at nightfall. It is built on open ground after the Zulu fashion, in a ring fence and with beehive huts. The cattle kraal is behind and a little to the left. Indeed, both from their habits and their talk it was easy to see that these Butiana belong to that section of the Bantu people which, since T'Chaka's time, has been known as the Zulu race. We did not see the chief Nala that night. His daughter Maiwa went on to his private huts as soon as we arrived, and very shortly afterwards one of his head men came to us bringing a sheep and some mealies and milk with him. 'The chief sent us greeting,' he said, 'and would see us on the morrow.' Meanwhile he was ordered to bring us to a place of resting, where we and our goods should be safe and undisturbed. Accordingly he led the way to some very good huts just outside Nala's private enclosure, and here we slept comfortably.

"On the morrow about eight o'clock the head man came again, and said that Nala requested that I would visit him. I followed him into the private enclosure and was introduced to the chief, a fine-looking man of about fifty, with very delicately-shaped hands and feet, and a rather nervous mouth. The chief was seated on a tanned ox-hide outside his hut. By his side stood his daughter Maiwa, and squatted on their haunches

round him were some twenty head men or Indunas, whose number was continually added to by fresh arrivals. These men saluted me as I entered, and the chief rose and took my hand, ordering a stool to be brought for me to sit on. When this was done, with much eloquence and native courtesy he thanked me for protecting his daughter in the painful and dangerous circumstances in which she found herself placed, and also complimented me very highly upon what he was pleased to call the bravery with which I had defended the pass in the rocks. I answered in appropriate terms, saying that it was to Maiwa herself that thanks were due, for had it not been for her warning and knowledge of the country we should not have been here to-day; while as to the defence of the pass, I was fighting for my life, and that put heart into me.

"These courtesies concluded, Nala called upon his daughter Maiwa to tell her tale to the head men, and this she did most simply and effectively. She reminded them that she had gone as an unwilling bride to Wambe--that no cattle had been paid for her, because Wambe had threatened war if she was not sent as a free gift. Since she had entered the kraal of Wambe her days had been days of heaviness and her nights nights of weeping. She had been beaten, she had been neglected and made to do the work of a low-born wife--she, a chief's daughter. She had borne a child, and this was the story of the child. Then amidst a dead silence she told them the awful tale which she had already narrated to me. When she had finished, her hearers gave a loud ejaculation. 'Ou!' they said, 'ou! Maiwa, daughter of Nala!'

"Ay,' she went on with flashing eyes, 'ay, it is true; my mouth is as full of truth as a flower of honey, and for tears my eyes are like the dew upon the grass at dawn. It is true I saw the child die--here is the proof of it, councillors,' and she drew forth the little dead hand and held it before them.

"Ou!' they said again, 'ou! it is the dead hand!'

"Yes,' she continued, 'it is the dead hand of my dead child, and I bear it with me that I may never forget, never for one short hour, that I live that I may see Wambe die, and be avenged. Will you bear it, my father, that your daughter and your daughter's child should be so treated by a Matuku? Will ye bear it, men of my own people?'

"No,' said an old Induna, rising, 'it is not to be borne. Enough have we suffered at the hands of these Matuku dogs and their loud-tongued chief; let us put it to the issue.'

"It is not to be borne indeed,' said Nala; 'but how can we make head against so great a people?'

"Ask of him--ask of Macumazahn, the wise white man,' said Maiwa, pointing at me.

"How can we overcome Wambe, Macumazahn the hunter?'

"How does the jackal overreach the lion, Nala?"

"By cleverness, Macumazahn."

"So shall you overcome Wambe, Nala."

"At this moment an interruption occurred. A man entered and said that messengers had arrived from Wambe.

"What is their message?" asked Nala.

"They come to ask that thy daughter Maiwa be sent back, and with her the white hunter."

"How shall I make answer to this, Macumazahn?" said Nala, when the man had withdrawn.

"Thus shalt thou answer," I said after reflection; "say that the woman shall be sent and I with her, and then bid the messengers be gone. Stay, I will hide myself here in the hut that the men may not see me," and I did.

"Shortly afterwards, through a crack in the hut, I saw the messengers arrive, and they were great truculent-looking fellows. There were four of them, and evidently they had travelled night and day. They entered with a swagger and squatted down before Nala.

"Your business?' said Nala, frowning.

"We come from Wambe, bearing the orders of Wambe to Nala his servant,' answered the spokesman of the party.

"Speak,' said Nala, with a curious twitch of his nervous-looking mouth.

"These are the words of Wambe: "Send back the woman, my wife, who has run away from my kraal, and send with her the white man who has dared to hunt in my country without my leave, and to slay my soldiers." These are the words of Wambe.'

"And if I say I will not send them?' asked Nala.

"Then on behalf of Wambe we declare war upon you. Wambe will eat you up. He will wipe you out; your kraals shall be stamped flat--so,' and with an expressive gesture he drew his hand across his mouth to show how complete would be the annihilation of that chief who dared to defy Wambe.

"These are heavy words,' said Nala. 'Let me take counsel before I answer.'

"Then followed a little piece of acting that was really very creditable to the untutored savage mind. The heralds withdrew, but not out of

sight, and Nala went through the show of earnestly consulting his Indunas. The girl Maiwa too flung herself at his feet, and appeared to weep and implore his protection, while he wrung his hands as though in doubt and tribulation of mind. At length he summoned the messengers to draw near, and addressed them, while Maiwa sobbed very realistically at his side.

"Wambe is a great chief,' said Nala, 'and this woman is his wife, whom he has a right to claim. She must return to him, but her feet are sore with walking, she cannot come now. In eight days from this day she shall be delivered at the kraal of Wambe; I will send her with a party of my men. As for the white hunter and his men, I have nought to do with them, and cannot answer for their misdeeds. They have wandered hither unbidden by me, and I will deliver them back whence they came, that Wambe may judge them according to his law; they shall be sent with the girl. For you, go your ways. Food shall be given you without the kraal, and a present for Wambe in atonement of the ill-doing of my daughter. I have spoken.'

"At first the heralds seemed inclined to insist upon Maiwa's accompanying them then and there, but on being shown the swollen condition of her feet, ultimately they gave up the point and departed.

"When they were well out of the way I emerged from the hut, and we went on to discuss the situation and make our plans. First of all, as I was careful to explain to Nala, I was not going to give him my experience

and services for nothing. I heard that Wambe had a stockade round his kraal made of elephant tusks. These tusks, in the event of our succeeding in the enterprise, I should claim as my perquisite, with the proviso that Nala should furnish me with men to carry them down to the coast.

"To this modest request Nala and the head men gave an unqualified and hearty assent, the more hearty perhaps because they never expected to get the ivory.

"The next thing I stipulated was, that if we conquered, the white man John Every should be handed over to me, together with any goods which he might claim. His cruel captivity was, I need hardly say, the only reason that induced me to join in so hair-brained an expedition, but I was careful from motives of policy to keep this fact in the background. Nala accepted this condition. My third stipulation was that no women or children should be killed. This being also agreed to, we went on to consider ways and means. Wambe, it appeared, was a very powerful petty chief, that is, he could put at least six thousand fighting men into the field, and always had from three to four thousand collected about his kraal, which was supposed to be impregnable. Nala, on the contrary, at such short notice could not collect more than from twelve to thirteen hundred men, though, being of the Zulu stock, they were of much better stuff for fighting purposes than Wambe's Matukus.

"These odds, though large, under the circumstances were not

overwhelming. The real obstacle to our chance of success was the difficulty of delivering a crushing assault against Wambe's strong place. This was, it appeared, fortified all round with schanses or stone walls, and contained numerous caves and koppies in the hill-side and at the foot of the mountain which no force had ever been able to capture. It is said that in the time of the Zulu monarch Dingaan, a great impi of that king's having penetrated to this district, had delivered an assault upon the kraal then owned by a forefather of Wambe's, and been beaten back with the loss of more than a thousand men.

"Having thought the question over, I interrogated Maiwa closely as to the fortifications and the topographical peculiarities of the spot, and not without results. I discovered that the kraal was indeed impregnable to a front attack, but that it was very slightly defended to the rear, which ran up a slope of the mountain, indeed only by two lines of stone walls. The reason of this was that the mountain is quite impassable except by one secret path supposed to be known only to the chief and his councillors, and this being so, it had not been considered necessary to fortify it.

"Well,' I said, when she had done, 'and now as to this secret path of thine--knowest thou aught of it?'

"Ay,' she answered, 'I am no fool, Macumazahn. Knowledge learned is power earned. I won the secret of that path.'

"And canst thou guide an impi thereon so that it shall fall upon the town from behind?"

"Yes, I can do this, if only Wambe's people know not that the impi comes, for if they know, then they can block the way."

"So then here is my plan. Listen, Nala, and say if it be good, or if thou hast a better, show it forth. Let messengers go out and summon all thy impi, that it be gathered here on the third day from now. This being done, let the impi, led by Maiwa, march on the morrow of the fourth day, and crossing the mountains let it travel along on the other side of the mountains till it come to the place on the further side of which is the kraal of Wambe; that shall be some three days' journey in all.[*] Then on the night of the third day's journey, let Maiwa lead the impi in silence up the secret path, so that it comes to the crest of the mountain that is above the strong place, and here let it hide among the rocks.

[*] About one hundred and twenty miles.--Editor.

"Meanwhile on the sixth day from now let one of thy Indunas, Nala, bring with him two hundred men that have guns, and lead me and my men as prisoners, and take also a girl from among the Butiana people, who by form and face is like unto Maiwa, and bind her hands, and pass by the road on which we came and through the cutting in the cliff on to the kraal of Wambe. But the men shall take no shields or plumes with them,

only their guns and one short spear, and when they meet the people of Wambe they shall say that they come to give up the woman and the white man and his party to Wambe, and to make atonement to Wambe. So shall they pass in peace. And travelling thus, on the evening of the seventh day we shall come to the gates of the place of Wambe, and nigh the gates there is, so says Maiwa, a koppie very strong and full of rocks and caves, but having no soldiers on it except in time of war, or at the worst but a few such as can easily be overpowered.

"This being done, at the dawn of day the impi on the mountain behind the town must light a fire and put wet grass on it, so that the smoke goes up. Then at the sight of the smoke we in the koppie will begin to shoot into the town of Wambe, and all the soldiers will run to kill us. But we will hold our own, and while we fight the impi shall charge down the mountain side and climb the schanses, and put those who defend them to the assegai, and then falling upon the town shall surprise it, and drive the soldiers of Wambe as a wind blows the dead husks of corn. This is my plan. I have spoken.'

"Ou!" said Nala, 'it is good, it is very good. The white man is cleverer than a jackal. Yes, so shall it be; and may the snake of the Butiana people stand up upon its tail and prosper the war, for so shall we be rid of Wambe and the tyrannies of Wambe.'

"After that the girl Maiwa stood up, and once more producing the dreadful little dried hand, made her father and several of his head

councillors swear by it and upon it that they would carry out the war of vengeance to the bitter end. It was a very curious sight to see. And by the way, the fight that ensued was thereafter known among the tribes of that district as the War of the Little Hand.

"The next two days were busy ones for us. Messengers were sent out, and every available man of the Butiana tribe was ordered up to 'a great dance.' The country was small, and by the evening of the second day, some twelve hundred and fifty men were assembled with their assegais and shields, and a fine hardy troop they were. At dawn of the following day, the fourth from the departure of the heralds, the main impi, having been doctored in the usual fashion, started under the command of Nala himself, who, knowing that his life and chieftainship hung upon the issue of the struggle, wisely determined to be present to direct it. With them went Maiwa, who was to guide them up the secret path. Of course we were obliged to give them two days' start, as they had more than a hundred miles of rough country to pass, including the crossing of the great mountain range which ran north and south, for it was necessary that the impi should make a wide détour in order to escape detection.

"At length, however, at dawn on the sixth day, I took the road, accompanied by my most unwilling bearers, who did not at all like the idea of thus putting their heads into the lion's mouth. Indeed, it was only the fear of Nala's spears, together with a vague confidence in myself, that induced them to accept the adventure. With me also were about two hundred Butianas, all armed with guns of various kinds, for

many of these people had guns, though they were not very proficient in the use of them. But they carried no shields and wore no head-dress or armlets; indeed, every warlike appearance was carefully avoided. With our party went also a sister of Maiwa's, though by a different mother, who strongly resembled her in face and form, and whose mission it was to impersonate the runaway wife.

"That evening we camped upon the top of the cliff up which we had so barely escaped, and next morning at the first breaking of the light we rolled away the stones with which we had blocked the passage some days before, and descended to the hill-side beneath. Here the bodies, or rather the skeletons of the men who had fallen before my rifle, still lay about. The Matuku soldiers had left their comrades to be buried by the vultures. I descended the gully into which poor Gobo had fallen, and searched for his body, but in vain, although I found the spot where he and the other man had struck, together with the bones of the latter, which I recognized by the waist-cloth. Either some beast of prey had carried Gobo off, or the Matuku people had disposed of his remains, and also of my express rifle which he carried. At any rate, I never saw or heard any more of him.

"Once in Wambe's country, we adopted a very circumspect method of proceeding. About fifty men marched ahead in loose order to guard against surprise, while as many more followed behind. The remaining hundred were gathered in a bunch between, and in the centre of these men I marched, together with the girl who was personating Maiwa, and all my

bearers. We were disarmed, and some of my men were tied together to show that we were prisoners, while the girl had a blanket thrown over her head, and moved along with an air of great dejection. We headed straight for Wambe's place, which was at a distance of about twenty-five miles from the mountain-pass.

"When we had gone some five miles we met a party of about fifty of Wambe's soldiers, who were evidently on the look-out for us. They stopped us, and their captain asked where we were going. The head man of our party answered that he was conveying Maiwa, Wambe's runaway wife, together with the white hunter and his men, to be given up to Wambe in accordance with his command. The captain then wanted to know why we were so many, to which our spokesman replied that I and my men were very desperate fellows, and that it was feared that if we were sent with a smaller escort we should escape, and bring disgrace and the wrath of Wambe upon their tribe. Thereon this gentleman, the Matuku captain, began to amuse himself at my expense, and mock me, saying that Wambe would make me pay for the soldiers whom I had killed. He would put me into the 'Thing that bites,' in other words, the lion trap, and leave me there to die like a jackal caught by the leg. I made no answer to this, though my wrath was great, but pretended to look frightened. Indeed there was not much pretence about it, I was frightened. I could not conceal from myself that ours was a most hazardous enterprise, and that it was very possible that I might make acquaintance with that lion trap before I was many days older. However, it seemed quite impossible to desert poor Every in his misfortune, so I had to go on, and trust to

Providence, as I have so often been obliged to do before and since.

"And now a fresh difficulty arose. Wambe's soldiers insisted upon accompanying us, and what is more, did all they could to urge us forward, as they were naturally anxious to get to the chief's place before evening. But we, on the other hand, had excellent reasons for not arriving till night was closing in, since we relied upon the gloom to cover our advance upon the koppie which commanded the town. Finally, they became so importunate that we were obliged to refuse flatly to move faster, alleging as a reason that the girl was tired. They did not accept this excuse in good part, and at one time I thought that we should have come to blows, for there is no love lost between Butianas and Matukus. At last, however, either from motives of policy, or because they were so evidently outnumbered, they gave in and suffered us to go our own pace. I earnestly wished that they would have added to the obligation by going theirs, but this they declined absolutely to do. On the contrary, they accompanied us every foot of the way, keeping up a running fire of allusions to the 'Thing that bites' that jarred upon my nerves and discomposed my temper.

"About half-past four in the afternoon we came to a neck or ridge of stony ground, whence we could see Wambe's town plainly lying some six or seven miles away, and three thousand feet beneath us. The town is built in a valley, with the exception of Wambe's own kraal, that is situated at the mouth of some caves upon the slope of the opposing mountains, over which I hoped to see our impi's spears flashing in the morrow's

light. Even from where we stood, it was easy to see how strongly the place was fortified with schanses and stone walls, and how difficult of approach. Indeed, unless taken by surprise, it seemed to me quite impregnable to a force operating without cannon, and even cannon would not make much impression on rocks and stony koppies filled with caves.

"Then came the descent of the pass, and an arduous business it was, for the path--if it may be called a path--is almost entirely composed of huge water-worn boulders, from the one to the other of which we must jump like so many grasshoppers. It took us two hours to climb down, and, travelling through that burning sun, when at last we did reach the bottom, I for one was nearly played out. Shortly afterwards, just as it was growing dark, we came to the first line of fortifications, which consisted of a triple stone wall pierced by a gateway, so narrow that a man could hardly squeeze through it. We passed this without question, being accompanied by Wambe's soldiers. Then, came a belt of land three hundred paces or more in width, very rocky and broken, and having no huts upon it. Here in hollows in this belt the cattle were kraaled in case of danger. On the further side were more fortifications and another small gateway shaped like a V, and just beyond and through it I saw the koppie we had planned to seize looming up against the line of mountains behind.

"As we went I whispered my suggestions to our captain, with the result that at the second gateway he halted the cavalcade, and addressing the captain of Wambe's soldiers, said that we would wait here till we

received Wambe's word to enter the town. The other man said that this was well, only he must hand over the prisoners to be taken up to the chief's kraal, for Wambe, was 'hungry to begin upon them,' and his 'heart desired to see the white man at rest before he closed his eyes in sleep,' and as for his wife, 'surely he would welcome her.' Our leader replied that he could not do this thing, because his orders were to deliver the prisoners to Wambe at Wambe's own kraal, and they might not be broken. How could he be responsible for the safety of the prisoners if he let them out of his hand? No, they would wait there till Wambe's word was brought.

"To this, after some demur, the other man consented, and went away, remarking that he would soon be back. As he passed me he called out with a sneer, pointing as he did so to the fading red in the western sky--'Look your last upon the light, White Man, for the "Thing that bites" lives in the dark.'

"Next day it so happened that I shot this man, and, do you know, I think that he is about the only human being who has come to harm at my hands for whom I do not feel sincere sorrow and, in a degree, remorse."