

Poetry.

A PRETTY IRISH MELODY.

Were I but his own wife to guard and to guide him,
 'Tis little of sorrow should fall on my dear;
 I'd chant my low love-verses stealing beside him,
 So faint and so tender his heart would but hear.
 I'd pull the wild blossom from valley and highland,
 And there at his feet I would lay them all down;
 I'd sing him a song of our poor stricken Island,
 Till his heart was on fire with a love like my own.

There's a rose by his dwelling—I'd tend the low trea-
 sure,
 That he might have flowers when the summer would
 come;
 There's a harp in his hall—I would wake its sweet
 measures,
 For he must have music to brighten his home.
 Were I but his own wife to guard and to guide him,
 'Tis little of sorrow should fall on my dear;
 For every kind glance my whole life would reward him—
 In sickness I'd soothe, and in sadness I'd cheer.

My heart is a fount, swelling upward forever—
 When I think of my true love, by night or by day,
 That heart keeps its faith like a fast-flowing river,
 Which gushes forever and sings on its way.
 I have thoughts full of peace for his soul to repose in,
 Were I but his own wife to win and to woo—
 O! sweet if the night of misfortune were closing,
 To rise like the mountain-star, darling, like you.

Select Tale.

A RIDE ON SERVICE.

A THRILLING SKETCH.

It was a splendid summer evening, and the moon was shining out from the sky, bright as if, like a fortunate general, she never knew what it was to be behind a cloud. But wherever she smiled, it was on few pleasanter spots than on one of those half valleys, half slopes, which form so agreeable a feature of South African scenery, where the gracefully undulating ground is covered—not too closely—with clumps of trees and flowering shrubs, so picturesquely grouped that one might have fancied wealth had been expending itself there in park-adornment, only that so much taste would never have been displayed by man's decorating hand.

But the moon shone also on other objects less in harmony with the peaceful valley than the gleaming leaves or drooping blossoms; for brightly her rays were falling on piled arms and military accoutrements, which flashed up to her recollections of strife and bloodshed. And scarlet uniforms moved in and out among the greenwood, and around the fires which flung the glow of their red flames upon the moonlight.

It was, in short, the bivouac of a detachment of British—I mean *white*—troops *en route* from their head quarters to their destined post on the extreme frontier. We did not belong to the party, but, journeying also "under orders," had halted in the valley some time previous to the arrival of the detachment, which had been tempted to bivouac there by the same attraction as ourselves—a spring of sweet fresh water, a luxury which South African travellers of every class very soon learn to prize, as muddy ponds are the ordinary substitutes for fountains.

As one or two of the officers belonging to the detachment were old acquaintances, we were not sorry for the rencontre; so joined our travelling dinners *pic-nic* fashion, and spent a pleasant evening there in the soft moonlight, listening to many a tale of hair-breadth escape, and by-gone adventure, with which a soldier's stirring life had stored the memory of some of our companions.

Most were of distant scenes and places, which were noticed and laughed at by the tellers themselves, as giving room for suspicion that they guarded against all contradictory evidence.

"Or," I suggested, "that South Africa does not afford the materials for any adventures worth recording."

"Not that," at all events," replied one who had hitherto been a listener, "for I can say, for my own part, that the most critical day of my life was spent not a hundred miles from here."

"I have heard of that," said another. "It is a good story, Morden, tell it to us."

"Yes, do!" echoed half a dozen voices.

"But I am a bad story teller."

"So much the better; you'll tell it all the more straightforward, as the reviews at home say of an unlitary author."

"So, finding no excuse would be admitted, Lieutenant Morden began his story:

"It was two or three years ago, during ordinary Kaffir weather—that is to say, there were no thunder clouds of war darkening the sky, but for all that the black shadows of Kaffir marauding parties were flitting across it whenever they had a good

opportunity. The fact is, the Kaffirs, as usual, stole cattle whenever they could; and some daring fellows had just made off with a fine herd belonging to a frontier farmer, after wounding both the herdsmen. Troops were of course ordered off from the nearest point, to endeavour to recover the plunder, and obtain compensation for the outrage. Accordingly, Grant, of ours, stationed at a small post across the Rhei Kops River, received orders to undertake the duty with the greatest portion of his detachment.

"That is to say, the orders were despatched to him, but they were scarcely gone, when an express arrived with the intelligence that Grant had that morning been thrown from his horse, and so severely hurt that the sergeant had sent as quickly as possible for medical assistance. But the doctor could not be ulid hands upon at once, as he was gone to visit another of our small out-standing posts.

"This deprived me of a pleasant companion; for I was ordered off immediately to take the duty in Grant's place, and endeavour to teach the offending Kaffirs the worth of their misdeeds. Few minutes did for preparation, and I was soon in the saddle. Then came shaking hands with brother officers, and kind wishes—and I was off.

"Though belonging to a white regiment, I had, of course, a Hottentot soldier as escort, a smart little fellow, who, if he barely reached my elbow, looked as if his keen eyes could pierce half a mile further than mine into a mass of jungle. They were always darting about in every direction, looking for something suspicious. It seemed a positive pleasure to him when some Kaffirs were visible on a large flat we were crossing.

"Three Kaffirs, sur, and dey got plenty assegais."

"I could see the Kaffirs plain enough, but nothing of the assegais. However, Piet stuck to it that they had them, and afterwards that they were hiding them—of which I saw nothing either. I rode up to them, and found they had a pass quite according to rule for entering the colony. They were unarmed, and when I charged them with having weapons, denied it with the most perfect assumption of injured innocence, yet there was a look about one which made me feel that Piet was right and I was wrong. But I had no time to waste in investigation, so rode on.

"Piet's next report was far less to his own satisfaction:

"De paard's foot sore, sur. De horse 'im lame."

"Nonsense," I replied, but it was no nonsense. We walked the horse to and fro. Lame he was decidedly; we examined the foot, but could not discover the cause of the mischief. He was dead lame, there was no question about the matter.—And there was no question either as to what was to be done. Piet had to lead the animal slowly back to the fort, while I went on alone.

"In a little while I heard a shot fired, at no great distance on one hand: but took no heed of it, supposing—as proved afterwards to be the case—that it proceeded from some young men, settlers' sons, &c., on one of their frequent courting parties.

"I had not, however, gone twenty yards further before I beheld a splendid tiger—"

"Now, Carson," said Morden, checking himself, "you need not break in with your natural history. We all know, that, strictly speaking, it is a leopard, and not a tiger that we have in South Africa. But the animals are so universally called tigers, that I should feel quite awkward in calling them by any other name.

"Well, as I said, I had not ridden twenty yards before I saw a splendid tiger, the finest I ever saw in South Africa, break cover some distance in front. As these animals, though they can be terribly fierce when irritated, are seldom the first to commence hostilities, I was surprised to see him advance straight towards me as if to do battle. Then I suddenly recollected that only one of my barrels was furnished with ball, the other being loaded merely with small shot, which, in the hurry of preparation, I had forgotten. I now levelled, and took as steady aim with the useful barrel at the fellow as his rapid movements permitted.

"He was hit, somewhere about the chest, I thought, but it only checked him for a moment; then he rushed at me like a gigantic wild cat as he was, with his eyes burning, and his teeth bristling. His claws—I did not see them, but I knew well what they were like.

"The remaining barrel was worth no more than a handful of sand, but I resolved to face it out.—The brute was close upon me, so I seized my gun by the barrel, and whirling it round my head, was prepared to deal the rascal such a blow as might, I hoped, cure him of coming to such close quarters.

"But my horse was not in my councils, and, calculating possibly that his face might be clawed more readily than mine, he, at this very moment,

wheeled half round, and galloped away as if something even worse than a tiger was after him.

"This mad flight had not lasted a minute, when I did not require the horse's cry of pain and terror—and every one who has heard knows how horrible that is—to tell me what had happened. The tiger had sprung upon us, and while the claws of his left forepaw were fixed in the flank of my unfortunate horse, those of his right were plunged deep into my own side.

"For one instant my four-footed comrade in suffering seemed paralyzed; but the next he sprang into the air like an antelope, then wheeled round and round like a teetotum, and then darted off like a rocket, kicking up his heels as perhaps horse never kicked before. All this occupied but a few seconds, and by the time I had got over the first shock of the tiger grip, we were scouring a rugged flat with death spurred speed.

"I now discovered that the tiger had, luckily for me, made an awkward leap of it. He had miscalculated his distance, and instead of being seated very comfortably behind me, he merely held on by his murderous claws, while half his body hung over the tail of the horse, and his hind legs were one moment flourishing wildly in the air, and the next scaring the legs of the poor horse, in their vain endeavours to obtain a footing, which my steed's mad kicking and plunging prevented for the time; but that could not last long.

"But where you will ask, was the savage beast's delicate teeth all this while? So I asked myself, when my first expectation of having my spine bitten right off was agreeably disappointed. There was such a wonderful fumbling, and snorting, and growling, and crunching, and tugging behind me, that it was a minute or two before I understood it.

"But when I did, what a glorious idea it was! bringing with it the first little doubt of becoming the tiger's dinner which had visited me. I had got into a habit of carrying my spare ammunition—powder, bullets, shot of different sizes, in short any thing I did not want at hand—slung in a strong cartouche box behind me, soldier fashion.—At this the tiger made a grab, fierce enough to crash through both leather and tin (for it was so lined), and when he found the unsavoury morsel not to his taste, he was so jammed by the teeth, that he could not as yet extricate his jaws to employ them more pleasingly on my flesh and blood.

"So there he was, crunching and champing, but for how long? And there was the maddened horse cutting the maddest of capers, and trying his best to fling both me and the common enemy from his back, dashing furiously over any sort of ground, and taking leaps such as only an animal so spurred on by pain and terror could have taken.

"And now the tiger tore his claws out from my side, but only for an instant, to enable him to plunge them, in tender embrace, further round my waist. Was this a proof that he was progressing? In situations of this kind one minute is like ten, and all this takes much longer to tell than to occur, but how fully and painfully you seem to live through each long-drawn instant. Thank God, such moments cannot last long! Now every thought was busy with the question—what to do? To turn round and face the tiger, so close as we then were, would, I felt, be certain death; and to throw myself off was, I found, impossible, he held me so tightly in his loving embrace.

"What was to be done? Just at this moment, as my infuriated steed was executing one of his maddest pranks on the edge of a rugged hill, I espied the dark waters of Rhei Kops River at no great distance. At once the idea flashed on me, that I might be saved if I could reach it before I was converted into a luncheon. I at once seized the reins with a master's hand, for hitherto the agonized animal had had it all his own way, as I knew he was, for the time, doing the best for both us. But now I touched the reins in a way he knew must be obeyed, and turning his head towards the river, away he dashed, 'over brake, brook, and scarp,' faster than ever the wild huntman rushed through the night.

All, or much, depended now on the horse's speed. If he could gain the water before the furious brute behind me had shaken his jaws clear of the cartouche box, there was a chance; but, perhaps, all our necks might be broken first. I did not much care. I wondered whether the more uniform pace of the horse would favour the tiger's desire to ascend to closer companionship, but my flying steed still kept kicking about his heels in a marvellous style; and, besides, it struck me that his mishap with the cartouche-box engaged the most of the tiger's attention, or he would have accomplished that feat before this.

"Then what a tug the fellow gave me, and what a blow, as he shook his head with a ferocious growl! I thought it would have knocked me for-

ward, but no! the strong clasp of those lacerating nails kept me steady. At last the Rhei Kops was in full view, some twenty yards in front. I knew that it was very deep there, and that the current was very strong, but so much the better—anything was preferable to the kind of death before or rather behind me. Another second, and we reached the brink of the canal-like stream, and full time too, for at the same instant I heard something which convinced me that the tiger had at length got his dental weapons ready for action.

"But the horse required no urging to induce him to take the water; in he plunged at once. In a moment he was beyond his depth, then he struck out to swim, and then for the success of my experiment. As I have said, the current was both strong and rapid, and though I kept my horse's head up stream as much as possible, to gain all the advantage of the water, it swept us down at an amazing rate. And then my adjunct set up a snorting, and a spluttering, and a gurgling, as if the water incommoded him. I looked over my shoulder, and there I saw him striving hard to keep his head above water, not to much purpose, for every instant a fresh splutter and gurgle attested failure.

"Yet amid his choking, the pertinacious brute was still trying to scramble further up. I gave the rein such a furious jerk, that it brought the horse's head in the air, with a blow on my own forehead—prepared though I was—that half stunned me; but it also brought my steed into nearly an upright position, and completely submerged master tiger.

"I heard gurgling and puffing worse than ever, and I jerked the reins again to keep matters so.—The horse was, I felt, giving up swimming, he was turning with the current, but I should not then have minded being drowned. There was a struggle behind me, the fierce nails were clenched with agonizing movement in my flesh, and I dare say my poor dumb comrade might have said 'ditto.' Then they were torn out painfully from my lacerated side, and then—O welcome sight!—I saw the tiger swimming for himself, with his head above water.

"I immediately threw myself from the saddle to try my own fortune and let my poor exhausted horse have the best chance I could give him of saving his life. In a moment I saw him carried down the stream, floundering helplessly in the very centre. Just afterwards, the tiger passed me, going also with the current, and looking very little at his ease in the ungenial element.

"But now I had enough to do to think of myself, and whether—albeit the distance was not great—I should succeed in gaining shore. For the Rhei Kops is at all times a strong current, and when, as then, swollen to the brim by recent rains among the mountains, is sufficiently dangerous, and no one in his senses—unless tiger-driven—would dare to attempt it at an unfordable spot. But, with my utmost exertions, I calculate I drifted a fathom for every foot I won towards the land. I was rather embarrassed, 'tis true, by my gun, which I could not think of relinquishing. Perhaps some remembrance of the tiger had a share in my reluctance; besides, it was the last gift from a dear friend, who sleeps beneath the shadow of the Syrian trees, and I could not part with it, clog though it was on my exertions.

"So I struggled on. Many a time I thought it was uselessly,—that the current would overpower me at last, and that obscure stream close over my latest sigh. But my presence here is sufficient proof that it did not; though it was only after a long and desperate struggle that, weary and exhausted, I at length scrambled up the rugged bank,—how far below the point where we first touched the Rhei Kops, is more than I can say.

"I was so utterly done up, that all I wished for was to crawl to some place where I might lie down and rest—or die; and the wet state of my garments would have rendered the latter very likely. But I had scarcely had time to breathe out my first pantings of fatigue and suffering, when I saw something that sent a glow—more (odd as it may seem) of indignation than any other feeling—through my frame. But it was like a positive insult to see that tiger standing there, confronting me only at a few yards' distance. Miserable and half drowned he looked, but his eyes were still glowing and burning, as if with the thought that a comfortable meal would recruit him after his misadventures.

"I glanced round quickly. Steep and stern the hill rose behind me, forbidding all thought of climbing, even with leisure. But I was now on more equal terms with the savage brute than I had been before, and I seemed to care little that there was no avenue for escape if my first blow should fail.

"The tiger crept stealthily forward a few paces, with his fiery eyeballs steadily fixed on me. Then,