



C. P. Winkelman, photo. A SURVEYORS CAMP, WAIMAMAU VALLEY, HOKIANGA, N.Z.



Thos. F. Hill, Amateur, Auckland.

NEW PLYMOUTH, N.Z.



NOONDAY.

HOW THE BOERS FIGHT.

THE STORY OF MAJUBA HILL RETOLD.

WHATEVER may be the result of the storm clouds now lowering so darkly on the Transvaal, whether they will blow over, or as seems more likely, herald a tempest that will deluge Europe and Africa in blood. Never again will a British force (authorised or unauthorised) suffer a defeat at the hands of the Boers. Twice have we been defeated, twice out-generaled, twice beaten in every department of the game of war. The mistake must never again be made of underestimating the fighting powers of the Boers. For the peculiar style of warfare necessitated by geographical and climatic conditions of the country, the Boers manifestly excel. Cruel they may be, stupid and ignorantly pig-headed they undoubtedly are, but they can fight as we have learned to our cost. It was on the 5th of April in 1881 that the mail brought details to New Zealand of the terrible defeat sustained by General Colley. The account furnished of that engagement was most graphic, and as the story of the defeat cannot fail to be interesting now when Englishmen have again suffered a disastrous reverse at the same hands, it may well be here reproduced. We are, moreover, enabled to give pictures of that engagement, which, as will be seen, resemble the more recent defeat and disaster in several well-marked particulars.

The writer begins by describing how the hill came to be occupied by the British troops. He then continues:—

AT sunrise the BOERS WERE TO BE SEEN MOVING IN THEIR LINES, but it was not until an hour later that a party of mounted vedettes were seen trotting out towards our hill, upon which they evidently intended to take their stand. As they approached our outlying pickets fired on them (fatal error!), and our position was for the first time discovered. They immediately turned their horses and galloped back to their laager, losing one man on the way (see illustration, page 54). The whole scene was now changed as if by magic. In the place of a few scattered figures, there appeared

SWARMS OF MEN RUSHING HITHER AND THITHER. Some rushed to the horses, others to waggons, and the work of yoking oxen and preparing for instant retreat began. When the first panic had abated, it could be seen that some person in authority had taken command. The greater portion of the Boer force began to advance to attack us, but the work of preparing for a retreat if necessity should arise still went on, and continued until the waggons were unspanned and ready to move away. Some indeed began to withdraw. At 7 o'clock the Boers opened fire, and bullets whistled thickly round our heads. The men were perfectly cool and confident. I do not think the possibility of the position being reversed occurred to anyone. From 7 to 11 o'clock the Boers continued to keep up a steady fire.

THEIR SHOOTING WAS WONDERFULLY ACCURATE. The stones behind which our men in front line were lying were hit every time. Opposed to such a deadly fire, there was no necessity to impress on the men to keep well under cover; they only showed themselves to take an occasional shot, so that, accurate as was the Boer marksmanship, up to 11 o'clock we had only had five casualties. Commander Rommily was dangerously wounded while standing close to General Colley. Twenty men under Lieutenant Hamilton kept the point which was most threatened by the Boers.

SO FAR OUR POSITION SEEMED PERFECTLY SAFE. The Boers had indeed got between us and the camp, but we had three days' provisions, and could hold out till reinforcements came up. From 11 to 12 the fire from the enemy continued as fierce as ever, but between 12 and 1 it slackened, and it seemed as if the Boers were drawing off. This was, as we learned to our cost, not the case. They had, as was afterwards learned, merely retired to strongly reinforce the attacking party. Shortly before 1 o'clock terrible and destructive firing broke out from the right lower slopes of the hill, the side on which firing had all along been the heaviest.

A TREMENDOUS RUSH WAS SIMULTANEOUSLY MADE BY THE ENEMY.

One advance line was at once almost wiped out, only a few men being driven back. Our whole force now lined up to repel the assailants at the point of the bayonet. From this time the hand to hand battle was terrible in its ferocity and sanguinary results. The Boers, with shouts of triumph, swarmed up the sides of the hill and made continuous and gallant attempts to carry the position with a rush. Time after time they were driven back with bayonet point, and time after time they rounded up and came on with renewed virulence and undiminished vigour. Their firing, which had nearly ceased during the *mêlée*, suddenly broke out with renewed violence and destructive effect, and

OUR MEN FELL WITH SHOCKING RAPIDITY.

At last the end came. The Boers gathered on the edge of the slope for one great rush at the bayonet point. They singled out a position where the number of defenders was smallest, and on they came. A wild burst and it was over. They had broken through the defenders, gained the basin, and our position was lost. The roar of firing, the whistling of bullets, the shouts of the enemy made up a din which seemed infernal. All about men were falling.

THERE WAS NO RESISTANCE; IT WAS FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

At this moment I was knocked down by the rush and trampled on, and when I came to my senses the Boers were firing over me at the retreating troops, who were moving down the river. Trying to rise, I was taken prisoner and led away. As to the completeness of their victory there can be no question. By sheer bravery and fighting they carried a position considered by their own General to be impregnable.