

The Veldt in War Time.

BY DONALD MACDONALD.

WITH the introduction of long range magazine rifles and smokeless powder war has changed in many aspects. The aftermath of battle may be as horrible, as repellant as heretofore, but its impending presence is less manifest, and even on the eve of a great battle there is little sign of the coming strife. A few hours before the Dublin Fusiliers went up the slopes of Talana Hill in the first combat of the Natal campaign, the men had been out for running exercise, so certain were they that actual contact with the enemy was yet many days removed. It is with the solemn possibilities of battle ever in front of one that the quieter aspects of Nature come home the more impressively. The blue black faces of the men who had died with their heads down the slope of Waggon Hill—the waxen death masks of those who slept their last with their heads to the crest of it—the shell marks showing so plainly on the bare legs of the Highlanders, who look giants almost in death—were not the less impressive because on that quiet Sunday morning of January 7th skylarks were singing sweetly just over the thorn-decked plateau where the Kaffirs sweated, chattered and laughed as they dug the graves for the one hundred and twenty white men lying in a long gruesome row in the sunlight.

I had ever been a lover of Nature from those days when by the home paths of our old Southern farms, the honey parrots screamed and scrambled for the harvest of the red gums, when the brush of the leaves, the yellow-dusted bees upon the Cape weed—realizing fully Shelley's fancy of a golden sundown—were the true bush symphonies,

and night with the soft coo of the Boobook owl or the shrill scream of the stone plover on the rocky hills only brought one closer to the heart of her mysteries.

The first thing that impressed one on the South African veldt was that clear, vivid atmosphere which so annihilates distance that the beetling crags of the Drackenberg, on some days distant, and mist-hidden on others, seemed to loom over us until one almost saw the gleam of their mineral points. For a country so long settled, so much harried by Dutch and Englishmen with rifle and fowling piece, one was astonished to find so many deer, for when the wild game were threatened with complete extermination, the Natal authorities wisely brought into operation an old Act declaring all the scarcer kinds "Royal Game." So they have increased and multiplied, re-stocking their old pastures all the more readily because the lion who once lorded it over them has disappeared altogether, and the leopard is only occasionally found in the many kloofs and dongas which seam and cut that rocky land everywhere. I saw one day several hartebeeste, one of the largest of African buck, quietly feeding across the fire zone—the neutral territory which both Briton and Boer commanded with their fire, and upon which, accordingly, neither side cared to intrude. Right into our camps at times strayed the slim spindle-shaaked Bluebok or the cinnamon Reidbok, one of the handsomest of African antelopes. They were shot even in the heart of Caesar's Camp, where never, during the long four months' siege, were the lines of defenders at all relaxed. Marching over the veldt the troops constantly disturbed little red Spring-