

**THE CAPE AS  
I FOUND IT**

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The Cape as I Found It by Beatrice M. Hicks

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**BEATRICE M. HICKS**

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BY

BEATRICE M. HICKS

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LONDON

ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ON THE SEA - - - - -	I
II. IN THE TRAIN - - - - -	20
III. IN GRAHAMSTOWN - - - - -	40
IV. ON A FARM IN ALBANY - - - - -	60
V. ON A FARM NEAR QUEENSTOWN - - - - -	83
VI. IN SCHOOL AND OUT - - - - -	103
VII. IN QUEENSTOWN - - - - -	123
VIII. THE NATIVES - - - - -	142
IX. AWAY ON THE HOLIDAYS - - - - -	157
X. ABOUT THE BOERS AND OTHER THINGS - - - - -	173
XI. GOING HOME - - - - -	186

*Memoranda - 11th Dec. 1948*

## CHAPTER I

### ON THE SEA

IT was before the war that I was living in South Africa, but I doubt if the country is, or ever will be, different to what I knew it. It is a large, wide tract of land, with few people there, and things change very, very slowly. Climate, race, and custom have made the place what it is, and it will not be altered in a day or so, however great the schemes for the future may be ; but, all the same, there are many men who will rush out ' when affairs are settled ' for better—or maybe for worse—and there will be going a crowd of women also, I hope, both for their own sake and that of the surplus females in England—and it is for them chiefly that I am recalling these reminiscences of South Africa, hoping that these may be of some use and entertainment to them, in showing what the country was like to me, and how I got on there.

I was still quite a girl when I made up my mind to go abroad, and so, after some deliberation, started off for the Cape. As I had no relatives out there, and knew scarcely a soul, all my acquaintances were interested in my departure, and found different reasons for my going. Some said I went to make my fortune,



which, needless to say, I did not do—I never heard of a woman who did—so that was a failure ; some other friends—and friends generally impute the loftiest motives to one—said I was going out there to try and get married : but I didn't do that either, so that was a failure too. The real reason, though, of my leaving was very prosaic. I had at that time to earn my living somehow. In England I sat in an office all day long, and knew if I sat there for years I should never get on any further or earn really enough to keep myself, so I thought it silly to go on sitting there at all, and decided to go out to the colonies, where, if I should not earn much money, I should at least see a different phase of life, and more of the world at the same time.

Through the kindly help of that most excellent institution, the Women's Emigration Society, I made my preparations for departure, took my money, which was very little, out of the Post-Office Savings Bank, and booked my passage to the Cape on board the *Athenian*. I had heard that there was a good opening for teachers, so a-teaching I intended to go. I think I had a fair knowledge of book-learning. I had been educated at the North London Collegiate School (Miss Buss), and held several certificates, which are supposed to be a correct gauge of the knowledge which has been packed into one ; and, indeed, I found out that at the Cape my London Matriculation certificate stood me in good stead, and some people up-country thought me really clever.

A party from the society, teachers and hospital nurses, were going out under the charge of Sister

Henrietta, of Kimberley. These I joined, and so I set forth to see the world. I think I quite fancied myself a person out of a fairy tale, and, to keep up the illusion, perhaps I ought to say something about my parents and my family. As far as I can find out, my ancestors, as in the story, were poor and humble folk; but, unfortunately, they were never poor enough nor humble enough to be in any way interesting, so there is nothing more to tell about them. And as for adventures, I'm afraid I cannot boast of having had any all the time I was away, although I was on the look-out for them. I had no exciting experiences. I always got food to eat in the daytime, and a bed to sleep on at night, and these without any difficulty, so I was not even thrilled by the ordinary emotions of hunger and sleeplessness. In fact, looking back now, those three years in South Africa seem quite commonplace, but a commonplace which is bright and pleasant to think of, a life without rush and worry, where you get more money and have less work, and the days pass on quietly and smoothly. Of course, on leaving home you give up many things. Until you get out there, you do not know what a difference that three weeks' journey from London makes; but instead of the (perhaps overrated) advantages of England, you can go for miles and miles, on and on, over ground which no spade has ever turned; you can breathe air uncontaminated by the breath of millions, such air as you have never felt in all your life before; you can find a people whose hearts perhaps are nearer the surface than those in the Old Country.

There were nine of us in Sister Henrietta's party,

and although we were dissimilar in tastes and of different ages, we got on very well, and were quite happy together. We were all going out for the first time, and looked upon the future, like Alexander, only as a fresh world to conquer. We were very hopeful, and when we parted vowed to each other eternal friendships, and now, in spite of the eternal friendships, I have lost sight of them all. When I last heard, one, like myself, had come back to England, one was married at Kimberley, one was teaching at Maritzburg, another at Bloemfontein, two were nursing somewhere—I don't know where—and the other two were dead. Theirs were sad stories, and to them South Africa was a disappointment. And so we all went off different ways.

Of course, we all nine intended to keep diaries, and to put down faithfully what happened to us each day. I had made the same resolution many times before, but had always given it up at the end of a week, and now I am glad I gave it up this time too. There is no satisfaction in reading an old diary; it always gives one an untrue picture of life. One day we write, 'Grandfather died, aunt broken-hearted'; the next, 'Cook left, had dinner out'; and the next, 'Sales began; took Tommy to be fitted for some boots,' and so on for weeks and weeks. Grandfather, Cook, Tommy, all are the stars of their own day—but afterwards? It is only by looking backwards in our own mind that we can get the right focus of the past—what things are important, what not. Yes, it is best to trust to memory—but, all the same, before I go on, it is well for me to say that everything, such