

LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649480395

Life in South Africa by Lady Barker

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

LADY BARKER

**LIFE IN
SOUTH AFRICA**

LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

By ^{Mary Ann Stewart} LADY BARKER, Broome

AUTHOR OF

"STATION LIFE IN NEW ZEALAND," "STORIES ABOUT," Etc., Etc.



PHILADELPHIA
J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.
1877.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
317759
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS.
R 190c L

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1876, by

J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.,

In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

LIFE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

PART I.

CAPS TOWN, October 26, 1875.

SAFE, safe at last, after twenty-four days of nothing but sea and sky, of white-crested waves—which made no secret of their intention of coming on board whenever they could or of tossing the good ship Edinburgh Castle hither and thither like a child's plaything—and of more deceitful sluggish rolling billows, looking tolerably calm to the unseafaring eye, but containing a vast amount of heaving power beneath their slow, undulating water-hills and valleys. Sometimes sky and sea have been steeped in dazzling haze of golden glare, sometimes brightened to blue of a sapphire depth. Again, a sudden change of wind has driven up serried clouds from the south and east, and all has been gray and cold and restful to eyes wearied with radiance and glitter of sun and sparkling water.

Never has there been such exceptional weather, although the weather of my acquaintance invariably *is* exceptional. No sooner had the outlines of Madeira melted and blended into the soft darkness of a summer night than we appeared to sail straight into tropic heat and a sluggish vapor, brooding on the water like steam from a giant geyser. This simmering, oily, exhausting temperature carried us close to the line. "What is before us," we asked each other languidly, "if it be hotter than this? How can mortal man, woman, still less child, endure existence?" Vain alarms! Yet

another shift of the light wind, another degree passed, and we are all shivering in winter wraps. The line was crossed in greatcoats and shawls, and the only people whose complexion did not resemble a purple plum were those lucky ones who had strength of mind and steadiness of body to lurch up and down the deck all day enjoying a strange method of movement which they called walking.

The exceptional weather pursued us right into the very dock. Table Mountain ought to be seen—and very often is seen—seventy miles away. I am told it looks a fine bold bluff at that distance. Yesterday we had blown off our last pound of steam and were safe under its lee before we could tell there was a mountain there at all, still less an almost perpendicular cliff more than three thousand feet high. Robben Island looked like a dun-colored hillock as we shot past it within a short distance, and a more forlorn and discouraging islet I don't think I have ever beheld. When I expressed something of this impression to a cheery fellow-voyager, he could only urge in its defence that there were a great many rabbits on it. If he had thrown the lighthouse into the bargain, I think he would have summed up all its attractive features. Unless Langalibalele is of a singularly unimpressionable nature, he must have found his sojourn on it somewhat monotonous, but he always says he was very comfortable there.

And now for the land. We are close alongside of a wharf, and still a capital and faithful copy of a Scotch mist wraps houses, trees and sloping uplands in a fibry fantastic veil, and the cold drizzle seems to curdle the spirits and energies of the few listless Malays and half-caste boys and men who are lounging about. Here come hansom cabs rattling up one after the other, all with black drivers in gay and fantastic head and shoulder gear; but their hearts seem precisely as the hearts of their London brethren, and they single out newcomers at a glance, and shout offers to drive them a hundred yards or so for exorbitant sums, or yell laudatory recommendations of sundry hotels. You must bear in mind that in a colony every pot-house is a hotel, and generally rejoices in a name much too imposing to fit across its frontage. These hansoms are all painted white with the name of some ship in bright letters on the side, and are a great deal cleaner, roomier and more comfortable than their London "forbears." The horses are small and shabby, but rattle along at a good pace; and soon each cab has its load of happy home-comers and swings rapidly away to make room for fresh arrivals hurrying up for fares. Hospitable suggestions come pouring in, and it is as though it were altogether a new experience when one steps cautiously on the land, half expecting it to dip away playfully from under one's feet. A little boy puts my thoughts into words when he exclaims, "How steady the ground is!" and becomes a still more faithful interpreter of a wave-worn voyager's sensations when, a couple of hours later, he demands permission to get *out* of his delicious little white bed that he may have the pleasure of getting *into* it again. The evening is cold and raw and the new picture is all blurred and soft and indistinct, and nothing seems plain except the kindly grace of our welcome and the never-before-sufficiently-appreciated delights of space and silence.

OCTOBER 17.

How pleasant is the process familiarly known as "looking about one," particu-

larly when performed under exceptionally favorable circumstances! A long and happy day commenced with a stroll through the botanic gardens, parallel with which runs, on one side, a splendid oak avenue just now in all the vivid freshness of its young spring leaves. The gardens are beautifully kept, and are valuable as affording a sort of experimental nursery in which new plants and trees can be brought up on trial and their adaptability to the soil and climate ascertained. For instance, the first thing that caught my eye was the gigantic trunk of an Australian blue-gum tree, which had attained to a girth and height not often seen in its own land. The flora of the Cape Colony is exceptionally varied and beautiful, but one peculiarity incidentally alluded to by my charming guide struck me as very noticeable. It is that in this dry climate and porous soil all the efforts of uncultivated nature are devoted to the *stems* of the vegetation: on their sap-retaining power depends the life of the plant, so blossom and leaf, though exquisitely indicated, are fragile and incomplete compared to the solidity and bulbous appearance of the stalk. Everything is sacrificed to the practical principle of keeping life together, and it is not until these stout-stemmed plants are cultivated and duly sheltered and watered, and can grow, as it were, with confidence, that they are able to do justice to the inherent beauty of pencilled petal and veined leaf. Then the stem contracts to ordinary dimensions, and leaf and blossom expand into things which may well be a joy to the botanist's eye. A thousand times during that shady saunter did I envy my companions their scientific acquaintance with the beautiful green things of earth, and that intimate knowledge of a subject which enhances one's appreciation of its charms as much as bringing a lamp into a darkened picture-gallery. There are the treasures of form and color, but from ignorant eyes more than half their charms and wonders are held back.

A few steps beyond the garden stand the library and natural history museum. The former is truly a credit to the Colony.

Spacious, handsome, rich in literary treasures, it would bear comparison with similar institutions in far older and wealthier places. But I have often noticed in colonies how much importance is attached to the possession of a good public library, and how fond, as a rule, colonists are of books. In a new settlement other shops may be ill supplied, but there is always a good bookseller's, and all books are to be bought there at pretty nearly the same prices as in England. Here each volume costs precisely the same as it would in London, and it would puzzle ever so greedy a reader to name a book which would not be instantly handed to him.

The museum is well worth a visit of many more hours than we could afford minutes, and, as might be expected, contains numerous specimens of the *Bok* family, whose tapering horns and slender legs are to be seen at every turn of one's head. Models are there also of the largest diamonds, and especially well copied is the famous "Star of South Africa," a magnificent brilliant of purest water, sold here originally for something like twelve thousand pounds, and resold for double that sum three or four years back. In these few hours I perceive, or think I perceive, a certain soreness, if one may use the word, on the part of the Cape Colonists about the unappreciativeness of the English public toward their produce and possessions. For instance, an enormous quantity of wine is annually exported, which reaches London by a devious route and fetches a high price, as it is fairly entitled to do from its excellence. If that same wine were sent direct to a London merchant and boldly sold as Cape wine, it is said that the profit on it would be a very different affair. The same prejudice exists against Cape diamonds. Of course, as in other things, a large proportion of inferior stones are forced into the market and serve to give the diamonds that bad name which we all know is so fatal to a dog. But it is only necessary to pretend that a really fine Cape diamond has come from Brazil to ensure its fetching a handsome price, and in that way even jewelers themselves have been known

to buy and give a good round sum, too, for stones they would otherwise have looked upon with suspicion. Already I have seen a straw-colored diamond from "Du Zoit's pan" in the diamond-fields cut in Amsterdam and set in London, which could hold its own for purity, radiance and color against any other stone of the same rare tint, without fear or favor; but of course such gems are not common, and fairly good diamonds cost as much here as in any other part of the world.

The light morning mists from that dampness of yesterday have rolled gradually away as the beautiful sunshine dried the atmosphere, and by mid-day the table-cloth, as the colonists affectionately call the white, fleece-like vapor which so often rests on their pet mountain, has been folded up and laid aside in Cloudland for future use. I don't know what picture other people may have made to their own minds of the shape and size of Table Mountain, but it was quite a surprise and the least little bit in the world of a disappointment to me to find that it cuts the sky (and what a beautiful sky it is!) with a perfectly straight and level line. A gentle, undulating foreground broken into ravines, where patches of green *veldts* or fields, clumps of trees and early settlers' houses nestle cosily down, guides the eye halfway up the mountain. There the rounder forms abruptly cease, and great granite cliffs rise, bare and straight, up to the level line stretching ever so far along. "It is so characteristic," and "You grow to be so fond of that mountain," are observations I have heard made in reply to the carping criticisms of travelers, and already I begin to understand the meaning of the phrases. But you need to see the mountain from various points of view and under different influences of sun and cloud before you can take in its striking and peculiar charms.

On each side of the straight line which is emphatically Table Mountain, but actually forming part of it, is a bold headland of the shape one is usually accustomed to in mountains. The "Devil's Peak" is uncompromising enough for

any one's taste, whilst the "Lion's Head" charms the eye by its bluff form and deep purple fissures. These grand promontories are not, however, half so beloved by Cape Colonists as their own Table Mountain, and it is curious and amusing to notice how the influence of this odd straight ridge, ever before their eyes, has unconsciously guided and influenced their architectural tastes. All the roofs of the houses are straight—straight as the mountain; a gable is almost unknown, and even the few steeples are dwarfed to an imperceptible departure from the prevailing straight line. The very trees which shade the Parade-ground and border the road in places have their tops blown absolutely straight and flat, as though giant shears had trimmed them; but I must confess, in spite of a natural anxiety to carry out my theory, that the violent "sou'-easters" are the "straighteners" in their case.

Cape Town is so straggling that it is difficult to form any idea of its real size, but the low houses are neat and the streets are well kept and look quaint and lively enough to my new eyes this morning. There are plenty of people moving about with a sociable, business-like air; lots of different shades of black and brown Malays, with pointed hats on the men's heads: the women encircle their dusky, smiling faces with a gay cotton handkerchief and throw another of a still brighter hue over their shoulders. When you add to this that they wear a full, flowing, stiffly-starched cotton gown of a third bright color, you can perhaps form some idea of how they enliven the streets. Swarms of children everywhere, romping and laughing and showing their white teeth in broadest of grins. The white children strike me at once as looking marvelously well—such chubby cheeks, such sturdy fat legs—and all, black or white, with that amazing air of independence peculiar to baby-colonists. Nobody seems to mind them and nothing seems to harm them. Here are half a dozen tiny boys shouting and laughing at one side of the road, and half a dozen baby-girls at the other (they all seem to play separately): they are all

driving each other, for "horses" is the one game here. By the side of a pond sit two toddlers of about three years old, in one garment apiece and pointed hats: they are very busy with string and a pin; but who is taking care of them and why don't they tumble in? They are as fat as ortolans and grin at us in the most friendly fashion.

We must remember that this chance to be the very best moment of the whole year in which to see the Cape and the dwellers thereat. The cold weather has left its bright roses on the children's cheeks, and the winter rains exceptionally having this year made every blade of grass and leaf of tree to laugh and sing in freshest green. After the dry, windy summer I am assured there is hardly a leaf and never a blade of grass to be seen in Cape Town, and only a little straggling verdure under the shelter of the mountain. The great want of this place is water. No river, scarcely a brook, refreshes one's eye for many and many a league inward. The necessary water for the use of the town is brought down by pipes from the numerous springs which trickle out of the granite cliffs of Table Mountain, but there is never a sufficiency to spare for watering roads or grassplots. This scarcity is a double loss to residents and visitors, for one misses it both for use and beauty.

Everybody who comes here rides or drives round the "Kloof." That may be; but what I maintain is that very few do it so delightfully as I did this sunny afternoon with a companion who knew and loved every turn of the romantic road, who could tell me the name of every bush or flower, of every distant stretch of hills, and helped me to make a map in my head of the stretching landscape and curving bay. Ah! how delicious it was, the winding, climbing road, at whose every angle a fresh fair landscape fell away from beneath our feet or a shining stretch of sea, whose transparent green and purple shadows broke in a fringe of feathery spray at the foot of bold, rocky cliffs, or crept up to a smooth expanse of silver sand in a soft curling line of foam! "Kloof" means simply cleft, and

is the pass between the Table Mountain and the Lion's Head. The road first rises, rises, rises, until one seems halfway up the great mountain, and the little straight-roofed white houses, the green velts or fields and the parallel lines of the vineyards have sunk below one's feet far, far away. The mountain gains in grandeur as one approaches it, for the undulating spurs which run from it down to the sea-shore take away from the height looking upward. But when these are left beneath, the perpendicular walls of granite, rising sheer and straight up to the bold sky-line, and the rugged, massive strength of the buttress-like cliffs, begin to gain something of their true value to the stranger's eye. The most beautiful part of the road, however, to my taste, is the descent, when the shining expanse of Camp's Bay lies shimmering in the warm afternoon haze with a thousand lights and shadows from cloud and cliff touching and passing over the crisp water-surface. By many a steep zigzag we round the Lion's Head, and drop once more on a level road running parallel to the sea-shore, and so home in the balmy and yet bracing twilight. The midday sun is hot and scorching even at this time of year, but it is always cool in the shade, and no sooner do the afternoon shadows grow to any length than the air freshens into sharpness, and by sundown one is glad of a good warm shawl.

OCTOBER 28.

Another bright, ideal day, and the morning passed in a delicious flower-filled room looking over old books and records and listening to odd, quaint little scraps from the old Dutch records. But directly after luncheon (and how hungry we all are, and how delicious everything tastes on shore!) the open break with four capital horses comes to the door, and we start for a long, lovely drive. Half a mile or so takes us out on a flat red road with Table Mountain rising straight up before it, but on the left stretches away a most enchanting panorama. It is all so soft in coloring and tone, distinct and yet not hard, and exquisitely beautiful!

The Blue-Berg range of mountains stretch beyond the great bay, which, unless a "sou'-easter" is tearing over it, lies glowing in tranquil richness. This afternoon it is colored like an Italian lake. Here are lines of chrysoprane, green-fringed, white with little waves, and beyond lie dark, translucent, purple depths, which change with every passing cloud. Beyond these amethystic shoals again stretches the deep blue water, and again beyond, and bluer still, rise the five ranges of "Hottentots' Holland," which encircle and complete the landscape, bringing the eye round again to the nearer cliffs of the Devil's Peak. When the Dutch came here some two hundred years ago, they seized upon this part of the coast and called it Holland, driving the Hottentots beyond the neighboring range and telling them that was to be their Holland—a name it keeps to this day. Their consciences must have troubled them after this arbitrary division of the soil, for up the highest accessible spurs of their own mountain they took the trouble to build several queer little square houses called "block-houses," from which they could keep a sharp look-out for foes coming over the hills from Hottentots' Holland. The foes never came, however, and the roofs and walls of the block-houses have gradually tumbled in, and the gun-carriages—for they managed to drag heavy ordnance up the steep hillside—have rotted away, whilst the old-fashioned cannon lie, grim and rusty, amid a tangled profusion of wild geranium, heath and lilies. I scrambled up to one of the nearest block-houses, and found the date on the dismounted gun to be more than a hundred years old. The view was beautiful and the air fresh and fragrant with scent of flowers.

But to return to our drive. I could gaze and gaze for ever at this lovely panorama, but am told this is the ugliest part of the road. The road itself is certainly not pretty just here, and is cloudy with a fine red dust, but this view of sea and distant hills is enchanting. Soon we get under the lee of the great mountain, and then its sheltering arms show their protective power; for splendid oak