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THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING.

A PATRIOTIC POEM.

BY

E. GILBERT HIGHTON.

*M.A. Cantab. Et Oxon., F.R.S.L.,
And
Barrister-at-Law,
Author of an Elegy on the late Emperor Frederick of Germany
and of other Poems*

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“ARMA VIRUMQUE CANO.”
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HARRISON & SONS, 59, PALL MALL.

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1900.
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THE SIEGE OF MAFEKING: A PATRIOTIC POEM

DEDICATED

BY PARTICULAR PERMISSION

TO

Mrs. BADEN-POWELL

THE MOTHER OF THE CHIEF HERO

OF MAFEKING.

PREFACE.

***T**HE following Poem was written a few days after the appearance — in “The Times” of the 19th Ult. — of the historical narrative, upon which it is chiefly founded, and, inasmuch as the Author has read it to several distinguished Scholars, Critics and Poets, with the result that they have unanimously pronounced a verdict in its favour, he is encouraged to believe that its publication may prove to be of interest to a wide circle of readers.*

EDWARD GILBERT HIGHTON.

*THE OWLS' NEST,
SOHO SQUARE,
LONDON, W.*

JUNE, 1900.

THE SEIGE OF MAFEKING.

A little Town surrounded by the Veldt,
Built as an outpost of Imperial sway,
Had so enlarged its borders, that, ere War,
Voiced in the breeze, had swept across the Plain,
This Town had reached a rank municipal.
Full of incorporate life, it, not in vain,
Pleaded for aid against the fell attack
Of Foes insatiate from a neighb'ring soil,
Where, as of old, "neighbour" oft meant no friend!
The pleas was heard and answered. Baden-Powell 10
Hero, not of the hour, as some have said,
But "of all time," came nobly to the front,
And, armed with powers to raise a goodly troop
Of brave Colonials, soon brought a band
Together, such as not a chief, be he
Of fame however high, would hesitate
A moment in full faith to lead, where'er
His flag might wave in onslaught or defence.
The trial sharp soon came, since Mafeking
Defenceless would have stood, but for that Band 20
Of gallant spirits, officer'd by chiefs
As brave and gallant too, Baden-Powell
And his illustrious staff — names now as great
As those, of which our might Bard hath said,
That with the troops they led they would become
¹"Familiar in their mouths as household words."
²Salisbury still there as Cecil, whose young thought
And prescient eye assisted to provide
Food for the garrison before the siege,
Well seconded by *civil* forethought too 30
³In the wise overplus of Julius Weil!
⁴Vivian and Hore at Ramáthlabáma Camp,

1 Shakespeare, Hen. V., Act iv., sc. 3.

2 *Vide* sc. Just quoted, where the then Lord Salisbury is mentioned.

3 The contractor who wisely sent into the town a far larger supply of provisions than had been ordered, and for which General Baden-Powell and Lord Edward Cecil also made themselves responsible.

4 The officers who helped to form the future garrison.

And Plumer vigilant along the line,
All aided Mafeking to make defence,
And now the brave beleaguer'd Town must stand
Upon *its own* defence. *Its own* right hand
And arm, depending on the God of battles,
Must now henceforth its scanty bounds protect,
Fence off its children from the deadly fire
Of guns directed by remorseless foes, 40
Who use religion as a cloak for spite.
Brave women too remain, though some have gone,
A Sisterhood of blessed Nuns inspired
By holy zeal to nurse the suffering sick,
And those struck down amid the raging fight,
Abide still in their Convent, and with aid
Of ladies less ordained, not less devout,
Seek the sad soldier on his bed of pain,
And with that Catholicity of care,
Which make true Catholics throughout the world, 50
Dwell not on the difference of sect or creed,
But, tending gently on their patients' needs
Breathe too a grace divine within their ear.
Strange contrast this to action of the Boer,
Who pours, with foul and fierce deliberate aim,
His shot and shell where women laagered lie,
And where babes sleep upon their mothers' breast.
One form is there, a fair and blue-eyes boy,
The sole remembrance of a Father dead,
A Father, who had died amid the strife 60
And roar of battle, and whose bones
(His corse o'erlook'd on some forgotten ledge)
Lie whitening 'neath the glare of Afric's sun,
And near him sleeps a Mother, whose fond care
Is all devoted to that darling child.
Alas! the fragment of a fatal shell
Breaks through the roof, and strikes that loved child's head
Leaving the mother lonely and forlorn,
Stunn'd by a blow more fierce, because in mind,
Awhile she gazed in blank and mute despair, 70
Till a kind Sister took her hand, and said,
Be of good cheer, bereaved one, thy sweet boy
Is now an Angel beckoning thee to Heaven.
Malice had done its worst, the callous force
Of calculating cruelty had spent

Its power to pierce that sorrowing woman's heart,
And, with the rising sun, her spirit flew
To that calm City of eternal peace
Where Boy and Father had but gone before.
Yet Mafeking still holds its flag aloft, 80
Sustain'd by deeds that men to heroes turn.
Gallant Fitz-Clarence led the glorious way
And, though defeated, played the Boers such pranks,
That they, demoralised, suspended arms,
And scarce recover'd strength to fight again
Before they found brave, watchful Walford's men,
A handful to a legion, quick prepared
To meet them face to face and drive them back.
Yet tears must fall upon the mournful grave
Where Pechell lies and Marsham's bones are placed, 90
The latter kill'd whilst helping to relieve
A wounded comrade stretch'd upon the earth.
Dishearten'd by their failure in attack
The wary, doggéd Boers at length resolv'd
To gain their ends by stealthy sap and mine,
Yet here they found their match. With equal skill
And like tenacity the Townsmen all
And Kaffir natives work'd under the lead
Of their undaunted and resourceful chief.
Each mine was countermined, a huge brick-field 100
Became the scene of all but constant fight,
Trench enfiladed trench, with endless toil,
Until the crafty Boers foil'd in device
"Hoist with their own petard," dismayed, retired.
Though aided by the flood of bursting stream,
They felt its waters too, and their assault
Was swift repulsed with ignominious loss!
Next came the grand sortie toward Game-Tree hill,
A spot most impregnable, but yet
Thought not beyond high courage to attain. 110
With valour cool, such as, confess'd by all,
The British infantry conspicuous show.
Fitz-Clarence leading, sorely wounded, fell,
Sandford and Vernon, Paton, all were slain,
And not until of sixty men sent out
A third were kill'd, and more than half were struck
By cruel bullets made to burst within,
Did that small band withdraw, and close a day,

Which follow'd hard on Christmas' homing joys! 120
Alas! how sad to think, that, whilst dear friends
Were gather'd cheerful round the social board,
Nay, even on the morrow of a day,
Which the brave garrison themselves had spent
In merry gatherings and remembrance sweet,
So many precious lives should have been lost,
So many fond ties broken evermore,
All through the greed of oligarchic rule,
And lust of power ill-gotten and ill-kept!
In history's page no names will more be cursed 130
Than those of Kruger and his reckless crew!
At last the distant guns of Plumer's Force
Far in the rear were heard. Hot press'd the Boers
Renew'd their desperate fire, but all in vain,
Creuzot and Krupp alike had no effect
To bring the brave besieged to strike their flag.
Still high it waved above that gallant Town,
For, in its lofty fold symbolic spread
The sign of Britain's righteous rule and cause.
Famine, and fever's decimating force, 140
Had lent the Foe their dire and fatal aid.
That "Hope deferr'd," which sickens every heart,
Had tested Mafeking with cruel length,
But ever and anon its spirits rose
With the assurance, grounded upon trust,
That God would mercifully save at last,
That Britain never would desert her Sons —
Her Sons so leal, so faithful to her flag.
But, in that time, which comes to all who wait,
Would rescue bring the weary soul to cheer, 150
And crown its patience with a glorious end.
That end has come, the Banners light and free,
Of Mahon's forces now to Plumer's joined,
Are seen fair floating in the morning air,
Their steeds come dashing o'er the wide-spread Veldt,
Their trumpets sound the charge, the Boers flee,
Their cordon broken and themselves in rout,
But ere their flight, and ere relief arrives,
One more exploit the garrison achieve

By capturing ¹Eloff and a hundred Boers 160
In their last rush to seize the little Town.
The weak capture the strong, but right is might,
²“Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just.”
And now, where misery and gloom had reign’d
Through many a weary month, and hunger sharp
Had paled sad women’s cheeks and made strong men
Almost to faint, and fear the hour would come,
When e’en their strength no longer could endure,
No wonder was it, that those strong men wept,
No wonder was it, that the faces wan, 170
Which had so often tried to smile at fear,
Should be suffused with tears — the tears that flow
As natural offspring of the o’erjoyed heart,
But, could they hear how every pulse vibrates,
Throughout a mighty Empire’s wide domain,
With scarce less joy than theirs. Could they but know
How Britons, far and near, have watch’d the course
Of that grand stand, which they have grandly made
For Law and Liberty, for Right and Truth,
Their eyes would soon be dry, their pallor cease, 180
And the bright glow, drawn from the consciousness
Of Duty bravely done, would gild their brows.
Long, long may Britain still possess such Sons
To work her high behests throughout the world,
To show to nations jealous of her fame
How fame itself most truly may be won,
How War may be the harbinger of Peace,
And Victors’ laurels but the olive branch
Restoring harmony ’twixt man and man.
Thus toward the close of that victorious reign, 190
Which Victory itself had named its own,
Will our Queen-Empress, “blest ’bove women,” stand,
An emblem and a type of that Fair Time,
Which was an Empire, famous long before,
Become more famous still in all that tends

¹ Commandant Eloff (according to the second historical article in the *Times* of June 19th, entitled “The Last Day of the Siege of Mafeking”) is a Nephew of President Kruger, and was specially sent to take the Town, which he attempted to do with a large force the day before its relief!

² Shakespeare, 2 Henry VI., Act iii., sc. 2.

To make Life glorious, and a People great —
So indeed, that, riding on the top
Of that transcendent wave of power supreme,
Whose Crest is Freedom and whose Crown is Law,
They dare more grandly than did Rome of yore
¹“To spare the yielding and subdue the proud.”

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¹ *Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos.* — Virg. *Æn.* 6, 853.

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