

**DULCIE
CARLYON**

A Novel

VOL. III

**BY
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DULCIE CARLYON.

CHAPTER I. THE PURSUIT.

A new emotion—a hot thirst for blood—was in the heart of Florian now; his whole nature seemed to have undergone a sudden and temporary change; and to those who could have seen him his face would have been found deadly pale, and his dark eyes full of sombre fury.

The longing for retribution and destruction was keen in his mind at that time. Often he reined up the horse he rode to take a steady shot between the animal's quivering ears at one or other of the two desperadoes; but always missed them, and found that time was thus lost and the distance increased.

His present charger was not so steady as the old Cape nag, Tattoo, and Florian's hands, in the intensity of his excitement, trembled too much for his aim to be true; so the fugitives rode on and on, without firing a shot in return, thus showing that their ammunition had been expended, and they had nothing to hope for or trust to but a successful escape.

A cry left Florian's lips as the fugitives disappeared into a donga, and he thought he had lost them; but anon he saw them ascending the opposite slope at a rasping pace.

He could only think of the generous and chivalrous Vivian Hammersley, that good officer and noble Englishman, shot down thus in the pride of his manhood by the felon hand of an assassin, whose bullet was meant for himself—Hammersley, whose form stood with a kind of luminous atmosphere amid the dark

surroundings that beset them both since he (Florian) had come as a soldier to Zululand; and then he thought of Dulcie's friend Finella, whom he only knew by name.

Poor girl! the next mail for Britain might bring sorrowful tidings to her, with the very letter his hand had so recently indited, full of hope and expressions of happiness.

Crossing by flying leaps the Umvutshini stream, a tributary of the greater Umvolosi, the pursuers and pursued traversed an undulating tract of country, scaring a great troop of the brindled gnu, which were grazing quietly there; anon a terrified herd of the koodoo—graceful antelopes, with magnificent spiral horns—swept past them, where the karoo shrubs and the silvery hair-grass and wild oats grew; elsewhere their horses' hoofs, as they crushed or bruised the creeping fibrous roots of the Akerrania, shed a fragrance in the air.

The Umvolosi had now to be waded through near a rocky kop which towered on the right hand, and the opposite bank had to be scrambled up at a place where the tree-fern flourished thickly, and drooping date-palms overhung the water.

Next they had to cross a nameless tributary of the Upoko River, and then to skirt the base of the Mabenge Mountains (within two miles of Fort Newdigate), where, in some places, an odour, sickly and awful, loaded the evening air; and by experience they knew it came from the bodies of slain Zulus lying unburied, or covered only by their shields and a few loose stones.

In some places—one particularly—Florian and his companions found their progress almost arrested by spiky plants of giant size—the Doornboom, with its ox-horn-like prickles; for there are

thickets of those through which even horses cannot pass—odious and terrible plants which tear the clothes to rags, and pierce the flesh to the bone; but they discovered two breaches through which the fugitives had passed, and, forcing a passage, they rode onward again, and, in the fierce ardour of pursuit, Florian was all unconscious, till afterwards, how he and his horse too were lacerated, scratched, and torn by the sharp spines as he rushed through them at full speed.

One of the fugitives had evidently found a cartridge, in a pocket perhaps, for he fired one shot rearward, in Parthian fashion, but fruitlessly, as it hit no one, and then he rode wildly but steadily on.

Believing that if ever he returned to camp it would only be to find his friend dying or dead, Florian, plunged in grief, maddened by rage and a thirst for dire vengeance, rode furiously yet silently on, closely followed by his four infantry men.

His horse—Hammersley's—was a fine English charger, and soon outstripped those of his comrades, who ere long began to drop rearward one after another, though Tom Tyrrell continued to head the rest; but after a time Florian found himself almost alone; thus it was fortunate for him that those he pursued were without ammunition.

Once or twice he lost sight of them, as dongas or eminences intervened, and then a low cry would escape him; but by the aid of his field-glass he 'spotted' them again, and gored his horse with the spurs anew.

Now broad before them lay the foaming Nondweni River, with the lion-shaped hill of Isandhlwana about seven miles distant, its

rocky crest then reddened by the western sun, and Florian knew that now the pursuit had lasted for more than twenty miles from the Euzangonyan Hill.

Here the assassins reined up, and seemed to confer for a moment or two, as if in evident confusion and dismay. To remain was to die, and to attempt to cross the river would end in death by drowning, it was so deep and swift, red and swollen by recent storms of such rain as falls in the tropics only.

Florian dismounted now, dropped a fresh cartridge into the breech-block of the rifle he still carried, and just as he threw the bridle over his arm, Tom Tyrrell came tearing up and also leaped from his saddle, prepared to fire at four hundred yards range.

The two fugitives plunged into the water, where trees, branches, cartloads of enormous leaves and yellow pumpkins were being swept past, and strove to make their horses breast the stream by turning them partly at an angle to the current. More than once the animals snorted with fear, throwing up their heads wildly as their haunches went down under the weight of their riders.

Tyrrell fired and shot one in mid-stream; he threw up his hands in agony or despair, and fell on the mane of his horse, which, with himself, was swept round a rocky angle and disappeared.

The other had gained footing on the opposite bank, but at that moment Florian planted a rifle bullet between his shoulders.

Sharply rang the report of the rifle, and a shriek mingled with the rush of the world of waters as the deserter and assassin fell backward over the crupper of his struggling horse, which gained the land, while his rider sank to rise no more just as the last red

rays of the sun died out on the stern hill-tops, and in its rush the river seemed to sweep past with a mightier sound than ever.

Which of the two he had shot in the twilight Florian knew not, nor did he care; suffice it that he and Tom Tyrrell 'had polished them off,' as the latter said, and thereupon proceeded to light his pipe with an air of profound contentment.

Hammersley was avenged, certainly.

Before setting out on his return, Florian paused to draw breath, to wipe the cold perspiration from his forehead, and nerve himself anew for aught that might befall him on his homeward way, for with tropical speed darkness had fallen now, and he was glad when he and Tyrrell overtook the three mounted men, as they had a most lonely district to traverse back to camp, and one in which they were not likely to meet friends; so they now rode somewhat slowly on, breathing and enjoying what some one calls the cool and mysterious wind of night.

Zulus might be about in any number, with rifle, assegai, and knobkerie; but though Florian and his companions rode with arms loaded as a precaution, they scarcely thought of them, and were intent on comparing notes and studying the features of the country as a guide on their lonely way.

At last, with supreme satisfaction, after many detours and mistakes, they saw the red glowworm-like lights of the camp appearing in the streets of tents, and knew thereby that the last bugle had not sounded.

Ere long they heard the challenge of the advanced sentinel of an outlying piquet, and responding thereto, passed within the lines,

when Florian went at once to the headquarter tents to report himself to the Adjutant-General, together with the events that had so recently transpired by the Nondweni River.

'You have done precisely what the General commanding would have ordered you to do,' said the Adjutant-General, 'and I am sure he will thank you for punishing the rascals as they deserved. There are too many of "Cardwell's recruits" afloat in Cape Colony!'

'Is Captain Hammersley still alive?'

'Yes—but little more, I fear.'

He repaired straight to the sufferer's tent, but was not permitted by the hospital orderly, acting under the surgeon's strict orders, to see him—or at least to speak with him.

The ball had broken some of the short ribs on the left side, nearly driving them into the lung; thus he was in a dangerous state. Florian peeped into the bell-tent, and, by a dim lantern hung on the pole thereof, could see Hammersley lying on his camp-bed asleep, apparently, and pale as marble; and he thought it a sorrowful sight to see one whose splendid physique seemed of that kind which no abstract pain or trouble could crush—who could ever bear himself like a man—weak now as a little child—levelled by the bullet of a cowardly assassin.

Florian, though worn, weary, and sorely athirst after the skirmish by the Euzangonyan Hill, the subsequent pursuit, and all connected therewith, before betaking him to his tent, paid his next visit to Tattoo, for, after his friend, he loved his horse.

A little way apart from where the store-waggon were parked and the artillery and other horses knee-haltered, Tattoo was lying

on a heap of dry brown mealie-stalks in a pool of his own blood, notwithstanding that, awaiting Florian's return and orders, a kindly trooper of the Mounted Infantry had bound an old scarlet tunic about the poor animal's off thigh, where the bullet, meant for his rider, had made a ghastly score-like wound, in one part penetrating at least seven inches deep; and where Tattoo had remained standing for some time in one spot, the blood had dripped into a great dark crimson pool.

'Can nothing be done to stop it?' asked Florian.

'Nothing, sir,' replied a Farrier-Sergeant of the Royal Artillery.

'But the horse will die if this kind of thing goes on.'

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders, saluted, and turned away, while Florian put an arm round the drooping head of the horse caressingly; and, as if sensible of his sympathy, the animal gazed at him with his large, soft brown eyes, that were streaked with blood-shot veins now.

'His vitals is safe, sir, anyhow,' said Tom Tyrrell.

'I can't leave him thus in the cold—for cold it is here, by Jove, at night; bring a blanket from my tent, Tom, and put it over him.'

After belting the blanket about Tattoo, by the light of a stable-lantern, Florian lingered for a time beside the poor nag, who hung his head with unmistakable symptoms of intense pain, while his drooping eyes grew dull and heavy.

Without undressing, Florian threw himself on his humble camp-bed, which consisted of little else than a blanket and ground sheet, but was unable to sleep more than ten minutes or so at a

stretch. The fighting, the hot pursuit by hill and stream and karoo—the excitement of every kind, and the whole work he had been doing—had fevered his brain, and ever and anon he started from his pillow as if a snake had been under it; and so passed the few short hours till drum and bugle announced the *reveille*, and that the day-work of the camp had begun.

To those who saw him, he looked haggard in the cold, grey, early light, as he quitted his camp-bed, unrested and unrefreshed, though mere repose of the body is supposed to be a relief, and, as it was too early to disturb Hammersley, he went straight to visit Tattoo.

He was standing up now among the mealies of his litter, with his head drooping lower and his bright eyes more dim than ever; but they actually seemed to dilate and brighten at the sound of his master's voice. The latter had brought him the half of his ration-biscuit, soaked in water; and Tattoo looked at it with dumb longing, and turned it over in Florian's palm with his hot, soft, velvet nose; but after trying to champ it once or twice he let it fall to the ground. Tattoo was incapable of swallowing now.

There was little time to do much, as the troops were soon to march; but Tom Tyrrell brought some hot water in a bucket, and sluiced the wound with a sponge, and redressed it with such rough bandages as could be procured, and Florian got from Doctor Gallipot some laudanum to mix with the horse's drink to deaden the acuteness of the pain he suffered; but it was all in vain; Tattoo sank grovelling down upon his fore-knees and rolled heavily over on his side, and, as the wound welled forth again, he turned his head and looked at his master, and if ever eyes expressed a sense of gratitude, those of the old troop-horse did so then.

'We march in a very short time, sir,' said the senior officer commanding the Mounted Infantry, as he reined in his charger for a minute *en passant*; 'and in the cause of humanity, as your horse cannot recover, it had better be put out of pain.'

'Shot?'

'Yes.'

'Poor Tattoo!'

Florian turned away, sick at heart, as he saw a soldier quietly dropping a cartridge into the breech-block of his rifle in obedience to the stern but necessary order, for if left thus, the horse would be devoured while living by the monstrous Kaffir vultures.

With carefully sighted rifle, and distance as carefully judged, Florian had 'potted' many a Zulu at various hundreds of yards, in common with his comrades; he had shot, as he supposed, Josh Jarrett without an atom of compunction; but now, as he hurried away, he put his fingers in his ears to shut out the report of the rifle that announced the death of Tattoo.

As a souvenir of the latter—for Dulcie, perhaps—he desired Tom Tyrrell to cut off one of the hoofs, and Tom polished the hoof and burnished the iron shoe till the latter shone like silver—the hoof that never again would carry Florian across the wild karoo, or to the front in the face of the enemy.

The Second Division now began its march to encamp on the fatal hill of Isandhlwana—that place of ill omen.

Hammersley was conveyed with other wounded in an ambulance waggon, and it was decided that if he recovered

sufficiently he should be sent home on sick leave to Britain. Florian occasionally rode by the side of the waggon, the motion of which was anything but easy or pleasant to those who were in pain.

How pale, he thought, Hammersley looked, with his delicate nostrils, clearly cut mouth, and dark moustache; and his mind went from thence to Finella Melfort, the girl he loved, who was so far away, and whom he might not be spared to see again.

'Write gently about all this affair to Miss Carlyon,' said Hammersley feebly. 'But the infernal telegrams will make poor little Finella *an fait* of my danger before details can reach her.' Then he muttered to himself, 'How truly it has been said that the indifferent are often tied to each other irrevocably, while those who love truly are parted far as east from west.'

'So you have fully avenged me, I hear?' he said, after a pause, while his features were contracted by pain.

'Of that there is no doubt,' replied Florian.

'For that I thank you, old fellow, though I am low enough—in that state, in fact, in which, we are told, we should forgive our enemies, and pray for those who despitefully use us.'

'These two rascals are past being forgiven now. I dare say long ere this their bodies have been swept into the White Umvoloski,' said Florian, who still felt somewhat savage about the whole episode.

'Well, I am going to the rear at last, but I hope we shall meet again. If not,' he added, with a palpable break in his voice, 'my ring—take and keep it in remembrance of me.' And as he spoke Hammersley drew from his finger a magnificent gipsy ring, in

which there was a large and valuable opal, and forced it upon the acceptance of Florian.

'The opal is said to be a stone of ill-omen,' said Hammersley with a faint smile, 'but it never brought ill-fortune to me.'

Florian knew nothing of that, and, if he had, would probably not have cared about it, though reared in Devonshire, the land of the pixies and underground dwarfs and fairies.

'The only reason for the stone being thought unlucky,' said Hammersley, smiling, 'is that Mark Antony, Nadir Shah, and Potemkin, wearers of great opals, all came to grief.'

'Going home, I hear, Hammersley,' lisped a smart young *aide-de-camp*, cantering up to the ambulance waggon. 'Egad, I envy you—you'll see something better than Kaffir damsels there!'

Hammersley, in the midst of his acute pain, somewhat resented the other's jollity, and said:

'The poor Kaffir damsels are content with the handiwork of God, and don't paint their faces red and white, as our English women do in the Row and Regent Street, Villiers.'

'You'll soon be home—there is no such thing as distance now,' rejoined the young staff officer.

'Yes, Villiers, I am sorry to leave you all; but I am going back to England—dear old England—the land of fog, as Voltaire says, with its one sauce and its three hundred and sixty-five religions,' he added, with a feeble smile, thinking he was perhaps rather sharp in his tone to Villiers.

'And you have lost your favourite horse, I hear?' said Hammersley to Florian.

'Yes, poor animal.'

'Then take mine. I need not ask you to be kind to him. Who can say but you may lend him to me one day for a run at Melton again? Now, good-bye, old fellow, God bless you!'

They wrung each other's hands and parted, Florian to ride on to the new camp at the Isandhlwana Hill, prior to the march for Ulundi, and Vivian Hammersley to go with the rest of the wounded and sick to the coast for conveyance to Plymouth.

CHAPTER II. WHICH TREATS OF LOVE-LETTERS.

The middle of July had come, and matters remained almost unchanged in the family circle at Craigenowan. Lady Fettercairn had not yet carried out her threat of getting rid of Dulcie Carlyon, though a vague sense of dislike of the latter was fast growing in her mind.

Hammersley seemed to be effectually removed from Finella's sphere, though by what means Lady Fettercairn knew not; but still Shafto made no progress with the heiress; thus she feared some secret influence was exerted over him by 'this Miss Carlyon,' and would gladly have had old Mrs. Prim back again.

It was July now, we say; and July in London, though Byron says,

'The English winter ending in July,
To recommence in August,'

to the lady's mind was associated only with dinners, concerts, races, balls, the opera, garden parties, and so forth, all of which she was relinquishing for an apparently hopeless purpose, while she knew that all her fashionable friends would be having strange surmises on the cause of this most unusual rustication, and inquiring of each other, 'What are the Fettercairns about?'

Dulcie was painfully sensible that the lady of the house had become cold, stiff, and most exacting in manner to her, even condescending to sneer at times, with a well-bred tone and bearing

that some high-born ladies can assume when they wish to sting dependants or equals alike.

Finella's other grandmother, my Lady Drumshoddy, had ceased to be quite so indignant at her repulsion to Shafto, as she had a nephew—son of a sister—coming home on leave from India; and she thought perhaps the heiress might see her way to present herself and her thousands to young Major Ronald Garallan, of the Bengal Lancers, who had the reputation of being a handsome fellow and a regular 'lady-killer.'

Days and days and long weary weeks passed by—weeks of longing—and no word of hope, of love, or apology came to Finella across the seas from distant Africa, evolved as she hoped by the letter of Dulcie to Florian, and her heart grew sick with hope deferred, while more battles and skirmishes were fought, and she knew not that a vessel with the mail containing that missive which Florian posted at the orderly-room tent had been cast away in the Bight of Benin, and that the bags had been saved with extreme difficulty.

She contemplated Vivian Hammersley facing danger in battle and sickness in camp, marching and toiling in trackless regions, with one belief ever in his angry heart that she had been false to him—she who loved him more truly and passionately every day. So time seemed to pass monotonously on, and her unsatisfied longing to be justified grew almost to fever heat; and death might take him away before he knew of her innocence. She tried to be patient, though writhing under the evil eyes of Shafto, the author of all this mischief.

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