

MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper.

THE KIMBERLEY DIAMOND FIELDS.

No one visiting Cape Colony on business or pleasure feels he has done his duty unless he has visited the famous diamond fields situated about five hundred miles from Cape Town on the north bank of the Orange river. The scene at the railway depot at Cape Town every evening is a very animated one, more so when a mail steamer has arrived; that day a more cosmopolitan crowd could not be found at any spot in the universe. There are representatives from every country on earth. A big Californian over yonder is probably speculating when civilization will reach the southern hemisphere in the shape of Pullman cars. You get a prod in the back and hear a smothered voice from behind two armfuls of parcels say "Peg parding, mine friendt," another Israelite bound for the New Jerusalem. Here a sturdy German, there a son of La Belle France, keeping up his national reputation, judging from the interest he is creating in the breast of a buxom English exbarmaid. Dudes, soldiers, sailors, Boers, niggers, coolies all are there—either going out on the train or looting around to kill time.

At last the bell ring all aboard, and you scramble into your compartment and are locked in (I guess they do that so one won't get out and walk on to Kimberley to let them know the train is coming.) If you are caged up with only one intoxicated man you may feel lucky, as it seems to be more often the rule than the exception. The railroads in South Africa are run by the government and are very fair considering the difficulties that had to be overcome. Apart from heavy grades and skilful engineering, there were the Boers; they wouldn't hear of it; hadn't their fathers ridden in ox-wagons and why couldn't they. The traders and transport riders (freighters) promptly sat down on the whole scheme, and as they are a very influential class of voters, it looked for a time as though Cape Colony was to be denied steam transportation. But she got it all right in the end, as two trunk lines testify, the one running from Port Elizabeth, taking in the eastern province joining with the Cape Town line at Decar to proceed to Kimberley and Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State. The cars are built on the old conservative European plan in compartments with the improvement, however, of having the padded back of the seats on hinges, so by slipping out a catch a top berth may be improvised.

South African scenery with a few exceptions can be summed up as consisting of Karroo bush, copies and boulders, boulders, copies and Karroo bush, with a few sheep, cattle, ostriches and red-blanketed Kaffirs thrown in to relieve the howling wilderness. Kimberley, when I first saw it, seemed to have been built late one night and then in a kind of a hurry. As lumber is a terrible expensive article the majority of houses were composed of sheets of galvanized iron screwed together, roof and all being manufactured of the same article. When it is 105° in the shade and the gay and festive fly is on the war path,

life is anything but a bed of roses. But men will take any amount of discomfort and risks if only they fancy they see a chance to get hold of a little more of this world's goods. What are camp-fever and sun-stroke when placed in the balance against prospective wealth?

A rough diamond is a very innocent thing to look at—a pure carbon crystal; take it from its birthplace and send it adrift in the world, what a commotion it will cause as it passes from hand to hand! Now on the neck of a popular actress, again ticketed away in a pawnbroker's safe, perhaps adorning some millionaire's spotless shirt bosom, or maybe in the hands of a thief—it passes from one to the other, breaks up a family and goes on sparkling and dazzling for all time, no matter in what walk of life it is cast. The delicate girl who gazes upon her solitary ring and murmurs, "What a dear old boy Charlie is"—little knows about the various scenes that glittering jewel has been through!

Of course there is a corner on diamonds as on every thing else. The various claim holders have long since been bought or frozen out by the syndicate. Were the three great mines, Kimberley, DeBeer's and Jagersfontein, running at their full capacity, diamonds would be as cheap as garnets.

Kimberley claims the largest pick and shovel hole on earth, the dimensions being somewhere in the neighborhood of 2000 feet by 800. Wire cables are stretched diagonally from top to bottom, with baskets running up and down eternally. One steps into one of these baskets, shuts his eyes, and before he has got through the first three words of a mental prayer—he strikes the bottom. The loss of human life in Kimberley reaches an alarming height at times, so much so that there is always a stock of coffins kept on hand. The riot would cave in at most inopportune moments, but as long as it was only niggers that were pulverized it was all right. But a five ton rock on a down grade is no discriminator of persons, and things began to look as though the supply of white bosses might run out. So now the old style of shaft and tunnelling is resorted to.

It is not every Tom, Dick or Harry that can get a permit to visit the mines. I considered myself lucky in holding good letters of introduction, whereby I was graciously permitted to investigate the mysteries of diamond mining.

Early one bright morning I started out, accompanied by a very sociable gentleman as guide with another to keep an eye on us both to see that we did not run off with the mine. Our first introduction was to the Compound, the home and town of the real workers, the natives. Every South African tribe was there represented—Kaffirs, Fingoes, Pondos, Basutos, Zulus—all make the fields their goal. A year's work at a pound a week makes them independent for life, for can they not take their earnings and buy ten or a dozen cows, trade the animals for two or three wives, and settle down to a quiet domestic life, sit in the shade all day and smoke whilst the wives of their hearth, hoe the mealie patch, build a spare hut, chop wood, tend baby, fetch water from the nearest

vlei and otherwise rustle for their lord and master? The boys (all natives are called boys, be they sixty years old) in the compound were in the chronic state, viz., very merry with a perpetual grin on their ebony countenances, and lolled around clothed in fresh air mostly, making the air ring with their laughter like so many children. There must have been from 5000 to 8000 natives in the compound, and when once admitted they are not allowed to leave or hold any communion with the outside world without first giving notice to the bosses when they are taken into shanties and kept there for ten days with their hands encased in large leather mitts, so if the gentleman has any gems secreted around his anatomy or in a wound, it will inflame, the padlocked mitts preventing him from removing the gem and secreting it elsewhere. The company spends millions of dollars a year on their detective service alone and every town in Cape Colony has its I. D. B. detectives and spotters. A suspicious stranger is kept continually under their eye; traps are laid for the erring and woe betide him who bites. It is pitiful to visit the convict stations and break-water at Cape Town and see the number of young fellows, college graduates, and men of refinement, working out their ten years' sentence side by side with some vermin covered non-English-speaking native felon. And what was their crime? Simply having in their possession a stone for which they could show no registration certificate. Surely the way of the transgressor is hard. It is a fearful temptation when a man comes to you with a tale of woe and a good stone, or perhaps a Hottentot with an eight or ten carat stone, who offers to sell it you for schoolboy price—there is a fortune in your grasp! "Shall I risk it?" you argue with yourself. If you give in, God help you, for in nine cases out of ten the man is a spotter and at the next session another I. D. B. (Illicit Diamond Buyer) is doomed for the next ten years at a living hell—labor in the boiling sun amongst thieves, black and white, to die of fever, or be shot down in an attempt to escape. Yet men will risk all that in order to get riches, and some do get rich very mysteriously, despite all the snares laid for them. They have to be men of resource and an active brain combined with an equally smart accomplice inside the mine. False watches, heels, gold dental caps, cramming a stone down a chicken and shooing him over the compound fence, are all back numbers which only a greenhorn would practice. It is ticklish work, as no white man on leaving the mine knows when he may be searched. He may pass the office for a week and then be called in and searched for the next ten days. Searching is no child's play either; every part of the anatomy are gone over from the hair of ones head and beard to the soles of your feet, in a systematic and careful manner. If the luckless miner is suspected of swallowing a stone they simply give him an emetic and sit down and wait for the result.

The blue clay in which diamonds are found lies in strata. Experts claimed when the fields first began to be developed that the stones were only on the surface and in river washings; but subsequent events prove that the deeper they go the richer the "blue." The blue is brought to the surface and