CHAPTER I

A Memoir

" Let us now praise famous men,
Men of little showing;
For their deeds remember them,
Greater than their knowing. "

RUDYARD KIPLING.

The words of the well-known Westward Ho! school song seem, in many ways, to be particularly applicable to Alfred Dolman, traveller, diarist and artist. If he were not famous in the generally accepted sense of the word, yet he was so to those who knew him and treasured his journals and drawings as a miser hoards his wealth. In what degree Fame would have crowned him one can but conjecture — he was only 24 years of age when Fate intervened and cut short so promising a career.

From the existing portrait of him, in oils by some unknown artist, he appears to have been a tall, thin, romantic-looking figure; a trifle melancholy perhaps, but with the undoubted traces about the mouth of the cynic which his observations at times show him to have been.

His personal courage is undoubted. While yet at an age when most young men are still at the 'Varsity or enjoying themselves among the pleasant places of the earth, Alfred Dolman went out into a little known and comparatively uncivilized land, facing risks and dangers that might well have daunted many an older and more experienced man. There is in existence a small water-colour sketch made by him on his first voyage, showing the upper works of the *Zenobia* looking aft with the foresail bellying out "on a wind" in the foreground. Such a sketch could only have been made from a height of 40 to 50 feet above the deck, and then from some point of vantage such as a small spar lashed across the fore-stay as a sketching stool — truly a feat requiring a cool head and a certain amount of nerve. Later we read in his journal that he dragged a live cobra capella out of a hole by its tail and then killed it, as though it were a most ordinary, everyday occurrence to kill one of the most venomous of South African reptiles. The narrative of his adventures on his several expeditions

provides ample proof that he knew no fear. One can imagine him saying as a boy, with the "Great Little Admiral" — "What is Fear? What does he look like?"

Coupled with his courage he possessed a determination and fixity of purpose which, at times, enabled him to overcome almost insurmountable difficulties. Lack of water or shortage of food never hindered him on any of his expeditions. On one occasion his favourite horse, dead spent, was left behind rather than it should hinder his progress. His grief at learning the ultimate fate of the unfortunate animal is sufficient to clear him of any callousness towards animals, as are also his constant thoughts for the welfare and needs of his cattle before himself. His insight into character stood him in good stead in dealing with both white men and natives, and his open nature made him countless friends wherever he went. His unconscious, and often satirical, humour is frequently revealed in his journals — in his description of the priest's house in Madeira, and his welcomes at the hands of the various Boers that he came in contact with. His descriptions of the latter, for the most part, are distinctly unflattering, and, though he doubtless writes of them as he found them, his accounts seem rather tinged with a British prejudice of all things un-English. Nowhere in his writings can one find any trace of the visualist or dreamer; yet one point is worthy of remark. On his first game shooting expedition into the Franche Hoek region he climbed a mountain to see the panoramic view from its summit, and, facing the north, he describes what he sees in his journal as a "Pisgah" view. Taking for argument's sake the Biblical meaning of Pisgah as the mountain where the Promised, but never-reached, Land was viewed by Moses, could Alfred Dolman have had some premonitory feeling that made him so describe the Northern Territory wherein he eventually met his tragic end?

In spite of the mantle of responsibility with which dangers to himself and to his servants invested him, he remained a boy at heart. When he climbs a gorge or precipice — boylike he flings down a boulder to see the result; when he climbs Ta-

ble Mountain he takes a little gunpowder with him so that he may proudly flash the signal that he has won to the top to his friends in Cape Town; mischievously, at one time, he sets fire to the bush and then becomes indignant when remonstrated with by the native inhabitants. As the journals proceed and he becomes older this human trait becomes less and less apparent.

Though not of exceptional physique, he possessed great strength and unbounded energy and his powers of endurance were amazing. He seemed able to go on and on, day after day, with but little water and what there was dirty, salt and brackish, yet never giving in — only once mentioning, and that on his first visit to the Colony, the fact that he had been inconvenienced by "Cape Fever." In this respect, of course, his knowledge of rough surgery and medicine must have proved invaluable. This knowledge, coupled with its necessary acquaintance with medicinal plants, etc., tends rather to point a flaw in his native servant's account that he died from eating a poisonous fruit.

He was most athletic — a long swim, or hours on end spent in the saddle, were as nothing to him. In addition, his prowess with the rifle is worthy of note. Not only was he a good shot, but he was also thoroughly conversant with the theory of the weapon, and was continually experimenting with patent forms of bullets, etc. — obtaining successful results when other, more experienced, hunters condemned the innovations as comparatively useless. He frequently mentions having killed or hit animals when "on the run" at distances up to 700 yards, generally with a conical bullet. Travellers are proverbially supposed to be adept at drawing the long bow, but Alfred Dolman's accounts of his various hunting adventures are so bald and ungarnished that they possess the undoubted ring of truth.

His gift of the pen is apparent to all who read the journals — the easy flow of language and power of graphic description need no comment, and his sketches supply the actual colour that the mere words lack. As an artist he showed undoubted

promise in pen, pencil and colour. His pen and pencil drawings have a delicacy of touch and a simplicity of line that show his love of both subject and medium. His pencil studies of the Karroo give one a feeling of the vastness and desolation of the desert, whilst his sketch of a herd of ostrich gives, in a few lines, a sense of intimacy seldom rivalled. His water-colour drawing possesses an individuality of treatment and freedom from convention for those days — a time when all was convention on a ground of "mustard colour." The subjects he took were full of interest and colour, and he has executed them with a peculiar style of his own, gaining in vigour what they lacked in technique. The last known sketch that he made, now in the possession of his niece, Mrs. C. Newington, was done but six weeks before his death and depicts, with exceptional charm of treatment, a river scene with dense undergrowth on the River Zouga.

Endowed with such attributes by Nature it seems reasonable to expect that Alfred Dolman would have gone far in this world. His short life he spent in making himself better acquainted with a semi-known land, the better to fit himself for the task of its exploration. Then, when on the threshold of the goal of his ambition — exploration — he was called away; but he left behind him an ineffaceable record of Godfearing purpose and perseverance along the unbeaten tracks of the Dark Continent.

Alfred Dolman, the third son of Edward Dolman, of Clifford's Inn, and Elizabeth Dolman, was born on the 19th September, 1827, in one of those red-bricked, green-trellized houses on Clapham Common designed by Sir Christopher Wren. Of his early life but little or nothing is known, save what has been passed on by word of mouth by the family, there being none of his contemporaries surviving. He was educated, along with his brothers, at the Old Clockhouse School, Wimbledon, long since closed down. At an early age he was taken away from school and consigned to the care of a tutor, a Mr. Parsons. His father, a wealthy lawyer and a member of a very old

CHAPTER 2

The First Journal

12.9.1845 – 27.9.1846

" To this far nook the Christian exiles fled,
Each fettering tie of earthly texture breaking;
For that good cause for which their fathers bled;
Wealth, country, kindred, cheerfully forsaking. "

Thomas Pringle.

Friday, September 12th. We arrived on board the *Lady Flora*, Indiaman, at half-past three p.m. Weather cold and fine. Only a few passengers had as yet come on board.

Saturday, 13th. Early this morning the steam tug took us in tow and carried us as far as the Queen's Channel, opposite Margate, where we anchored for the night. Wind easterly and very cold towards evening.

Sunday, 14th. Got the ship under weigh at seven, the wind now blowing S.W. — dead foul. About eleven a.m. a smart squall struck us, and laid the ship over so that the ladies began to sing out. There were five lady passengers and six gentlemen. We passed an immense number of vessels going up Channel, having evidently been detained by the late easterly winds. Dropped anchor at 7 p.m. in the Downs: a slight swell from the westward.

Monday, 15th. Weighed anchor at 7 a.m.: wind easterly; at eleven o'clock it fell dead calm: anchored. A fair wind sprang up at 2 p.m. — up anchor. In the afternoon we had a strong breeze from the N.W. Exchanged colours with a Dutch frigate and landed Midshipman Brown, and Mr. Ford, the Captain's brother, at Dover.

Tuesday, 16th. Strong breeze from the S.W. with wet weather: 3 p.m., the wind increased with a heavy swell; the ship off Hastings. Later blowing fresh and a heavy sea: vessel rolling violently, and pouring with rain. Reefed topsails and set storm-mizzen.

Wednesday, 17th. Still blowing strong, the weather very cold and damp. 3 p.m., blowing hard with a heavy sea. Close-reefed topsail and foresail. Passed several ships running up Channel. The Ower's Light eleven miles distant.

Thursday, 18th. The weather as yesterday. Thinking of running into Spithead.

F*riday, 19th.* As yesterday; the ship off Brighton. We had a very distinct view of the town as we sailed within a few miles. Slight breeze from the N.W., shook out reefs from the topsail.

S*aturday, 20th.* Fair wind from the southward. At 9 a.m. we landed the pilot off the Isle of Wight: sent a letter home. As we sailed past we could see very distinctly the green hills and all down the coast, which was very beautiful. St. Katherine's Lighthouse was also visible: this light is placed near a dangerous reef of rocks, on which many vessels have been lost. 3 p.m. — a smart squall with heavy rain. In the evening our fair breeze left us and shifted to the S.W. again. Reefed topsails: ship off Portland.

S*unday, 21st.* Blowing fresh. 9 a.m., a very heavy squall: close reefed topsails. Saw the Start Lighthouse. Not being able to weather the point of land,[1] we tacked ship. At 3 p.m. nearly a dead calm with pouring rain and heavy swell. Blowing strong from the N.W. at 9 p.m. — set the storm-trysail.

M*onday, 22nd.* Dead calm — fine weather. At noon the grey cat, a favourite, fell overboard and was drowned. Immediately after this an easterly wind sprang up: made all sail. Saw the Start Light.

T*uesday, 23rd.* Wind easterly and very cold. Began to rain about 11 a.m. and breeze freshened. Ship clear of the Channel at last; heavy swell with the wind increasing.

W*ednesday, 24th.* Wind east: weather much warmer but very damp. This evening we caught a hawk upon the mizzen-topsail yard, where he had gone to roost. Falling calm and wind heading us — in studding-sails.

T*hursday, 25th.* Wind east and gradually increasing. Passed a schooner sailing as ourselves.

F*riday, 26th.* Fine breeze from the east; weather becoming much warmer. Nearly had my head broken by a studding-sail boom, falling from aloft. A homeward bound

[1] Berry Head.

vessel passed us quite close.

Saturday, 27th. Wind east. Saw great quantities of Mother Carey's chickens, or the stormy petrel.

Sunday, 28th. Wind east. Saw two large grampus (a small kind of whale) and many small fish. In the evening the breeze freshened, saw several flashes of lightning towards the southward. Our distance from Madeira about 100 miles.

Monday, 29th. Michaelmas Day. Last night we had some heavy squalls of wind and rain. About ten o'clock we could barely distinguish the Island of Madeira, but we gradually approached nearer, when at 2 p.m. we had a beautiful view and could plainly discover several convents and houses scattered here and there. I took a sketch of the island, this being too good an opportunity to lose; in the evening we had a concert in the steerage for the first time. The instruments were two guitars and an old cracked piano, a perfect compound of discordant noises; I cannot say much for the performances, but in the middle we were interrupted by a heavy squall which effectually broke up our party.

Tuesday, 30th. Very squally all last night, wind S.W., weather fine and warm. Caught a small grey owl in the rigging and it was immediately stowed away with his companion, the hawk. Saw a schooner on our larboard beam.

Wednesday, October 1st. Wind S.W. — at 5 p.m. a dead calm. We had some music upon the poop in the evening and some of the passengers amused themselves by waltzing, and dancing the polka.

Thursday, 2nd. Still calm. A schooner in company. At noon a light air sprang up and gradually increased.

Friday, 3rd. Gentle breeze. Saw the Island of Palma (one of the Canary group), at the distance of 60 miles. This island is exceedingly high, being about 3000 or 4000 feet above the level of the sea. Towards evening the wind freshened: set all sail.

Sunday, 5th. Steady Trade and fine. Performed Church Service on the poop.

Monday, 6th. Fresh breeze: wind E.S.E.; weather wet and cloudy. 100 miles from Cape de Verde.

Tuesday, 7th. Breeze fresh, weather gloomy. We had an excellent view of St. Antonio (C. de Verde), the land is very high and rocky, and rises like the top of a mountain from the water. About 3 p.m. it fell dead calm, being under the lee of the island. Sighted a barque and a brig.

Wednesday, 8th. Fresh breeze. At 12 o'clock we saw the Island of Fogo at a great distance (60 miles). Wind increasing. 9 p.m., a hard squall. Shortened sail — weather looking unsettled and heavy; furled topgallant-sails, and reefed topsails.

Thursday, 9th. Last night very squally: raining in torrents and no wind. 11 a.m. a very heavy squall, the weather hot and close. Saw two sharks following the ship. Evening: coming on squally, wrote home.

Friday, 10th. Light airs and calms. Four vessels in sight. Saw a shark. 2 p.m., a heavy squall, falling calm and lightning to the southward.

Wednesday, 15th. Slight wind. This morning I caught a stormy petrel, with a line of silk trailing astern of the ship. It was about 14 inches from wing to wing, when placed upon the deck it seemed to have lost nearly all the power of raising itself in the air, and made several attempts before it flew away. At noon we also caught two bonitas, one of which we had for dinner. It tasted very insipid and dry. In the evening we saw a large shark, cruising about the vessel. After a short time we succeeded in hooking him. When brought on board, measured 10 feet in length.

Thursday, 16th. Dead calm. From curiosity we tasted some of the shark caught yesterday. The flesh was very soft and flabby, and not at all nice. I hooked another shark this morning, but could not secure him. Heavy rain and little or no wind.

Friday, 17th. Light wind, several vessels in sight, one of which signalized that she wanted a surgeon. Accordingly our doctor and several passengers went on board. The captain was lying ill and had been so for several days, and having no doctor on

board, he physicked himself (which made him worse). We gave him some medicines with their necessary directions and soon afterwards left him astern. The ship was named the *Success*, of Liverpool.

Monday, 20th. Light airs. At 10 a.m. I shot a shark through the head with a bullet. He kicked and floundered about for a short time and then disappeared. In the afternoon we saw some very large dolphins and bonitas. Evening, dead calm.

Thursday, 23rd. This morning we at last got the S.E. Trade wind after being becalmed exactly 14 days near the Line.

Friday, 24th. Fine breeze and clear weather. At 11 p.m. we crossed the Equator. Put the ladies in a fright about Neptune coming on board and shaving them.

Saturday, 25th. Breeze freshening. At noon 90 miles south of the Line. This evening Neptune signified his intention of coming on board and shaving such of his subjects as had now for the first time passed the great boundary of his watery dominions. Accordingly, at about 4 p.m., he was ushered on the quarter-deck with his wife, Amphitrite, the constables, barber, doctor and other attendants, preceded by a band of music, pouring forth not very melodious strains. After having made a speech suitable for the occasion, "His Majesty" gave directions that all the intended victims should be secured forthwith, and separately brought forward under the break of the forecastle to undergo the process of shaving, which is as follows. First, the unfortunate is placed upon a plank, before which is brought a huge tub of salt water. He is now deluged with buckets of water from all directions. The doctor immediately prescribes a pill, a delightful mixture, which he crammed down his throat. Then the barber anoints his face well with a foul composition of tar, fat and other delicacies, and flourishing a long piece of tin hoop, in lieu of a razor, he proceeds to shave the unfortunate wretch. Now Neptune interposes, and informs him that he is duly initiated into all the rites and mysteries of his service, and then orders that a dose of salts be given him. Immediately he is half drowned with buckets of water, and shortly he is

set free upon which he seizes a bucket in his turn and joins in the fray around him. This is the method they were all served. One man, a negro, took refuge upon the main-royal yard, from whence he threatened to throw off anyone who molested him, but he was soon enticed down by the chief officer. After all was over an allowance of grog was served out to all hands and the sports were finished with the daylight.

T*hursday, November 6th.* An immense quantity of sea-birds flying round the ship. Caught five Cape pigeons with threads trailing astern. Breeze increasing.

F*riday, 7th.* Fresh breeze. Last night some unknown mischievous person cut down Midshipman Rufus by the head, and put out his collar-bone.[1] Numerous birds following the ship.

S*aturday, 8th.* Light airs, the weather is now getting cold. This afternoon there was a row amongst the ladies.

M*onday, 10th.* We caught an albatross this morning with a hook and line. 10 p.m., a strong breeze.

T*uesday, 11th.* A fresh wind: a ship in sight. Saw several whales. Distance from the Cape 1000 miles.

W*ednesday, 12th.* Early this morning the ship nearly ran down a whale asleep. It was at first mistaken for breakers as the sea was dashing over it. In the afternoon the sailors harpooned a huge porpoise. Distance from the Cape 900 miles.

T*hursday, 13th.* Calm and heavy swell from the westward. We had some shooting to-day at the albatrosses which were hovering round the ship. In the afternoon, one of the "cuddy"[2] servants (a native of India) was seized with an epileptic fit that lasted

---

[1] The practice of "cutting anyone down" is a well-known form of practical joke amongst seamen. It consists of partially cutting through the rope from which the hammock is suspended. The weight of the owner, when he gets in, is sufficient to break the remaining unsevered strands and bring hammock and occupant "down with a run." Care is usually taken only to cut the rope at the foot-end of the hammock, since to let the occupant down by the head is likely to be attended, as in this instance, with disastrous results.

[2] Saloon, or the captain's mess.

some time. We hooked an albatross this evening, but he escaped by diving. The clouds looking very black and squally all round.

F*riday, 14th.* Calm. Caught three albatrosses with a hook and line. We set one of them loose with a copper plate round his neck, bearing the ship's name. At noon a fresh breeze from the southward. The crew employed getting up two six-pounders from the hold for signals.

S*aturday, 15th.* Strong breeze; expecting to land on Tuesday.

M*onday, 17th.* Fresh breeze from the S.E., very cold. Uncomfortable dinner today, on account of the ship's rolling so heavily. Wind increasing.

W*ednesday, 19th.* A gentle breeze from the S.W., tacked ship. Very hazy all round the horizon. About 3 p.m. we had soundings upon the L'Aghulhas Bank with 65 fathoms. Saw some gannet and shoals of fish. The water very phosphorescent. Tacked ship: distance from Table Bay 57 miles, from the shore 25 miles. Many hopes and fears concerning our landing to-morrow. Very heavy dew in the evening.

T*hursday, 20th.* Light airs from the westward. At 11 a.m. we had our first view of the land. The weather still very thick and hazy, and the Cape Fly-Away continually appearing. This phenomenon consists of a thick bank of clouds and mist, rolling about, and frequently assuming an exact resemblance to distant land. In a few minutes it is all gone away leaving the horizon quite clear, but upon looking in a different direction you see it again forming in a bank close to the water. The appearance is so deceptive that occasionally even navigators are led astray by it. The wind gradually increasing soon brought us within sight of Table Mountain. The view of the high land and the curiously formed mountains, from the sea, is exceedingly beautiful. At 8 p.m. we dropped the anchor in Table Bay, having been ten weeks upon the passage from Gravesend.

F*riday, 21st.* This morning we landed at the old jetty at 9 o'clock. As the boatmen were passing our luggage from the ship into the boat, the clumsy fellows managed to