



SORTING.

TWELVE MONTHS ^A

AT THE

SOUTH AFRICAN

DIAMOND FIELDS.

BY

“FOSSOR.”

—

1872.

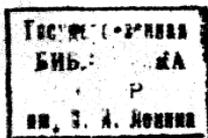
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“——— Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice.”—*Othello*.



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PART I.

THE "Cape" Mail Steamer, which left Southampton sometime in the winter of 1870, in addition to her ordinary list of everyday passengers, carried with her an extra number who were not of everyday, and who were now bound outward, attracted by a certain glittering fascination which just at this time was supposed to be emitting a very dazzling gleam, somewhere in the "Cape" direction. Saloon and fore-cabin were filled to repletion, many unusual expedients had to be adopted to make matters run smoothly, but eventually, after, as a matter of course, falling in with, and being unpleasantly *interviewed* by that riotous, inquisitive gale which seems perpetually on guard in the channel, everybody and everything shook into their places, and though it was evident the ship's accommodations were taxed to the utmost, yet on the whole, the passengers were as comfortable as they could well expect to be; indeed, from what afterwards transpired, they had some reason to congratulate themselves that their choice had fallen on one of the ships of this Company, in preference to one of those which about this period had been hastily fitted

up, and as hastily officered and manned,* to meet in some way the requirements of the restless people who had become inoculated with the diamond disease, and who were thronging in crowds to catch a glimpse of the illumination which was said to be shining very brightly on the banks of the Vaal and Orange Rivers, well away in the interior of South Africa.

The writer was one of those afflicted with the prevailing epidemic, and (having recovered) he now proposes to relate a short account of a journey to and from the Diamond Fields, some adventures therein, and a description thereof, which, as it will neither be very learned nor tediously geological, may possibly possess a little interest in its own way. If the relation can serve to produce that interest or even slightly to be of use to any person who may be now thinking of the "Fields," it will be a source of gratification to the writer, and agreeably correspond with his principal motives for inditing the experiences of a digger after diamonds.

It would serve no end or purpose, even if allowable, to allude to or attempt a description of those on board who were supposed to be bound for the "diggings," it will be sufficient to state that they were of all ages, classes, and temperaments, some boldly declaring their plans and intentions, and their entire belief in Fortune and the diamonds, while others affected more reticence as regarded the object of their pilgrimage, talking mysteriously of many wonderful things, which may or may not have since bloomed into reality.

On the ninth day we reached Madeira, and having only just emerged from the cold, wet, stormy British Channel, which had treated us in its usual ill-tempered, wintry fashion, it was more than delightful to step ashore upon this island of

* This remark, of course, has no reference to the present time.