

## *THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT*

January 22nd and 23rd, 1879.

PAINTED -BY A. DE NEUVILLE

Taken from the original 1880 manuscript (unabridged).

By courtesy Brecon Museum

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Almost at the opening of the campaign against Cetewayo, King of Zululand, the same day witnessed one of the saddest disasters, and one of the most heroic passages of British arms. When, on the 11th of January, 1879, the 3rd corps of the South African field force under Colonel Glyn, C.B., which included both battalions of the 24th or Warwickshire Regiment of Foot, crossed the Buffalo River into Zululand there was left behind at the mission station of Rorke's Drift, to cover the ferry over that river, and guard a field hospital established in the mission house and the commissariat stores, the B. Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 24th, under Lieutenant Gonville Bromhead, numbering 81 men fit for service, and 17 sick. In addition to this company there were 40 casualties at the post, 18 of them patients in the hospital, left behind on the advance over the Buffalo River, or sent back after the first engagement on the 12th of January, which resulted in the destruction of Sirayo's kraal. These casualties were made up of 1 non-commissioned officer, and 3 sick, of the Royal Artillery; Lieutenant J. R. M. Chard, and 1 man, of the Royal Engineers; 1 man of the 3rd Foot; 6 non-commissioned officers and men, and 5 sick, of the 1st Battalion 24th regiment; 1 man sick, of the 90th; 3 officers (Assistant-Commissaries Dunne and Byrne, and Acting-Commissary Dalton) and 1 man of the Commissariat and Transport Service; 1 officer (Surgeon-Major Reynolds), 1 corporal, and 3 men of the Army Medical Department; 3 sick, of the Natal Mounted Police; 1 officer and 6 men sick, of the Natal Native Contingent; a puntman, employed at the ferry; a native of Unkungu's tribe; and a chaplain, the Rev. George Smith, Vicar of the border settlement of Estcourt, making in all 8 officers and 96 men fit for service, and 35 in hospital.

It is worthwhile to be precise in a case where every one present deserves to rank, in some sense, as a hero.

A description of the station buildings will facilitate an understanding of the nature of the defence, and M. de Neuville's picture of it.

These erections, originally built by a border agent named Rorke, but recently purchased and occupied by a Swedish missionary, the Rev. Otto Witte, on behalf of the Swedish Church, included a thatched house of three rooms, occupied at the time of the defence as a hospital (which is seen in flames in the picture); and to the left, at a distance of twenty paces, another large building, once used for a church or meeting-house, but then as a commissariat store, of which a corner of the roof and verandah only is visible on the left of the picture. These buildings were not connected by walls.

The whole group was commanded on the south, at about four hundred yards distance, by a hill, the Oscarsberg, so called in honour of the King of Sweden, much broken with clumps of bush, ravines, caverns, and boulders, giving excellent cover to assailants. On the right of the hospital stretched, to the south-west, thick bush, in which a road and garden had been cleared, which there was no time to destroy. This and a taller clump of trees (eucalyptus and poplar, seen in the picture), with the garden walls, gave shelter to the enemy in this quarter of the attack, as the Oscarsberg and a group of outbuildings did on the south.

Lieutenant Chard was in charge of the ferry over the Buffalo River, and senior officer of the post of Rorke's Drift. At a quarter-past three in the afternoon of the 22nd he was on duty at the ferry, when two mounted men rode up to the opposite bank at full gallop and called out to be ferried across. It was from one of them, Lieutenant Adendorff of Lonsdale's Horse, that Lieutenant Chard received the first news of the disaster of Isandhlana and the Zulu advance on Rorke's Drift. The Lieutenant remained for the moment with Chard; his companion, a trooper of the same force, continued his ride to Helpmakaar to warn its garrison. Almost at the same moment arrived an urgent message from Bromhead, in consequence of which Chard at once hastened to the camp, which he reached at half-past three.

Here he found that Captain Gardner, who had escaped from the slaughter of Isandhlana, had brought hasty warning to Lieutenant Bromhead as he rode on to Helpmakaar, the next post, of the massacre and the rapid advance of an overwhelming Zulu force. This was the first official intimation of the danger impending the little garrison. Almost at the same time fugitives from the field of Isandhlana belonging to the Natal irregulars had brought the news to their comrades in hospital, and had then

hurried on towards Helpmakaar, leaving excitement and grief, but no panic, behind them. The preparations for defence were already well advanced. There was luckily at the post Mr. Dalton, holding an acting Commissariat appointment, who, as sergeant in the 85th Regiment some years before, had received a course of instruction in field fortification, and who combined with this rudimentary theoretical knowledge great stature, uncommon strength, and that contagious courage which serves to animate not only its possessor, but all within sight and hearing of him. Lieutenant Bromhead had at once ordered the tents which were pitched outside the group of buildings to be struck, and in concert with Dalton had already begun the construction of such rough lines of defence to connect the buildings as could be extemporised out of the commissariat stores, luckily at hand in abundance—sacks of mealies (Indian corn), bags of flour and potatoes, biscuit boxes, and such other materials as were most readily available. After Chard's party came in, one of the waggons from the Drift (represented in the picture) was pressed into the same service, and formed an important part of the barricade between the hospital and the commissariat stores. Chard, on his arrival, fully approved of all that Bromhead and Dalton had done, and the plan of defence was completed on their lines. It was as follows:

Enclosing the right angle of the hospital and running in face of the bush and garden, along a broken ridge which fell precipitously for a few feet, was thrown up a barricade of mealie-bags about three feet high. This, the first line of defence, was continued from the left of the hospital to the commissariat store, which was fortunately divided by a ravine from the broken ground of the Oscarsberg. There was a second line of defence, not resorted to till the fire from the Oscarsberg, which took the defenders of the mealie-bag barricade in flank and rear, together with the burning of the hospital, had rendered the first line of defence untenable. The defenders then fell back on a barricade running across the yard at right angles to the mealie-bag barricade, constructed of biscuit boxes, one on top of another (from three feet nine inches to four feet in height), which extended across the yard from the commissariat store, and formed part of a second line of defences including the store and an open space round it, and running as far as an adjacent cattle kraal, which it took in. The beginning of this line is visible, though as yet incomplete, in the foreground of the picture. Part of the same second system of defence was a redoubt of mealie-bags, with two faces, enabling its defenders to fire to right and left from a height of from ten to eleven feet, erected in the space between the store and the biscuit-box barricade. Within this the wounded were deposited out of danger from the enemy's fire, after the hospital was evacuated.

This second line of defence was never assaulted by the Zulus at close quarters like the barricade of mealie-bags. From it our men kept up a well-sustained and murderous fire from sunset till morning, thanks to the light of the burning hospital.

Besides these lines, the buildings were loopholed and barricaded. In the hospital a guard of four men was stationed, and all the sick who could stand and use a rifle had their posts assigned them. Some even patched up for service, with tacks and strips of hide, rifles as damaged as themselves.

After seeing the preparations for defence in good train, Chard rode back to the ferry, drew in his outpost, of a Sergeant (Miller) and six men, with their movable material and waggons, and fell back on the mission-buildings, though Sergeant Miller and the ferryman Daniels volunteered to hold the ferry, from the pontoon anchored in mid-stream - an offer the acceptance of which meant a deliberate sacrifice of brave men's lives (in all human probability) to duty.

It was now four o'clock, and the hasty preparations for defence were barely complete, when an officer of Durnford's Horse, one of the many fugitives from the field of Isandlhana who passed through Rorke's Drift that day, and who had volunteered to reconnoitre, came in with tidings that the enemy were at hand.

They appeared over the south shoulder of the Oscarsberg, at first in a body reckoned at five or six hundred, but increasing rapidly during the attack, as was afterwards ascertained, to at least four thousand, led by a mounted chief. Here is an account of the opening of the attack from a letter written at the time, and published in the Pall Mall Gazette, after Chard's dispatch :-

"They halted a moment, and then advanced quietly but quickly, at a run, taking advantage of every bit of cover. It seemed as if they had expected to surprise the camp. Our men opened fire at five hundred yards. The first man to fall was the chief. He was shot by Private Dunbar, and fell off his horse headlong. Numbers of the enemy fell at once. They hesitated, broke, and the greater number scattered to their left, and occupied the garden and orchard, where there was plenty of cover. A few got up close to the houses and lay behind the field oven and kitchens that there were built. Scarcely any of these men had guns or rifles. Others came on in a continuous stream, occupied the hill above, and gradually encircled the two houses. Most of the men who had guns were stationed on the hill, and kept up a continuous and rapid fire on the yard. It caught our men in their backs as they were guarding the

garden side, and five men were thus shot dead. Had the Zulus been good marksmen the place would have been untenable, but they fired wildly and badly for the most part, as if the noise had as much effect as the bullets.

“It now became dusk. The Zulus crept up nearer and nearer. Under cover of the bushes and long grass they were able to get within five yards of the hospital without being seen. From this point, in parties of fifteen to twenty, they repeatedly attacked the end room of the hospital. They made these attacks in the most deliberate manner, advancing after the manner of their dancing, with a prancing step and high action; they cared nothing for slaughter, but endeavoured in the most persistent manner to get over the barricade and into the hospital. Many times, seven or eight at least, Lieutenant Bromhead, collecting a few men together, had to drive them off with a bayonet charge. Then they would retire, and all of them in chorus shout and strike their shields. Our men cheered in answer and let them have it. There was plenty of ammunition. After the first half-hour there was no waste. How deliberate and telling the fire was may be gathered from the following incidents. Private Joseph Williams, a young Welshman, under two years’ service, had a small window in the hospital to shoot from. Next morning fourteen dead warriors were counted outside his window, and several more down his line of fire.

As soon as his ammunition was all expended, he and the other men with him defended the door of the room till the enemy by sheer weight of numbers forced it open. Poor fellow, he was seized by the hands and arms, dragged out, and assegaid and mutilated before the eyes of his comrades. Another instance - Private Dunbar, the same man who shot the chief on horseback, was posted to watch, the hill. As the Kaffirs streamed down from their right, this man, also a Welshman, and of less service than the above-mentioned, shot eight of the enemy in as many consecutive shots. Lieutenant Chard was standing by him as he did it, and the bodies were found heaped one on the other next morning, “The enemy at last effected a lodgement in the hospital. Thirty of the patients were got out in time. Most of them were pushed and pulled through a window which opened on the yard. Sergeant Maxfield, a fine young soldier, was very ill with fever and delirious. He could not be moved, and was killed in his bed.

They now set fire to the hospital. The roof was thatch, and it quickly blazed. By its light our men were enabled to see their foes better, and many fell before they retreated to better cover. After a pause, encouraged or commanded by a chief who from time to time shouted his orders from the hillside, they came on again. The fighting in places became hand to hand over the mealie sacks. The assailants used only their assegais. These they did not throw, but used only as stabbing weapons. Directly a soldier showed his head over the parapet to get a shot he was thrust at. Once or twice the Kaffirs actually seized the bayonets and tried to wrench them off the rifles. One of our men loaded whilst a Zulu was tugging at his bayonet. He pulled the trigger and blew the plucky fellow to atoms. They next tried to set fire to the thatched roof of the store. In face of a hot fire they got up to the house, and one fine savage had his brains blown out as lie was holding a brand against the eaves.

The passage in italics describes the moment chosen by the painter - the crisis of the attack - when just before sunset the enemy succeeded in firing the roof of the hospital by means of lighted wisps fastened to the points of assegais, which they hurled into the dry thatch from the shelter of the rocks and bush stretching from the base of the Oscarsberg. The hospital, as the letter states, had been stubbornly defended. After the outer door was forced by overwhelming numbers, the post was, maintained to the last by four privates of the 24th, W. Williams (1395), Hook, R. Jones (716), and W. Jones (593), Welshmen, like most of the 24th, whom Lieutenant Chard in his letter to the Illustrated London News of the 17th of March is forced to identify by their regimental numbers added to their names, there being about forty Joneses and as many Williamses in the regiment. Till the last sick man who could be moved had been passed through one of the windows into the yard, these gallant fellows, after expending their last cartridges, held each doorway in succession with the bayonet.

The painter is debarred from representing their heroic defence of their post, but he shows us the rescue which it rendered possible, in the group formed by a sick man being passed through the window, and received by a man of the medical department (identified by the red cross on his sleeve), and the line of sick, already rescued from the blazing building, carried across the yard by gunners and men of the medical department and transport service (distinguishable by their uniform trousers, though stripped many of them to their jerseys) to the shelter of the second line of defence. One, dying, is anxiously watched by a wounded private of the Army Service Corps - another, an artilleryman, able to crawl, crawling on hands and knees. Some sufferers, either wounded in the defence or extricated from the hospital, are seen lying on the mealie-bags, whose contents are strewn around, in the lee of the still incomplete biscuit-box barrier. Among’ those who help to carry the sick will be seen, conspicuous by his brigand-like uniform, Harry Lugg, one of the Natal Mounted Police Contingent,

who, being patients in the hospital, remained to take a share in the defence when the fugitives from Isandhlana, still under the influence of its scare, refusing to obey their officers, “skedaddled” to Helpmakaar.

From the blazing hospital in the centre of the picture is seen running on the right the mealie-bag barricade cresting the broken ridge, which forms a natural trench, into which the savage enemy are crowding to the attack. It is held in fierce hand-to-hand fight by the handful of defenders, using their bayonets and clubbed rifles when unable to fire. Conspicuous among them, by his brown blouse and sombrero with its red ribbon, is Corporal Scheiss, of the Natal Native Contingent, who was one of the many humbler heroes of the defence mentioned in Lieutenant Chard’s dispatch, and who, with the surviving defenders of the hospital, has received the deserved reward of the Cross of Valour.

This gallant fellow, a Swiss, had, during the Franco-German war, been a soldier in Bourbaki’s army. He showed the fighting quality of his race on this memorable day. He was already wounded in the leg, when a Zulu, who had reached the base of the barricade, sent a ball through his hat, but was at once bayoneted by Scheiss; springing on the barricade, he then killed another Zulu who had climbed it, and repeated the achievement with a third, in spite of his wound, refusing to fall out.

Among the defenders of the barricade will be seen Frederick Hitch, since decorated with the Victoria Cross, who receives a wound in the back from the Oscarsberg flank fire, which was most galling to our soldiers. Only two of the Zulus succeeded in climbing the barricade. They will be seen in the picture, one lying dead on the mealie-bags stained with his blood, the other just within them, fallen prone, but, like a brave man, with his face to the foe. Some of the assailants may be seen grasping the bayonets of the defenders, and receiving their fire, in the attempt to wrest the rifles from their grasp. Those who fire at the enemy take sheer-downward aim, as the Zulus were massed close under the mealie-bags, in the natural fosse along their line.

Between the skilfully arranged lines of the composition, formed by the bearers of the sick from the blazing hospital and the desperate defenders of the mealie-bag barricade, is a central group, consisting of Surgeon Reynolds, his bull-terrier, and a wounded man, the gallant Dalton, who played so prominent a part in the defence with both brain and arm. Conspicuous by his towering stature, and his dark dress among the red tunics, he had been foremost in the defence, exposing himself fearlessly above the low barricade, using his rifle with deadly aim, and his bayonet with Herculean strength. Seeing a Zulu who had reached the barricade, he called to one of the men to shoot him, while he himself was in the act of taking aim at another, when he turned pale, his rifle fell from his hands, and he sank to the ground, shot through the shoulder. He passed his rifle to another commissariat officer, Mr. Byrne, who was himself shot, almost immediately, through the head, as he was bringing water to a wounded man of the Natal Contingent, Corporal Scammel. Byrne’s body is not visible, owing to the biscuit boxes; Dalton’s rifle has been passed to Lieutenant Chard at the barricade, for which a wounded man hands him cartridges.

Surgeon Reynolds is applying a hasty bandage to Dalton’s wound. Refusing to leave the yard, he continued after his wound was bandaged to cheer the defenders of the barricade. The stalwart figure near him, in a white helmet, with a long red beard, and a long black frock coat, passing a packet of ammunition from his haversack to one of the defenders, is the chaplain, the Rev. George Smith, ready to administer cartridges as well as spiritual consolation. His exertions were honestly blended of earnest efforts, becoming the chaplain, to check the profanity of the men, and energetic encouragements of the defence, prompted by the old Adam. Mr. Smith looks a model member of the Church Militant. His thews and stature are, we are assured, not exaggerated. Lieutenant Chard, bareheaded, is taking as active a part in the defence of the barricade as any of his men, using Dalton’s rifle, just passed to him from poor Byrne’s dead hand. Behind Dalton and Reynolds, Lieutenant Bromhead is directing the aim of a soldier at his side, whilst conveniently stationed to superintend the transport of the sick, and the retreat to the second line of defence, which took place at nightfall, very soon after the moment depicted by M. de Neuville.

In spite of the devoted defence of the hospital, it is sad to know that some five of its inmates, whom it was found impossible to pass through the window, fell victims either to the flames or the Zulus’ assegais.

Between the hospital and the commissariat store we see the other line of mealie-bags and waggons, defended, not with the bayonet, but by the marksmen, who had the difficult duty of keeping down the plunging fire of the enemy concealed among the stones, bush, and caves of the Oscarsberg, the effect of which is visible among the defenders of the right-hand barricade. This was the most dangerous part of the defence, as the loss of life showed, though, thanks to the ravine just below it, no hand-to-hand fight took place here.

After nightfall the attack and defence from the second line were both aided by the light of the burning hospital. This guided the fire from the Oscarsberg until the order was given to fall back upon

the second line of defence, which the enemy never assailed in hand-to-hand fight, though they established themselves behind the outer wall of the cattle kraal, within ten yards of the wall held by our men. The fire from the mealie-bag redoubt and the biscuit-box rampart was very fatal, and the enemy presented a fair mark, thanks to the blaze of the burning hospital.

After midnight the attack of the enemy slackened, but it continued more intermittently through the small hours till 5.15 A.M., when the last shot was fired at a savage who was trying to fire the thatch of the store. It was not till day-dawn that the look-outs could announce the disappearance of the Zulus over the hill, and it was between seven and eight when the welcome approach of Colonel Glyn's column was greeted by a ringing round of cheers.

About three hundred and seventy of the enemy's dead were buried round the post, but a great many more must have perished in the attack, if we allow for the deaths among the wounded whom, after their fashion, the Zulus carried off in their retreat. The number of casualties on our side was fifteen killed and twelve wounded, of whom two died within a day or two.

Never was a more gallant or a more opportune defence - for within seven or eight miles, at Helpmakaar, were more than a hundred women and children under a slender guard, and the colony lay open to savage raid. Never were honours and promotions more deserved than those which have been awarded to Brevet-Majors Chard and Bromhead, to Surgeon-Major Reynolds and Commissary Dalton, to the gallant Corporal Scheiss, and the survivors of the defence of the hospital - Sergeant Williams, the two Joneses, and Hook; besides Lance-Corporal William Allan and Private Frederick Hitch, who received the Victoria Cross from the Queen's hand, in December last, and Bombardier Cantwell of the Artillery, who was decorated with the Distinguished Conduct Medal in this present month of March.

It is but fitting that an action so honourable to British arms, and so characteristic of the best fighting qualities of British blood, tenacity, defiance of odds, and refusal to accept a beating, should be recorded by the most accomplished painters who have devoted themselves to the record of deeds of war. Mrs. Butler (nee Miss E. Thompson) has represented it for the Queen, and her picture will be one of the centres of interest in this year's Academy. M. de Neuville, the painter of some of the most remarkable battle pictures of the time, episodes of the Franco-German war, in which he served, has here painted it for The Fine Art Society.

As the work of a French painter, the picture be naturally made the subject of question as regards truth and authority.

For truth of types and general character the picture answers for itself. That it represents British, not French soldiers, in physiognomy and bearing, as in uniform, is self-evident.

But as to the more individual truth of actual portraiture, it may be as well to put on record that the painter has had sittings of all the principal actors in the scene who were in this country while he was at work - Major Chard, the Rev. G. Smith, Surgeon-Major Reynolds. For the rest, as Major Bromhead and Commissary Dalton, he has had the aid of photographs, helped by the suggestions of relatives; while for the men, he has made studies of soldiers of the 24th and others, at Portsmouth.

As to the localities, he has had the benefit of all forms of topographical record; official plans, Major Chard's sketches, the plans, drawings, and notes made on the spot by Colonel Degacher (in whom Monsieur de Neuville recognised an old schoolfellow at the military school of St. Omer) the day after the action. As to the incidents of the defence, he has had the use not only of Major Chard's official report, and of all the letters which appeared at the time, but of many others from actors on the scene - in particular a long one from Harry Lugg.

Those who see the picture may rest assured that though the actual incidents of that remarkable night, like those of every incident of war, no doubt presented themselves very differently to every actor in them, and have left very different impressions on their memories, they have in M. de Neuville's picture as trustworthy a record of the Defence of Rorke's Drift as conscientious study of all the available authorities, combined with practised skill in the painting of warfare, founded on but too real and practical an experience of its horrors, can secure.

Accustomed to paint war as he has seen and known it, where he can make his studies and observations on the spot, it has been a hard task for M. de Neuville to build up from plans and sketches, the reports of officers, and the descriptions of actors in the scene, the picture of this remarkable Defence, which is now submitted with no less assurance of its substantial trustworthiness than of its artistic power.

## OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

*THE TIMES*, 17th March, 1880.

THE DEFENCE OF RORKE'S DRIFT. - In this impressive picture, opened on Monday to public view, one of the most accomplished of French battle-painters makes his *coup d'essai* on an English battle-subject. M. de Neuville is to be congratulated on his success in setting before us the English soldier's look, bearing, and manner of confronting his enemy, as in the easier task of representing his uniform, arms, and accoutrements: nor has he been less successful in bringing before us the material features of the scene, represented with a comprehensive view of the most critical moment of the defence, and an excellent choice of some of its most striking incidents. To this end he has had the aid of all the plans and sketches, official and unofficial, made on the spot and at the time; of actual studies or photographs of all the leading actors in the scene, and of the descriptions of officers and soldiers actually engaged. Guided by his own experience, gained in the Franco-German war, M. de Neuville has selected a moment which enables him to combine the principal features of that memorable defence, in which, between 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the 22nd of January, and 5 o'clock of the next morning, 100 English soldiers held at bay behind hastily extemporized fortifications, and finally beat off, 4,000 Zulus, leaving more than three of the enemy dead round the post for every one of the defenders. All the details of the night's work are compendiously described in a pamphlet sold in the room, which dispenses with the necessity of minute details in these columns.

For the merits of the picture, as a representation of hot and heady fight, its skilful composition, and its life-like painting of masses, groups, and single figures, it would be superfluous to praise the painter of "Le Bourget," and other episodes of the Franco-German war, already exhibited in London. It was well that the best contemporary art available should be employed in perpetuating, by painting and engraving, the memory of one of the most gallant acts that ever reflected honour on British arms. Her Majesty has given a commission for the same subject to Mrs. Butler (Miss Elizabeth Thompson). Her picture will, no doubt, form one of the central attractions of this year's Academy Exhibition. On this battle-ground of art, the best pictorial ability of French and English military painters may be proud to meet in friendly rivalry.

*MORNING POST*, 13th March, 1880.

M. de Neuville's picture on this subject was yesterday submitted to private view at the rooms of The Fine Art Society, 148, New Bond Street. For his graphic illustration of one of the most glorious incidents recorded in the annals of British prowess and determination, M. de Neuville, it is stated, has enjoyed several advantages. As regards portraiture he has had sittings from Major Chard, the Rev. G. Smith, and Surgeon-Major Reynolds, whilst photographs have been obtained of other of the principal actors in the eventful scene. He has also availed himself of various sketches, plans, and notes made by persons on the spot. The picture thus possesses exceptional interest, independently of its admirable execution and the skill shown in the disposition of the figures.

M. de Neuville has succeeded in introducing most of the personages whose names have become immortalised by their gallant defence of Rorke's Drift, and it must be added that, whilst possessing no objectionable sensational element, his picture engrosses attention by its dramatic treatment, its general air of reality, and its entire freedom from conventionalism.

*THE GLOBE*.

At the Gallery of The Fine Art Society in New Bond Street, a picture is now on view which cannot fail to attract a large share of public attention, both from its excellence as a work of art and the interest attaching to the subject. It represents the heroic "Defence of Rorke's Drift" on the evening of January 22nd, 1879, and is the work of M. A. de Neuville, whose numerous pictures realising incidents in the Franco-German war entitle him to rank as the foremost living painter of military subjects. The picture is painted with the artist's accustomed breadth and strength of style, and the colour, with the exception of some crudity in the red costumes, that may easily be modified, is harmonious and well-balanced. Its chief merit lies, however, in the dramatic way in which the story is told, in its diversity and truth of individual character, and in the vivid impression of reality which it conveys. It is a worthy record of one of the most memorable achievements of British arms.

*THE ATHENVEUM* 20th March, 1880.

Technically speaking, there cannot be two opinions about the vigour of this design, the spontaneity of the artist's conception of his subject, and the extraordinary practical skill applied in its execution. It is excellent in colour, first-rate in keeping throughout, not devoid of touches of grim humour, and needs

but to have been more equally finished in every part to have been one of the finest of M. de Neuville's works.

*THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.*

This large and powerful picture by the vigorous French battle-painter, M. de Neuville, whose "Le Bourget" has made the artist famous in this country, is now on view at The Fine Art Society's rooms, Bond Street. That so memorable a feat of British arms in a campaign which cost France one of her most illustrious sons, should be rendered, and worthily rendered, by one of the most eminent painters of that friendly nation is alike honourable to both countries. M. de Neuville has brought to his new task actual experience of war gained during the Franco-German campaign and so ably recorded in recent works; and he has consulted for the present picture every available sketch, plan, portrait, and authority of eye-witnesses; so that we have doubtless a perfectly authentic representation. And, happily, we may add that he has also succeeded in catching the physiognomy and bearing of the British soldier with a fidelity rarely attained by a foreigner, especially, perhaps, a Frenchman. In "Le Bourget" we remarked what to us seemed some exaggeration of Prussian physical characteristics, attributable, excusably enough, to the partisan rancour too certain to be entailed by a desperate war. But in this picture all colour of national prejudice or misconception is avoided with a success as rare as it is welcome. Although the painting retains some of the roughness naturally incidental to a sketch by an artist of almost exuberant vigour, it is so masterly and solid in manner, and so vividly graphic in suggestion, that to make such objection may well seem hypercriticism.

*COURT JOURNAL*, 20th March, 1880.

A picture bearing this appellation, illustrating the heroic defence of Rorke's Drift, is now being exhibited at The Fine Art Society's Gallery in New Bond Street, and cannot fail to create a stir not only from its intrinsic merits, but likewise from the national interests in the details of the scene. It is the work of a distinguished French artist, Monsieur de Neuville, the painter of many well-known episodes of the Franco-German and other wars, and he was commissioned by the Society expressly to execute the subject under notice. In this noble work of superb proportions, measuring nearly 8 feet by 5 feet, all the stirring scenes of the memorable combat stand out in bold relief. The entire painting is a work of great merit, every section of which is full of ability. Nearly all are portraits of officers, &c., who, since they have returned from the seat of war, have given the artist sittings. On Friday in last week their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales inspected it at the Society's Gallery, being followed the next day by the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. On Thursday last it was taken to Buckingham Palace for Her Majesty the Queen's inspection, and on the evening of the same day his Royal Highness the Field-Marshal Commanding-in-Chief called to see it, all of whom have graciously expressed their great delight with the artist's successful efforts.

*THE DAILY CHRONICLE*, 16th March, 1880.

Those who have been gratified with the view of that masterpiece of modern art in battle subjects, "Le Bourget," by the French painter De Neuville, will have expected something remarkable in the long-talked-of and now happily accomplished picture of "The Defence of Rorke's Drift," from the same hand, but few, we imagine, will be quite prepared for the treat in store for them. Deeds of heroism, be the actors of what nationality they may, are the property of the world, and we may claim for our own countrymen, as we should freely accord it to those of another race, the need of praise called for by acts of valour dictated alike by courage and sense of duty. A very memorable and beautiful work by our own illustrious artist, Mrs. Butler, "The Balaclava Charge," pictured a scene as splendid as an example of human hardihood as it was deplorable in the resulting loss of life.

But no comment brief and bitter, like that of the French general who witnessed that scene, "C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre," would apply to the subject De Neuville has found for his pencil in the deadly struggle between British troops and the savage warriors of Southern Africa; and the successful defence of Rorke's Drift by a handful of soldiers against thousands of the undisciplined but essentially brave subjects of King Cetewayo, is a fact which will doubtless be recorded in history as a notable example of endurance, skill, and courage. In technical qualities De Neuville's picture is undoubtedly of the first rank, splendidly designed and composed, the figures also instinct with energetic life, whilst a further quality, perhaps scarcely to have been hoped for from an artist of M. de Neuville's nationality, is the essentially British character with which he has endowed both the forms and faces in the various groups; and we do not hesitate to say that wherever this truly noble work is seen it will be acknowledged as the work of a master hand, as well as being the most touching record of an incident exhibiting self-devotion and true heroism.

*THE CITY PRESS.*

When it was announced that M. de Neuville was about to paint a scene in the Zulu War, the curiosity of many was naturally aroused, and various opinions were expressed as to the manner in which the great battle-painter would depict the English soldiery. It is not too much to say that this picture of "Rorke's Drift" is decidedly a success, and that a great treat awaits those who visit the gallery in which it is exhibited. That M. de Neuville has been most successful in his representation of British soldiers is certain; for the portraits and for the localities the painter had great facilities afforded to him. Major Chard, the Rev. G. Smith, and Surgeon-Major Reynolds gave sittings, and the official plans, Major Chard's sketches, and the sketches and notes of Colonel Degacher made upon the day following the action, were also placed at his disposal.

*THE BAZAAR, 26th March, 1880.*

No better artist could have been chosen to record in a spirited manner so spirited an action as the defence of Rorke's Drift than the distinguished painter of "Le Bourget," and although worthy treatment of the subject is naturally expected from Miss Elizabeth Thompson (Mrs. Butler), she must needs give us of her best to equal the achievement of her famous French confrere. M. de Neuville's picture, now on view at The Fine Art Society's Gallery in New Bond Street, is one wherein merit and interest go hand in hand, and in saying that it is fully as meritorious as it is interesting we offer the artist the highest praise within our power to bestow. Vigour of composition, life-like action, originality, and rare technical skill are exhibited in this admirably conceived picture.

*THE BUILDER.*

The composition of the picture is arranged, as in fact it naturally arranges itself under the circumstances, in a semicircle, with one or two prominent figures apart in the centre; and it has the merit of being very effectively composed without the grouping at all bearing the appearance of contrivance.

The French painter has succeeded in giving the character of English officers and soldiers admirably; indeed, we could hardly have supposed it possible for a Frenchman to paint Englishmen so very English, though we remember that he has also painted Germans very German in "Le Bourget;" so much so, indeed, that the Germans do not particularly like the compliment. We have no reason to object to the way in which M. de Neuville has painted us, and therefore, perhaps, national vanity may tempt us to say that Englishmen do look better in a picture than Germans, although in the same breath we will be just, and admit that they do not look so well as Frenchmen.

We are not essentially a picturesque people, nor is the English uniform as picturesque or as marked in character as the French. But the work has the same characteristic as others of its author's pictures, of looking thoroughly like grim earnest, full of mud, and blood, and struggle, and not a painted fight in spick and span uniforms; and it is gratifying that we should have such a fine and vivid record of a military action which every Englishman may be proud to remember, and of the pluck and heroism of the two young men who, as our friend Punch said at the time, saved "not only a colony, but the honour of old England."

*THE PICTORIAL WORLD.*

Alphonse de Neuville will hereafter be known to Englishmen as the painter of the picture of the "Defence of Rorke's Drift," which is now on exhibition at 148, New Bond Street. French artists have been generally credited with possessing exceptional skill in the delineation of military life and incident, and M. de Neuville certainly stands in the front rank of military painters; for while he carefully attends to every little detail, his pictures lack nothing in fire and action.