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# GOLDEN FETICH

EDEN PHILLPOTTS







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"STOOD AND WATCHED THE OCEAN AND THE SKY."

# The Golden Fetich

By EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "CHILDREN OF THE MIST,"  
"SONS OF THE MORNING," ETC.

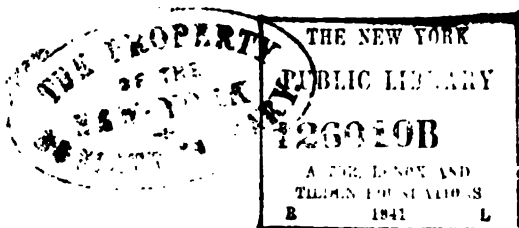
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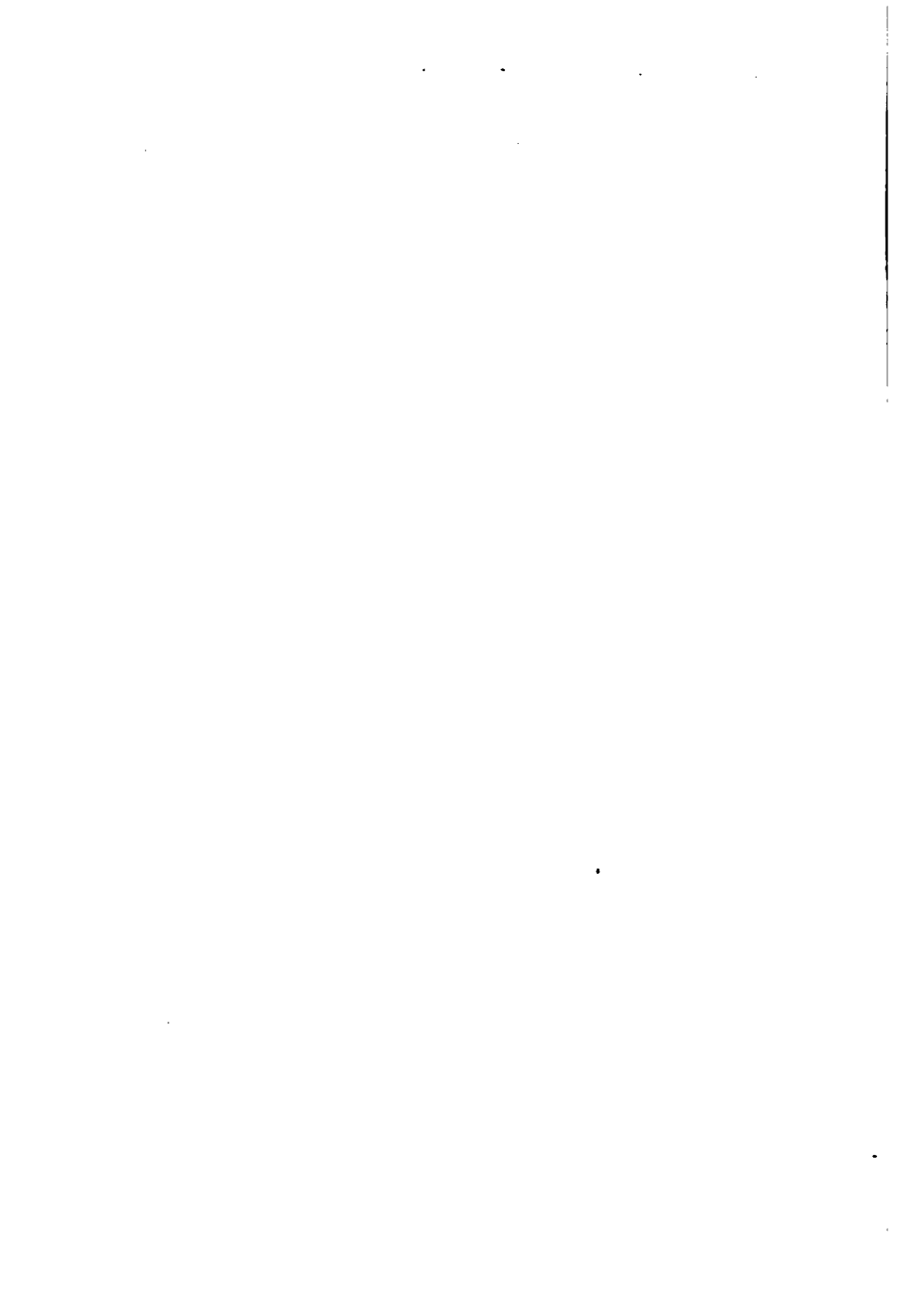
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Dedicated to  
**HENRY EDEN PHILLPOTTS**  
by his father,  
and to all other brave  
British and American boys,  
by their friend.

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# THE GOLDEN FETICH.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE FETICH FOUND.

"Please God, I'll never hear the sound of an auctioneer's hammer more," said Roy Meldrum. "Yesterday it fell like a tolling bell on my heart and beat away everything—everything I thought I had in the world."

His companion looked at him with a sort of grudging admiration.

"You must have been made of tough stuff to see it through."

"Well, it wasn't a pleasant experience, though I had long feared the trial had to come. After the governor died I knew the deluge must follow. Out of respect for the dear old boy the harpies held off, but the moment he was under ground, down they fluttered thick as starlings in autumn. Happily my back proved broad enough to bear it."

Roy Meldrum's position was rather a trying one despite his light tone and assumed contempt for his fate. His father had been a celebrated and a wealthy

man, but had died poor, save in honours, and now that the famous officer, General Sir Rupert Meldrum, V.C., K.C.B., and sometime aide-de-camp to His Majesty, had passed away, it was found that his affairs were sadly involved, and that the open-handed and too liberal manner of life pursued by the old soldier had left his only son much poorer than he expected to find himself.

A week before this story begins young Meldrum had been present at the sale of things he formerly regarded as precious heirlooms—trophies of the chase, rare curios from India and China, from the South Seas and Central Africa; but now all had vanished under the auctioneer's hammer; and Roy walked for the last time through the home of his youth, and knew that in all human probability his feet would never tread the oaken floors of Tamlin Hall again.

He wandered through the empty place, paused at each wide window to see some well-remembered view for the last time, puffed his pipe and returned but briefest possible replies to the questions and expressions of sympathy which proceeded from his companion.

Both men were above average height, but while Tracy Fain was dark and wiry, and only scaled eleven stone for all his six feet, the other man had a form of which any Viking might have been proud.

Roy Meldrum stood six feet four in his socks, and was built on massive lines. Strength rather than

speed was indicated in his tremendous limbs, and he had held for two years the heavyweight wrestling championship of the German Gymnasium; but this was his sole claim to athletic eminence, for, though tried in the pack of the Cambridge Rugby team, he had been found too slow to represent his 'varsity.

Roy Meldrum was of that type whereon Anglo-Saxon is stamped, and can be read the wide world over. His voice came from his tremendous chest; he looked all men in the face, was a clean liver and a man of simple, old-fashioned principles. Now, at thirty, and after imagining for years that a very large income would revert to him upon his father's death, he was suddenly faced with widely different prospects.

He stood at this moment rich in masculine friends of his own age, poor in those who could furnish him with wisdom.

Both his parents had now passed away and of near relations he possessed few, and none who could do him service. Indeed, Roy Meldrum seemed likely to represent the last of his line, and upon his marrying and adding another generation to the ancient race depended its chance of enduring beyond the limits of his own career.

Marriage, however, was the last thing in his thoughts. He found himself now heartwhole, hale, and energetic, with all the world before him and a total capital of some ten thousand pounds, where he

had once supposed that his income would be little short of that sum.

"Ten thousand!" said Tracy Fain. "Do you mean to say that your hopes and expectations have dwindled down to that, cousin? What in the name of Fortune did Sir Rupert do with his money?"

"Good," answered Meldrum stoutly. "Nothing but good from morning till night. Never lived a more charitable and generous man. His hand was always in his pocket, and those who gained his benefits were the sort who could pay no benefit back again. The men who came to our place were those who seldom got asked anywhere else; and so with everything and everybody. He had half a regiment of old soldiers on the estate, and of course not one in a dozen was earning his salt. Poor old dad! He didn't know how he had sent the money spinning. Why, he died under the impression that he was leaving me quite a tidy fortune."

"And you're built of the same stuff as he was, worse luck."

"Don't say that. I'm proud to think I've got a nature like his; but I'm not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with him. He was a father in ten thousand."

Roy reloaded his pipe and looked out over the rolling hills of Kent. Autumn already mellowed the woodlands and powdered the great tracts and glades

of bracken with gold. His cousin regarded him with a kindly though slightly contemptuous glance.

Tracy Fain had a shrewder intellect than Roy, and his dark eyes shot forth a keener intelligence than the frank blue ones of the big man; but life had yet to show where his heart was and prove the young fellow's nature. He was a three years' junior to Meldrum, but they had seen much of one another in early life, and to-day Fain, from mingled emotions, perhaps not wholly devoid of sentiment, had come down for the day from London to Tunbridge, and had driven out with his cousin to take a last look at Tamlin Hall. It represented half the sum total of the past happiness of both men; as boys they had dwelt there together; and their earliest recollections were stirred as they paced the chambers now echoing and empty.

"That's the room my mother died in," said Roy, as they stopped for a moment in a small apartment flooded with western light. "It was her boudoir, and the governor had it shut up after her death. Then, two days before he went himself, he insisted on having it opened again, and would occupy the couch mother passed away upon. There he died, too, and if ever a man saw things hidden from his watchers he did at the end. He spoke and stretched out his arms and greeted her, as though she had come to welcome him from the other side of the Dark Valley. And I think he knew that she was going to do so and expected her."

"I know you believe all that sort of thing, old chap," said Fain quietly. "Long may you continue to do so, if you get any solid satisfaction out of it. I envy the man with faith. It must be very comforting in this weary world. Now, let's go and look at the smoking-room, the general's sanctum sanctorum. There I smoked my first cigar—stolen when Uncle Rupert had his back turned."

"It looks naked and awfully wretched now. Everything's gone, of course—the pictures, the trophies, the old swords, the helmet I put on that day to frighten your sisters and couldn't get off again—all vanished. And for such ghastly low prices. I could have smashed some of the brutes haggling over six-pences at the sale last week; only that wouldn't have done any practical good of course."

"Probably not—except make an additional hole in your last few thousand pounds. This was the room. How different now!"

They entered a handsome apartment with dark oak ceiling and carved panelling reaching to the height of a man's shoulder. Upon wall-paper which covered the room above the lofty wainscote appeared strange impressions, where the various trophies that had hung there aforetime had left the paper clean behind them.

"What's that above the mantelpiece?" asked Fain. "They've forgotten something."



He pointed to a small square object hanging high on the wall.

"By Jove! they thought it was a ventilator, I'll bet. But I know what it is."

"How are we going to get it?"

"I'll lift you on to the mantelpiece, Tracy. I'd climb on to it myself, but it's not guaranteed to carry fourteen stone."

"All right. Steady! Great Scott! I feel like an infant in arms."

The simile made Roy laugh till the oak ceiling echoed; but meantime he had picked up his cousin with consummate ease and lifted him to a broad stone mantelshelf four feet from the ground.

The little object on the wall was now well within Fain's reach. A moment later he had dislodged it and jumped back to the floor.

"What is it?" he asked.

Roy took the thing in hand, blew the dust off it and then cleaned it with his pocket handkerchief. The curio was a small, hard packet three inches long, two broad, and about one inch deep. It was covered in a piece of sand-coloured lion-hide and tightly sewn with fibre. It depended from a circular string of small black seeds in shape of a necklace.

"It looks like some mumbo-jumbo foolery of niggers," surmised Fain.

"Just what it is," answered his cousin. "Governor got that and a big oxhide shield and a sheaf of asse-

gais when young Tarrant of the Cape Mounted Police came back from South Africa. He was on a holiday right up in Central Africa near the Batonca country, you remember. A horde of black men were kept at bay all through a long pitch-black night by a hunting party of ten Englishmen and a parson, who loaded the guns but wouldn't shoot. I mean the parson wouldn't. They came off without any losses, though several were wounded. And the good old parson said it was frightful to see about two hundred black men on their backs when the sun rose, because of the fact that there would be two hundred less Christians to go to glory. That amulet there came off a dead man's neck. A big man, too. He was called M'wen-ga, and afterwards, when the blacks caved in and made peace, they dug up the chap and took him back to his kraal up the country and buried him in style. And they made a rare row when the fetich couldn't be found. They said the new chief wanted it. Young Tarrant had all the dead warrior's spears, and his head-dress and everything; and as for that little packet, no doubt it hung round the beggar's neck to protect him against trouble. But the charm didn't work against a rifle bullet somehow."

"What's in the thing, I wonder?" mused Tracy Fain, regarding the object with slight interest.

"A dried-up toad, or a few berries from a medicine man's tree, or a lion's tooth, or some such rubbish. Tarrant said lots of the slaughtered Batoncas had

charms, and all those the fellows opened were full of such things. But one amulet had a jolly good diamond in it—only in the rough, yet there it was, and a man from the Transvaal gave a hundred quid for it. After that, Tarrant said, there were not many charms or fetiches left unopened."

"Perhaps this thing has a treasure in it too."

"I hardly like to open it—yet we may as well."

Tracy laughed.

"Open it by all means. Here we stand on the threshold of a grand mystery, for all we can say. Your life lies before you and you have no inclination one way or another. The contents of this charm may decide you. Why not? Stranger things have happened. Besides, you have such a solid trust in Providence."

"Yes, I have, for all your sneers," said Roy stoutly. "But even I don't expect to find evidences of Providence hidden away in a Batonca warrior's necklace. However, here goes. If it's a diamond we'll share and share alike. I should never have seen the thing hanging up there but for you."

Fain put out his hand and arrested the other's knife which was about to cut open the fetich.

"One moment. I've got a rum feeling about this. Will you go further and say 'share and share alike whatever it contains?' "

"Good or bad?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're a rum chap! If you don't believe in Providence, you evidently believe in something."

"I believe in my own presentiments."

Meldrum did not answer, but a moment later had cut into the mysterious packet, torn off the lion's hide covering and revealed the contents. First came a piece of coarse paper neatly and tightly folded into the necessary shape; and within it appeared a flat, thin, irregularly shaped disc of gold, upon which was set a curious, ink-black figure.



THE GOLDEN FETICH

But the talisman, or whatever it might be, paled its

interest before the paper that contained it. Fain occupied himself with this and spread it out carefully, while Meldrum studied the disc. A loud exclamation made him almost drop the gold.

"Look—look man! English! English writing in some brown sort of ink, and—ah! what's that great rusty-red splash at the bottom?"

Roy was now staring over the other's shoulder.

"Bring the paper to the window," he said; "the light begins to wane."

They scanned the scrawl and the splash closely before endeavoring to decipher it.

"We need no detective to read this riddle," said Tracy Fain. "The poor soul who began to write it never lived to finish. D'you see the blot at the end where his pen suddenly fell?"

"Yes—in the middle of a word. And the splash at the bottom?"

"An Englishman's blood, I'm afraid. As he bent over his work some blackguard came up behind and put a knife through his back or a bullet through his head. As for the writing, it's wonderfully neat and fine, though probably the materials were very rough—a porcupine quill for pen and some decoction of berries for ink."

"Better read it if we can," said Roy. "That may save the trouble of making any more theories."

Together the two men bent over the crumpled paper. Then, as Fain slowly made out the strange

document now for the first time since its creation spread before a white man's eyes, Meldrum wrote a fair copy in his pocket-book and afterwards read it aloud. Thus it ran:

*"Being this day in sound mind and body, yet having the fear of death most violently and vividly before my eyes and in my ears, I set down these facts with some slight hope that through the honesty and faithfulness of my servant, Pomba, all that I have achieved and suffered may not be lost by some monkey-trick of Fate.*

*"In brief space the facts are these; and let any honest man, if such shall ever become acquainted with them, look to it that those presently to be mentioned hear this story. Through the hands of Pomba, if I fall, I hope and pray these words may reach civilisation, and by his help alone can my treasure be recovered.*

*"Long years ago I worked at Kimberley, in the old days before the amalgamation, and being unsuccessful there, wandered northwards with three friends—tried men all. But they have gone, and the spears of the Matabele let the life out of them near twenty years ago. We had struggled north by slow stages and through many adventures, and when my companions fell I would have welcomed death gladly enough, but for those at home.*

*"The Matabele took me prisoner, and, love of life growing again within me as the chance of it diminished, I conformed to the demands of my masters, instructed them in the arts of civilisation and dwelt with them for the space of four years. Then, opportunity offering and war breaking out between two neighbouring tribes, I made my escape and endeavoured to get back south. But chance led my steps astray and I avoided one danger to fall in with others.*

*"The man Pomba, of the tribe of the Batonicas, I found sore wounded by the wayside, and was moved to play the Good Samaritan. Never did human being save a nobler and worthier life. Now on the eve of my last attempt to return whence I came, it is Pomba's right arm, his strength and his skill I trust to. But even he will have his powers taxed to the utmost, for this cursed country is in uproar, his own people, friendly until now, have grown cold against me, and it may go hard with us at any moment. Therefore I write this much in hope that, if I die, my treasure may not lie hidden here forever.*

*"To be brief, after falling in with Pomba and saving his life, he attached himself to me, proved my lucky genius and marked the turning-point in my fortunes. Within two months of our meeting in the land of the Kalongas I had struck wealth as great as any that man has*

*dreamed of since the tales of Arabian Nights' Entertainments; and now, with such diamonds as I can carry, and that is a number huge enough, I set forth.*

*"But half my stupendous discovery lies hidden close at hand—buried deep and safe in the stony seed pods of the umzimbeta—a wild tree abundant hereabout. There it will lie safe hidden from the knowledge of all men but Pomba and myself, until I return to claim it, if ever I shall do so.*

*"To know the exact region, leave the southern confines of Lake Mweru due north, then press along by the river Luapula that forms a boundary between the Congo State and British territory. And, where divers lesser rivers enter it south of the lake of Mweru, take that stream called Wambasi and follow it within the territory of the Batoncas. Here stands my hut, under an umzimbeta, without the village boundary beside the Golden Falls. Appro——"*

Roy Meldrum stopped abruptly.

"That's where death ended his interest in diamonds and everything else," he said; "yet—well, what one man has hidden another might find—is it not so? The ruins of his hut may still stand under that tree."

"A gorgeous wild-geese chase! You wouldn't spend your scanty patrimony like that?"



"I don't know. I should have a great time anyway and kill some heavy game and live every moment of each day. And, at worst, a man can only die once."

"So this poor chap found. The foe fell on him like a whirlwind doubtless; and he and his faithful Pomba were sent to 'Kingdom Come' together."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PAPER.

Through the shadows of evening and where pale blue mist-wreaths twined like fingers over the gold of the autumn woods, Roy Meldrum and his cousin passed rapidly. The elder's last glimpse of his father's home shewed its dark mass and twisted chimneys rising against a rusty red sunset. The dog-cart which Meldrum drove quickly soon rattled them back to Tunbridge, and, after a comfortable dinner at the hotel, the cousins strolled to the railway station and caught the last train back to town.

Conversation quickened over their cigars in a first-class smoking compartment, of which they were the sole occupants, and Roy's gloomy reflections were assailed and scattered before thoughts of the future in connection with the curious discovery of that afternoon.

"By the way," he said, "as we are to share and share alike, I suppose one must keep the talisman, the other the paper. Let me retain the gold disc and I will cheerfully surrender the keeping of the manuscript to you."

"They are equally valueless, I fear."

"Impossible to say that. I'm jolly sanguine my-

self. Take my advice and see me through. What is there about your present work that fascinates you so much? Three hundred a year isn't so grand that you need stick to it when you might stand a rosy chance of making three thousand a year for all we know. Chuck up your office and put in a year or so in the wilds with me. If we succeed, you won't regret it; if we fail, I can promise you as good as you have got."

"Just like a Meldrum," said Fain. "Always up in the clouds, always over-sanguine and overbold."

"My father would have seen this thing through as a young man; so I shall. It must be a grand experience anyway, and experience is always useful."

"If you live to avail yourself of it."

"Well, exactly. And I shall live. I'm not built to flicker out at a breath of swamp air."

"If abnormal biceps could do it, the diamonds would be yours all right, no doubt. But more than biceps go to success in Central Africa."

"You mean brains. Well, I know my upper story is a bit light, but the few things I have managed to cram into it are just the sort to be useful on a job like this. Anyway you've got plenty of brains for us both. Better change your mind and come. You can only live your life once, as I said before. Why not enjoy it?"

"As to enjoying it, old man, I can't say a trip of this sort would give me the least enjoyment in itself.

But I should like to make a fortune and you wouldn't believe me if I said I didn't."

"Well, let it be a bargain. We may do something that will wake the world up. Who knows?"

"I can't dash at it in this hot-blooded way. You don't know what you're doing. Only one white man ever gets through to about a hundred who go down on these explorations to Central Africa. Besides the expense. Your money will go like water. It's certainly a hundred to one against us—perhaps more. Let me review the position from these scanty beginnings, and you'll see I'm right. First here's a poor beggar, name unknown, who has on his own confession been residing with the niggers in the bush for years. He gets away from the Matabele at last and discovers a native, called Pomba, at death's door. They become tremendous chums and keep going together until the white man strikes it rich and apparently finds himself kicking diamonds about in the heart of Africa. We are to understand that he and his trusty Man Friday buried the bulk of their treasure near a place called Golden Falls, then got knocked on the head for their pains; and we don't know to within a thousand miles or so where all this happened."

"Yes, we do. The directions are explicit as can be. The river is named, and the tribe of niggers that he thought he was friendly with—the Batoncas. Who

killed him we can't say, but seeing his message was taken off a Batonca's neck, it isn't hard to guess.

"It may seem clear enough on paper. But it's a different thing when you're a stranger in a strange land, with nothing but sun and stars to tell you your way and a thousand dangers and enemies hiding on both hands. Think twice, Roy, and don't waste your money; second thoughts are best."

At Charing Cross the men parted after an arrangement to dine together on the following evening in Tracy Fain's diggings. Meldrum sought his club, and Fain returned to his chambers in Westminster. After he had done so he lighted a lamp, drew his arm-chair to the table, and again produced the manuscript. He looked round him, half as though he expected to see another person, then spread the paper, turned it over and examined the back of it. On the reverse of the sheet, in caligraphy even more minute than that he had already recited to Roy Meldrum, was one line of forty words. This he had caught a glimpse of when first he opened the manuscript, but, after reading the main document, from some impulse he had not repeated the single line to his cousin. The words ran along the bottom of the paper, and now, taken in connection with the dead man's other statement, they possessed peculiar significance.

For a moment Tracy was in doubt whether they had in reality any reference to the main body of the document; then he decided that they must have.

Thus ran the strange direction :

*"Stand where the peaks of the Antelope Head Bluff are in one line. Then wait till the hour when the rainbow shines upon the mist of the falls, and where the purple of the arch touches the forest—there—in white ants' nest."*

Tracy Fain wrinkled his brow over this enigmatic direction, then read and re-read the unfinished record on the other side. Soon he defined his position, with the added knowledge contributed by this single line. It amounted to an exact direction as to the position of the treasure. Somewhere about the limit of British territory in the direction of Lake Tanganyika, or in the extreme South of the Congo State a dead Englishman had made a marvellous find of precious stones. The approximate position of his discovery he had survived long enough to define pretty closely, and it occurred on the river Wambasi, a tributary of that gigantic stream, the Luapula, which flows between Lake Mweru and Lake Bangweolo in Lobisa.

Upon this tributary existed the territory of the Batoncas, and at some point outside the central stronghold of that people, it was clear that the dead man had dwelt for a time in harmony with them. Then, danger threatened, the tribesmen changed their attitude towards him, and he prepared to escape, but left action until too late.

It was clear that he had been slain on the day of flight—in all probability by his treacherous friends. The missive that occupied him in the very moment of death had evidently represented high fetich to his murderer, and become an amulet of power accordingly; but it was certain that the savage responsible for the murder could not read what the dead prospector had written; and therefore in all human probability the diamonds still lay within the “stony seed-pods” mentioned by the manuscript.

This much Roy Meldrum knew as well as his cousin; but the additional light of the single line was possessed by Fain alone. It indicated that at some point in the Batoncas’ land there rose, near or actually upon the river Wambasi, an eminence known as Antelope Head Bluff, probably on account of its resemblance to a beast familiar in that region. From some point of sight the horns of this stone animal might be observed in line one hiding the other; and, at certain elevation of the sun the natural phenomenon of a rainbow on the mist thrown up by a waterfall was also to be seen. And where the purple ring of that rainbow fell upon the shore amid forest trees—there should be found a white ants’ nest.

That was all the dead man’s directions, but Tracy Fain could read the rest without words. In the ants’ nest were the pods of the tree, and in the pods the diamonds.

He sat and thought until Big Ben solemnly thun-

dered two o'clock. Then, with the same sidelong glance as before, he took out his knife and neatly cut away half an inch along the bottom of the manuscript. This mutilation left the main statement and the great rusty drop of blood untouched. Indeed the face of the paper was unchanged; but now the line of explanation had vanished from the back of it, and soon occupied a secret place in Fain's pocket-book. Then he drank a stiff glass of whiskey and soda, knocked out his pipe and retired for the night.

"Until this little discovery of mine our expedition was madness," he said to himself, as he flung himself upon his bed; "but now, in the light of such a revelation, the thing comes more within the range of practical politics. Yes, I shall delight old Roy to-morrow. I feel sure I shall. His great, silly blue eyes will twinkle when I tell him that I'm coming too, and he'll shout 'Hurrah!' and grip me by the hand till my finger bones ache. And as to the diamonds—why, we shall see. Of course I may tell him all about this later on—and, again, I may not. In this rotten world it's everybody for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

With which reflection Tracy Fain resigned himself to sleep. Yet the ideas of the day pursued him, and he moved and growled in weird dream-scenery of tropic trees laced with giant creepers, and full of chattering apes. The narcotic scent of huge blossoms made him feel faint, and as he plucked them from the



bough, blood, like a man's, burst from the broken stems and trickled over his fingers, and twined and twisted and turned into little live coral snakes with diamond eyes.

He shook them from him, for their bite was death, and they fell wriggling into night and silence. Then, through unutterable darkness sounded the monotonous, gong-like roaring of great beasts, and flashed fireflies, and fell heavy tropic rainstorms.

But the morning of his dream dawned at last, and the sun rose and brightened every polished stem and shining leaf of the tropic wilderness. Then he looked at the sun, to bless it for returning, and rubbed his eyes and looked again; for instead of the old sun there had risen into the sky the golden disc from the dead Batonca's fetich; and on its face shone out that ink-black, strange design.

Tracy Fain may here be hit off in a sentence. He was a man absolutely lacking in principle, though to describe him as an atheist, as most men did, was to err. He was his own god, and to himself and his own selfish aims and amusements and interests he had heartily dedicated his life.

It happened, however, that he was a very poor man and had been obliged to work for his living since he left school. His life in the city redounded but little to his credit. Originally on the Stock Exchange and independent, he had overshot the mark, come to grief, and been "hammered" under circumstances that those

who knew the truth were bound to regard as highly discreditable.

But it was just the truth that the young man hid from his relations. His piteous story of undeserved misfortune had completely deceived Roy Meldrum (who begged to be allowed to go into the city to "punch" respectable men of business on a grand scale when he heard of his cousin's misfortune); and it had also deluded his uncle, Sir Rupert.

Through the exertions of that kind friend, Tracy Fain indeed obtained his present employment; and now, as senior clerk in a small shipping firm, he prospered beyond his deserts and hoped some day to be taken into partnership. As a preliminary step to that end, some six months before the beginning of this narrative, he had offered marriage to the only daughter of the head of the firm; but she, though plain enough to shake the pluck of even penniless men, was shrewd as well and had astounded Tracy by curtly refusing him without conditions.

Lastly it need only be said that Roy Meldrum was wholly ignorant of his cousin's real character, but recognised his ability, although he could not see through his superficial charm of manner and simulated generosity.

Roy swore by Tracy; and, as for Fain, he honestly felt regard of a sort for his huge cousin, though the big man's mediocre intellect, transparent simplicity,

and natural trustfulness of disposition made him sneer often enough in secret.

The cousins met on the following evening, and, as Tracy had foreseen, Roy Meldrum greeted his change of purpose with very hearty applause. Roy had come armed with the latest and most expensive map of South Africa to be bought in London, and upon it the men traced the tremendous journey before them, marked the sweep of the Luapula from one great lake to another, and speculated as to what region upon the Wambasi, where it wound through the land of the Batoncas, the capital and chief's kraal of that tribe was most likely to exist.

"As to the journey," said Fain, "money being an object and time not pressing, I should suggest one course, whereas had time been precious and coin of no account, I might have proposed another. But it doesn't matter to a month or two when you start on our little trip, and the more money you keep, the more likely you are to get through. So, instead of going to the Cape in a 'Castle' or 'Union' liner, I propose a cargo-boat. She'll be a bit longer, yet not so much longer as you'd suppose if you didn't know. Because there are 'tramps' that visit the little twopenny half-penny ports along the Mozambique and Zanzibar coasts; and if we went out to one of these small centres we might start our expedition and work inland along one of the great rivers. From Zambesi, on the coast of Mozambique, we could follow the Zambesi

River right away for a hundred and fifty miles and more northwest, which would start us well on our way; or we might disembark at Rovuma and follow the river of that name along the edge of German territory to Nyassa. That would be in a fairly straight line for our mark."

Meldrum was delighted.

"I can see you've been putting thought into it already," he said.

"It's not thought; it's money that we want."

"Well, and haven't we got mine? That's all right. You find the brains; I'll find the brass. We want both."

"My people do some business with Zanzibar and other small East African ports as it happens, and if you're game for a cargo boat, I don't see why we should delay taking our passage. There's only one little condition I want to make. You see I'm a beggar excepting for what I earn, and if we come back empty-handed I think I may reasonably ask you to guarantee me as good a billet as I'm flinging up. Three hundred a year is a fleabite to many of the men you know in Kent."

It did not occur to the other that if they returned empty-handed Roy would probably need a billet as much as his cousin.

"That's all right, old chap. I'll see you don't suffer. You may take my word for it."

Tracy was going to ask him to write the promise

down, but felt rather nervous of doing so. The other was touchy on matters of honour and might have resented it. Moreover, he felt safe enough. A Meldrum's word was as good as his bond, and Fain knew that Roy would have the power as well as the will to keep his promise.

He therefore proceeded upon other subjects.

"We must leave nothing to chance. If we land at one of these small places, we can get little for our expedition but the necessary niggers. We must take everything in the way of stores and camp furniture with us."

"Heavy guns and stores and all the rest of it."

"Yes, but be careful of your money. You know Lord Winstone, don't you? He's a famous East African hunter and he's been all through Central Africa—at least through a good part of it—after big game. Have a chat with him about what is practical. I rather fancy you ought to lay in a cargo of beads and cheap knives and rubbish. It won't cost much here and will save your money on the other side."

Roy Meldrum, always a man of one idea at a time, happened to know that Lord Winstone was in town, and the next day spent a long morning with him. According to his custom, the young giant set out every particular of the contemplated excursion with absolute frankness. His Lordship shewed keen interest and a strong inclination to join the expedition. But he was little more than convalescent from a heavy

attack of malarial fever—the outcome of his last experience abroad—and could give no undertaking.”

“I’m going in fear of my medical man just now,” he said. “Yet, if I can bring him round before you start, I should dearly like to come. You’re breaking new ground for me to some extent, and I’d rather winter in Africa than England, fever or no fever; but I fear it’s out of the question.”

A long discussion followed and Meldrum listened to the expert.

“Of course modern ideas are all in favour of a Lee-Metford repeater with a long conical bullet and cordite behind it; but I’m old-fashioned and shall stick to my favourite battery as long as I can draw trigger. A single 4-bore, sighted for short range and shooting 12 drachms of powder and a spherical bullet, is the first piece—for rhino and elephant, of course, and dangerous game at close quarters. Then a double 8-bore, sighted up to 200 yards; a double .577 Express; a .44 Winchester carbine, which is a weapon I swear by at long ranges, and a 12-bore shot gun. You won’t want more than that.”

“But I’m on business, you know, not pleasure.”

“Business or pleasure, you must carry guns in Central Africa.”

His lordship was silent a moment, then continued:

“Have everything you can hammerless of course. That’s a necessity with nigger bearers, as you’ll find. A strong leather cartridge magazine is essential too,

and a pair of powerful binoculars. Have them made of aluminium for lightness. As for togs, wait till you get to Zanzibar. You get the right coloured khaki there, and colour is half the battle in stalking big game."

"But, my dear fellow, I'm not going to stalk big game."

"Well, perhaps some big game will stalk you. Anyhow there's a right and wrong way of going to Africa. You must go right or better not go at all. Now, as to camp-gear, if there is a man in England who understands camp-gear, without undue boasting I am that man."

To this theme Lord Winstone now devoted himself, and an hour or two later, after hearty expressions of thanks, Roy left his friend with a light heart and a full notebook.

During the following week, while Tracy Fain looked into the matter of a vessel that would suit them his cousin made the necessary purchases, and the following Friday found him nearly a thousand pounds poorer in pocket. Chance was kind in another direction—at least so it seemed—for Fain reported within a week that one of the steamers of his firm had been signalled rather unexpectedly off Ushant and might be in London within eight-and-forty-hours.

"She is a fairly fast vessel—one of the old China clippers fitted as a steamer—but this voyage has been a record. She must have had a fair wind behind her

ever since she left the Cape. She will load at once for the East Coast ports and sail if all's well on the third of next November. I've told the people at the office I'm going, and when I went further and mentioned the fact that I was thinking of taking a cruise in the *Morning Star* they looked surprised, I assure you."

"Good news; and there's a chance of Lord Winstone coming if he gets fit in time. He pulled rather a face at the idea of a 'tramp,' but he was awfully tempted.

Fain looked uneasy.

"He won't stand in with us, of course?"

"Why not? The more the merrier."

"What nonsense! What does a man rolling in money want with——?"

"There, my dear Tracy, don't fret yourself. That's all settled. I offered him a third share if he would come, but he said he valued diamonds no more than glass and would give all the precious stones in the world for a shot at a new antelope.

"You had no right to offer him a third. Half of anything we find is mine."

Meldrum flushed up and his blue eyes grew hard.

"Great Scott! Has the very thought of wealth made a miser of you already? That's not the spirit to please me, Fain, and you know it. You're a wise man and I'm a fool—granted; but we must understand one another before we enter on this business. I'm the boss—that's all. I should never have re-



mind you of it, but the last day or two you've made me doubt if you quite realised the position. Remember, that's a good fellow, and don't make me savage, for I hate the sensation. Never tell me what I have a right to do or what I haven't a right to do, because I don't like it. Now we know where we are; and you can come or stop, just as you please. But don't make any mistake and don't let these diamonds worry you already, or I shall begin to doubt if you are such a clever chap as I always thought. As a matter of fact, Fred Winstone laughed at the idea of finding the treasure at all."

Fain was silent for a moment after this sharp rebuke. Then he put out his hand frankly, gripped Roy's with extreme apparent fervour and made a handsome apology.

"Forgive me; I beg your pardon ten thousand times. As your junior I had no right to dictate, and I hope you will overlook my very foolish remark."

"That's all right, old man. And as to the diamonds, Winstone absolutely refused my suggestion that he should go share and share with us. But he was not hopeful, so be wise; and don't set your heart too much on what may prove rainbow gold."

The word "rainbow" made Fain start, and he was glad it had grown too dark for the other to see his face.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE "MORNING STAR."

On a bright sunlit evening in early November the cousins found themselves leisurely dropping down the Thames. The river shone ruddy in the waning light and the steamer set the water rippling and twinkling along her sides and under her taffrail like fiery snakes wriggling in a river of oil.

Through gathering darkness the *Morning Star* passed down the Thames, and as Fain and Meldrum finally turned in they heard a thousand unfamiliar sounds: the steady song of the screw, the deep roar of the syren, the fiendish rattle of the ashes coming up from the stokehole, and a sound of many bells.

The novelty of their situation kept them restless, but they slept at last, then woke before dawn to find the gentle peace of the river had vanished and the *Morning Star* was beginning to shake herself and wake up. They felt her lift, like a horse at a gate, as Roy put it; an electric vitality seemed to inhabit the great hull beneath them; overhead there was racing to and fro of heavy men, shouts and growls and whistles, creaking and groaning of timbers, that uttered different complaints according to the force of the sea, and the lap and tumble of broken water beneath the cabin porthole.

Meldrum got out of his bunk—a huge figure in his pajamas. He began by hitting his head and seeing stars, then stumbled to the port to note another strange concourse of illuminations—yellow and green and crimson. Ghostly things passed over the black sea; distant lights flashed dimly and waved red and yellow arms, then vanished; a bell buoy, tolling monotonously, slid past not thirty yards from the cabin window. Under his feet the strong, bounding sensation of the ship increased, and having no sea legs as yet, Roy made but a clumsy task of returning to his bunk and carried away several objects before getting back again.

Daylight found a fair wind blowing and the *Morning Star* slipping speedily away to the Channel with “a bone in her teeth.”

Meldrum had seen no more of Lord Winstone, but there was a rumour of other passengers aboard and at breakfast—served in a snug deck saloon of dark oak—both Roy and Fain were surprised to find no less than five fellow voyagers, including two ladies.

We mention the latter first. Mrs. Manuel Podesta was a Portuguese matron and the most cheery, humorous, shrivelled-up, black-eyed little Creole imaginable; while Elizabeth Ogilvie set the young male hearts on the ship beating from the moment their owners' eyes fell upon her.

A grey-eyed girl with dark hair was she. Miss Ogilvie rose somewhat above the recognised standard

of perfection in woman's height, but her proportions were perfect in their harmony and one only realised that she stood nearly five feet ten inches when the girl stood beside another woman or an average man. Her face showed thought, yet was not saddened or aged by it, and her eyes were frank and beautiful.

She was amiable with everybody and won all hearts before the *Morning Star* had passed out of the English Channel. From the Skipper to the cabin-boy; from Roy Meldrum to General Podesta, the fat and bellicose husband of Madam already mentioned, not a soul on board but had one opinion concerning the Scotch girl.

Of the remaining passengers, one proved to be a taciturn Italian, who kept tight lips over his affairs and preserved a silence and mystery most rare aboard ship; while the other was a missionary, one Rev. James Messenger, bound for Zanzibar.

Before breakfast had ended everybody felt by a sort of intuition that the most interesting man at the table was Captain Ogilvie himself. His niece, Elizabeth, who was taking a voyage of pleasure with her uncle, resembled him in some respects and he had her grey eyes and dark hair; but the expression of his face was widely different and it puzzled all strangers by a certain sense of peculiarity which those who gazed upon him felt instantly but were powerless to define.

Mr. Macabe, the First Engineer, suspected he must

be a mesmerist and stoutly held to that opinion; others advanced more plausible theories; in reality, a very definite reason existed for the captain's singular expression and strangely varied moods; but only a medical man would have known it.

Alister Ogilvie had a wide reputation as ship-master for a man whose years numbered no more than five-and-forty. He stuck to sailing vessels for choice through many years, but had been in 'steam' since he was forty and appeared quite content to stop on a ship he liked, possessing neither wife nor children to make him ambitious.

He had commanded the *Morning Star* for five years, and he gloried in her, for she could sail upon occasion as well as steam. He was popular both with the owners and crew; but of late there were rumors that Captain Ogilvie had changed, and his old boatswain, Dan Hook, a man who deemed himself as much a part of the *Morning Star* as her spanker-boom, growled sometimes in secret at harsh words undeserved and advanced all manner of theories to account for a gradual change in the skipper's character.

Off the Isle of Wight a little private steam yacht, aglow with cream-coloured funnel, shining spars and bright brass-work, came tumbling alongside the *Morning Star*, and a thin, red-bearded man in a fluttering grey ulster hailed the vessel through a speaking trumpet.

One passenger recognised this bird-like figure: Roy Meldrum shouted with delight at the spectacle of his friend and shattered all rules of marine etiquette by roaring a welcome to Lord Winstone even while Captain Ogilvie was hailing the yacht.

The *Morning Star* hove to and soon his lordship came aboard. He explained with grim satisfaction that he had given his medical man the slip, had bolted down to Southampton, where he knew a friend's yacht was lying, had borrowed her, and, after a four hours' tumble in the track of outward-bound steamers, had met the right one. A man-servant saw his master's trunks aboard, then returned to the yacht; and soon the little vessel gave a screeching salute with her steam whistle and set off for port, while the *Morning Star*, her complement the richer for one of the most famous British sportsmen in the world, resumed her way.

Lord Winstone was a hard nut, with a face the colour of his beard, little reddish eyes, as keen as a hawk's, and a rather hawk-like nose between them. He appeared remarkably thin, but such muscle as he possessed was hard as Damascus steel and his powers of endurance were known to be extraordinary. He had come out of the very jaws of death a hundred times; but luck and his own resource and nerve had thus far ended all his great adventures with man and beast in his own favour.

He hopped a little in his walk, like a crane with

clipped wings, for his right knee was stiff and represented the sole personal injury of any importance he had ever incurred. His lordship, however, rarely alluded to this little misfortune. Had it been the work of lion or other noble beast, it would not have mattered; but the catastrophe resulted from a single hand-to-hand encounter with a giant baboon which had bitten Lord Winstone in the knee as he was killing it.

His friends said that the sportsman feared only one thing in the world, and that was cold weather. He admitted himself that he would as soon face a tiger with a shot-gun as ten degrees of frost.

It is not our purpose to record the early days of the *Morning Star's* voyage with anything like the regularity of Captain Ogilvie's log. Favourable winds held into the Mediterranean, and Dan Hook, the boatswain, who had plenty of sailor's superstition in him, began to grow actually uncomfortable.

"Us be gettin' a blamed sight more than our share o' fair weather for the time o' year," he told Tracy Fain. 'Twas this way Jonah's voyage began, I warrant 'e; an' Paul—him as cast forth four anchors from the stern an' wished for the day; an' well he might, poor chap—bein' no seaman clearly. No, I caan't say as I likes tu much happiness all to one spell. It do make the bad days, as be sure to come, sooner or later, all the longer."

But Dan found few to agree with him except in the fore-castle. With increased knowledge, increased fa-

miliarity and friendliness grew amongst those thus thrown together for a brief period of time, and a party of various souls, all for the most part of amiable disposition, found life pass agreeably away.

"It's so jolly to let your conscience have a rest," declared young Meldrum to Bessie Ogilvie. "Ocean travelling sends it to sleep every week-day, and it is all even that good man, Mr. Messenger, can do on Sundays to wake it up again. I suppose if a chap had committed a murder, or robbed a bank, or some such thing, his conscience would prick him a bit, even in mid-ocean, but for humdrum every-day folks there is nothing like a voyage to give peace of mind."

She laughed, shut her sunshade, as the shadow of a sail made it no longer necessary, and answered him.

"You and your friend, Mr. Fain, are too busy to think at all of your consciences, I am afraid. You were going to tell me some more about your great diamond-hunting expedition and a wonderful paper and a fetich—whatever that may be."

"So I was, only whenever I have the luck to find you alone and get a chat like this, I forget and just go babbling on like an idiot about the colours in the sea and sky and the wonderful mountains on shore."

"I love these things; and you know it and speak of what pleases me. Look at all this glorious sapphire below us and turquoise above. See the fleecy clouds rippling over heaven, as the little foam caps ripple



over the water; watch these great birds dropping like shooting-stars into the waves and the little rainbow that glimmers at our bows, where the great ship cuts the blue and turns it up in a roaring furrow of foam. The air on my cheek and the sunshine on the sea make me thank a good God for letting me glory in these beautiful things. Yet I am sad in the midst of my own happiness, for how many lives there are that will never be gladdened by these wonderful sights."

"Certainly the sea is very jolly when it keeps amiable and flat. This is my first voyage. And yours, I suspect, Miss Ogilvie?"

"Yes, my first since I was a little baby, but I hope not my last."

"Are you going anywhere in particular?"

"Only where the ship goes—to various ports on the East Coast, then to Cape Town and then home, touching at some islands—the Mauritius and the Seychelles, I think—on our way."

"Your uncle is fortunate to have such a companion for his whole voyage."

The girl sighed.

"I fear he hardly values my society as you suggest, Mr. Meldrum. You see, we are alone in the world, he and I—the last of our branch of a large family. I went to live with him some years ago, when my mother died, and this year, not being happy about Uncle, I insisted on coming to sea with him. But I

might as well have stopped ashore. He is ill, but I cannot get to his heart and comfort him."

"Don't say that. He thinks the whole wide world of you—naturally."

"He does—I know it. At times he is his old self again and I feel ten years younger, for I know I am to him what I always have been. But the sun seems to shine on him so seldom now."

"Is he really ill? Has he any physical pain to fight against? Some days he looks such a splendid fellow; and others he seems shrunken and thin and starved."

"I can tell you no more than you have seen for yourself. He won't take medical advice. In fact, he knows a good deal about medicine and prefers to attend to himself. The Captain of a sailing-ship is the doctor, too, as a rule, so he has had plenty of rough experience in the past."

"Well, I wish I could cheer you up. It may be something on your uncle's mind. But if you have not got his confidence, nobody on this ship can expect to get it, that's very certain."

"I cannot say; I don't know if there is anything to know; but something lies hidden, and sometimes I fear it is of the mind, sometimes of the body. We must be hopeful, yet it is hard to be."

Fain approached at this moment and a cloud crossed Roy's eyes.

"How that chap does find us out!" he said with a

short laugh. "Well, 'two's company; three none.' I'll leave you and be more sportsmanlike than he was."

"Don't go. Why should you? Stop and tell me about the diamond hunt. That will interest Mr. Fain as much as it does you."

Tracy now joined them and Meldrum grew taciturn. Then he seemed suddenly impressed by an idea.

"I'll show you the fetich," he said: "It's a rum trinket, though it's got nothing to do with the diamonds as far as we know."

Fain had little enough to say, albeit his cousin's brief absence gave him an opportunity. He stood with his back to the bulwarks and his hands in his pockets; but the girl in a deck-chair with her eyes upon the sea did not get a glance of the dark, hungry face turned towards her. Presently she looked up to speak, but caught his eyes and said nothing, while a blush brightened her cheek.

"This is a quiet corner and you get a splendid view of the shore just at present," he said carelessly.

"Yes, it is very perfect—the shore and the sea, too; so is everything else of dear Mother Nature's that men don't interfere with and spoil."

"Yet that splendid wall of foam, all aglow with sunshine and iris colours, would not be there if our bows did not churn it up."

"I cannot argue with you, and I would not have

you think me a misanthrope, for I am far from that."

"God forbid! It would be hard if you hated your fellow-creatures, seeing that they all love you, Miss Ogilvie."

"That's not in your usual pleasant manner, Mr. Fain. Even clumsy for you."

"The truth is apt to be clumsy; but here comes my mammoth cousin."

Roy returned, exhibited the gold disc and told his story. The three sat long together, and it was not until a big bell beat the hour and a little one, in a lusty hand, began jangling a summons to luncheon that they left the fascinating theme of the treasure.

The ship's company had now shaken down and regular amusements filled each day. Lord Winstone played whist with General Podesta and the two diamond hunters, when the latter could be dragged from more attractive metal; while at other times his lordship and the old officer had single-handed battles at cribbage. Madam Podesta developed a mild flirtation with Signor Polti, but the Italian, though uniformly courteous, was somewhat unsociable and occupied most of his time in reading.

Captain Ogilvie did not come as much amongst his passengers as might have been expected. He often spent whole days in his own cabin, taking his meals there, and only appearing on deck for a few moments at a time.

Mr. Crouch, his first Officer, however, proved a

man of exceedingly gregarious instincts. He had fallen hopelessly in love with his Skipper's niece before leaving the Thames, and now, with the ingenuous frankness of most mariners, openly hinted at his condition to his junior officer, and ostentatiously mourned his lack of means and the hardships of a seaman's life, especially in the matter of marriage.

Passage through the Suez Canal was a little interrupted by a big French steamer which went aground a mile ahead of the *Morning Star*, and during this night of delay Lord Winstone and Meldrum had an interesting chat in the smoking room after most of the passengers were in their bunks.

"Some rum people on this ship," began the sportsman. "I've a way of making theories about everything and everybody as you know, Roy. It's exciting work, because the theories contradict each other and have regular battles among themselves. In the case of our fellow-creatures on this ship two especially interest me; the Skipper and that beetle-browed Italian, Polti."

"He ought to have a monkey and hurdy-gurdy to complete the picture," declared Roy.

"He's got an axe to grind, I'll bet you, not an organ. He's either a rascal or a rascal-catcher—that's my theory of him."

"Perhaps he's both."

"It isn't impossible. He left his book yesterday to go below for another cigar and, chancing to pass

his chair before he came back, I took the liberty of glancing at it. The elaborate cover is a blind. The thing had cuttings from newspapers in it all pasted on separate pages. They were in Italian, which is Greek to me; but at the head of one page, written in red ink, was the word 'Ravogli'; and another set of pages were headed 'Pannardo.' That was significant—eh?"

"I never heard the names—and yet they seem not quite strange."

"I should think not! Why, Ravogli was the black-guard who killed the Archduke Feodor of Russia. He stopped him at the door of his Summer Palace in Orel, just as he was going out shooting, and flung himself down and held out a petition. The Archduke was begged not to take the scroll, but he had leanings to Socialism, people said, and believed himself generally beloved. So he was in Orel, but not by the brood of vipers that are allowed to ripen their poison so freely in London and other great centres. He opened the scroll, a spring was broken and the infernal machine exploded, killing the Archduke on the spot and wounding three of his companions."

"An Anarchist on this ship! By Jove! that's a theory, indeed, Fred."

"Either that or a detective interested in them."

"But they've never been heard of in Africa."

"That's no reason why they never should be. Imagine the blow to Great Britain if such a man as

Lord Milner were suddenly destroyed at this present critical page in South African history!"

"Well, old chap, you're a cheerful companion for an ocean voyage! And now, as to Captain Ogilvie—what do you make of him?"

"My theory of Ogilvie is, if possible, still more serious."

"Good heavens! What could be worse than an anarchist?"

"Nothing ashore, but several things afloat. Consider the crew of this ship. We're under-manned to begin with—all 'tramps' are, more shame to the cheese-paring rascals who make their money out of them. Then the officers. After Ogilvie, there's not a man I would like to sail under or trust myself to. Crouch is a fool—a good-hearted beggar, but a fool. He confessed to me that he tried five years to get his mate's ticket and then only passed because he had a bit of luck and the examiner was in a hurry. The second mate's a boy and can't even make himself respected among the men. Dan Hook's all right, but he couldn't navigate a ship any more than you could a billiard-table. It isn't his business. Mr. Macabe, too, is an able man and keen as a razor, but he's not a navigating officer and has enough to do with his rotten old engines."

"What does that all prove?"

"It proves that if the skipper fails at a critical moment, we might be in a very unpleasant position."

"But why imagine he will?"

"I do more than imagine. I think it the most probable thing in the world."

"My dear Fred, why?"

"Because," said Lord Winstone solemnly, "my theory of him is that the man's a morphia-maniac and far advanced on the road. I've had some bitter family experience in that direction, and if Ogilvie isn't either eating opium or taking hypodermic injections and big ones, then my own poor brother-in-law never did. He indeed recovered, being made of strong stuff, but how many do?"



## CHAPTER IV.

### LOVE.

Long before the *Morning Star* had left the Red Sea, the justice of Lord Winstone's fears concerning Captain Ogilvie was too surely proved.

On a fine morning, when the men were watching a pilgrim ship conveying devout Moslems to Jiddah for Mecca, the skipper's cabin-boy came rushing on deck with the sensational announcement that Captain Ogilvie was dead.

Roy Meldrum, Mr. Messenger, the missionary, and Lord Winstone instantly hastened to the cabin, to find Miss Ogilvie in the extremity of grief and her uncle lying open-eyed, but quite unconscious upon his bunk. He had been invisible for two days, and Meldrum, as well as the clergyman, was shocked to see the change in him; but Winstone showed no alarm. He examined the sick man's eyes, then sent an order along to the galley for strong coffee. He had already convinced himself of the facts and, unnoticed by anybody but Meldrum, had picked up from the ground near the Captain's bunk a little nickel-plated syringe—the instrument with which the unfortunate man administered the poison.

Clearing the cabin of all but Miss Ogilvie, and

bidding Meldrum exert his strength on the prostrate figure, Lord Winstone shook the captain into some semblance of life, roared and shouted at his ear, and then kept him tottering up and down on his legs until the coffee came. Two hours later the danger was passed and the Captain sitting quietly on deck with his niece.

Elsewhere Lord Winstone had a private chat with Meldrum and Tracy Fain.

"This is the thing he has been squirting death and damnation into himself with," he said, showing the little syringe. "I've suspected it for some time, as Roy is aware; but to-day Ogilvie's face told me all I wanted to know without anything further. Did you see his eyes? The pupils had practically vanished altogether. He's had a big debauch, evidently, and he'd have been a dead man to-day but for our timely intervention."

"He must be accustomed to heavy doses," said Fain.

"Exactly. Now the question is, what's our duty? Shall I give this back when he asks for it or not? Personally I incline to keep it, out of regard for the safety of the ship and its passengers."

"It might kill the man altogether to go without now," suggested Meldrum.

"No, that's a fallacy. He would have a very bad time and endure a lot of ghastly misery, no doubt, while his nerves clamoured for the poison; but

he'd get over it and be the first to thank me afterwards. He may have another syringe, but if he hasn't we shall soon know, because this form of opium is of little use, I fancy, without the hypodermic needle to put it into him. Very well, then, I'll keep——"

He did not finish the sentence, for suddenly a long arm and a thin, hairy hand shot between Fain and the speaker, and before the startled man could close his fingers upon the syringe, it was gone.

Ogilvie, unseen and unheard, had come up behind the group, and his eye had noticed the deadly weapon in Lord Winstone's outstretched hand. At sight of it the man's face became violently agitated. His teeth clenched, his forehead grew wrinkled. He divined in a flash the course of events and knew what had led to the present situation; but he did not hesitate a moment. With one action he drew close, and the next moment had stretched out his arm and snatched his property.

"Mine, I think, my lord!"

Not another word he said. Only his eyes flashed at the startled company as he turned on his heel and went in the direction of his cabin.

But Winstone was not done with, and now he hurried after the departing figure and entered without any formality.

"Listen, Captain Ogilvie; listen, I beg and pray of you. I saved your life this morning; the least you can do is to hear me now."

"A pity you meddled," said the other shortly. "My life's my own, and if I chose to——"

"Hush, hush, for God's sake! You a man, and dared to think of that! To what depths has this cursed drug reduced you! I implore you to consider, sir, the gravity of your position. Who is there upon this ship that can adequately take your place if you were lost to us? As for your first mate, you know as well as I do whether the man's to be relied upon to handle a big, heavy ship with weak engines, on a dangerous coast. It was not only suicide you contemplated, but murder—wholesale murder for all you knew to the contrary."

This attempt to frighten Ogilvie failed.

"You at least are not the man to fear me," he said, "and if you think I fear you, you are mistaken. Lord or not, you've no right to tell me my duty to myself, or my ship, or to God, or to the devil. I'll do what I please and as I please. Opium is the only thing that makes my life worth living. It's my slave, not my master. Who dares say that I let it stand between me and duty? By God, the man who says it is a mutineer, and I'll treat him like one."

"You've changed your ground now altogether; but I'm not here to argue with you. You're soaked with the poison still, and no more able to reason at present than a man in drink. You're right at least when you say I don't fear you; but you've more than fifty souls in your care on this ship, and I pray Heaven when

you come to yourself you'll recognize your responsibilities."

"It's mutiny to dictate to me!" thundered the other, and Lord Winstone, realizing that at present all words were vain, withdrew. He walked pensively, like some lonely stork or heron, up and down the deck; he scratched in his great red beard awhile, and then shook his head and retired baffled and uneasy to his cabin.

But the unfortunate victim appeared to realise the truth of his passenger's rebuke. Indeed, within a week he had spoken to Lord Winstone again, expressed profound regret for the past, and made a solemn assurance that he was fighting the poison and lessening the doses.

As for his accuser, he knew too well what a morphia-maniac's promises are worth; but it was beyond his power to do anything practical; he could only hope that the captain spoke the truth and was honestly endeavouring to cure himself.

Elizabeth Ogilvie, however, alone knew the extent of her uncle's sufferings, and, womanlike, when once the secret was in her hands, she shielded the unhappy sufferer from those who were most anxious to save him from himself.

Her life on board the *Morning Star* was a strange blend of happiness and misery, for love had come into it—a great golden first love that quite transfigured all thoughts of the future and filled her lonely days with

sunshine. Yet, before the spectacle of her unfortunate uncle, her young heart was torn with sorrow and her own powerlessness to aid made her grief the greater.

Alistair Ogilvie was the only near relation that his niece could claim. Born at Cape Town in South Africa, she had returned home as an infant with her mother; and her father, Richard Ogilvie, a man of whom she could never get her mother to speak, was no more than a name to her.

Once, after his wife's departure from Africa, Richard Ogilvie had written home, and once his brother Alistair, the sea captain, had visited him at Pietermaritzburg, when his vessel was lying for a fortnight at Durban; but from that day forward the man had never been seen or heard of again.

There was a rumor that he had proceeded with a big prospecting party into Matabeleland; while other reports indicated that he had died of fever at Inham-bane twelve months after his brother last saw him; but the truth was never known, and after eighteen years in ignorance as to whether she was a wife or a widow, Mrs. Ogilvie herself died in her daughter's arms, and Elizabeth was left alone at the age of one-and-twenty.

For her this first voyage since babyhood had been full of sensations indeed, and while she had found the man of all others most likely to make her happy—a man to whom her lonely young heart went out with

longing—she, on her side, in all innocence, had set a light to two ardent beacons and started a rivalry between two friends—a rivalry which made one man bitter and the other sad.

There came a still, hot night, when the *Morning Star* lay like a log under a red moon. A glimmer of light afar off indicated the Arabian shore, for the vessel had reached the portals of the Red Sea and Captain Ogilvie expected to make the Straits of Babel-Mandeb on the following day.

Just now, however, there had been a slight accident in the engine room, which called for some few hours' delay, and now three red lights glared in a perpendicular row aloft and warned craft to give the *Morning Star* a wide berth, as for the time being, she was unmanageable. She might have made easy way under sail, but there was no wind to move a feather.

Some of the men were playing cards; the decks lay silent and deserted save for the watch; from the forecastle came a rough "shanty" to the squeak of a concertina and the clatter of bones. A small awning was stretched aft, and under it sat a man and woman alone.

With beating heart and a strange sensation as of being in a dream world, Elizabeth listened to Tracy Fain. So full was her mind that she could hardly follow the thing, he said, but the music of his voice murmured melodiously on her ear as he ran on.

She had come there to be alone, perhaps to hide herself and follow the current of her thoughts without interruption; but Fain found her out and begged to be allowed to stay. Timidly she gave him leave, though she knew only too well the reason of his petition. A moment later and he had flung his cigar overboard and was sitting beside her.

"It's a story that's as old as the hills and as young as the daisies," he said. "It comes to each in turn, like the waves of a great sea, and tosses a man's heart crest-high, like a cork on a billow. He rises aloft, and then he sinks into the depths, only to rise again on the next wave of hope. I'm afraid my metaphors and similes are getting mixed, but you must forgive that, for I suppose no lover ever yet failed to entangle his tongue at the critical moment."

"What are you saying? Oh, Mr. Fain, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying that I love you, Bessie; that I love you with all my soul; that you've come into my life like a star of hope and brightness. I love you more than language can tell, dearest heart. God in Heaven knows how precious you are to me—only He knows. Your voice is like the chiming bells of home, your eyes make the sunshine of my life, and it is night only when they are turned away from me; you are all the world in one darling, dainty parcel—all the world to me—and I?"

"Oh, Bessie, don't say I am nothing to you—don't



say that. I've watched, and I've watched, day after day, till I knew every turn of your lip and twinkle of your dear grey eyes; and I've dared to hope a little, I've dared to think your face was kind and your smile sweet towards me. Was I mad to think it? Tell me quick—very quick. Let me rise into the seventh heaven or tumble headlong to the pit——”

He stopped quite breathless, but though she had not interrupted him she eluded the arm he strove to slip around her waist.

“Don't, don't,” she said. “It hurts my heart to tell you. It is cruel and sad; but you will understand and forgive me. I am proud to have won your friendship; it will always be precious to me; but you mistook me. It was because you were his friend—Roy's friend—his dear, close friend, that I smiled at sight of you. I wanted to win your friendship, too, for he thought so highly of you. I even felt jealous sometimes. But I only knew that it made him glad to see us friendly; I never dreamed of this—never.”

The man's voice had hardened terribly before he spoke again and all his fire and passion were dead.

“Roy Meldrum? What is he to you?”

“All—all. My life and my soul.”

“And he hid it from me. He might have saved me this.”

“Do not blame him. How could he guess any more than you did? It was my wish and desire that no one should know—least of all you. I am only a

woman and weak and foolish, and I could not suppose that you, too, would grow fond of me. So I begged Roy to keep his great deed a secret, even from you, until I could win your friendship. I was frightened of you—that is the truth—frightened that you would think I had come between you and your friend. Forgive me. I have done what I shall always look back upon with sorrow.”

“A bitter mistake,” he said, “but I have had to suffer others only less bitter. You did no wrong, save in supposing me capable of jealousy towards Roy Meldrum. I have seen no cause heretofore why I should be jealous of him. You have accepted him—that is enough. He has played and won—our first game.”

He broke off, for his eyes were attracted and his mind startled by the sudden glitter of gold. The moon had now ascended and her orange tones were changed to silver as she rose into the sky. It was in a flood of pure light that Fain had suddenly caught sight of an ornament at Elizabeth Ogilvie's throat, and his breath came hard and his right hand unconsciously clenched as he recognised the Golden Fetich. But he said nothing and she, ignorant of the cause of his sudden silence, spoke.

“Roy's character is very beautiful to me. I did not know there was such a simple, single-hearted man left in the world. I worship him and I am a proud

woman to think that I have won such a treasure as his love."

He bowed, then rose to leave her.

"You have my congratulations and I wish I could echo your estimate of our common friend. But that he is my friend makes me silent. We need not speak of him. But you will keep my secret, Miss Ogilvie? I have a right to beg you to do that."

"It is a sacred thing," she said seriously; "none will ever learn from me the honour you have done me, Mr. Fain."

He was about to move away, but lingered. Many different thoughts coursed through his mind, for the great agony of his disappointment had not as yet crushed into his heart. He could not realise where he stood, or that the hope and ambition of the last four weeks were shattered.

He had counted in secret on victory; he had read the signs, as he fancied, and believed himself safe. Now "No" had fallen, like a frost, upon his soul and had stricken him the deeper because he expected "Yes."

A purely trumpery, temporary incident now troubled Tracy Pain, and only a great numbness crowding down over his life yet indicated the suffering that was to come.

For the moment he felt a spark of anger, not at his terrible mistake and unutterable loss, but because upon Bessie's throat hung the fetich of their present adven-

ture. The gold disc might mean nothing; there was no good reason why it should have the least to do with the incomplete manuscript; but he chose at this moment to resent its present position, and told himself that Meldrum was guilty of a breach of trust in thus playing in all a lover's foolishness with a thing that might have the gravest bearing on their future.

"I do not like to see that toy there," he said suddenly, pointing to the disc. "Roy has only a half interest in that and he had no right to give it to you. You might easily lose it."

She grew hot and her hand went up to her neck.

"He told me the story and I understood that you had the manuscript for your share, and that he kept this trinket. But I will wear it no more. Indeed, knowing the story of it, I did not wish to do so, only Roy insisted. He said it would bring him and you luck."

"You will be wiser to return it to him. And now, good-night, Miss Ogilvie."

He passed away, moving silently like a ghost; and she sat long after he had gone until there came a sort of fear to her heart and she shivered, though not with cold.

Of Fain she had not thought a dozen times since the beginning of the voyage. Only after her hero proposed and was accepted, had she turned any attention to his friend and tried to win Fain's regard before the engagement should be announced. Now she saw

how he had misunderstood her, and she was very sorry.

Yet, while she pitied him, a little uneasiness and even shadows of fear darkened her mind. He was a strong man, that she knew, and a clever one. He had never re-echoed his cousin's openly expressed admiration for him. Now, unconsciously enough, Elizabeth herself had become a stone of stumbling between them, and her soul was full of vague presentiments as she retired to rest that night.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BLACK HAND FROM THE SKY.

Roy Meldrum had felt a regret that his sweetheart imposed silence concerning their engagement. He would have liked to tell every soul on board, to roar the great news through Captain Ogilvie's speaking trumpet whenever another ship came within hail, to shout his triumph to the stars. Now, however, the truth was out, in one quarter at any rate, and upon the next occasion of a private talk with his cousin, Roy was surprised to find that Tracy had learned the news. Thus Fain unconsciously revealed his own secret.

As for Meldrum himself, he had been swept clean off his legs by a tremendous masculine tornado of love that shook his big soul and banished every other emotion, thought and hope to limbo. His was a nature incapable of much patience, and before the *Morning Star* left the Mediterranean, the young man had told his love and asked Elizabeth Ogilvie bluntly if she could ever care about a pauper, six feet four inches high, who worshipped the deck she trod upon and the air she breathed.

Luckily for him she had come to the conclusion that she could. He was her first love and from the moment of accepting him great joy filled Elizabeth's

life, a joy which even the sad and tragic fate hanging over her uncle could not dispel.

There came a day in the Indian Ocean when the *Morning Star* was spanking along at twelve knots, and a little crowd of passengers sat round Mr. Dan Hook and listened to that hardy mariner's yarns of the past.

Dan was generally considered to be rather broader than he was long, but his proportions, such as they were, consisted of nothing but hard muscle and harder bone. Above this solid frame his bull-dog head, with small grey eyes, under-hung jaw and flat nose, rolled about on his shoulders now upon one, now the other. It was always cocked sideways, and he very rarely took the trouble to open more than one eye at a time.

The boatswain was a West country man, and the Devon accent tumbled and rolled off his tongue in moments of high excitement, as it tumbled and rolled off the tongues of Drake and Raleigh in the spacious days, to the delight of good Queen Bess and the merriment of her Court.

Dan worked with lanyard and handspike, and, as he did so, regaled the British passengers with his doings on all the Seven Seas. The talk was of foreign sailors, and Mr. Hook's experience of them proved extensive and peculiar.

"I was on a 'tramp,' by name the 'Flying Fish,' " he

said, "an' us had a Lascar crew to her. Them cusses can work, if you know how to handle 'em, but they've gotten some blessed queer notions 'bout matters of religion, an' who be theer betters an' who ban't. They wouldn't no more pick a bit o' salt pork than you'd take a walk along the top-gallant-yard. You might say a cove as couldn't eat pig ban't much sort o' use 'pon a ocean-gwaine vessel; but theer 'twas, an' Lascars feed on trash any time, ashore or afloat. But a poor, blighted nigger, gwaine to the galley on a dark night, missed stays when the ship pitched, an' comed a cropper, head fust. Not that that mattered, but in falling he hit his head against a gert ham, an' another Lascar seed un do it.

"Then theer was the deuce on' all af a tantara, I can tell 'e, because to touch pork be so bad as to eat it if you'm a heathen; an' tother niggers sent the poor joker to Jericho from that day forrard. He'd gone an' wrecked his caste, you see, an' was poison to all the other chaps—a pariah, as they say. If he'd been a leper-man, they couldn't have gived un a wider berth.

"Well, the poor cove's life growed to be a damn nuisance to him, beggin' pardon for the fiery word. A nuisance it growed, 'cause the whites didn't know a syllable of his lingo, an' his pals wouldn't be seen on the same side o' the ship with him.

"Then the 'old man'—as we allus calls the skipper in the mercantile marine—the old man ups an' sez 'I've had about enough of such tomfoolery. The poor



sweep'll go off his chump at this rate.' An' I sez, 'That he will for sartain.'

"So skipper he pipes a muster of the niggers and has 'em up afore him in a row and sends a quartermaster to the cook for the biggest ham he's got by him. Then the old man just gives 'em beans, an' tells 'em they be the most knock-kneed, slack-twisted, her-ring-gutted crowd as ever he sailed with.

"Then he sez, 'Now, my sons, I'll soon settle this little matter once an' for all.' So he takes the ham by the knuckle an' marches down that line of monkey-faced Lascar men an' smacks each cove on the head wi' the ham as he walks along!

"That soon put 'em all level again; an' a tidy fuss an' fury they kicked up, I assure 'e; but so 'twas, an' theer weren't no more trouble—not till the end of the voyage, anyway."

Everybody laughed at Dan Hook's yarn, and thus encouraged he told one or two more.

Then it was that a strange smell, that staggered the nostrils of those who sniffed it, attracted attention. It floated everywhere, but as Winstone thrust his sharp nose over the side of the ship he started back in dismay; for the odour appeared to rise out of the sea. An open port below, however, served to explain it, and inquiry proved that the window was that of Signor Polti's cabin.

"A chemist, I'll lay," said Hook, not guessing how near to and yet how far from the truth he had come.

"I hope theer ban't no harm in his powders an' stinks, an' that he ain't arter any gert, marvellous invention; for inventions, so I've heard, is always discovered through explosions and such like deviltries. I blawed my eyelashes into my head when I was a bwoy, an' the door off its hinges same time; but the only thing as I discovered was that my father could hit a sight harder than gunpowder."

Lord Winstone said nothing, but beckoned his friends aside.

"This awakes a suspicion that has slept for some weeks now," he declared. "I thought things were steadying down, and, in so far as the captain is concerned, I believe they are; but Polti's up to some sinister business, as sure as fate, and it would be a rough piece of luck for us if some high explosive manufactured for other causes, should blow the bottom out of the *Morning Star*."

"We can't prove anything yet," answered Roy.

"No; excepting that he's a chemist and occupies his cabin as a laboratory," said his Lordship. "That's dangerous in itself. He's no right to cook hell-broth in this ship—or anywhere for that matter. But on board he would not be the only one to suffer from an explosion. It's all right when anarchists blow themselves to the devil, and puts one on better terms with Providence generally; but it's all wrong when they endanger the lives of honest men."

Tracy Fain, however, did not share their anxiety. He even sneered a little.

"Perhaps the poor wretch is only making himself some horrible, oily dish from his mother-country that he cannot get them to cook for him here. I'm sure for my part garlic is more terrible than dynamite," he said.

"No laughing matter, in my opinion," declared Roy, and Winstone agreed with him.

Finally it was decided to speak to the Captain, whose health of late had conspicuously improved. They designed to speak privately upon the subject and impart suspicions, not unnatural under the circumstances, yet of a sort almost too sensational for ready acceptance without strong proof.

The projected conference, however, was not destined to be held. That afternoon the pleasant conditions changed and certain phenomena indicated unfavourable weather. The *Morning Star* was now well on her voyage down the eastern coast of Africa, and the following day it was hoped she would cross the line.

Her first port of call was Jumbo, a little town at the extreme south of Somali-land, notable as having given a name to that African elephant of famous memory whose loss London deplored so bitterly some years ago. But now, out of the infinite horizon, from the far distant heart of the Indian Ocean, rose one long, livid purple line, straight and clean. It ascended, very

slowly, but steadily; the glass began to fall rapidly and the wind to fail and come in flaws.

Captain Ogilvie found himself a little nearer shore than he liked, and, fearing heavy weather, furled all sail, for the *Morning Star* always helped her steam with sail in a fair wind, and stood out a trifle to meet the oncoming gloom.

Once or twice during the day sharp eyes had sighted the rugged mountain region of the African coast. Now however, it swiftly fell beneath the horizon and the dark and sullen violet arch of the heavens rose higher and higher, apparently increasing in its speed of progression as it rushed from the east and darkened all the upper chambers of the air.

Towards the horizon and at the centre of the great cloud was one strange rift, torn by an elemental chaos of which as yet no sound could be heard; but in its heart a savage, lurid, copper-coloured shadow, like some huge demon of the tempest, moved and increased in size, and changed its form as the darkness gathered. Now a head it seemed, now a hand with claw-like fingers; but amid its protean shapes each towered larger than the last as it swiftly approached.

Of the passengers none on board except Lord Winstone had ever seen a storm at sea; but all, save one, faced the approaching tempest with courage, and most of them with extreme interest, untempered by any fear.

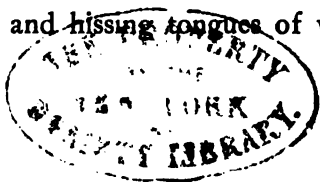
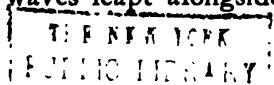
The exception proved to be Signor Polti. His

cheek had visibly blanched at the sight of this towering continent of cloud, rising like the wrath of God from that equatorial sea. What he read into the approaching chastisement none knew beyond himself; but he liked it little enough, and after his dark eyes had roved in the still darker clouds, he withdrew to his cabin and was no more seen.

Captain Ogilvie faced the coming hurricane with the self-command and confidence bred of knowledge and resource; his niece felt perfect trust in him and had no fear; the emotion in Meldrum's mind was one of frank excitement at the prospect of a great new experience, while Winstone, though in his heart he devoutly wished the *Morning Star* was engined up a little stronger, yet knew her by this time to be a good weather boat. Moreover, she would be in better case than many a giant of the sea, even if her infirm engines did break down, for she belonged to that old-fashioned class of ships on which it was possible to make sail. She carried not only steadying staysails, but canvas enough to push her along in a good breeze.

The storm broke in the afternoon, and out of the darkness suddenly spread over the sea and sky, there came a yell and scream and a jagged scrawl of blue light that set every eye throbbing as it exploded and seemed to tie huge ribbons of livid flame at each masthead.

The sea rose instant and ink-black. Great cross waves leapt alongside and hissing tongues of water



came aboard and slipped here and there, snake-wise along the decks. Hail flogged and churned the sea and rattled like the discharge of musketry on the skylights and ironwork of the steamer.

Invisible fingers seemed playing savage music on the great harp of the cordage; a screaming and sorrowing as of unhappy spirits hurtled in the darkness above, and on every side came the thud of heavy water; while almost within the first minute of the storm the *Morning Star* took it black and heavy over her bows, and the great ship stood still and shivered to her keelplates, like a frightened sheep.

The lightning blazed; its blue light glared mistily over the raging sea, and showed where the hail had collected in great, glimmering heaps along the junctions of deck and deck-houses, and wherever obstacles occurred to prevent it being swept aft.

The *Morning Star* met the gale head on, and now she had slowed down and was pitching violently. The second engineer stood at the throttle valve, the chief occupied ten places at once; but the sea ran so high that it was impossible to do more than save the propeller a little.

Now it stuck clean out of the water, and the vessel shook and groaned with the awful race of the huge blades, then down went the stern of the ship and the whirling screw slapped into the sea with a roar, tearing the heart of each great black roller into a cauldron of ghostly foam, and putting such strain as only en-

gineers can guess at upon shaft and blade and throbbing piston.

No attempt was made to travel against the tempest. The log-line hung jerking up and down astern; the "cherub," affixed to the taffrail, now tossed mute, as the line hung limp, now started to run with a sound half purr, half screech. Then perhaps came the "ting" of the bell and again the strain was off and the hand on the dial motionless.

At the Captain's order all the passengers had gone below, and presently, when in his judgment the centre of the storm was past, he edged his ship off a little on her course again. But the attempt was not successful. With the sea on her beam she began to roll gunwales under, and had to be brought back nose to wind once more.

Through that night and until the morning watch, Captain Ogilvie stuck to the bridge, and Engineer Macabe to the engine-room. Then the worst was over and the *Morning Star*, with a few storm-sails set to steady her, proceeded a little more southerly; while the hurricane began veering to the north and slackened as it veered.

No great damage had been done, though things were in a rare confusion forward. One whale-boat was stove in and a few plates bent on the starboard bow, while a stoker, his last watch ended, in getting along the life-line rigged to the forecastle, had lost his life in a heavy sea which carried him with awful

violence across the waist of the ship and smashed his skull against the forward donkey engine.

Great gloom settled over the ship when this sorrowful catastrophe became known, and the delight of the passengers, as the sullen demon of the storm drew off and fleeting but fierce tropic sunshine brightened the morning, was sadly damped upon the sudden mournful beating of the ship's bell.

The funeral was not destined to follow the usual procedure, however, for, when the hands were ready, and the dead man laid peacefully on a grating in tight-sewn hammock with a round shot at his feet awaiting his last restless resting place, there came a rumour that the Captain was too ill to conduct the ceremony.

Dan Hook brought the intelligence with a blank face, and whispered it to the first officer, who was waiting at the corpse's side for Ogilvie.

A few of the passengers, including Lord Winstone, Meldrum and Tracy Fain, were present at the funeral; and now his lordship was informed of the black news, that, doubtless overcome by the privations and anxieties of the past four-and-twenty hours, Captain Ogilvie had fallen back upon a worse enemy than the storm, and was lying incapable of action.

"And I beg and implore you'll read the service, my lord," concluded Mr. Crouch; "for I'm no great shakes at such a job best of times, and don't feel like it just now, I promise you. My arm is terribly pain-



ful, too, from a blow I got last night. There's a bone in the wrist carried away I fancy."

Lord Winstone nodded, steadied himself and, with one hand gripping a stay, for the ship still rolled heavily in a big sea, and the other holding a prayer-book, he read in a high, hard voice the pathetic words.

Then the grating was run out even as a greedy sea tumbled to the bulwark and splashed the dead man's mates; and into its dark bosom the corpse dropped with solemn plunge, glimmering wanly through the waves as it sank and fell astern.

"We therefore commit his body to the deep, to be turned to corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body when the sea shall give up her dead."

At the end of the brief ceremony those sailors who had been able to attend it went forward, slow and gloomy, for the dead man was a favourite; the officers returned to their duties, and the passengers disappeared into the saloon where lunch awaited them.

Elizabeth Ogilvie walked sadly from her uncle's cabin. With harsh words he had bid her depart and trouble him no more.

From the engine-room came clanking of hammers, for some strain and damage had resulted from the storm; and in the saloon the clatter of plates and business of a meal went on as usual, though voices were hushed before the sad incident of the morning, and those who knew the truth concerning Alister Ogilvie

wore grave expressions at that other tragedy being acted once more in the Captain's cabin.

A gorgeous, but brief, tropic sunset ended the day, and Roy Meldrum, with Elizabeth Ogilvie and some others stood above the throbbing screw that marked a great green highway in the wake of the ship, and watched the ocean and sky.

The sun, his disc having once touched the sea, sank with amazing rapidity from an orange horizon that faded towards the zenith into pure, pale tones of beryl. Above the western glow there swept a wild whirl of wind-torn cloud, all ruby and gold; while below it, cast, irregular, vaporous masses full of glorious light showed where the pavilions of the storm still thrust their pinnacles above the horizon.

To north and south crimson islands, great and small, floated through an ocean of purple and merged together into flying continents; while cloudy giants, under tattered banners of sheer flame, rolled above the sunset in awful battle, and all the wide heaven burnt and glowed to its unfathomable heart with light and with fire.

Almost as they gazed these splendours dwindled, and the bewildering pageant grew lifeless and pale. Then there trembled out a fleeting after-glow of pearly silver and rose—a dream sunset on whose breast hung one planet, like a tear upon the bosom of another dead day.

“Thus, in the hand of their God, do wind and sun

and the mists of the sea magnificently labour together," said Lord Winstone gravely. "A sunset may be more beautiful on shore over high mountains and to the sound of bells and waterfalls; but it is never so solemn as upon the lonely sea."

Roy nodded, and poor Bessie, sadly overwrought by the stress of the storm past and the fear to come, could not speak, but gulped down her tears before the dying glory of the sky and squeezed her lover's hand under the gathering darkness.

But another pair of eyes were surveying the sunset with added knowledge and very little sentiment.

Dan Hook knew the glass was falling again; that a strange darkness was advancing from the north to welcome night; that the Captain remained utterly incapacitated, and that the First Officer was in his bunk with an injured wrist and arm.

From the engine-room still came clanking and thunder of heavy hammers, and Hook turned his quid, sniffed the sea, and stuck out his great underhanging jaw till a row of yellow teeth showed over his upper lip.

## CHAPTER VI.

### ON A LEE SHORE.

The *Morning Star*, as though she was endowed with human reason and human distrust of the gloomy returning monster behind her, made splendid progress. Hook had given Mr. Macabe a bit of his mind, and the engineer, alive to the situation, was getting all he could out of his engines.

A big following sea lifted the ship and hurried her on her way, but each moment the wind freshened, and it became a question how soon she would have to turn her nose to it, or run the risk of holding on until it was too late to turn.

Meldrum and Fain stood at the round portholes of the smoking-room, which looked out aft, and watched the great tumbling mountains of water rising above the taffrail, all laced with the foam of the screw. Each threatened to overwhelm the ship, but her nose dipped and her stern cocked higher and higher until the great mass slipped under her hull and she wallowed, shaking and trembling with her propeller whirling naked in the air.

"Wind freshening again," said Meldrum; "by Gad, it's a glorious thing to think that men built of the same stuff as you and I invented ships! What a fight! With the deep sea and the winds of heaven and the

lightning. And we smoke our cigars and laugh and pit our brains and our steel and our steam against the raving Titans, and beat 'em!"

"Not always. Only a fool would laugh to-night, if you ask me. It was a circular storm, Hook says, and is coming back again—with seven devils worse than the first from the look of it. The Captain's lying like a hog in his bunk; Crouch is moaning like a sick girl about nothing, Winstone says, and the second officer can't work out his sights and knows little more about our reckoning than we do. I wish we were out of it, and I'm not ashamed to say so. They've given up all idea of calling at that first port with the ridiculous name. In fact, we've passed it, and shall be off Zanzibar before we know it."

"So much the better. That's where we want to be."

The men were still friends to outward seeming, but their relations had been not a little strained since the incident of Tracy's rejection. Fain, indeed, taxed his cousin afterwards and blamed him bitterly for keeping his secret in the light of his own subsequent step; but Roy answered, truly enough, that he had never dreamed that Tracy was smitten in the same quarter.

The subject was not one upon which a man would be likely to unburden his heart even to his dearest chum; and though Meldrum had doubtless confessed to his triumph proudly enough after Bessie's favourable answer to his prayer, yet her own wish it was that sealed his mouth. Afterwards, the mistaken girl's

very efforts to win Fain's friendship had precipitated the catastrophe of his proposal.

On such a man as he was—proud, sensitive and not a little vain—this reverse fell with crushing force. It shattered his self-respect, terribly wounded his self-love, and awoke bad passions and reckless thoughts. His mind ran upon the time to come, and he brooded of what it might bring; he allowed himself to sink into baseness and dwelt on the picture of a future in which he should return to England rich beyond the dreams of avarice, while his cousin and his cousin's wife might find themselves beggars.

Before this blackguard fancy hope awakened. His busy brain traversed a thousand plans and possibilities, and he told himself it was never too late for a woman to change her mind.

Between the men, therefore, Bessie had come, and Meldrum's magnanimity only made the position more painful for his cousin. It is easy for a victor to be generous, but difficult for him to escape giving offence at every turn to those he has defeated.

Unconscious Roy blundered daily and inflamed a mind already bitter and full of gall. But Fain conducted himself outwardly with propriety sufficient for the case. His bearing towards Bessie was well considered, and she, wholly ignorant of the truth, mentally commended her disappointed lover and felt rejoiced that he had taken his sorrow in such manly fashion. So the position stood.

Meldrum and Fain shared a cabin, but through those dark hours neither slept much. The ship had been turned head to the wind at midnight, and now heavy seas came over her bows, and the cousins in their bunks heard the crash and thunder of them and the hiss and rattle as torrents of water dashed down the side alleys scarcely two feet from their faces where they lay.

The deafening sounds increased and they felt themselves tossed and rolled helplessly. The storm was evidently rising and heavy seas flogged at the port-hole window, lighting the cabin with a wan and ghostly gleam from the phosphorescence of the water, then falling with a savage hiss back to the deep and leaving all in utter darkness.

Every moment some thud or crash or startled cry from deck seemed to suggest disaster; every moment Meldrum was about to dash out of bed and rush to Bessie's rescue; but nothing definite happened, and between the brief lulls of the shrieking wind, he could hear, far off in the turmoil of the waves, that slow thud, thud of the faithful giant below; and the sound warmed his heart, for he knew that the *Morning Star* need fear no ill—given sea-room—with sound propeller and engines.

The watch had been removed both from the fore-castle head and the forward bridge, for no man could have stopped upon the first, and there was danger on the second; but though the cheery "all's well!" did not

echo across the savage night, now and again came the windy beat of the bell, telling off the half-hours; and that melody is one of comfort, too, to those in peril on the sea.

Few eyes closed aboard the *Morning Star* that night, and a sulky, leaden morning at last illuminated the most terrible tempest that any soul on board had witnessed. The labouring ship now slid down awful hills of water, lashed and pitted by the wind; then, when destruction appeared a question of moments only, with a shiver and stagger and struggle, with the grinding concussion of a heavy sea aboard and smother of flying foam and green water forward, her bows came up and her nose gradually pointed into the sky.

Meldrum and Lord Winstone climbed into the wheel house to find the first officer, with his hand in a sling and his face drawn and haggard. His eyes were on the wind gauge, but it gave him no hope, for the hurricane rather increased than moderated.

The ship was straining heavily, and from this altitude Meldrum was astonished to see what a small thing the vessel looked in that awful sea, while the insignificance of the little creatures she carried appeared almost appalling.

"How's the Captain?" he asked.

"Better, Hook tells me—or was last night. But he didn't take anything to eat, so I expect he had another dose."



This proved to be true. Ogilvie was helpless and Lord Winstone, who went to see him, did not stay a moment. But a hypodermic syringe and a bottle of morphia tablets appeared in a small rack at the Captain's elbow, and the visitor possessed himself of them before retreating. Then, full of a sudden determination, he pursued a rapid search, and presently had the satisfaction of finding a secret hoard of Alister Ogilvie's morphia tubes hidden in a flat trunk.

Lord Winstone thought long before pursuing an extreme measure, but, finally, he removed every atom of morphia, and a moment later had flung it overboard. He was familiar with the action of morphia and knew that Ogilvie, despite his agony, would not die from lack of the drug, but live to bless him.

For three hours the struggle with the weather continued, and towards midday—as some slight improvement was reported and hearts began to beat more cheerfully—there came a crash from the engine-room, with cries and orders yelled louder than the howl of the storm, and with dense ribbons of steam curling and creeping through crevices from below, to be instantly blown invisible as they touched the wind.

A moment later came the tremendous news that the screw-shaft had broken at the third pair of thrust blocks. The ship, helpless and masterless, began to fall into the trough of the sea, and the question was whether she could be got round tail to wind without going on her beam ends. The steam escape pipes were

shrieking a veritable devil's song and Mr. Macabe toiled below where the danger was a bursting boiler; but every man stuck to his post, though they knew the ship was coming round and must, for some appalling moments, lie in the trough of the seas.

Hook got a head sail or two on the *Morning Star*, and of these one defied the wind, though the other was blown bodily away out of the bolt ropes.

Chance helped the vessel at this critical juncture, for, as she came broadside on to the storm, there reigned a few precious moments of comparative calm upon the waters and she was nearly round before a heavy sea fell aboard, swept her starboard side, sprung her deck-houses, twisted a pair of davits into corkscrews and smashed a boat.

A minute sooner, and the whole weight of this mountain of water would have fallen into the ship and probably sunk her like a sardine box. Now, however, there was still a spark of hope.

Hook managed to get a little sail on her and then, at considerable risk, shook out some more, for between two perils, either of carrying away a mast or getting pooped, he chose the former.

Fortunately the sailing powers of the *Morning Star* preserved the ship, for, as we have said, she was rigged to carry unusual canvas for a steamer even of her day.

Dan's great and daily jest with Mr. Macabe had always been that their steam-power was merely an

auxiliary. Now the Chief Engineer, with an engineer's usual pluck and resource, was estimating the possibility of tinkering the broken shaft and getting a band round it with the tools and appliances at his command.

But, meantime, the ship kept running before the wind, and, as the storm abated, the First Officer made more sail until the *Morning Star*, rejoicing in her old powers and aided by the great following seas tumbled and crashed forward at seven good knots an hour.

Towards evening the sea grew a little calmer. In the wheel-house heads were bent over a chart, and anxious eyes fixed upon the rugged and dangerous coast line of Zanzibar as represented in the map. Where their ship was, exactly, neither of the navigating officers could tell, but on her present course they knew that she must be rapidly nearing the land.

"We'm on a lee shore, that's what we be," declared Dan Hook. "We can stand out a bit, no doubt, but Lord He knows which way the currents set or what we ought to be looking for. I reckon we be past Zanzibar these good few hours."

"The thing is to stand out a bit to-night anyway. We may get an observation to-morrow," decided Mr. Crouch.

The ship's course was altered, and as she fell off a little another vessel was reported through the gathering dusk. She appeared to be about a mile or more

away and was steaming steadily in a northeasterly direction—a big, powerful ship which made little matter of the waning storm, but pushed along rapidly against it.

Suddenly a rocket went up from her, then another as she was lost in the gathering night. An answering stream of fire leapt aloft from the *Morning Star*, but nothing more of the strange ship was seen, and whether she was signalling for aid or warning her sister of danger none knew until later.

The night crowded down and sail was shortened. Double watches were set despite the weariness of the men, and Hook himself was seldom far distant from the forecastle-head. Meantime the passengers, many of whom had suffered no little fear and misery, took heart once more.

General Podesta had steered his lady on deck just before dark to look at the seas, which, though trifling compared with what they had been, were still running high; Signor Polti had also come up from his cabin to give one shuddering glance at the waters and then retire below; and Tracy Fain, with whom the heavy pitching had sadly disagreed, also appeared on the lee side of the deck saloon and found himself the better for a breath of air.

Meldrum had been neither sick nor sorry from the first onset of the storm, but he was concerned enough for his sweetheart; while she, though hale in body, found herself oppressed beyond measure with the fate

of her uncle, and knew full well the contempt in which he was now held by every honest man on the ship.

His criminal weakness, his unmanly lust for this cursed drug had gone far to endanger the life of the vessel and every soul upon it; because, though neither responsible for the storm nor the broken screw-shaft, Captain Ogilvie had certainly been to blame for much else, and his absence from duty was still a cause of deep uneasiness to those who knew the critical position of the ship and her dangerous situation with respect to the coast.

His knowledge and experience would have been of the most vital service at this period; but he kept his cabin, with locked door, and appeared oblivious to the welfare of his craft and his crew, his passengers and himself.

About midnight, however, a cry rang over the vessel, and Ogilvie, swinging a lantern and clad only in his night attire, appeared upon the deck. One name was on his lips, and he called for Lord Winstone with harsh persistence.

It happened that his lordship had not turned in, but was himself on deck walking up and down with Tracy Fain and the First Engineer.

The sea was now much calmer, and the ship being on an even keel, many who had not slept for the last eight-and-forty hours were glad of the opportunity to do so. The *Morning Star* was for the most part a

home of sleeping men, therefore, when Alister Ogilvie summoned Lord Winstone.

The old sportsman instantly responded, crossed to the weather side, and expressed a hope that the Captain found himself in better health. But the other's face told him that he hoped in vain.

Ogilvie had turned a sort of leaden grey, and out of a face like that of a dead man his eyes burnt with living fire. His cheeks had fallen in, his beard was unshaven, and he shook and tottered in his walk. An appearance of greatly increased age had come upon him. His countenance was deeply wrinkled and an expression of anxiety and terror, such as oftentimes appears upon the faces of the dying, marked his features.

"What is amiss?" asked Winstone, although he had divined the truth after a first glance in the lantern light.

The other spoke with passion in his voice, but his articulation was vague and his nerves evidently suffered from frightful tension.

"You know—none better. Where is it, I say? Quick, for the love of Heaven—the syringe and my morphia. I'm in raging, roasting hell! I shall die—I shall go stark mad if you keep it from me. Man, don't hold it back if you have any heart in you. I am tormented by agony that a devil would pity!"

"You must endure and you will conquer," said Lord Winstone, firmly. "I wish to God that I could

lighten your suffering by sharing it, but that is impossible. Only be sure of this: you will recover, and——”

“My morphia—my morphia, or I’ll tear the heart out of you!”

Lord Winstone faced the other unflinchingly, but he threw away his cigar and made ready.

“Your syringe is in the sea, and all your morphia, too,” he said.

With an awful cry, like some spirit dropping into eternal torment, the suffering man dashed forward and gripped Winstone by the throat.

“Fetch it back—you shall fetch it back—by the angels of light, I swear it, or I’ll strangle you!”

He fought like a maniac, with purpose to hurl Lord Winstone overboard; and so sudden and tremendous was his onslaught that but for the assistance of the First Engineer and Tracy Fain, his lordship might indeed have followed the hypodermic syringe and the glass tubes of poison. The four struggled together; then a blow on the head dropped Ogilvie, and at the same moment from forward came a loud, thrilling cry of danger.

The boatswain’s keen eyes and ears had seen and heard what he now announced in a voice that rose like the roar of a wild beast across the night.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE WRECK.

Hook had noted the ashy gleam of broken water far off in the darkness, and had listened to the tumble and roar of heavy seas beating against stone. For some time his anxiety deepened, because there was that in the increased leap and wave-beat of the sea which told him, despite the darkness, that the *Morning Star* was in shallower water. And yet, as she had been steadily standing to the south-east, he supposed that she should now be far from shore.

The hoarse growl of the breakers and the sudden gleam of them not half a mile distant set the seal on his growing alarm, yet staggered him immeasurably. There, right away to the east, on the port bow, extended a hideous hell of broken water where he had supposed only the deep sea fell and rose; and right ahead the sea was also splashed and streaked with foam.

Dan Hook yelled his terrible news and the First Officer called all hands to save the ship; but human power was vain in such a strait, and every experienced man on board knew that the *Morning Star* had come to the end of her last voyage.

Before they could bring her round, for she answered but slowly and sulkily to her helm under present



circumstances, the grey chaos of broken water had crept close out of the night, and then deep currents gripped the doomed hull with hands of iron and she wallowed broadside on a hundred yards from the breakers.

Captain Ogilvie, his fit of madness apparently dispelled before this counter-shock, appeared upon the bridge ghostly and grim, like some dark incarnation of the storm.

"All over, bar the last pinch, I'm afraid," said Winstone to Meldrum as the two men stood staring at the death before them.

"Don't say that. Here we are with muscles and brains and pluck. We *must* come out of it all right; there's Bessie to save."

"Be sure I'm not the man to throw up the sponge a moment before I must. But where are we? Is this a mere reef in mid-ocean, or are we near land? If it's a reef, then only God Almighty can keep us alive another half-hour; if it's land, some among us may possibly reach it. But what land—what land can lie here?"

Captain Ogilvie was running forward and passed them as Winstone spoke. He answered, as though absolutely oblivious of the life and death struggle between himself and this man not twenty minutes before.

"Land it may be, and it tells me what's happened. We've been ploughing ahead faster than we thought,

and we've run past Zanzibar without sighting. Now we're between the mainland and that ridge of rocky islets extending north of Mafia Island. If we're running on Mafia now and we're not hit very hard, we may live till daylight in this falling sea; if it isn't the island, but only the north of the ridge, we're done for."

The effort to get her head round had at last succeeded, and the *Morning Star*, with canvas flattened against the stays and masts, was drifting astern. Now, when the vanguard of the reef actually thundered and boiled within a hundred yards of her rudder, she got way on, and, thanks to wind and cross currents, began moving slowly but steadily to the south-west. Breakers now gleamed and hissed out of the night on either hand, but every hundred yards on the present course was reckoned to take the *Morning Star* nearer to the mainland of Mafia Island.

All too soon, however, the end came. Land, or lofty rocks, had suddenly loomed out of the night, and in the first glimmering premonition of dawn, while yet the stars shone diamond bright in a clear sky, the *Morning Star* touched ground. So slight proved the shock that scarcely a man was thrown off his feet; but a sharper, harsher impact followed; the ship heeled over to starboard and the foremast parted twenty feet from the deck.

A sad vision of terror succeeded upon this disaster. Two men were carried overboard with the foremast;

and now the great spar, held alongside by the cordage, began to pound at the side of the ship like a battering ram. Astern she was settling as it seemed, and that rapidly, but her bows rose well out of the water.

Here crowded the life of the ship. Madame Podesta, in the last agony of fear, clung to her husband and rent the air with hysterical shrieks; Signor Polti, white to the lips, knelt by himself and bowed his head and prayed; Dan Hook and his mate were at work upon the broken mast, chopping and hacking at the heavy ropes which bound it alongside.

A strange white light from the wilderness of seething water made darkness visible, and against it might be seen the form of Meldrum with the lesser shapes of Fain, Winstone, and some of the sailors struggling at a boat and endeavouring to turn her on the davits and make ready for launching. Elizabeth Ogilvie stood by her uncle, pale and breathless, but silent.

Each moment of that terrible crisis seemed a century to all not actively engaged in manual labour. Those sweating and struggling with axe or rope suffered least. The others stood mute and ready, awaiting that last plunge when the ship should sink to her long home.

But the *Morning Star* was hard and fast, and showed no sign as yet of breaking up. She would not sink unless buffeted from her present position by the

seas, and this seemed an improbable event, at any rate for the present, as every moment the waves decreased and the wind fell.

Hearts took hope as the time lengthened out, and the sheets of white water hissed aboard less and less often. Then a cheer came from forward, where the gigantic labours of Hook and his fellow seamen had at length cut the mast free and seen it float away clear of the ship.

A boat was now ready for launching; but Ogilvie refused to allow it to leave the vessel. He held that the *Morning Star* herself was safer than the sea, and until light came and revealed their true position he bid them make no effort to depart.

In the hold stood deep water enough, but it did not increase rapidly, and the wreck was evidently held up firmly from the bottom.

Delicate flush and glow of rose at length banished night; the stars disappeared one by one, and against the East, as the light strengthened and ascended swiftly into heaven, there appeared the contour of land. With tropical speed the day broke, and presently the sun rose over the dark eastern ridge of earth and climbed aloft into a clear sky. Soon the full fiery heat of him blazed down over a calm sea, and a prayer of thankfulness rose in many hearts.

As Dan Hook remarked, there was no reason why a single ship's rat should perish, for salvation was at hand, and, though the *Morning Star* had become a

total wreck, no danger to any aboard of her could now be said to exist.

So the shipwrecked souls lifted up their voices and saluted the sunlight, ignorant one and all of the danger close at hand and of the awful and imminent fate destined for many who now praised God that they were still in the land of the living.

Nature had done her worst and Providence, holding the giant Anakim of old Ocean in the hollow of her hand, had guarded the struggling vessel and guided her where those she carried might still be saved from death in the deep sea; but the dark imagination of man, the inventions of man and the evil of man had yet to work their way with the ill-fated *Morning Star*. At present, however, and until the next gale of wind should break her up, she lay snug enough.

Had daylight served and Captain Ogilvie been aware of the exact positions of the rocks on which she now reposed—a dead ship with a broken back—he could hardly have navigated her into a safer position from the point of view of the human life aboard her.

She lay due north and south, was protected on the west by a grinning ridge of rocks like teeth, and to the east by similar but lower ridges. The channel she had entered before striking shelved shorewards, and right ahead, not half a mile from the ship, extended a bank of land—a low sandy islet lying well within the main great island of Mafia.

The latter rose easterly as a grey streak on the horizon, and appeared to be about ten miles distant, while to the west a dim blue mist indicated the African shore.

The navigating officers' first care was to make an examination of the exact position of their ship. The ocean was now smooth as glass, and no more than a ring of foam bubbled pearly bright about the neck of each jagged rock that rose above the sea. Infinite purity marked the deep green water under noon sunlight, and with a sea telescope it was possible to probe deep into its secrets.

Great birds surrounded the wreck and fought for fragments of food flung overboard, while here and there on the smooth surface appeared the sinister triangle of a shark's dorsal fin. Though the stoke-hole was submerged and the engine-room knee-deep in water, it encroached no further, and thus that part of the vessel in which men lived remained intact with all the necessary supplies of life.

Observations were taken and the chart consulted. Then it transpired that the *Morning Star* had struck a reef some ten miles inside the island of Mafia, and that she lay about forty miles from the mainland.

Lord Winstone positively chuckled when he heard it.

"I should like to know what gives you so much solid satisfaction, if I may ask," said Tracy Fain at sight of this merriment.

"You shall know. If we had absolutely chosen our landing-place on African soil we could hardly have made a better shot. Indeed, it would be impossible. We want Lake Mweru, don't we? Very well. Take the chart and draw a line from the mainland opposite Mafia to the southern extremity of the lake, and you will see it is practically the nearest possible point to which a vessel could have brought us. I'm devilish sorry for the *Morning Star*, but it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and the grand thing is our guns are safe."

Meldrum next spoke, with his eyes on the chart.

"We might get ashore at Simbaranga, work across the Mahenge country, between Lakes Tanganyika and Nyassa, and then keep right ahead to Mweru. It's as easy as falling off a log!"

"Yes—on the chart," admitted Lord Winstone. "But you can't call a hansom when you're tired in Central Africa, and the question is whether we shall be able to fit out at all nearer than Zanzibar. We want at least fifty men, including head men, if we can get 'em; but on second thoughts I doubt if such an expedition can be mustered nearer than Zanzibar."

"We're not ashore anywhere yet," interrupted Fain; "and I heard Mr. Macabe say it was a question whether the passengers wouldn't be landed on Mafia Island. We're in the skipper's hands, and since day dawned he has disappeared again. His cabin door

is locked, and he says he is not to be disturbed for several hours. He will not even see Miss Ogilvie."

Food was served soon after midday, and immediately the meal had been disposed of a council of war met to decide what course to pursue.

Captain Ogilvie presided at this conference and Lord Winstone was invited to attend it; but declined to do so on the ground that his opinion upon such a question could possess no value. Moreover, he was entirely of one mind, and frankly admitted he could not approach the arguments for landing on Mafia without prejudice.

At three in the afternoon Captain Ogilvie and Mr. Crouch appeared from the smoking-room, and the news was made public that on the following day all passengers would be sent ashore and efforts made to save at least part of the freight. That craft of size large enough to take off the *Morning Star's* cargo might lie at Mafia was possible; and on the following day at dawn a boat's crew would pull to the island and ascertain. Two other boats were to leave the wreck at the same time, their course being shaped for the mainland; and with these the passengers were to travel, each would be permitted to take a fair share of their private property. Whether a landing might be effected was doubtful, but once off the coast the big whale-boats could lie outside the surf and their signals must be seen from Simbaranga.

Captain Ogilvie made this announcement himself,



and crew and passengers gave him a cheer as he did so; but all were impressed with the terrible expression on his face as he ranged his eyes over his men, and then departed.

The loss of his ship had doubtless caused this strange and haggard change in him, so the crew supposed; but some of the passengers knew better, and Mr. Messenger prayed on his knees in secret through many hours that the unfortunate Scotchman had passed the crisis of his tribulation and might yet save his soul and his body alive.

The night closed down without any interval of twilight, and flares were rigged fore and aft to facilitate the nocturnal work. Three boats were made ready, one for the island, to be manned by Mr. Crouch and a crew of four men; the others, which were considerably larger and carried big sails, for the passengers. Of these, the second officer was to command one, Dan Hook the other.

Captain Ogilvie, Mr. Macabe, and the bulk of the crew would remain with the ship and transfer cargo to the shore; and as it was impossible to get steam for the donkey engines to work the cranes, windlasses were rigged to bring up on deck that portion of the freight which was not already under water.

There was no danger for those who remained by the *Morning Star*, as in the event of a return of bad weather the men aboard could easily reach the shore of the low islet on which they had been cast.

To this, indeed, a boat had already put off, and after an examination, the crew of her reported an easy landing, and the presence of some caves in the low cliffs above high-water mark, where goods from the ship might be safely housed for the present.

Never in the memory of any on board had a big vessel been wrecked under more fortunate conditions. As Hook said:

"Us had got to come to it, 'cordin' to the dark ways o' the Lord; but if skipper had chose this very identical spot to run her aground, he couldn't have pitched on a better where sea meets land; an' if you ax me, I sez we'm damn well out of it, beggin' pardon for the fiery word."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### SIGNOR POLTI'S PORTMANTEAU.

Daylight found the preparations far advanced, and when it became a question of what each passenger should take ashore, both Lord Winstone and Roy Meldrum, after packing necessities, decided for their batteries of guns, while Tracy Fain, who was no sportsman, took for his portion several cases of beads and knives, looking-glasses, and bright trinkets, to be used as gifts in their progress across the countries of the various savage potentates. No great anxiety accompanied these decisions, as it was assumed that another visit would certainly be paid the *Morning Star* before the explorers finally set forth to the interior.

The boat for Mafia Island had already started before the passengers came to breakfast, and as soon as possible after that meal was finished, Captain Ogilvie bade Dan Hook pipe the crews of the two whale boats destined to convey his passengers to the shore.

Soon both floated alongside, and while the passengers' luggage was being stored and all necessary tackle shipped, the skipper sent along a message to Lord Winstone desiring his company. The sportsman instantly complied, and was soon hidden in the captain's cabin.

Alister Ogilvie looked a trifle stronger than he had done for many days, and though weak and thin, a very obvious change for the better appeared in his manner. His eyes were less wild, his gestures and speech more calm and dignified.

"Lord Winstone," he said, "before you leave the ship I have something to say to you. I need not, however, dwell much upon the past. It forms a nightmare horror, and if I live to be an old man the incidents of this voyage can never fade. To have suffered what I have suffered and survived it appears to me a marvellous circumstance, but the bitterest struggle is over, and, please God, I shall never fall again, having once escaped."

"I am more thankful than I can say," answered his lordship. "My treatment was rough and ready, but there was no other way."

"I wish it was in my power to atone for my brutality to you or express the extent of my gratitude," answered the other. "But I can do neither; I can only implore you to forgive a man who was raving mad when he fell on you; and to believe that I shall bless your name as long as I live."

"Think no more of it, my dear fellow. You would have done just as much for me had the positions been reversed. At any rate it is an ill wind that blows good to nobody; and if this bad business has resulted in an escape for you from the opium demon

—well, I for one cannot wholly regret it. Better to lose your ship than your soul.”

“You believe that we have souls to save?”

“As sure as I believe in God; and I believe that though your ship’s a wreck, your soul will soon be in deep water again. Forget the past and look forward cheerfully to a life of health and honour and happiness—a life worthy of a man.”

They shook hands heartily and Lord Winstone spoke.

“We shall meet to-morrow,” he said, “for I design to come back to the ship, if all is well. There are several things I cannot take with me now, but would wish to have them before our expedition starts. Indeed, if all is well ashore and the officers of the boats decide to come back to the ship to-night, I shall probably return with them, supposing they make no objection.”

So the interview ended, and Lord Winstone left the captain’s cabin, little dreaming that he had seen his last of Alister Ogilvie.

Soon the boats were loaded and manned, and a hearty cheer greeted the departure of the first under the command of the second officer. With him he took four men, while the passengers who accompanied him were Miss Ogilvie, Tracy Fain, Lord Winstone and Mr. Messenger.

Elizabeth had wished to stop with her uncle, but she yielded to his desire and the entreaty of Roy.

It was proposed that she should remain at Simbaranga until everything possible had been saved from the wreck, and then return with Captain Ogilvie and his crew to Zanzibar, from which port it would be possible to get a vessel bound for Europe.

In the other boat were to sail General Podesta and his wife, Roy Meldrum and Signor Polti. The first officer, with four men, had gone in the little vessel already despatched to Mafia, and Dan Hook was therefore appointed skipper of the second boat for the mainland.

The awful incident that followed could only be dimly realised by those who beheld it. The first boat had pushed off, proceeded cautiously clear of the rocks and was now waiting rather less than a quarter of a mile distant for her companion. Time passed and still the second boat did not come. An awning was rigged to keep the terrific vertical sunshine from Bessie's head, and Lord Winstone grumbled an echo to the growling comments of the sailors, for the day grew each moment more fiery hot, the wind was insufficient to fill the boat's sail, and the prospect of a thirty-five miles' pull in a heavy and deeply-laden craft became less and less pleasant to men already weary with a night of work.

"I'll give 'em five minutes more to follow," said the second officer, as he turned in the stern sheets, and tried to get a sight of the dawdling craft behind

him. "Now they're coming, I believe," he added. "They're clear of the ship anyway."

Meantime those in the second boat were quite as impatient of delay as their leaders, and the more so that one man only was responsible for it.

After being told the extent of the luggage that he might take as his share, Signor Polti had disappeared to his cabin and only once reappeared therefrom to drink a cup of coffee at the hour of breakfast. Now they still waited for him, and Roy shouted and Dan Hook made impolite asides.

"Stupid idiot," said Meldrum. "Why the deuce should everybody be delayed like this? And the other boat out there roasting, and Miss Ogilvie——"

"Ah! Now we see why this great indignation!" laughed Madame Podesta, and her little wrinkled face became as full of lines and cross lines as a ripe melon. "But as for our Signor Polti, though he is a man of mystery and was very, very frightened when the great waves came, he has a tongue of honey, Monsieur Meldrum, and the manner of an aristocrat. Far more than the Lord Winstone. Is it not so? Dar as diabo a sua parte. We must give even Monsieur the Prince of the Great Warm Place his due."

At this moment Polti, attired in a grey suit and big grey hat of light felt, appeared at the top of the ladder.

"I come this instant," he said. "You sadly fluster me, Monsieur Meldrum, with your huge shoutings;

and Capitaine Ogilvie, he sadly fluster me also. One little portmanteau is all else. I get him this instant. Take this for me. Then I fetch my little portmanteau quicker than lightning."

So saying he dropped a small packet into the boat; and Meldrum caught it and put it in his pocket until the owner should arrive. Polti again vanished to his cabin and there began a further delay.

At this moment, thirty yards from the ship's side, a big turtle appeared swimming leisurely with not a little of its shell gleaming brilliantly above the water. The incident distracted those on the boat for a moment, and they paddled in the direction of the reptile, while Hook instantly began to relate picturesque yarns concerning turtles in general, and his own experiences with them in particular.

Captain Ogilvie, however, did not share this distraction. Polti's continued delay angered him. It was already long past nine o'clock, and according to his original plan the boats, ere this, should have been ten miles on their way. Now he used some sailor's language, and, hurrying to the top of the companion, shouted a few sharp words down it.

"If you're not in the boat in half a minute, Signor Polti, it goes without you. Now, one—two—three—four——"

"Stay—stay—arrest the boat! I come, but I must be slow—I——"

He appeared at the bottom of the ladder, forgot



the list of the ship, slipped when half way up, and uttered a shrill scream of terror as the big leather case he carried dropped from his hand and fell fifteen feet to the deck below.

It was at this moment that the second officer in the distant boat had uttered the last remark recorded; and now a horrified cry escaped his lips and every ear was hurt by the sound of a terrific explosion.

The note was sharp and clear. It fell like a knife on the ear, like a heavy blow against the heart. For a moment they sat dazed and stunned; then, gasping and with faces grown pale, they looked in the direction of the *Morning Star*.

The ship had vanished, and in her place a tremendous column of yellow smoke ascended into the blue sky, then billowed hugely out, as a cloud billows to meet a water-spout. A hell of stinking vapour had suddenly burst from the *Morning Star*, and now, after ghastly moments of silence, came the thundering smash of heavy objects falling into the water.

A chaos of tumbling waves, battered and lashed to foam by falling timber and iron, now spread where the great mass of the ship had laid. The catastrophe had blown her afterpart to pieces, hurling huge masses aloft; while the stem, now completely separated from the rest, had gone down entire, and a great whirlpool hissed and yawned above it.

The watchers saw more than this, for their sister boat, though happily out of reach of the original

explosion, being well clear of the ship at the time, was now struck and sunk by a heavy spar dropping into it from aloft.

The sulphurous clouds rose and hung like a pall over the scene of death and ruin; screams and groans came clearly to the awe-stricken spectators; and the sea, as it grew smoother, was covered with black specks and streaks of bloody foam, little lakes of oil, fragments of the thousand things that had filled the ship, barrels, patches, and shreds of canvas, shattered timbers, a torn red ensign gaudy cotton goods floating in ribbons, fragments of books and papers the dust of cinders, the stain of coal, dead fish, awful fragments of the flesh of the dead, and living men, fighting their last battle and losing it.

Sea-birds shrieked over the desolate scene and the sunshine filled the smoke with a dazzle of light as each billow of it expanded and thinned and rose higher and higher above the theatre of the tragedy.

Even within fifty yards of those who mercifully escaped, heavy masses of wood and iron, hurled from the wreck, had fallen; but now the startled and heaving sea grew calm again, save where it was splashed and spattered by struggling life, and the boat, driven by stout arms and bending oars, came racing back to save any who had not already passed beyond salvation.

The awful tension of those endless moments which passed before their boat could return chiefly tried

those among the rescuers who were inactive, for the men at the oars had no time to think.

But to one beyond all the rest this event appealed with crushing and distracting significance, and into the mind of Elizabeth Ogilvie fell such a night of horror-stricken grief as happily descends upon the life of few women.

In a moment all that was dearest to her in the world had been swept away. Roy indeed might still live if he had escaped the descending spar, but in that sea of sharks the chances were against the escape of any one who had occupied the sunken boat; while as for those on the steamer, it was mere hope run mad to believe a single soul could have survived the explosion.

Bessie uttered no sound, gave no sign of her agony; but she kept her straining eyes on the sea, while Fain and Lord Winstone watched her closely, fearful that she might lose her self-control.

At last the boat reached the scene of the catastrophe and passed hastily to where evidences appeared of life. Three men had swum to the rocks and the first sound in Bessie's ears was her sweetheart's voice crying to them that he was safe and unharmed.

Roy had already effected one rescue, and a small cabin-boy, who was right forward at the time of the explosion and escaped by a miracle, had been dragged into safety as he rose half strangled to the surface.

Three men (two firemen and a ship's steward) were

happily ashore taking cargo on to the island beach at the time of the explosion, and three others, including Dan Hook, were now dragged into the boat, one at his last gasp and unconscious. But these represented the sole survivors, and a terribly heavy death-roll remained.

Captain Ogilvie, Mr. Macabe, his junior officer in the engine-room, General Podesta, his little wife, and Signor Polti were all destroyed, together with not less than twenty men.

Thus, out of a total of forty-eight souls, less than half were still alive and twenty-six had perished. Of the former, one rescued sailor never recovered consciousness; Dan Hook had received a heavy flesh wound in his leg; and the other men were suffering in a less degree.

There was nothing to be done for the rest, as most of those upon the ship had been literally blown into their elements by the explosion, and the few in the second boat not accounted for were either drowned, destroyed by sharks, or slain by the falling spars.

The survivors landed and a brief, hushed conference took place. Then the boat was lightened, and a small party, under the second officer, set out for the mainland. Only sailors accompanied him, and it was hoped, as a light breeze had now sprung up, that they might make the coast before dark and return on the following day.

Happily, ample stores had already been taken off

the ship to the island, and now a fire was lighted and a meal prepared. Few had appetite for food, but the wounded suffered terribly from thirst. To these Lord Winstone and Tracy Fain ministered as best they could, spreading for them in the little caves along the shore some of the bales of cloth already taken out of the *Morning Star*, and thus giving them comfortable couches out of the sun's glare.

Meldrum was wholly occupied with Elizabeth, who now suffered severely from the after effects of the shock and the consciousness of her uncle's terrible death.

Roy, himself absolutely unhurt, tramped the hot sand and found to his great delight some turtles' eggs. Of these he made a sort of dismal mess in a tin pan and patiently cooked it under the impression he was preparing an omelet for Bessie.

Not until the evening, when the girl was peacefully sleeping in a little cavern high and dry above the sea, did Meldrum, Winstone and Tracy Fain meet together and discuss the past and future.

"The guns are all right," said his lordship, "and nothing else matters."

Conscious from Roy's stare that this remark sounded unutterably cynical to other ears, he proceeded:

"I mean nothing else matters to us now. God is aware how bitterly I deplore the awful loss of life, and He knows that I would have gladly given myself if any one of these poor fellows could have lived; but

the reason of Providence's acts is hidden from man. We are permitted to remain, while others, as good and better, are snatched to their last account. Now we must look forward. And, as I said, the guns are left."

"How did it happen?" asked Fain. "You were nearer than we were, Roy. Can you add anything to what we know?"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE EXPEDITION IS FITTED OUT.

Thus questioned, Meldrum slowly passed the incidents of the morning in review, and then remembered that before the final catastrophe Polti had thrown down a packet into the boat.

"I have it yet," he said, "but I had utterly forgotten it until this moment."

He brought out the heavy pocket-book and the three men fell to carefully studying its contents.

The incident of the Anarchist Plot is, however, closed in so far as this narrative is concerned; indeed, it only excited a passing frown on the world's wide face when the facts came to be reported to civilisation; but his death happily rid Europe of one or two greater rascals than himself; for the secrets of the Brotherhood of the Red Knife—an Italian organisation whose headquarters were in London—proved to be set out at extreme length in Polti's bulky pocket-book, and when the memoranda reached Scotland Yard, the scoundrel's accomplices, innocent of any knowledge that the long arm of the law was stretching towards them were easily captured.

Fain, who knew a little Italian, made out that Polti had once been an assistant in the laboratory in the Scientific Institution of Bologna, had joined the broth-

erhood, and had been drawn by lot to carry out their policy in Africa. Others, whose names were given, had similarly been selected to destroy prominent personages elsewhere; but against whom Polti designed to use the infernal machines of his construction did not appear until several leaders of his party were arrested and made confession.

Then it transpired that Polti's mission was to destroy the Sultan of Zanzibar—an example of the aimless and fatuous policy usually adopted by Anarchists who, when they do pluck courage to strike, usually destroy the least powerful or most amiable of princes.

After dark the boat from Mafia Island returned, and those aboard of her were horrified at the terrible fate which had overtaken their companions. They themselves brought the news that a little trading schooner was leaving Mafia for Zanzibar two days later, and that she could accommodate half a dozen persons with their luggage for that journey.

Mr. Crouch, who was now in command, declared his intention of returning to Mafia Island in a few days, when those at present in ill health had recovered; and after the whale-boat returned at dawn to report tremendous surf off the mainland and no possibility of making shore in their craft, the first officer was all the more fixed in his determination.

Early next day, therefore, the remaining passengers put off once more for the island ten miles distant, and with them came Dan Hook, whose wound was appa-



rently healing by first intent. He had accepted Meldrum's offer to accompany the expedition, and Roy was well satisfied, for Dan promised to be a useful man with niggers. He was, moreover, passing honest, and apparently feared nothing.

The short journey to Mafia Island was soon completed, and the longer one to Zanzibar occupied a week in a fast little sailing ship and proved wholly uneventful.

As for the remainder of the crew, with the first and second officers of the *Morning Star*, it may here be said at once that they, too, reached Zanzibar from Mafia a fortnight later, and conveyed to that port the cargo saved from the *Morning Star* before she was blown up. Subsequently all returned to England, being conveyed as distressed British seamen in a British steamer.

Once at Zanzibar, Meldrum found much to do before he could depart into the interior, and his modest ideas were quickly shown to be too small for the task and its dangers.

Permission to take a hunting-party to Lake Mweru was granted by the German representative at Zanzibar, but he urged the employment of a considerable number of Zanzibari or Wamyamwezi porters, together with a dozen at least of well-armed fighting men; and he assured the leaders of the expedition that the greater the number they took with them in reason, the smaller would be the fear of savage attack.

Seeing the expedition was one of peace, Lord Winstone did not entirely agree with the German, and it was finally settled that fifty porters and a small party of ten or a dozen Soudanese under arms would be sufficient.

Lord Winstone, who was himself familiar with Swahili, the vernacular of Zanzibar, chose a couple of head men for his troop and bade each collect five-and-twenty experienced followers. He then made other purchases, including three pack donkeys and a riding ass; two tents, dipped in sulphate of copper to preserve them from rotting, a chest of various drugs and three huge bottles of quinine. Cloth he also purchased in large quantities, with fifty pounds of brilliant beads and a mile or so of bright brass wire—an enormously popular commodity with the savages. Lastly he had the good fortune to meet a former servant—one Blackbird, a full-blooded Ethiopian, who had served him faithfully in a former expedition. The man was free and joyfully joined his old master.

No mention of the treasure of precious stones they went to seek had been made at Zanzibar. Indeed, Lord Winstone frankly declared that the expedition must be regarded as one of sport and adventure, for heads of heavy game and African curiosities were, in his opinion, the only likely returns from the trip. He was not, of course, aware that Roy Meldrum's finances had now become much diminished, and when

the porters demanded two months' pay in advance before the company set forth, Roy signed the draft somewhat gloomily, for he knew nothing of the value of money, though he now began to discover that, before African travel, thousands vanish away like a shower of rain on thirsty ground. But hope was in his blood, a part of himself, and on the day the little cavalcade of seventy-five souls turned their faces towards the unknown, no man of the party was in better or more sanguine spirits than their chief.

Roy much desired Winstone to assume the command, but his lordship declined to do any such thing. He pointed out that Meldrum by all right must lead, that he was a far more picturesque and commanding figure than any in the column, and that, for the rest, his (Lord Winstone's) knowledge of the country and the people was always at his friend's disposal to draw upon. As a matter of fact, however, with the exception of a few Zanzibari carriers who knew the earlier stages of their journey, the ground was strange to all members of the expedition from the coast. Lord Winstone knew the Cape, the Transvaal, and Rhodesia well; Somali, Uganda, and the Congo were also not unfamiliar to him; but he broke new ground in German Africa.

On the eve of departure his Lordship defined the position and the nature of the expedition before them.

"Speaking roughly, it is seven hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies from this place, Saadahi, to the

southern shore of Lake Mweru, where we shall hit the River Luapula. The country to be traversed is very diversified, and we shall make most unequal progress, sometimes doing our five and even six miles a day on the plains, more often putting in three to three and a half miles. We will add to the seven hundred and fifty miles of total distance another two hundred, which is fairly liberal, and we get nine hundred and fifty miles. Add fifty more for the distance down the Luapula to the Wambasi tributary, which leads into Batonca country, and we get a thousand miles. Assume a progress of three miles a day, and we have about three hundred and thirty-three days to complete the outward journey. That, as a matter of fact, is pretty much what we shall do, if things go reasonably right, though, of course at times, we shall push along a good deal faster. I will venture to prophesy that, if Fate is kind, we shall get to the Batoncas early in December, that the total trip takes rather more than a year and a half; and that we are home again inside two years."

Meldrum gasped.

"Good heavens, Fred, you don't mean that?"

"Is it possible, my dear fellow, you made no calculation before you started?"

"Rather so; any amount; but they were jolly different ones."

"Based on your own powers of walking along a

turnpike road plentifully dotted with places of refreshment—eh?”

“Not exactly, but I certainly reckoned on ten to twelve miles a day.”

“Wait till you see the country—the forests and the rivers. Besides, remember we must eat, and to kill game for a big party means a long halt and a rest and the hunters well away from the main camp. A mob of marching men cannot be expected to get very near game. As to the aborigines, I’m not familiar with them in these districts, but we shall find every sort, be sure; some friendly and some the reverse. It all takes time, and permission to go through a chief’s country often requires a great deal of diplomacy to secure.”

“Then the sooner we’re on the march the better,” declared Roy.

“That’s so. As for organisation, you hadn’t thought of that; but we must have a sort of military system, for it’s the only thing a Zanzibari understands. You’re the commanding officer, and I’m your first lieutenant, and will go ahead with my nigger hunter, Blackbird, and the little regiment of Soudanese fighting men. Then Fain, with the Arab, Omar Laluzi, must lead one body of the Zanzibaris, and Dan Hook, with Raalt, the other head man, who’s a rascal if I’m not mistaken, will head the other.”

“All right. I’ll tell Dan to watch the chap pretty closely.”

"Your grand difficulty with Zanzibaris is to get common sense into their asses' skulls. At first they're the biggest fools on earth, and quite oblivious to danger until it stares them in the face; and then they turn into the biggest cowards on earth, and will drop their guns and fall on their faces and let a naked savage cut their throats single-handed, as though they were sheep.

"Now, good-night; and one more hint: begin with short marches at first, no matter how tempting the way. Let the laden men grow accustomed to their loads and it will pay you in the long run. And, above all things, order Hook and your friend Fain to keep their tempers at all times and under all circumstances. It's difficult but absolutely essential. Have infinite patience with these poor fools, and don't punish them more than you can help.

"They're trying folks to deal with, and their idiocy has often endangered the safety of many greater and more important expeditions than this little sporting venture of ours; but tolerance and forbearance are the best and only weapons to fight them with. They always buy their experience in the dearest market, and when a few have come to grief and lost their lives, as always happens sooner or later, the others get a little sense."

Meldrum heartily thanked his friend for these varied and valuable hints; then retired, to sleep his last sleep on a comfortable bed for many a day.

The expedition was now fully equipped and on the mainland, at Saadani, and the following morning would see it set forth down the River Mukondogwa in five boats.

One startling incident has yet to be mentioned: Elizabeth Ogilvie begged to be allowed to accompany the party. Her pluck none doubted, but Meldrum loved his sweetheart too dearly to agree to such a petition.

Lord Winstone was of the same mind, while Fain, on the contrary, supported the girl's plea and saw no reason why one so intrepid, so courageous and so strong should not accompany them. He now affected a purely Platonic attachment to Bessie, and she, ever ready to credit all men with good motives, was glad to possess his friendship and thankful that the painful incident of the past had been buried and forgotten.

But no arguments, other than those advanced by Bessie herself, would have moved Roy. He dimly guessed at the terrible difficulties and dangers before them, and he hated the thought that the girl he loved better than anything in the world should be exposed to so much unnecessary misery; while Lord Winstone, who knew better than Meldrum the nature of their task, was also strongly opposed to the suggestion. Bessie had carried her way, however, and reminded Roy of many reasons why she should go.

"Mrs. Baker went with her husband to the Lakes," she said, "and there are many English ladies in the

very heart of Africa doing noble work. Am I not as plucky and hardy as they were? Indeed and indeed I can't leave you, Roy; you're everything I've got now. You musn't ask me to. Just think what my life would be while month after month passed by and I had never a word from you and lived in agonised doubt as to whether you were dead or alive. It's too frightful to imagine. I *must* come, and I'll be no trouble and do what I'm told and help with the cooking if I can—when there's anything to cook; and if you and Lord Winstone won't let me come with you, I shall go alone."

Argument was vain, and as a sign of defeat Meldrum finally bought a fine white riding ass for Bessie's especial benefit and a snug little double tent for her. An experienced German lady at Saadani assisted the girl to make a variety of necessary purchases, and a smart Kaffir boy of fifteen, to whom she took a fancy, was appointed her special servant.

Lord Winstone, finding Miss Ogilvie absolutely determined, advised Roy to marry her before the expedition started; but though the suggestion was pleasant enough, Meldrum refused to avail himself of it.

"I daren't, and that's a fact," he said. "You see, the upshot of this business is very uncertain, and if I don't find anything to pay me at the other end, between ourselves, Fred, I shan't have even a home to offer the girl when we come back to civilisation. Not, at any rate, immediately. I've got money enough to



see this business through, and that's about all; so I'll put off matrimony till I find where we are at the end. It's only fair to Bessie."

"Well, I hope things will be all right, but I should feel a good deal happier if she were not going," declared his lordship. "It's a fool's trick, if you'll forgive my saying so."

"But she *will* come. What can a chap do?"

"You're idiots, both of you. Such an event as a young woman going on a big game shooting expedition into Central Africa doesn't happen."

"But it's going to happen."

"Yes, I know. You're taking your diamond with you, and I'm afraid she'll badly handicap you in your search for the other precious stones. That's the truth of the matter."

"Perhaps she'll be the very one to find them! A woman's always got an eye for gems."

"It's no good arguing with you," answered his lordship. "I only hope you won't regret a foolish action when it is too late."

"Never, Fred. She'll be our mascot, God bless her!" declared the lover in a fine fervour of conviction.

## CHAPTER X.

### RHINOS.

It was the seventh day of January when the Meldrum Treasure Recovery Company, as Bessie called it, set forth by boat upon the wide waters of the Wami, afterwards called the Mukondogwa River. The porters and fighting-men were told their destination, but no more, and they regarded the expedition as one to be devoted to sport alone. Good progress was made at the outset and the last indications of civilisation speedily vanished behind the explorers as they pushed westwards upon their way.

For two weeks all went well enough and the little company settled down into a military regularity and smartness. The weather was fair; no danger threatened and the river in its lower reaches proved tolerably easy. But the last few stages were so difficult and slow that, on a certain day, near Furhani, in the Usagara country, Lord Winstone decided that the Mukondogwa was no longer navigable, and Meldrum called a halt for camp.

On the morrow the boats would return whence they had come, and for purposes of navigation the expedition would depend in future on chance canoes, either occupied without permission, or borrowed by arrangement with friendly natives. One hundred and twenty

miles had been accomplished in sixteen days on the river, giving a fair average of more than seven miles per day.

One man had died, through eating some poisonous berries, and two others lay sick from the same cause, but were expected to recover. Other serious illness there was none. As for food, it had been plentiful thus far, although the friendly natives from whom Indian corn, fowls, goats, and bananas were purchased knew the value of beads and brass wire as well as Lord Winstone himself.

One other painful incident, besides the death of the carrier, had occurred during the preliminary stages of the expedition. The advance guard were armed with Remingtons, and one of these men was caught in the act of selling his weapon to a chief of a small tribe for fifty heads of Indian corn. The awful danger of such a course could not be over-estimated, as the safety of the entire company might many times depend upon their defensive powers.

Winstone reluctantly advised hanging the robber, as a necessary lesson to the rest, and Fain agreed with him; but Meldrum pursued a more tender course. As yet his followers were untried, and his heart was not so hard as experience of the foolish Zanzibaris and shifty Soudanese presently promised to make it.

"He shall be flogged," said Roy.

It was explained to the sinner that only his master's mercy had saved his life, and he was then flogged by

his own head man, a lean and wiry Arab, who, with Dan Hook's eye upon him, did his work well. The warrior stood his punishment stolidly, but next morning it was reported that he had deserted; and with him went his Remington and half a box of ammunition—as much as he could carry.

This happened two days before they reached the last stage that the boats would make; and then came a morning when, rounding a bend in the river, a great shoeshoe-shaped fall, nearly forty feet high, barred further progress. Others only less tremendous had been successfully passed below; but after a survey of the ugly and rock-scattered rapids that spread above the M'posa Falls, Meldrum determined to carry the boats no further.

The spot was well suited to the making of the usual camp, and the leaders of the party decided upon a stay of a week, to put all in order, prepare the system of loads and lay in an extra stock of food against the unknown forests and prairies before them. The route was also to be carefully studied and planned and the tents and camp furniture overhauled. These things were done, and at the end of three days the boats set forth for home, their departure reducing the expedition by fifteen men.

The future route was mapped out, and ample stores collected from adjacent villages. Indeed, matters progressed so satisfactorily and speedily that Meldrum

changed his intention and declared an earlier start than that determined upon might be made.

Lord Winstone, with a couple of Zanzibaris and Dan Hook, had gone afield that morning, however, and on returning, his lordship reported the tracks of heavy game within two miles of camp. There a mass of mingled spoor had delighted the hunter, and at a drinking-hole upon the edge of mixed bush and prairie land, he had marked the tracks of eland, buffalo and rhinoceros.

"We have a clear day," he said, "and may as well put it into sport—eh? I haven't killed anything bigger than a guinea fowl yet. Is the 'boss' willing?"

Of course Meldrum immediately abandoned his new notion of pushing forward, and it was decided to spend one day with big game.

That night the two sportsmen made ready their batteries and each selected three men to accompany them as bearers. Fain and Dan Hook were to remain in camp, and Elizabeth, though desirous to join the shooting-party with a light shot gun that Roy had bought her at Zanzibar, was of course not permitted to do so.

In her neat dress of holland, with short skirt and long gaiters to the knee, Bessie, and her special servant, Bungani, a bright Kaffir lad, and Raalt, an Arab, the head man of the second Zanzibari detachment, had a little sport on her own account; but she ran no risks and never strayed far from the 'boma' or fence

of brushwood, which encircled the camp, having promised Roy not to lose sight of it.

Meantime, Tracy Fain, who was appointed chronicler of the expedition, spent a day on his diary; while the hunting-party, with provisions for a four-and-twenty hours' excursion, had already set out at daybreak.

They made their way to neighboring high land beneath which lay the water-hole and beyond which to the sky line extended fine hunting country of alternate bush and prairie. The former predominated around the water-hole, but beyond it, a bird's eye view of plains tree-dotted could be observed; and with his glass Lord Winstone made out a few buffalo and small antelope grazing peacefully in company not more than two miles distant. The wind necessitated a lengthy stalk, but taking their bearings carefully both men descended from the bluff, passed the water-hole upon their left hand and then, getting through the scrub belt below, which was chiefly composed of prickly acacia, separated until half a mile parted them.

Each had his bearers behind him, and so began their stalk. For an hour they pursued a snake-like way within sight of each other, then a high bed of reeds came between them, and beyond it the prospect was altogether hidden.

Roy had now to pursue his way by compass through a bed of sere grass three feet high. This proved difficult and painful, for the stuff was harsh and tough

and cut the big man's face and hands as he pushed steadily forward, making for a point where a tree stood.

Unknown to Roy a little clearing here existed; the grass grew green and lush and a streamlet wound sluggishly through narrow channels of red mud. As he struggled out upon the bank of it, a cry of birds rang in his ears, and he found that immediately ahead of him stood the tree he had striven to reach.

Dimly through the grass at its foot heaved up a round mass of some darkish substance, and Roy, believing it a sort of ant-heap different in kind to any he had seen as yet, was about to investigate when aroused by the shrill hissing and din of the birds, the mass moved, turned, and lifted an enormous head on which two lofty horns appeared.

Meldrum had surprised a rhinoceros—a big cow, as the length and thinness of her front horn testified; and now the awakened monster, with a grunt like a huge pig, slowly rose to its feet, sniffed the air, then fixed small eyes on the disturber of its siesta. Only thirty yards separated man and beast, and it was difficult to say at that critical moment which showed greatest surprise.

Instinctively, though never before that moment in the presence of big game, the Englishman dropped his .577 Express and stretched his arm behind him for his heavy 4 bore, which should have been in a Zanzibari's hands within a yard or two; but his ras-

cals, appalled by their sudden and unexpected meeting with the rhino, had fled like one man, each leaving his load where he turned.

Meldrum fell back, keeping his eye on the rhinoceros. Then his foot struck the 4-bore, and as he bent to pick it up, the great animal before him suddenly became intent on an attack. With an angry snort it charged straight and swift its head down, its lean tail in the air.

The sportsman had barely time to get his gun to his shoulder and discharge it at a range of fifteen yards. Luckily for Roy the shot saved his life, though not by destroying his foe. He had never fired the 4-bore until that moment, and now, holding it as lightly as a shot-gun, the terrific recoil nearly broke his collar-bone and hurled him headlong backwards to the ground.

A rhinoceros always charges the smoke of a gun discharged against it, and as the sportsman fell backwards, a dark body thundered over the spot where he had stood and the huge foot of the beast crashed down within three inches of Meldrum's thigh. At the same instant, he twisted away and thus escaped the hinder leg a second later.

Luckily the rhinoceros had not trodden upon his gun in its charge. It proceeded straight ahead, with gathering velocity, and as Meldrum rose, a scream behind him announced that one of his flying bearers had been overtaken.



The smoke cleared; the rhinoceros pursued its onward flight and speedily disappeared, while the two Zanzibaris who had escaped returned, one from an acacia up which he had climbed oblivious of its awful thorns, the other from the bush.

But Achmet, the poor wretch who had been running madly forward in the track of the rhinoceros, was smashed as by the blow of an express train. The brute's greater horn had gone through his back and then lifting its head, she had tossed him ten yards behind her. The man's body was mangled to a jelly and his neck broken in his fall.

The discharge of the big gun had of course frightened the game which Roy and his friend were stalking; it had also summoned Lord Winstone, who quickly appeared to help if possible, being pretty sure that Meldrum must have come suddenly upon something more inviting or more pressing than the buffalo.

He heard the story, assisted to remove from the dead man's corpse his accoutrements, then directed the awestricken bearers to bury their comrade, and read them a sermon of obedience and courage as they did so.

"Never forget this lesson," he said. "Remember the reward of him who flies from his master in the hour of need. Do your duty and all will be well; fail in it and death will reward you—death at the hand of our enemies or in the jaws of fierce beasts."

This sudden destruction of their servant naturally

changed the plans of the party. Three of the remaining bearers were quite unnerved by the sudden death of their companion, and clearly would be of little further use; while even had that not been the case, Meldrum might have hesitated to pursue sport after this unfortunate event. He himself was uninjured save for a tremendous bruise on his right shoulder.

They returned slowly towards camp, and Winstone, carrying his own heavy rifle, followed the track of the galloping rhinoceros until it reached high reed that rose to a tall man's shoulder. The entrance of the beast was marked by a wide downtreading of this growth, but no drop of blood or other evidence that Meldrum's shot had struck her appeared.

"End on, the horn of a rhino shields his brain," explained the elder sportsman. "Now we'll climb the bluff again and see what that reed patch looks like from above. With luck we may have her yet."

They passed the water-hole and then began to climb the steep ground beyond it. Raised a couple of hundred feet, his lordship swept the ground below and satisfied himself that the spot in which the foe was now concealed extended for some fifty yards in one direction and a hundred in the other. It was surrounded by open ground and no forest or other obstacle approached within a quarter of a mile of it. Lord Winstone shut up his glass with a snap.

"The brute's there and to be bagged," he said. "You've had enough for one day, Roy, so call a halt

and look on, and I'll take Yosef down with me and stir her up. The other men are all showing the white feather. They're only born to be beasts of burden; but they'll get braver presently."

"If you go, I go," answered Meldrum. "I'm all right and I owe the beggar one surely."

"With two guns she should be a certainty. Either you hurt her, in which case she'll be on the look-out and dangerous; or else you missed her, in which case her burst of temper at being waked is over and she's very likely to be going to sleep again. We'll give her half-an-hour, then start and revenge the poor devil she smashed. Look through my glass and tell me if you see any buphaga birds clustering over one place."

"Yes," said Meldrum, after a careful inspection. "The birds are there; and what's more," he added, "I believe I can see the beast itself lying down."

He pointed to the spot, but his friend would not commit himself to a definite declaration. Together with the native Yosef, and Blackbird, a practised hunter, they set out, each carrying his heaviest gun, while the servant held their 8-bores, and the Expresses were left behind on the bluff. In twenty minutes they had reached the reed clump and begun their search. Then, guided by the fluttering of birds, they proceeded inch by inch until a well-worn and miry wallow in the heart of the brake showed evidences of regular occupation.

"With luck we may find more than one," whispered Lord Winstone. "But it's your first shot, so come along. If the birds only keep quiet you'll find her as easy to kill as a milch cow."

In ten minutes, the grey bulk of the rhinoceros was distinctly visible through the grass. Two birds were busy picking the ticks off her; the rest had fluttered some distance away.

"She'll run up wind," whispered Winstone, "so you stand here and give her the shoulder shot as soon as she's on her legs. I'll go along a little; you could almost walk up to the brute now and kick her, while she sleeps the sleep of the just! Tell Yosef to shout and fling a stone at her when I wave my hat. That'll wake her up."

A few moments later loud shouts disturbed the silence from where Yosef stood by a little mimosa on rising ground, and rhino bicornis arose in her wrath. Her forehead was spattered with gore and her horns were still red with the life-blood of unhappy Achmet.

As Winstone had predicted, the beast prepared to go off up wind and presented a fair shoulder shot to Roy. The heavy rifle crashed out and rhino, with a smashed shoulder-blade and 4 ounces of lead in her heart fell, to rise no more.

The delighted hunter pushed forward and was just approaching his fallen prey when a second shot echoed close at hand and the thundering charge of another

rhinoceros made the ground shake. It came galloping on, bleeding from the mouth, and ran straight into its fallen companion, then recovered itself and whirled round and round helplessly, after the manner of these beasts when shot through the lungs.

It did not see Meldrum who was within five yards of it upon the other side of the dead rhinoceros, but suddenly marking Blackbird, who stood not fifty yards off, it put its head down, its tail up, and charged him, while blood spouted upwards through its nostrils.

Yosef fired and fled; while the Negro hunter also fired twice, missed with his first bullet, which screamed dangerously close to Roy, but staggered the enemy with a second shot, and then, showing wonderful agility and nerve, swung himself into the fork of the young mimosa tree behind him and prepared to mark the direction of the wounded beast when it regained the reeds.

He reckoned without his host, however, for his coign of vantage lay exactly in the road of the rhinoceros, and a moment later, with head down and quite oblivious as to where he was going, the great creature had struck Blackbird's mimosa fairly and squarely and swept the slight tree before it like a straw. It snapped off two feet from the ground and the huntsman aloft came down on hands and knees upon the back of the rhinoceros.

This was probably about the best place he could have fallen upon, as, in another moment, he tumbled

to earth clear of the creature and out of reach of molestation.

But rhino's days were done, his last mimosa leaf eaten, his last rollic in the red mud ended. After the collision with the tree, he slowed down, then staggered on to his knees, still blowing blood, and finally rolled over upon his side and kicked away his life in a few mighty gasps and struggles.

Lord Winstone arrived well pleased, for the creature proved a fine bull, half as large again as the cow which Meldrum had slain. His front horn was twenty-eight inches, his second horn but three inches shorter.

It transpired that the hunter, all eyes for his friend and ready to help Roy in a moment if necessary, had nearly walked on top of the second beast, shot it in the shoulder at a range of ten yards, then leapt aside as rhino charged the smoke, and shouted to his companions, in time to warn them of the oncoming danger.

Now they returned to the bluff from which their other bearers had witnessed the scene below and, later on, having regained camp, sent half a dozen men with Yosef for the horns of the dead monsters.

To carry them forward was out of the question, but the trophies were buried two feet under ground, at the camp, in hope that did the expedition return by the same route, it might be possible to recover them in the future.

That night, while Bessie lay asleep under her snug tent and the wood fires glimmered in the camp, Roy sat and smoked and listened to Winstone, while the Zanzibaris, save the watchmen on duty, slept and snored under the stars.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE ELEPHANT SPIRIT.

The Rubeho Mountains lay as a mist on the Southwestern horizon as Roy Meldrum's expedition set forth upon its first foot-march at dawn on the following day. The road proceeded not far from the slaughtered rhinoceros, and as the column passed within two hundred yards of them, a few started to see the sight, while a halt was called. Among these were Bessie and Tracy Fain, but they quickly returned to report that the dead monsters had attracted other attention than that of vultures and hyaenas. They had been systematically cut up and their hides were removed, doubtless for making of shields and utensils by the fortunate native finders.

"We are now in a land where doubt begins to arise as to the nature and disposition of the aborigines," said Lord Winstone. "Fifteen miles or so of open country lie ahead, and then we come to the forest. All's well until we get there; but once in it, danger hides behind every tree, and the man who falls out or strays to right or left is as good as dead."

The sullen green fringe of woods was reached in two days, and his lordship, at Meldrum's request, solemnly addressed the column, urged every member of it to take no risk, assured all of the awful danger



and almost certain death that awaited the wanderer, and pointed out how disobedience would most surely be followed by a terrible punishment.

"It is not from the anger of your leaders that you will suffer, but by the heavy hand of Allah," he concluded. "Here any error, any act of folly, must be instantly punished by Nature and the savage gods of these wild places. Obey, and all shall be well with us; disobey and the hyenas will gnaw your bones; poison will rot you; Death will make his daily feast of you."

With this grave caution the expedition set forth, and in half an hour, led by Meldrum, the pioneers were hard at it, cutting, chopping and tearing a way through the tropic vegetation. Roy himself laboured at this heavy task until urged to desist. The more methodical Zanzibaris, though possessed of half his strength, yet made better progress and, foot by foot, the expedition wormed itself into the gloom of the woods.

Under their luxuriance no sun could penetrate. Aloft, indeed, sun-glints like stars twinkled in the dense foliage, but it was only on rare occasions that the bewildering, seething, fighting armies of trees and creepers, hosts and parasites, thinned out and gave the sweeter air and purer light any opportunity to penetrate.

At such places, where some tree that was young at the Conquest had fallen in its old age to the

lightning and tempest, and now lay extended, a bleached giant whose rotten wood fed a million ants and crawling centipedes,—at such spots a mist of golden sunlight indeed winnowed through the woods, and aloft small apes leapt and chattered, and parrots screamed and flaunted their gaudy colours as they climbed among the scarlet berries of the phrynias and hunted for nuts and fruits. But glimpses of such a sort were rare, and progress proved slow indeed—a belt of forest, some fifty miles across, occupying fifteen days in transit.

On the third day, dead to the warnings poured out for their benefit, two Zanzibaris, Salem and Ferez, weary of the rations of rice, plantain and plantain flour, fell out and went foraging for mushrooms and wood beans to vary the monotony of their food.

When camp was pitched, both men were missing, and not until the following day did one crawl into the protected circle of the encampment. Ferez had been slain and fallen to a dozen simultaneous spears; Salem had escaped with life, but was severely wounded in the thigh and arm.

He described the natives as of dark colour and great stature. See them he could not until they were almost upon him, for they pressed their bodies on the ground like snakes and hid themselves with extraordinary cunning in shadows or at the roots of trees.

Often in his struggle to get back to camp he had passed near a savage and believed the man a stock

or stone until a sudden movement and the scream of a spear had convinced him of his error.

Salem had slain two savages, and his life was saved by the fact that he had never allowed his rifle out of his hand; but he explained that the other unfortunate, weary of the weight of it, actually set his weapon against a tree stem and wandered unarmed, until death suddenly overtook him.

Five days after the entry into the forest, Roy's expedition came upon a native village in a clearing. The savages had fled, to a man, long before Meldrum and his party arrived; but a woman, lurking in a plaitain grove, was captured and brought before the explorers.

Lord Winstone could not make her understand Swahili, but the Arab, Raalt, whose private slave-dealing adventures had acquainted him with divers dialects, found out the woman was a Mapora, that the main stronghold of the tribe lay right ahead, far beyond the forest, and that her people were very strong and would certainly show fight.

"They know the fire-medicine and do not fear it," said the woman. "They will answer your guns with ten thousand spears, for they fight to the death against those who would take their children into slavery."

Meldrum tried hard to explain that his party had nothing to do with the slave-raiders and was merely a peaceful hunting expedition; but the woman evidently disbelieved him. Finally, however, she consented to

proceed to her friends who lay hidden two miles off in the forest. A necklace of large glass beads was given her; and a present, which she promised should be conveyed to the monarch of the Mapora, whose headquarters were twenty days' march from the village in the wood, was also entrusted to her. She was promised further handsome gifts if her king, Kanatto, should prove friendly.

The woman departed and, at any rate so far as her own little community was concerned, the gifts did good, for soon the savages came flocking back fearlessly, helped the Zanzibaris to cut plantains and showed great friendship.

Their head-man—a grandson of Kanatto's—assured Meldrum that his grandfather, once convinced that the column had nothing to do with the cursed Arab slave-traders, would welcome it gladly in so far as his own territory and nation were concerned. Then Meldrum received welcome gifts in the shape of two goats and a fowl. Bessie had the latter; it made three meals for her and was an invaluable change.

At the Mapora village a halt of two days was called and plantains sufficient for ten days' provision per man secured at reasonable cost of beads and wire. Such a store, with an occasional dip into the reserve stores of tinned meats and milk for the white men, would enable the expedition to reach the headquarters of Kanatto, supposing that monarch returned a favourable answer to their petition.

During the brief halt at this spot, the natives made great mystery about a forest god, known as the Elephant Spirit, who had his home a few miles distant, near a deserted village. The spirit, which was very powerful, had been seen by hundreds of adventurous Mapora and appeared well known to the whole tribe, though whether a good or evil demon none could tell.

It appeared in shape like a man, but of huge stature, and while some natives maintained that it sat motionless and made no sign, others declared that they had seen it signal them to depart from its presence, and others, again, solemnly swore that the monster had leapt towards them and chased them from the forest with unearthly cries. The Elephant Spirit was said to be green in colour and of forbidding aspect. It dwelt where the elephants were most wont to congregate and was supposed to be their guardian and protector. No Mapora would have dreamed of attempting to slay any elephant within a considerable distance of the green monster's domain.

These things were explained to Winstone and Meldrum, and while listening with all respect to the narrative as told by Kanatto's grandson, they yet permitted themselves some doubt in the privacy of their own tent after the chieftain retired.

"I had suspected a big ape," said his lordship, "but for the fact that no such thing is recorded hereabout. Chimpanzees have been known to grow to an awful

size, and gorillas are of course still larger; but the last named monster is a West Coast customer, and though chimpanzees are reported pretty far East, yet none have ever been heard of to my knowledge near this district. If they are here, my zoology is all wrong."

"Besides, the brute is green."

"That's nothing. These people are vagueness itself about colours. Some nigger once vowed the thing, whatever it may be, was green; then all the rest stuck to it for ever afterwards. The legend appears to me too widespread to be wholly false. Nine-tenths of their talk is lies; but there's some more or less interesting foundation in fact for most of their stories, I fancy; and as to-morrow will be our last halt of any duration for a considerable time, I'll take the opportunity and go and see if I can get an interview with their prize hobgoblin."

Next morning Roy, much to his surprise, had a touch of fever, and Fain, not caring for the proposed excursion, stopped with him, while Lord Winstone, Dan Hook with three Zanzibari carriers, two native hunters of the Mapora, and Blackbird, set out to the regions ruled by the Elephant Spirit.

The aborigines led them a trying journey over a deserted clearing, where the road extended along slippery tree trunks, above foetid marshes and through gorgeous tangles of climbing convolvulus, orchids and

dense undergrowth. At last the guides arrived at a little patch of plantains and refused to proceed.

The place was the site of an old village, but had been deserted for countless years, and the ruined huts were now absolutely obliterated under tangles and torrents of wild living things. Only here and there through masses of lush green stuck up the rotten, sun-bleached skeletons of poles and props indicating the work of man; but all soon promised to vanish, for Nature had already sown the clearing with young trees which rose above their ancestors and dominated the last evidences of man's presence.

Elephant tracks were plainly visible on the edge of the plantain patch and, through the deep silence of the desolate place, their heavy bodies could be heard crashing through the woods not a quarter of a mile off.

But Winstone was after the green Spirit, not the creatures that it was supposed to protect; and he had to pursue his investigation alone, for even the Zanzibari boys and Blackbird now declined to accompany him. The weirdness of the place had awakened fear in them, and the latter said:

"Big game me know, and savage beasts me fear not, but what is dis? Who before or since de Prophet, hab heard ob a giant green Elephant Spirit more huge dan de tallest man, more vast dan Bana Mkuba, our Great Master?"

"All right—as you please. You'll come, Dan, of course?"

But Mr. Hook was not at all sure.

"It's like this," he said, scratching his head. "Blame me if I doan't reckon these heathen toads to be in the right for once. I ban't 'feared of anything, in reason; but theer's a good deal in these here plaguy plantations as have made me puzzle my brains since I fust comed in 'em. They'm a darned sight too much out o' repair for my likin', an' a man's a fool to run any risks in a God-forgotten place wheer he's purty nigh the awnly respectable citizen in a million square miles. What's true an' what ban't true 'twould puzzle the devil to say, beggin' pardon for mentioning of un; an' I'd so soon believe in a green man twenty feet high as not. Awnly sort of green man I onderstands is that swinging on the sign of a public house; but you won't find nothin' o' that sort here, else I'd be the first to come along with your Lordship, like a good Christian."

"Well, give me the 4-bore, and wait, all of you, until I return. If I fire, you'd better push on after me; if not, fire yourselves every ten minutes or so to tell me where you are; and fire in the air, mind."

He departed alone, pushed forwards through the purple stems of the plantains, and soon found himself in unutterable loneliness and desolation. Three hundred yards from the starting-point the shining stems and tattered foliage of the grove thinned out some-



what, and after proceeding fifty yards further, the explorer discovered himself in an open space ringed about with trees and having rising land at the centre. A hundred yards distant rusty masses of iron-stone preceded an undulation in the flat country; and towards the base of one tall block his lordship descried an object which made him rub his eyes with frank amazement.

Near the foot of the rock, his back against it, and shadowed entirely from the sun's light by a natural grotto in the stone, sat an enormous man or ape. Its stature was colossal, though smaller by far than the natives had described; its naked body was bright green; its hands were folded over its breast; its misshapen head was bent forward, and wild snaky hair, also of vivid green, fell luxuriantly around it; while pressed upon its crown was a wreath of flowers.

So natural appeared the pose that Winstone, contrary to his reason, almost expected to see the huge hermit rise, stand upon its feet and approach him; but the thing did not do so. Its position was curious, for it sat in a sort of niche on the red sandstone boulder. There was no sound but the tinkle of falling water and the distant intermittent echo of great beasts, with an occasional crack like a pistol-shot, where an elephant had broken a heavy bough or young tree.

In the midst of this strange kingdom, silent, motionless, and alone, with uncouth face and distorted limbs, reigned this huge green monster in mortal shape.

Lord Winstone got out his field glasses, without which he never hunted, and trained them on the grotto. He stared awhile, and then his breath left his lungs in a gasp of surprise, as he returned the glasses to their case and pushed forward.

To reach the Elephant Spirit proved difficult, for its grotto in the mass of stone opened twelve feet above the ground and could only be approached after a difficult climb up ladders of wild vine.

Falling water gushed in a steady stream from the cavity aloft, and its path was densely coated with small and slippery vegetation; but the wanderer finally reached his goal and stood beside the huge sitting figure. It moved not, nor had it moved through years unnumbered and unknown, for it was the skeleton of a man densely coated with more than half a century's growth of tough green moss and apparently bound together by branches of a small water-loving and flowering creeper, which, falling in a stream from the skull, suggested green hair bound about with bright blossoms.

Lord Winstone assumed that no man would have perished in a position so natural, and some investigation showed that the corpse had been artificially placed within this funeral niche.

Scraping the heavy growth of moss from its skull and neck, he discovered that the bones were all fastened together with stout bark thread. This had held except in the case of the left foot, and the little

spring, which, as it bubbled from the ironstone, had spattered the dead body, served to explain the dense and close accumulation of moss and green lichen on every bone.

The dead man's skull, in the eye of which a yellow orchid flourished, was of negroid type, but extraordinarily large; his only companions in solitude were some unwholesome-looking efts, spotted like toadstools, which crawled quickly away to their fastnesses in the ferny pool of the spring.

Other evidences enabled the discoverer to arrive at a theory of this gigantic corpse, for scattered about, each coated as thickly with dense and rank mosses as the skeleton itself, lay various articles which superstition had there buried with the defunct savage.

A glimmer of red rust was all that remained of his spear-heads, and the handles were nearly rotted away, though enough remained to identify them, while an earthen jar, doubtless containing malwa, or native beer, in the far past, now stood at the hand of the Elephant Spirit, full of dead wood, and rank, trailing vegetation.

Lord Winstone had discovered the quaint burial-place of a chief and solved the prime mystery of the Mapora.

But his lordship knew the character of the natives far too well to present them with this rational explanation of their precious tradition. Instead, he patted the moss down on the rotten bones again and stuffed the

skeleton's broken ribs and jaws with living green things; then, capturing one of the hideous newts, fully a foot in length, he made it prisoner, worked his way cautiously down the precarious ladder of wild vine stems, and soon reached safety.

At this moment a sound of the first distant gun signal reached the explorer's ears and, though the report came from further off than he expected, he set his face for it steadily and pushed forward as quickly as possible.

Ten minutes later the gun fired again, and he corrected his line of march by it; but then, within the space of three minutes from the last discharge came a sudden fusillade, the shots following each other in rapid succession and sometimes simultaneously.

Fearing a savage attack, he sped forward at a remarkable pace considering his heavy rifle and the nature of the ground; but long before he could regain his companions all firing ceased, and he moderated his pace, feeling that for his own safety a careful approach to the scene of action must now be essential.

The road his little party pursued from the main camp of the expedition had been carefully blazed and the hunter was not fearful of losing it even without the native guides, but to traverse it alone, supposing there had been treachery and his friends were slain, would be to court death.

Permitting himself no more gloomy reflections until the realisation of his fears, Lord Winstone proceeded

with the utmost caution, and it was only a loud shout of two voices raised in laughter that caused him to improve his pace with a lighter heart.

A strange scene met him, for his friends had indeed been invaded during his absence, though not by the Mapora. A small herd of elephants, pursuing their resistless march, had crashed out of the banana plantation within fifty yards of the explorers and Dan Hook.

Without a moment's reflection the mariner had opened fire and attracted the unpleasant attention of a bull, who received his shot in the flank and promptly charged.

Far from hastening to his rescue, the two Mapora, confident that the green Elephant Spirit would take terrible toll for this outrage, fled with screams of fear, and the three coast men wavered, then ran after the natives.

Blackbird alone stood firm, and it was lucky for Hook that he did so, for the sailor must have been overtaken and destroyed in a few moments had not the hunter, with one of his master's rifles, brought the infuriated beast to the ground. With perfect nerve he awaited the charge, and as the advancing elephant hesitated a moment at thirty yards between its two enemies, shifted his aim like lightning from the body shot he had meant to fire and pointed his rifle at its head.

One vulnerable spot on the forehead, where the

bone is thin, was his mark, and as he fired the instant fall of the big brute showed his aim was true. At the same moment the Zanzibaris, who had fled, began discharging their weapons, and the forest echoed to the rattle of guns and the shrill trumpet of the stampeded elephants.

When Winstone arrived, Hook had scaled the huge mass of his fallen foe and was dancing a hornpipe on it. Blackbird clamoured for the tusks, which proved a heavy pair, and would have amply repaid him for his pluck and straight shooting; but Winstone, when he heard of what had happened, absolutely refused permission to take a hair of the elephant into camp.

"We dare not," he said. "As it is, you cannot remove the ivory without help, and if we brought a fragment into camp it might lead to grave trouble. I shall not forget this day's work and the Master will not forget it, and Mr. Hook will not forget it either, my good Blackbird, but you must wait for your reward until later. We dare not tell the Mapora that we have slain one of the Spirit's elephants. They would do I know not what, and Kanatto might refuse us a peaceful march through his territory at the very least."

Hook was already heaping gifts on his preserver.

"You'm a gude-fashioned heathen, anyway, Blackbird, my son; an' I thank 'e; an' my kids an' the missis, down Devonshire way, would thank 'e if they knawed what you'd done. Here's my auld jack knife,

an' here's my tobacco-box wi' a butivul picter o' Plymouth harbour in the lid of un; an' here's my——"

Lord Winstone interposed, while Blackbird, to whom Dan's conversation was double Dutch, grinned and showed his great yellow teeth and stretched his hand for more.

"That'll do, Dan, that'll do. Mr. Meldrum will be responsible for the rest. No call to beggar yourself."

"Well, then, I'll do more still for the bloke. Tell un I'll tattoo his black hide wi' a pair o' love birds a-flyin' in the air, an' a anchor an' a holy cross, an' such like rare devilries—all free, gratis, an' for nothin'."

The expression of Blackbird's face at the offer to tattoo a Christian cross upon him had doubtless been instructive enough, seeing that he was a firm Moslem; but his lordship attempted no translation.

Together the trio returned and, threading the difficult way, reached camp at nightfall to find all well. The cowardly Zanzibaris were disrated and deprived of the distinction of weapon carrying, while the Mapora were assured by Mr. Hook that the elephant had made a mistake, and seeing that it was a white man who fired, had accepted an apology and assured him in elephant language no harm was done.

As for the Green Spirit, Lord Winstone reported his interview with the monster most solemnly. It had showed him great kindness, spoken well of the white

men and sent a gift of a wondrous spotted eft to King Kanatto. It had also directed that the expedition was to be allowed to pass in peace through Mapora territory.

These things and the wretched newt in a wicker cage were duly transported by runners to the capital, and when Meldrum and his friends made their march next day, it was with high hopes that the immediate future might be considered promising.

As for Roy, Bessie's tender nursing and a few doses of quinine had done him much good, and, when the time came to start, he was quite equal to the task of leading his column forward through the aisles and avenues and jungles of the great forest. A few cases of fever and ulcers were reported, but in the main the health of the expedition continued excellent.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THROUGH KANATTO'S.

The long and weary struggle with the great forest tract ended at last, and once more the travelers stood under the clean sky and breathed sweet air upon the grass lands. They had plodded through a wondrous wilderness of lush and reeking green; they had faced the fevers that arose like ghosts by night from the bogs and swamps; they had struggled day after day with the snake-like vegetation, the wild vine and innumerable other creepers, the pepper bush and huge arum; the wild mangoe, amona, sword grass, gigantic tree ferns, acacia, phrynium, livid fungus and thick moss, bedewed with the warm moisture of that natural hothouse. And yet, save for half a dozen cases of fever and one death, the expedition was sound.

Once on the rising plateaus that appeared after the forest was past, the invalids quickly recovered; and it was well that they did so, for three days' march from the mountain strongholds of Kanatto, messengers arrived from him. They came empty-handed, but their mouths were full of bad news.

Kanatto refused to believe that a party of more than fifty persons with nearly as many guns could be engaged in any peaceful enterprise. He defined the

eastern and southern confines of Mapora territory and expressed a hope the expedition would follow them. He absolutely declined to permit them to set foot in his country, and declared that if any attempt was made to do so, he should resist it with five thousand spears.

Kanatto's messenger was polite but firm, and the white leaders, conscious how much depended on it, treated him with every courtesy and gave him presents of considerable value.

Winstone explained to Roy that the route indicated would extend the total journey by at least two hundred and fifty miles, a very serious consideration, and a further halt was made therefore until the natives bearing the eft and the message from the Elephant Spirit should reach Kanatto and return.

It was hoped that Lord Winstone's expedient might prove effective, and as the first envoy from the monarch seemed enormously impressed by the incident, and evidently attached much importance to the green deity of the wood, both Fain and Meldrum felt sanguine, though his lordship did not share their hope.

"It's good enough at least to wait for his answer, Fred," declared Roy one night at a council of war held by the four white men. Most of the expedition slept, and strange eyes, like precious stones in pairs, crept about outside the zariba; while now was heard the howl of a hyena and now the deep thunder of a lion's roar.

"I shouldn't wait if you ask me—not after to-morrow. Time is precious and we must make friends pretty soon or we shall be in a fix for food and have to take without asking. We're not strong enough to bluff Kanatto and march through his kingdom without leave, for the Mapora are a tremendously powerful tribe, and if he'd said ten thousand spears instead of five, I should have believed him. But he's got enemies all round him, his first messenger told me yesterday. That's a good thing as far as it goes, for to be his enemy will prove an excellent introduction to other tribes, if bad comes to worse."

"I'll give Kanatto one more day, then. Both Fain and I hoped a good deal from that speckled beast you sent to the monarch; we do still, for that matter."

Early in the morning Lord Winstone's fears were proved ill-founded, and for once a hopeful view proved the correct one. Kanatto, powerful monarch though he was, evidently bent the knee to the Elephant Spirit, and was disinclined to disobey its express order. He sent, though with evident reluctance, to say that the expedition might pursue its way through his country, but must turn neither to right nor left, must neither hunt nor kill game without the permission of the head men of the districts, and must pay fair prices for plaintains, goats and other food.

To make his permission the more gracious he sent one ox as a gift, and explained that from the capital

onwards to the River Ruaha he would lend the explorers a guard of fifty fighting Mapora to be their escort. He also enquired the course he was to pursue with the gift from the Elephant Spirit.

To this amiable message Meldrum returned another as friendly. He forwarded a selection of the best gifts at his command, a brilliant scarlet coat laced with gold braid, a cocked hat with red feathers, and a picture-book of wild animals. He also, at Fain's suggestion, directed Kanatto to kill the eft on the third day of the new moon and anoint the portals of his capital with its blood, as a sign of friendship with the Elephant Spirit and a promise of prosperity.

The rainy season was now at hand, and Winstone hoped that before the middle of March, when steady and heavy downfalls must begin, the expedition might find itself on somewhat higher lands, where there would be abundant cover, but of a more healthy sort than that afforded by the forests.

Five hours after the arrival of the messengers, camp was broken up, and within an hour the expedition entered Kanatto's territories. A sharp look-out was kept, and military order maintained, for though Winstone had little fear of treachery, the possibility existed.

Crowds of natives assembled on either side of the moving column, and here and there a youngster flourished his spear and looked warlike, but blows or sharp

rebukes from some older man speedily quieted the more pugnacious.

As for Kanatto's messenger, a native of fine aspect and almost intellectual features, he marched at the head of the Soudanese fighting men with Meldrum and Lord Winstone.

Bessie, riding her white donkey, accompanied them, for their road now lay upon broad well-known tracks, and Kanatto's envoy, at his special request, was permitted to walk beside her. The girl excited his profound admiration, and indeed the spectators ten deep on either side of the line of march showed similar wonder and pleasure.

Lord Winstone, quick to catch a hint from any incident of the passing moment, instantly realized that Bessie might be a power; and during a halt for luncheon he mentioned his opinion.

"She must be Queen," he said, "and we are her subjects. The idea will appeal to the savage mind everywhere and carry weight in our negotiations."

"She's a jolly sight too retiring," said Roy.

"We must give her a lesson then. Some of our Zanzibaris will show her how to put on side," declared Tracy Fain.

"For that matter, they call Miss Ogilvie 'Queen' already," explained Dan Hook. "I mean our own squad do. 'Twas that Arab cove's idea, they tell me. Raalt thought of it. She be called Silver Sunrise by 'em, an' a purty name enough, come to think of it."

"I'll swear you never thought of anything so nice as that when you were courting, Roy; come, now?" laughed Lord Winstone, and Meldrum admitted no such poetic fancy had ever crossed his Saxon mind.

"But it's a jolly good name for all that," he declared. "Queen of the Silver Sunrise must Bessie be henceforth."

"She will look the part, but won't play it," declared Fain. Then the bugler blew his blast and the column moved forward steadily.

Splendid progress was made over the healthy open and undulating lands of the Mapora; indeed, eight miles proved an easy day's work, and on several occasions ten was exceeded. Then the palisades of Kanatto's capital appeared, perched on a little hill at an elevation of some three thousand feet above the sea, and the monarch himself, with his medicine men and retinue, came forth to the wooden and monotonous thud of drums and the blare of a huge ivory trumpet.

Kanatto wore the scarlet coat and cocked hat, while a sky-blue petticoat sent with special respect to his favorite wife had also appealed to his own fancy, and now covered his middle and descended a trifle below his knees.

He proved polite and self-possessed, but not cordial. Upon hearing that Bessie was the Queen of the expedition and that her territories were peopled with white men and women and extended beyond the sea,

he treated her with increased respect and refused to address anybody else.

The interpreter, a Zanzabari, turned the monarch's speeches into Swahili, and Lord Winstone then translated them into English for Bessie's benefit; while her remarks were translated into Swahili by his lordship and then into Mapora for the ear of Kanatto. Thus Lord Winstone was in a position to say much what he pleased, for the interpreter knew no English.

An agreement was quickly come to and twenty days' rations promised by Kanatto on reasonable though not generous terms. He furnished millet, sweet potatoes and some hundreds of heads of extremely large plantains. He spoke with reverence of the Elephant Spirit, and invited Queen Bessie and her white medicine men to be present at the ceremony of the slaying of the giant eft.

This proposal was agreed to with simulated gratification, and Lord Winstone, in his character of the mighty hunter, who had seen and spoken with the green deity of the forest, received very great honour both from Kanatto and his medicine-men.

Two nights before the expedition proceeded, the wretched eft was duly slain while a young moon shone like a silver sickle in the sky. Then the Sudanese fired a volley, and the ceremony concluded with a war dance which Bessie and her followers witnessed and duly admired.

Asked if her own fighting men could have equalled

this display, she hesitated, then admitted the superiority of the Mapora, but Lord Winstone translated to different purpose, knowing well that nothing was more impolitic than to acknowledge a savage's superior skill, craft, wealth, beauty or honour.

"Our people dance as well as the Mapora, but not better," he said; "indeed, they cannot jump quite so high, but that is because they carry guns instead of spears."

This satisfied Kanatto; then he sent for his picture-book, the gift already mentioned, and went through it with Winstone, page by page, like a child. His lordship had to tell the story of each beast, and when the animal described was one with which Kanatto was familiar, it was amusing to see his attention and his readiness to catch the narrator in a falsehood or inaccuracy, if possible. This, however, he could not do, and after descriptions of the rhinoceros, lion, bush antelope, elephant and zebra, he uttered grunts of satisfaction and sometimes, turning back to them, said "Tell again!"

Further gifts concluded the night's entertainment, and at dawn the expedition, much refreshed by its halt on the high ground, was ready to set out for the river. Kanatto offered an additional regiment of fighting men, for the Ruaha bounded his country, and upon the other side of it dwelt his enemies—the tribe of the Maga-Miga—who must now be Meldrum's enemies also; but Roy assured the monarch that an



escort to the boundaries of Mapora territory was all his Queen required. Her enterprise was one of peace; she only desired to see a wondrous land which no white queen had ever seen before; but her heart was warm to all her fellow-monarchs, and she had no quarrel with any among them.

Upon this assertion Kanatto spoke with the wisdom of experience, declared universal peace impossible to human nature and warned the Queen of the Silver Sunrise not to put her trust in the Maga-Miga or their monarch.

"The door of Unyah's dwelling is built of Mapora skulls," he said grimly; "but I can wait; I am patient; his head shall come to me presently, and to-morrow I will drink malwa out of the pan that to-day holds his lying brains."

"When we return from our journey, if the thought pleases you, and my Queen allows it, I will visit again the Elephant Spirit," declared Lord Winstone, "and send to you warnings and prophecies concerning this enemy of the Mapora."

Kanatto expressed great gratification at this promise, and bid the expedition farewell with a cordiality quite genuine, and far warmer than that with which he had welcomed it.

The way led by high lands and deep ravines to the bed of the gigantic Ruaha River, and the chart indicated a possibility of using that stream for a distance of at least a hundred miles, if not more, supposing

canoes of sufficient size and stability were discoverable. The Mapora had no canoes, for they employed the river but seldom; they declared, however, that their enemies possessed them, but as to the qualities of the Ruaha as a navigable stream they could give little information.

Long before the river was reached, the rainy season had begun, and the same dreary phenomena were presented day after day to a miserable and depressed company. The mornings often dawned fine, though sullen clouds of mist now covered most of the higher peaks and mountain crowns of the land; and they continued to do so, replenished daily with cold torrential rains. These usually began after two o'clock and were often accompanied by tremendous thunder, lightning and a sort of livid darkness. The high lands speedily became impassable under these conditions, and the woods, if less comfortable, were less dangerous to life.

Three days after leaving Kanatto, two of Meldrum's Zanzibaris died, including Salem, whose wounds had only recently healed. The poor creatures dropped out of the ranks insensible and evidently succumbed to sheer cold. Indeed, the whole expedition suffered severely, for most of the carriers wore the lightest clothes, many from choice going almost naked, and now the temperature was often less than 60 degrees at nightfall, and the bravest men among them grew cowed and frightened.

But after ten days of long marches the Ruaha was reached without further misfortune, and under its densely wooded banks a temperature more congenial to the natives from Zanzibar and the Soudan was encountered. The awful rains, however, regularly reduced camp to a scene of dire misery, and firewood was only procured with difficulty. The fallen trees chosen for the purpose harboured every sort of insect and reptile in their rotting hearts, and termites, beetles, centipedes, snakes, black wasps and hornets made the men's lives a burden to them. Yet fire was vital to all, and Meldrum and Dan Hook daily set the example of pluck and determination in collecting wood and scrub capable of burning.

At one point on the river a bluff rose sheer and offered protection against the heavy hurricanes that blew from the north and northwest during the rains. Here exceptional advantages of position justified a brief halt. A little beach of white limestone pebbles spread from the cliff to the river in Mapora territory, and against the solid rock of the bluff it was possible to build pent-roofs of grass thatch and leaves against the eternal rains, and thus allow of comparatively dry and healthful sleeping places for all.

As for the white leaders, Bessie's special double tent had thus far defied the tempests; Roy, Winstone and Tracy Fain shared a big and comfortable "fly," also impervious to most of the rain it had endured, and Dan Hook occupied the remaining tent, sharing

it with the Arab head men. The stream ran deep and wide, guarding the camp on the southern side, while a quarter of a mile from shore a little wooded islet broke the smooth surface with a picturesque knoll of fine trees, twining creepers and gaudy flowers.

Meldrum's hope was that during this brief halt it might be possible to make friends of the Maga-Magi; but the few of this tribe who inspected the strangers did so from mid-river in canoes, nor could any signs of friendship attract them within hailing distance.

"That we are encamped in peace on their enemy's ground is enough for them, no doubt," said Roy; "but we must make friends somehow. What we want is just half a dozen canoes, like the big one, with about ten men in it, that came to look at us yesterday. This chap, Unyah, must surely be as fond of beads and rubbish as the others; we shall have to send him a messenger with a gift or two and an explanation of who we are."

"How's it to be done?" asked Fain. "Who's going to run his head into the lion's den like that?"

"Nobody; we've no lives to waste, Heaven knows. My plan is simpler; we must set a trap for one or two of these inquiring cusses who drop down from the island in mid-stream, have a look at us, then paddle away again smartly. We've been here four days now and cannot delay much more. In fact, we've only five days' rations, though they're adding to their fare with a little fish. We must build a boat and a good one,

arm it, hide it one night in the tangles of undergrowth that fringe the island and then, when a canoe comes creeping down to have a look at us, we can shoot out and intercept it. Dan's the man for this job. I wager he'll have a workmanlike tub of some sort ready in a few days—a boat that will seat three or four men and be taut and trim. Anyway it's our only move, because, without friends and canoes, we cannot get over at all. Never saw such a country. There doesn't seem to be a river in it less than about thirty feet deep and a mile or so across."

Lord Winstone agreed to this suggestion as the most feasible and Hook was straightway set about his task. The sailor pursued it with such energy that he had a flat punt of large size completed in three days, and upon the following evening a carefully selected force of five men armed with repeating rifles set forth to the island. Dan Hook navigated the punt, while Lord Winstone commanded it; and with them were Blackbird, the hunter, and two of the most trustworthy Soudanese.

Roy Meldrum had naturally determined to lead this little enterprise himself; but he yielded to the entreaties of Hook.

"Do you bide ashore, theer's a good man, Mr. Meldrum; 'cause I'm only a amateur boat-builder, do 'e see? Her looks all right, for a fair weather river, an' the oars on the thole pins will push her along faster'n you'd guess, but her's not built to carry giants like

what you be; an' if her got 'pon her beam-ends an' sinked amidst the crocodiles an' sich-like varmint in midstream, 'twould be a damn awk'ard sarcumstance for us all—beggin' pardon for the fiery word."

So Roy kept ashore and waited with some anxiety until the prearranged signal—a torch thrice flashed through the darkness—told that the "Pride of Devon," as Dan Hook christened his punt, had reached the island in safety.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### HOW DAN DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF.

Next morning no vestige of the exploring party was visible from shore. The sun rose gloriously, and delicate mists ascended from the Ruaha, revealing a silent, sleeping islet on the silver river. Evidences of life there were none, and it might have been a dream island magically conjured from the air and the water.

Nevertheless keen eyes and sharp wits were hidden within its green recesses, and long before sunshine turned the river into gold, Lord Winstone and his companions had made a meal and were posted at advantageous and secret spying-places around the isle.

Dan Hook stopped by the punt, where it lay entirely concealed under a natural curtain of dense and training creepers. To man the little vessel and push her out would be the work of a moment, and as the island was not more than four hundred yards in circumference, but a few minutes must suffice to bring the scattered party together again. At the first indication of a canoe, the hidden watcher who discovered it was to hasten to the other posts. Then all would collect at the boat which lay on that side of the island where canoes usually appeared, and so assist in the necessary capture.

It was nearly midday, and as yet no sign of the Maga-Miga had been reported by any of the watchers, when Dan Hook, knocking the ashes from his fifth pipe and peering through the screen of creepers for the hundredth time, suddenly found his interest awakened before the prospect of an adventure.

Speeding across from Unyah's territory and pointing straight into his own hiding place, there came a light canoe paddled by two men and containing three in all. The third was of remarkable appearance, and looked no larger than a medium-sized monkey as he sat crouched up in the stern sheets of the little vessel. But that he was a person of some note Dan guessed from his robe of lion skin, his scarlet feather headdress, and the heavy bracelets of brass that appeared upon his lean arms.

With such speed was his light craft propelled that the sailor saw there would be no chance of communicating with his scattered comrades before it arrived.

Some of his friends must have seen the strangers already, and might at that moment be hastening to his aid; but there was no time to lose, and even as Dan tightened his belt, cocked his revolver and determined to attempt a single-handed capture, the nose of the canoe poked through the trailing curtain of leaves and flowers and the boatmen shipped their paddles.

"What, ho! my hearties!" roared Hook, with his revolver covering the leading rower. "Now doan't 'e make no fuss. You've run right in a h'ambush—



that's what you've done— an' you'm my prisoners, so best to sing small an' come along quiet."

The savages, naturally unfamiliar with broad Devon, glared at Mr. Hook, and a spear shrieked within a fractional distance of his ear by way of reply. But it was the last missile that warrior ever hurled at foe. Dan fired point-blank at him and he fell backwards, shot through the head.

"Bad luck to it, why for caan't 'e be civil?" he asked. "Drop them skewers this instant moment, or I'll send 'e after t'other cove sure's my name's Hook."

All this time the savage in the lion-skin sat motionless and exhibited absolute self-control. Now he spoke quickly to his companion and the boatman dropped his spears.

"That's better," said Dan, "just step in my wherry the pair of 'e, if 'tis all the same to you. You'm lawful prisoners of war, an' if the old gent in them their go-to-meeting togs will only trust us, he won't find himself a penny the worse."

At this moment Lord Winstone with the riflemen arrived; and the Maga-Miga were assured by signs that they had nothing to fear from their conquerors. To converse with them was impossible until they returned to the main camp, where several of the Mabora still abode with the expedition; but the old native appeared a man of some distinction and intelligence. He made a few remarks to his servant, then submitted to be placed between two of the Soudanese

soldiers. On nearer inspection he proved to be very aged. His skull was bare under the feather headdress; his body was shrunken and lean and his back bent, yet there was that about him which showed a man accustomed to lead men.

A reverse, terrible enough from his point of view, and a fate absolutely uncertain so far as he could guess, awaited the venerable native; but his self-possession was complete, and he showed no trace of fear or even emotion. Intuitively he had guessed that Lord Winstone, not Dan Hook, was the leader among his captors, and, as the punt with the canoe in tow slowly dropped down stream, cleared the island and then made for a hostile shore, the old man kept dim, but unblinking eyes fixed upon his lordship.

Dan was delighted at his prowess in this matter and only regretted his ignorance of the Maga-Miga tongue.

"I had to shoot one of 'em, worse luck. 'Twas 'which he should,' as they say down Devon way—me or him. But if the fools had awnly knawn plain English, 'twould have been differ'nt. Still theer it is; what's done's done. Anyway, the old monkey-faced party in the lion-skin over-alls be my prisoner—fairly took in h'ambush—an' I wants Mr. Meldrum to knaw it."

At the landing-place a mighty surprise awaited everybody. Before the boat touched shore, yelling parties of the Mapora waded thigh-deep to meet it.

They howled and danced in the water; they shook their spears; they showed in a thousand ways their extreme excitement and ferocious joy, while on every tongue rolled the same word in a guttural bass. For the Mapora recognised the unarmed and defenceless old man as their sworn foe; they knew that the skulls of their grandfathers hung grinning at his portals.

"Unyah! Unyah! Unyah!" rang out the cry, and the savages tumbled and fought to reach the boat and bury arrow or spear in the carcass of their dearest enemy. But Lord Winstone, alive to this sudden danger, stopped and bade Dan pull out again into deep water. Even there a dozen frantic Mapora, dead to commands or threats, pursued them and swam round the boat.

"Snakes alive!" roared Dan at the spluttering and swearing Mapora, "I've caught a King! Us have got un safe an' sound; an' he'm my prisoner of war; an' the fust of you common swine as touches my King, I'll break your ugly jaws for you!"

Meldrum had now become aware of the strange scene being enacted within a hundred yards of the shore. Winstone shouted to him to call the Mapora back, and explained that they had better be disarmed and guarded, for twenty still remained with the expedition at Kanatto's command, to see the strangers across the river and out of his territory.

"Find a man who can speak the dialect," he

shouted, "and bring him to meet the boat. We have taken Unyah himself!"

"Beggin' your pardon, 'tis I that have!" yelled Dan.

The Mapora reluctantly returned ashore and were immediately disarmed, much to their indignation. It was explained to them that the monarch, though their enemy, was not as yet an enemy of the Queen of the Silver Sunrise. With difficulty they were pacified, and the leader of the band, an old soldier, volunteered to become interpreter, as he had often fought against the Maga-Miga and knew their language. This man was accordingly brought to the shore, and while Unyah explained his presence at the island on the one hand, Bessie, who in her regal character gravely greeted him, announced, after due coaching from Fain and Meldrum, the nature of the position and the character of the aid she required from her captive monarch.

Unyah spoke first:

"Hearing from my people of a wondrous encampment upon the Ruaha river and of white men with good store of thunder medicine"—here he pointed to the rifles—"I myself proceeded in private to yonder island, called Batu, with purpose to see in my own eyes the things reported. I came without evil purpose against the white men, but realising that they were friends with the Mapora, I feared they would not make peace with me. I was captured by this war-lord

and am his prisoner until his Queen bids him release me. I repeat I have no quarrel with you. I will serve you with friendship; but it can avail you nothing if you treat me ill. I am old and my breath comes slowly and will soon flicker out. Nothing matters to me. I have lived a King's life. But you—you must answer to my people. So be it. Let me serve you if you desire it; if not, suffer me to depart in peace as one with whom your Queen has no quarrel."

Then Bessie made answer:

"I desire no quarrel with Unyah—far from it. I have heard of his greatness and majesty and power, and am willing to be his friend. We captured Unyah perceiving him to be a very great man, but not knowing that he was King of the Maga-Miga. We captured him, thinking that he would bear our messages of friendship and good will to the King; but behold! this is better still, for the King himself comes among us and we welcome him with rare gifts, and will make a feast for him before the day is over. The White Queen has come from afar off and is at peace with all men. She brings but fifty tubes of thunder medicine, and fears not to trust herself with the monarchs of the land.

"To-day she is here, to-morrow she has departed. She has no enemies; she is not concerned with the feuds of the Mapora and the Maga-Miga any more than she is concerned with the feuds of the buffalo and lion. She comes in peace and desires that Unyah will

permit her to pass through his kingdom in peace, that he will grant her good store of canoes to proceed along his river-ways, and that he will proclaim among his people that the Queen of the Silver Sunrise is his friend.

"These messages I had designed to send by the first of Unyah's subjects who fell into my power, and so I sent my servants to lay in wait and capture a man or woman of the Maga-Miga; but it is willed by Fate that we monarchs should meet face to face, and I am glad, most ancient and famous King, that it is so."

The old man's face exhibited many varying emotions as these amiable sentiments were conveyed to him piecemeal by the assistance of two interpreters. At the end of the speech he rose, bowed twice, then, taking a crimson feather from his wild bonnet, presented it to Bessie. She likewise bowed and placed the feather in a big white Panama hat which she usually wore.

Then Unyah spoke again:

"The Queen of the Silver Sunrise is wiser than her years, and Unyah, who has lived through a hundred rains and seen more new moons than there are hairs in his beard, will make a friendship and a compact, and will lend the Queen ten great canoes and will bestow upon her people twenty days' rations of millet and plantain; and Unyah will send gifts to the White Queen; for though his head is red with blood and he has walked in blood to his knees, yet he has no love

for war, but would rather be a man of peace and see no spear shaken upon his coming and no war cry lifted against his warriors."

Then the Mapora soldier who acted as interpreter had something to say on his own account, and he implored Winstone to permit him and his friends to convey the defenceless Unyah to Kanatto. He explained that the White Queen could not by any possibility be the friend of both monarchs, and he swore, by all the oaths he knew, that, once the friends of Kanatto were well into the territory of his rival, they would surely be surrounded, betrayed and destroyed. To trust Unyah was to trust a hyena. Not to destroy him now or give him to his hungry enemy was to release the snake under the heel, to pardon the stinging wasp, to rescue the drowning beast of prey.

But Lord Winstone naturally felt indisposed to listen to these suggestions, and King Unyah, being now quite satisfied of his safety, offered of his own free will to stay as the guest of the travellers until his messenger could reach his capital, situated some miles up the river, and bring therefrom the necessary canoes and stores. The difficulty centred with the Mapora aborigines, for Kanatto's people were already clamouring to depart, and, if one escaped and got inland half a day's march, news of Unyah's capture would reach his rival and a rapid raid result. The King himself speedily shewed means of escape from this difficulty.

"Cross to my side of the Ruaha and you are safe," he said. "A mile below here the stream narrows somewhat, and it may be possible to get a few canoes which shall suffice to take your party to the other side. Do this to-morrow; but meanwhile I will send my servant in his canoe. Give him a day's start of the Mapora and he will rejoin us in force before they can do us any hurt. Besides, they have no canoes, and if they attempt to reach us, your thunder medicine will pour their blood upon the river. With my men shall come one from the far coast land who is skilled in Swahili; then may we speak without need of this good and sinewy warrior, servant of Kanatto."

But the translator only scowled as he repeated these words; and then the conference terminated for the time being. The surviving boatman of the King's canoe was soon making the best of his way home upstream; while as for the Mapora, it became evident very speedily that if they were not released, they would raise a war-cry, on the chance of being heard by their fellow tribesmen far away. A Zanzibari was stationed with a loaded gun at the ear of each, and their position explained to them by Meldrum.

"Let one of you but lift up his voice, so that it can be heard fifty yards distant, and I will slay you to a man," he declared. "To-morrow, at midday, you will be released—until then you are my prisoners through your own fault. You shall have your promised gifts



to-morrow if you obey me; but disobey and you will perish instantly."

Throughout that night sharp lookout was kept, and Winstone, Meldrum and Fain alternately watched with the Zanzibaris and Soudanese. But Dan Hook was busy with the building of a big raft, and at this second vessel he and his assistants laboured by the light of a huge fire.

Before this, however, Mr. Hook, at his own desire and as an honour to King Unyah, had been told off to wait upon that monarch. A special pent-house was raised against the cliff and strips of scarlet cloth wound round the pillars of it. Blankets were spread, a tin of soup opened, and a bale of cloth and a big looking-glass bestowed upon the King. He conducted himself with courtesy, but did not attempt to hide his gratification when the "war-lord," as he insisted on calling Hook, was appointed to be his servant. Dan hustled about the monarch, spoke to him with absolute disrespect, and delighted Unyah, who thought him only less great than Lord Winstone and the White Queen herself.

"You were my master this morning; you are my servant now," he said to Dan; but the sailor of course understood nothing.

"Good old Onion!" said Hook. "You'd frighten crows, you would!"

The King beamed, assuming a compliment.

"You a very great man with much cattle in your own country, I suppose?" suggested Unyah.

"Blamed if you doan't talk like a broody hen as wants to lay an' can't. I'd hang myself if I had no better language than that theer. 'Twould choke a parrot to speak your damn lingo, beggin' pardon for the fiery word."

"You shall be a war-lord with the Maga-Miga, if you will. You are a man of war and not afraid of spears."

"Now shut your mouth, theer's a good sawl! Here's the soup ready for 'e; and I lay you've never in all your born days had nothin' like this down your scraggy neck. Soak it up, an' thank your stars you met me, my bold hero."

The King drank a few mouthfuls of the soup.

"The people of the White Queen are happy people," he said. "This is a precious thing."

"I suppose you're axin' of me what the tipples made of, ban't 'e? Can't tell 'e, Onion. Mock turtle, I reckon, whatever that is. Gorm me, if I wouldn't give a month's wages for a basin of it; but 'tis only for auld skeleton cusses same as you be, 'cause you'm a King, an' I be awnly a bo's'n when I'm at home."

"I know you are a leader of the white people, and I will make you war-lord of the Maga-Miga. You shall be my right hand and wear the yellow feather if you will stop with me."

"Oh, go an' smother yourself, Onion. Doan't 'e get at me, my son, or I'll give 'e a clout 'pon the side of the head—by Jimmery I will!"

"I know full well you say to me a kind thing. But there is a great river between us. We know not each what is spoken of the other. We are like twin lions roaring in the dark."

"Eat your meat, an' doan't lick your fingers like that, you auld pig. What be thicky spoon for? You'm a dirty toad, King or no King."

Dan pointed to the spoon as he spoke and the monarch he served picked it up, regarded it reverently, then stuck it among the feathers on his head.

"I know, I know," he said. "It is the token of the White Queen. She has my scarlet feather; I have her—her honour of strange white metal."

"'Struth! You'd make a cat laugh! As if you wasn't scarecrow enough already, you knock-kneed, slack-twisted, boss-eyed auld vegetable! 'Tis to eat the soup with, you silly monkey. Didn't 'e ever see a Christian spoon afore?"

"I cannot answer those great words; but I know that you speak nobly. Wait until my councillors come from the river. Then you shall receive your reward."

"Have 'e done? Ess fay! an' licked the plate like a dog. Well, well, now I'm off, 'cause I've got to be busy to-night. So long, sonny; keep your weather eye liftin'!"

Dan kissed his hand, and Unyah bowed. Then with truly regal unconcern and indifference, the old monarch, superior to danger, oblivious of the fact that he lay amid strangers in an enemy's country, rolled himself in his bale of cloth, put the opened soup tin under his head for a pillow and speedily slept.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### TREACHERY.

Very early in the morning, while yet the nocturnal mists born of the rains lay heavy on the Ruaha, there appeared, black against the grey, the beaks of big canoes. Unyah himself proceeded to the pebbly strand with Bessie and Meldrum. He spoke in a loud voice for one so old, and was answered with shouts of rejoicing from the canoes.

Meanwhile Winstone, Fain and Hook liberated the captive Mapora, gave to each his promised present, and watched them vanish at a dog-trot into the woods. No time could now be lost, and it was explained to Unyah that before any further talk of interchange of compliments, it would be well that the expedition should take ship across from Kanatto's territory into that of their new friend.

The order was given to strike camp, and, quite alive to their danger, the Zanzibaris and other servants worked with such will that, soon after midday, everything was ready, and, under torrents of heavy rain, a long line of canoes, with Dan's raft in tow, slowly set forth up the river.

Five miles they proceeded, then Unyah called a halt; the party landed; zaribas were erected and the encampment pitched. An interview, satisfactory in

every respect, was held towards nightfall, and Unyah not only provided the White Queen with ten big canoes for the river, but also sent crews and pilots with them.

The chart indicated that the Ruaha might be followed for a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles; and as Unyah was on terms of friendship with his western neighbours, a period of peace and rapid progress promised, to extend immediately ahead of the expedition.

The route by water was considerably longer than that which Meldrum's party would have taken by land, but the rapid progress possible on the river, together with other advantages, more than compensated for the increased distance.

Great cordiality prevailed, and Bessie received gifts of goats and fruit, while Roy, generally known as Bana Mkuba, or the Great Master, was given two huge jars of malwa—a native beer made from plantains—and Lord Winstone received a magnificent tusk of ivory, which required two men to carry it (and which he knew it would be impossible to bear further than the limit of the forthcoming river journey). Dan Hook also received ivory, together with a most pressing offer to remain with Unyah as his head man. Acquainted with this proposition he made answer:

“’Tis very good of ’e, Gaffer Onion; but I’ve signed on with this here picnic party, an’ I’m a-gwaine to see it through if I can. Then I must get back home—

along to the wife an' kids; 'cause though you'm powerful liberal wi' your offer o' wives an' cattle an' such like beasts o' the field; yet, when all's said an' done, my Martha be worth two dozen o' your females by the look of 'em. Axin' pardon an' hopin' theer ban't no offence gived or took, for I never met a tidier cannibal than you—never."

Lord Winstone freely translated these remarks into Swahili thus:

"The war-lord, Daniel Hook, is prostrated with admiration and gratitude before the noble invitation of King Unyah of the Maga-Miga, but Hook has entered into treaty and solemn covenant with the Queen of the Silver Sunrise to accompany her on her travels, and be ever at hand to aid her with his strength and wisdom in time of need. Moreover, the war-lord has a white wife and numerous children in his own country, and he desires no more wives, because the one he has got is quite enough for him. Neither does he require cattle, save for food. He kisses the hand of Unyah, and sets Unyah in his heart after the White Queen. He will noise abroad Unyah's greatness also when he returns to his own country."

In exchange for the monarch's presents, both he and the great men of his tribe received gifts amounting in all to the value of two hundred pounds; while the humbler folks obtained small doles of beads and glass.

Bessie herself presented Unyah with a little revol-

ver, and after Winstone had explained the weapon and fired a few shots with it, the monarch showed immense pleasure at the "little thunder medicine," and had goats and fowls brought to him that he might slay them at close range. In return he gave Bessie a fine lion's skin, and it then transpired that there were many lions in the country.

Lord Winstone heard with interest that at a point some fifty miles up the river wide grass lands and sandy plains stretched through scrub and jungle. Here flourished abundant game of various kinds, and the tribe upon the land was subject to Unyah and paid tribute.

With every manifestation of mutual goodwill the black and white monarchs, with their respective retinues separated. Again terrific rains poured down and under the leaden grey, Roy's expedition put out into midstream, while Unyah, with his bodyguard, prepared to return to the capital by easy marches over land. The old king himself never walked, but was carried between two pairs of bearers in a sort of light palanquin.

Already the Mapora began to assemble on their own side of the river in large numbers. But action was impossible, and Meldrum took care to keep his flotilla far out of spear range. At dusk the camp was always pitched in Maga-Miga territory, and double watches set to repel any nocturnal attack. For three days threatening demonstrations attended the advanc-



ing company; then the Mapora vanished and were seen no more, for their lands were past.

Steady and uneventful progress was made upon the river for a fortnight. Discomfort and misery were indeed endured, but food was plentiful, the peaceful riparian natives all owed suit and service to the Maga-Miga, and many hands made light work at the various small falls and rapids when the canoes had to be emptied and taken onwards and upwards by land, sometimes for a mile at a time.

Then it was that an incident involving loss of life and unexpected treachery within the ranks darkened the days of the explorers. None knew at the time the true and tremendous significance of the event, or they had endured far deeper anxiety and mental suffering than was the case.

A system of barefaced peculation was abroad. Small things only vanished, for large ones it would have been impossible to carry forward and still conceal. Man after man, both Zanzibaris and the native boatmen, came to headquarters with complaints; but threats and the use of spies similarly failed to find the thief or thieves. The coast men from Zanzibar suspected the followers of Unyah; while the Maga-Miga were loud in their protestations of innocence, and implored their white leaders to search them and the scanty property they carried for the vanished articles.

All private kits were publicly examined without

result; and then a conference was held between representatives of the different interests. Raalt, the Arab head man, spoke for the Zanzibari bearers and Sou-danese; while two leaders from the boatmen stood for Unyah's people, and Roy Meldrum himself presided. But a long and unsatisfactory wrangle was the only result of the investigation.

Raalt, representing his party, pointed out that the Zanzibaris must be guiltless, for how could they conceal anything now that their scanty kits had been examined? Again, if they hid the stolen articles by the wayside on the march, they did evil to no purpose, for they might never return by this route. Indeed, it was most improbable that they would do so.

The Maga-Miga, on the contrary, must soon be going back with their canoes; and to abstract the effects of the expedition would be easy enough for them, because they had only to bury their stolen goods in the ground and blaze a tree hard by the spot. That done they could gather up the treasure at their ease upon the homeward journey.

As an answer to this, the other side again protested their innocence, and reminded Meldrum that they had no control either of stores or goods; that they slept at night in a camp of their own making some distance from the expedition, and were absolutely without the power to abstract property, great or small, even supposing that they possessed any inclination to do so vile a thing.

The matter ended with a display of much bad feeling between the different bodies of men—a circumstance in some respects serious, as it was necessary that all should work together for at least another fortnight.

Two days passed, and still the petty thefts continued. Then came a crowning disaster, and with it the sensational explanation of the whole mystery.

Seventy miles of the tortuous Ruaha River had now been traversed, and an excellent rate of progress maintained, considering the numerous rapids and falls. Then the nature of the surrounding country began to change; the prevailing forest thinned somewhat; intervals of grass land became more frequent, and once or twice herds of zebra, antelope, and other gregarious beasts were seen, though at considerable distances.

The expedition was now in the Uhehe district, and the rainy season at last drew towards its close. With the advent of May, physical conditions soon promised to be more pleasant in every respect.

A halt of three days was called, and general barter for food entered into with the friendly aborigines; while a small expedition of twelve men, under Lord Winstone, was told off for a two days' hunting trip, in order that the camp might be supplied with a little fresh meat, of which it stood much in need.

The expedition had only lost one man from fever during the past three weeks, but the rains were respon-

sible for a good deal of debility. Ten of the Zanzibaris and Soudanese, though not actually prostrated, were nearly useless from weakness, and among the white men both Tracy Fain and Lord Winstone were invalids. The latter, however, declared himself quite equal to a couple of days' sport, and while Roy remained in camp and looked after his cousin the hunter chose his men and perfected a plan of attack on the big game of the district.

Heavy antelope were of course desired, but Winstone in his secret heart hoped for sport of a different nature as well. Lions were plentiful, and on the first night of the temporary halt a luckless Maga-Miga—straying beyond the boma around the boatmen's camp after the fires were lighted—had been stricken down and destroyed within thirty yards of his friends.

Attracted by his screams they rushed in a body to his rescue with shouts and yells; but though they frightened a lion from its prey, they came too late to save their comrade. The muscles of his back were literally torn off the man, and he perished before his friends could carry him into camp or summon aid.

Lord Winstone was up betimes on the morning of his little expedition, but not before bad news had run like wildfire from one end of the camp to the other. As he emerged from the tent that he shared with Roy and Tracy Fain, he found Bessie, Dan Hook and Blackbird waiting for him. Then he learned their unpleasant intelligence.

During the night the Arab, Raalt, with two Zanzibaris—Mabruki (whose family name none knew) and Abdullah Saboko—had disappeared. Bessie's Kaffir boy, Bungani, was also invisible and, what appeared even more serious, the defaulting quartette had carried with them five rifles, two boxes of ammunition, one box of trinkets, two bales of cloth and numberless trifles.

Bessie herself reported some grave losses. While she slept her tent had been entered, doubtless by Bungani, and a leathern dressing-case, containing brushes, combs, bottles, needles and thread, and many little odds and ends, had been abstracted.

The poor girl was crying, for greater than her own loss she esteemed that of Meldrum's Golden Fetich.

"Nothing else mattered really," she said, "but I know what store Roy and his cousin set on the disc. Mr. Fain will never forgive me."

"Bother Mr. Fain!" said Lord Winstone shortly. "That's the least important thing of the lot. First, your own comfort is involved, which nobody can regret more than I do; secondly, we've lost five guns, which is frightfully serious in my opinion; thirdly, we've been robbed by our own men—a nice example for the aborigines. Raalt is at the bottom of this. I never met an honest Arab yet."

"Us must get on the varmint's track if us can. He's got some rascally plan in his ugly head, though what 'tis you'm more like to know than me. The

canoes be all right, so he'm ashore somewheers, I reckon. Perhaps he's got friends in camp yet' as'll tell what his game be, if us can squeeze the truth out of 'em."

But Dan found himself mistaken. The raid took everybody by surprise, and even Lord Winstone, after a lengthy enquiry, was constrained to admit the vanished Raalt had no friends left behind him. Now that he was gone twenty of his own men brought forward stories to tell against him. He was a mischief-maker; he never spoke well of the white men behind their backs; he had sounded more than one of the coast bearers as to the advisability of throwing off the yoke and mastering their leaders while they slept. Now, not one among them knew of the vanished rascal's destination or the nature of his enterprise.

"We'll go hunting notwithstanding," said his lordship. "There'll be a slight variation in the quality of the sport, that's all. The rascals probably mean to join one of the big tribes lying ahead of us. They will represent our wealth and our weakness, then help an enemy to overpower us and trust to luck for the issue. Evidences of their road should not be difficult to find, and seeing they have rather overburdened themselves, it is more than likely that, with double marches, we shall be into them before they know it."

Meldrum agreed with his friend's suggestion and breakfast was hurriedly taken; while during the meal Blackbird the hunter, and several aborigines from the

neighbourhood made a careful search of the environment of the camp to discover if possible any trace or trail of the absconding rogues.

A local native it was who finally spied out some faint indications of a track, but the footsteps, if such they were, extended directly from a point near camp into adjacent sandy grass lands, where they were lost sight of.

The camp lay upon the river between two wide and marshy tributaries of the Ruaha, which here inclosed a space of very considerable extent. With the main stream as its base, these tributaries formed a rough triangle of country, and now two parties set forth, one under control of Dan Hook, the other conducted by Lord Winstone.

They proceeded in different directions to the points at which the tributaries ran into the main stream, and it was then arranged that each party should work up a side of the triangle until they met, near its apex. At the same time scouts were to be thrown out, though never beyond the sound of gun fire from their main party; and thus it was hoped to cover as much ground as possible and overtake or intercept the runaways before they got clear of the district.

By nine o'clock in the morning the two detachments set off. Their constitution had been carefully considered, and only the most active and hardy volunteers were chosen, for great speed had to be maintained and forced marches would be the order of the day.

With Winstone went Blackbird as gun-bearer, and the two men walked a hundred yards ahead of their armed squad. A wild but easy country for travelling rolled around them in light forest, bush and grass. Reed swamps also occurred, and as they met the efflux of the tributary and began to follow its banks inland evidences of big game became most frequent, though no sign of the robbers rewarded a sharp look-out.

Before a brief midday halt, however, Blackbird's keen eyes made a discovery that created some excitement and acted as an incentive to additional exertion at a crucial hour in the day's work.

Where the edges of a lofty sand dune, covered with mimosa scrub and coarse grass, broke abruptly into a low shelf overhanging the marshy margins of a pool there was evidence of an accident. The overhanging shelf had broken away under feet of beast or man, and a raw stain in the abraded sandy rock revealed a fracture of extremely recent date.

Below Lord Winstone found exactly what he sought in the damp sand at the water's edge, for here appeared the print of a naked foot, while a yard beyond it was a deep and sharp indentation evidently caused by the pressure of some regularly-shaped object.

Blackbird, who had served English masters on more than one big sporting expedition to Somali Land, Kilima Njaro and elsewhere, now spoke and read the signs before him without difficulty.



"Him walking long edge of de little sand cliff and de sand slip. Dat mark in mud de sharp edge of box, what drop off his head when he fall down, and de footprint is small and flat. Him made from de foot of Bungani, de Kaffir boy, de Queen's boy, what stole de case last night. So him with Raalt for certain."

No further evidence of the runaways rewarded Lord Winstone on that day. A good twelve miles was traversed before dusk, then his lordship got a shot at a young hippopotamus, and camp was pitched on a little hillock above the plains. Here a boma was constructed, fires lighted and a rough sleeping-place of dry brushwood erected for the Englishman. A steak from the young hippopotamus turned out excellent fare, and the Zanzibaris, long strangers to flesh, consumed enormous quantities of the meat.

Soon after dark the hollow, metallic growl of a lion was heard, and a glance in the direction of the sound showed two little green lamps that shone steadily together, scarcely thirty yards from the frail hedge of the boma. A red-hot firebrand hurled in his direction sent the beast off with another angry growl; and the circumstance reminded Lord Winstone of a duty necessary before he finally turned in.

With guns and torches he left the fires and proceeded two hundred yards upwards to the point of the slight hill on which his camp was pitched. From here with his glass he swept the dark scene below, hop-

ing and indeed expecting to find within his ken the glimmering camp-fire of the fugitives. A fire they must certainly have in this land of lions, or they ran the risk of sudden and terrible catastrophe, of a sleep whose waking would be death.

For a fire Lord Winstone looked, therefore, and his scrutiny was at length rewarded. After some time, like a dim red star on the inky darkness spread beneath the sky he detected a little spot of flame. To calculate its remoteness was beyond the watcher's power. It might have been any distance between three and ten miles from the hill; but its position greatly pleased the discoverer, for the lofty point on which he stood lay exactly between the two camps.

Thus, though he could see the distant light, those beside it would trace no glimmer of his own fires upon the nocturnal darkness. Taking three sticks of unequal heights, the old hunter marked his own standpoint on the ground, and then set up the wands so that their summits stood in an exact line between his eye and the light twinkling beneath. Thus, when the dawn came he would know his way, and be able to proceed by compass on a course as direct as possible to the distant camp.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A GRIM NEMESIS.

Lest the smoke of their morning fires should serve as a signal to Raalt and his accomplices, Lord Winstone went without his cup of coffee on the following day, and the men of his contingent were content to make a cold breakfast of plantain flour and water. Some revisited the carcass of the young hippopotamus, distant a quarter of a mile from camp, and despite the work of hyenas and carrion birds, cut from it more meat for future use.

Then, while yet the sun was below the horizon, the party went forward, topped the hill and found the sticks in a line that pointed almost due south. The precaution proved unnecessary, however, for pursuers were astir before pursued, and the runaways, unconscious of the near approach of danger, still dawdled at their morning meal, as a thin column of smoke, rising like a blue thread into the grey air, testified. But even as they looked it waned and died away.

"They're off," said Winstone. "I should calculate they've got the start of us by about four miles, or a little more, if anything; and as they'll probably put in about ten miles to-day, we must go fourteen, my lads. Then we'll join them at their camp fire, and they shall have the pleasure of seeing us eat their sup-

per. Remember, they're heavily laden and we're in light marching trim. Yes, I expect to take them at nightfall, if not sooner. Our first spell shall be to that dying smoke yonder. Then we'll see what their camping-ground can tell us, if anything; and so after them again."

The Zanzibaris grunted satisfaction at this programme. One or two among them were suffering agonies from undigested hippopotamus, but they put on a stoical front, and soon, over fairly open ground, the party was plodding forward at the rate of nearly three miles an hour.

In an hour and a half they reached the deserted camp to find evidences of a feast. Two cans of tinned milk, which were among the purloined stores, had been opened and emptied, and the remains of a bush antelope indicated that Raalt and his party had enjoyed a heavy meal of meat.

Blackbird grinned and pointed to the bones.

"Dey very full—full to the froat wid de buck. Dey go slow now. Fat belly—short march!"

A cry from one of the scouts attracted Lord Winstone's attention, and approaching he discovered that the man had found a large, new-made mound, almost grave-like in its shape. It was hidden in a little patch of brush, and two rough native spades of wood lay beside it.

"They've buried something! Quick, with the

spades! We must be away in half an hour at the latest."

"P'raps dat Raalt, he kill Abdullah or Mabruki or de boy," suggested the hunter.

"Very likely, indeed, Blackbird, but he isn't the man to bury them, even if he had done so. No; they're overladen and they're getting lazy. You'll find a box of ammunition, most likely; perhaps both. They want to get out of danger and push on until they can find some powerful friends; then they'll come back and dig up the spoil, no doubt."

Lord Winstone's theory proved correct, and both boxes of ammunition appeared three feet below the earth. These by his direction were covered up again as speedily as possible, a hasty meal was taken, and all were soon upon the march again.

The progress of the robbers was now sufficiently obvious, for they took no trouble to conceal it, and upon reaching a belt of rough land, mostly under-bush, the party opened out and proceeded in a line, each in sight of his neighbour. Blackbird walked within twenty paces of Lord Winstone at the right hand of the column, and as they moved forward he mentioned one or two points of interest in connection with the arch-thief, Raalt.

"Him very cunning, long-eared man, dat Raalt. He hab ears all ober him head; him listen when you tink him sleep or drunk or saying him prayers. He hear all 'bout ebberyting, sar, an' him tell me an' many

udder gen'men all him hear 'bout de Batonca country and de precious dimond stones and de Golden Fetich de Queen keep."

"How the deuce did he hear anything about that?"

"Him listen wid his ear at de bottom ob de tents, and he hear Missy Queen tell Massa Meldrum, and Massa Fain and Massa Winstone. So he got to know de Gold Fetich a very wonnerful ting; and I specs him say to himself, 'Raalt must hab dat Fetich, 'cause him want it so much.'"

"The rascal! Much good may it do him. Personally I don't attach any value to that, but the guns are what I must get back. If I'd only found those with the ammunition I should have stopped and troubled no more about the rascals themselves."

"But it noble sport, sar, hunting de Raalt in de bush."

"I don't agree with you. I'd sooner shoot a lion than a Zanzibar Arab any day. He's a much finer beast, look at him how you will."

A man on the left of the line suddenly raised a shout, and the rest closed in upon him to make a startling discovery. Hanging before the party, bound by his neck, wrists and ankles to a tree, appeared the naked body of the wretched Kaffir boy, Bessie's special attendant.

The unfortunate Bungani was quite unconscious and apparently dead. His head hung forward, every muscle was relaxed, and marks of heavy blows were

apparent on his breast and face. Already, above him in the tree, black vultures with naked necks and eyes like gems, hopped clumsily, waiting; while the lad's discoverer had frightened two hyænas from before him as he approached the spot.

"He's not dead all the same," said Winstone, "or those brutes up there wouldn't have waited. They know as well as a doctor when the heart has pulsed its last; and they never peck an eye that can see them."

The unhappy Bungani was released, stretched on his back in the shade, rubbed, and stimulated by a few drops of whiskey from Winstone's pocket pistol. Whereupon he showed signs of returning consciousness, and within half an hour, after further doses from the spirit flask, had recovered sufficiently to sit up and recognise those about him.

Every moment was precious, and after extracting a few disconnected sentences from the Kaffir thus miraculously restored to life, Winstone pushed rapidly on with Blackbird and six others, leaving the remainder of his force as a rearguard to proceed after him as soon as Bungani was strong enough to eat a little food and be carried between a couple of men.

What the boy could say confirmed previous suspicions. Raalt had awakened him in the dead of the night before his departure and, by dreadful threats of death if he declined, forced him to enter the tent of his mistress and abstract her dressing-bag, which the Arab knew contained the Golden Fetich.

Bungani, aroused from his usual sleeping-place at the entrance of Bessie's tent, had awakened to find a knife at his breast, had turned coward in the terror of the moment, had crept to the side of the blankets where Bessie lay sleeping soundly, and had taken the treasure from its usual place beside her. Already overladen, Raalt hesitated a moment with the bag in his hand, but his cupidity proved too great for the necessary sacrifice, and not content with the little oil-skin packet, which held the talisman, he had stolen the bag itself and all that it contained.

Bungani was then given his choice of flying with Raalt and the others or having his throat cut; and he chose the former alternative. He was heavily burdened and forced to keep pace with the men.

Their design, as he learned, was to anticipate the main expedition and reach the country of one Narratambo by land before the flotilla should do so. Once there they hoped to win the chief and people of the country and overwhelm Meldrum's forces.

Not far from Narratambo's territory Raalt had a brother on a big slave-raiding expedition, and the rascal had elaborated a cunning plot by which he might ultimately join forces with the Arabs in the north, attack Narratambo's forces when they could no longer be of service to him, and so, in the long run, acquire for himself the total wealth of the slaughtered English.

As for Bungani, he had himself to thank for his



present critical condition. Soon after the burial of the ammunition boxes, he had conceived the idea of escaping and returning to the expedition, but his effort was ill-timed, and Raalt himself—a man as fleet of foot as a springbok—fairly ran him down in the open.

As the Kaffir could be of little further use, Abdullah suggested putting a bullet through his head, but Raalt saw no reason to waste a good cartridge, and Bungani was therefore condemned to a lingering end, and fastened to the tree until wild beasts should destroy him or some other death overtake him. Thus the cruelty of the Arab had outwitted its own object, and his intended victim was still alive to testify against him.

Lord Winstone now pushed on with all possible speed. The country grew wilder but not more difficult as he proceeded, and while hour followed hour his anxious eyes pierced the distance upon ascending each elevation, for now he believed himself to be at close quarters with the robber trio.

He had proceeded six miles from the spot where Bungani was found when to his amazement, at the edge of a little jungle of tall yellow grasses and scrub, his sight fell full upon two Winchester rifles and Bessie's leathern dressing-case. There was no mistake, and having been informed of its contents by the owner of the bag, Lord Winstone was now able to check all that it held.

Bessie's property proved intact, save in one par-

ticular: the Golden Fetich had vanished. Seeing the importance that Raalt had heard attached to the talisman, he doubtless deemed it more precious than anything else in the bag and had hidden it about his person. Then, however, other appearances attracted his lordship.

The high grass was crushed down close at hand; a gory turban lay on it; there were also indications of a struggle, and wet blood spattered the ground in several directions.

His first thought was that the thieves had fallen out among themselves, and that Raalt, now within one day's march of his destination, had treacherously turned upon his accomplices; but a horrified shout from Blackbird soon drew him into the brake. The negro had found the solution of the mystery.

"Me Gard, Massa! Snakes an' little apples! De man Raalt—him here—him dead—him kill—him eat by lions, sar! Oh, golly boo! Bery uncomferrable time dat Marse Raalt hab. Him pain in him 'tomach for certain!"

The nature of the Arab's horrible death was manifest. Trudging forward with two guns in one hand, the dressing-case in the other, he had skirted the jungle and been suddenly stricken down by a hidden beast without one chance of fight. Then the wretch had been dragged into a lair at the heart of the brake, and the hungry brute had straightway fallen to upon its human meal.

The man's skull was smashed, and his neck broken by the lion's charge, and now he lay horribly mutilated. The soft portions of his frame below the ribs were all gone; his abdomen was entirely eaten, his scanty loin cloth torn away, his left hand bitten off and devoured.

Whether Raalt's companions had made any effort to save him was doubtful. The evidence pointed to a sudden flight on their part, for two more guns were found close at hand, together with two cases of stores and goods. Both men had vanished, and with them they had evidently taken but one rifle.

"They were terrified by the sudden attack on their leader, flung down their burdens and ran for their lives," decided Winstone.

Then Blackbird touched his arm.

"De lion not far off, Sar. Him paw marks here and dey red an' wet still."

"Begad! It was the approach of our party that frightened him away, no doubt. This is an old lair. Look at those antelope bones. Well, well, our task is done, I suppose. Hunt very carefully through every inch of grass and all around for that blessed golden toy, and look in this poor brute's loin-cloth and turban, which were all the clothes he appears to have troubled himself with of late. We shall never be forgiven if we don't bring back the disc. Keep awake, too, for your own sakes. There are lions very close."

But most careful search, though it brought to light

the remaining rifle and sundry other articles dropped by Abdullah and Mabruki in their frantic flight, revealed no sign of the Golden Fetich, and neither Raalt's shattered corpse nor gory turban could furnish the curiosity. It was true that one of his followers might be carrying the thing; but that appeared unlikely, seeing the high esteem in which the Arab had held it.

However, there was nothing more to do but pile a heap of stones over the dead man, push on to the meeting-place with Dan Hook, and then return as quickly as possible to camp. The rearguard, with Bungani, arrived just as Winstone was preparing to continue his march, but upon their appearance he changed his mind and determined to camp about a mile from the lair of the lion for the night.

Then it was that several hours of daylight being still available, and evidences of game appearing on every side, Winstone and Blackbird set out to shoot an antelope or two if possible. They started exactly an hour after the discovery of Raalt's corpse, and an adventure, ever afterwards described by both hunters as the most extraordinary within their experience, almost immediately befel them.

The patch of jungle extended westerly for a considerable distance, and leaving it at the spot where Raalt had been destroyed, Winstone, Blackbird, and a gun-bearer proceeded along its edge until a sharp corner, some two hundred yards from the starting-

point, was reached. Round this his lordship peeped cautiously, then fell flat on his stomach and signalled to the men behind him to do likewise.

What he had seen was a herd of zebra, ten or a dozen in number. The wind was from them, and ignorant of danger they were trotting briskly along together. On their present course they would pass within fifty yards of the sportsman, and Lord Winstone, quickly discarding a heavier weapon, took his double-barrelled Express rifle and made ready. But before the beasts reached him they came into contact with another enemy.

Suddenly from the edge of the jungle grass, fifty yards ahead, a tawny streak leapt out and shot like an arrow into the little herd. With terrified squeals the brutes stampeded and fled with thundering hoofs; but one was down, to rise no more, and a big male lion crouched upon it.

For a few moments the beast kicked frantically, then the lion struck him twice with a sledgehammer paw and apparently broke his neck, for the zebra's hindquarters suddenly trembled, then it ceased to kick, straightened out and grew still. Thereupon the conqueror, in no haste to feed himself apparently, lifted up his gory head and roared twice.

"Him call his missis and de pickaninnies," whispered the hunter. "See! him eat nuffing, but leave it all."

An answering roar soon echoed from the reeds, and

a full-grown lioness with two cubs, no larger than big cats, arrived to rejoice in the banquet. The little cubs set to work promptly licking blood, and the mother selected the inside of the zebra's thigh for her point of attack.

"Him full already! Him no hungry," declared Blackbird, pointing at the lion.

"We must bag the pair if we can," answered the leader. "That's a particularly fine male, if I'm a judge."

Blackbird handed his master the four-bore once more and Lord Winstone, though within range, prepared to utilise a squat shrub twenty feet nearer his game, and crept forward on his stomach until behind the bush.

The lioness had her haunches turned towards him and presented an uncertain shot as she crouched over her food and tore at the meat; the lion, who had evidently satisfied his appetite elsewhere, rolled over on his side at a little distance from his family, curled up one giant paw like a cat and began washing his muzzle and cleansing it from the gore of the slaughtered zebra.

In this position he offered a tolerably easy shot, but Winstone, pushing forward by inches, got so near before he took aim, that he could hear the contented brute purring, with a harsh noise, like a saw cutting hard wood. He knew that he would have to deal with both lions, and desired therefore to make the

despatch of the male an absolute certainty at the first shot.

Suddenly a thin streak of flame leapt forward from the distant edge of the jungle beyond Lord Winstone, and the crack of a Winchester woke a dozen echoes over the undulating country. His lordship had his own finger on trigger at the moment, but did not fire until the result of the first shot became apparent. One of the party, contrary to orders, had gone hunting on his own account, and now, ignorant of the nature of the sport and his own danger, had opened fire at a range of two hundred yards upon the lions.

An awful roar greeted the shot and the lioness sprang up into the air like a frightened cat. She had been struck in the foot, but not much injured. The lion rose instantly and ran to her, while she held up her wounded paw and snarled with agony and rage. Then the distant sportsman fired again, but this time he missed altogether, though only by a few inches, but the bullet struck up the sand within a hand's breadth of the lion.

The great brute answered this attack with another roar and faced round in the direction of the discharge; but as he did so, at the critical moment before he leapt towards his enemy, Lord Winstone fired.

The lion was hit heavily, but not killed. It staggered forward, but recovered itself, turned and approached the second assailant. Long before it reached him, however, the great brute's powers were broken,

its hind legs ceased to be of use, and it struggled and scratched forward, dragging its body towards the hunter by the use of its paws alone.

The lioness approached at the same time, but by leaps and bounds, and the brute was within ten yards of them when Blackbird and his master fired simultaneously, then leapt to right and left as she still came on.

Other shots echoed in their ears at the same moment, for the valiant Zanzibari who had fired with the Winchester at long range, seeing what was going on, and desperately anxious to distinguish himself in some way, now rushed into the open and began blazing away at the two cubs, which still tugged and tore together at the dead zebra.

Meantime the lioness turned and made a final frantic dash, but she was badly hurt, and bleeding heavily. Winstone, uncertain of the lion's position, now called to Blackbird to despatch the lesser brute alone, then, bending under the smoke, he looked for the other beast and found it within five yards of him. It was still alive, but could crawl no further, and the gun-carrier, eager to have some share in the battle, now fired point-blank at its head. It roared again, then blood choked its huge jaws, and, after the manner of its kind immediately before death, it vomited. Winstone had shot it through the lungs and inflicted other unknown injuries, as its speedy collapse testified.

Now he turned from the sight of its final death-



struggle to assist Blackbird, and dropped the lioness dead within fifty yards of her lord. In the distance the Zanzibari, finding himself apparently unequal to shooting straight, had rushed to the dead zebra, clubbed his weapon, and brained the young lions with successive blows. Now he arrived in high glee with a dead cub in each hand.

At this moment a cry of amazement attracted Lord Winstone's attention to the dying lion, and he found Blackbird and the carrier regarding the moribund brute with unutterable horror. Cast up in froth and blood before it, lay a human hand with a silver ring upon the middle finger; and the dying lion had also disgorged a lengthy scrap of scarlet cloth, torn from the dead Arab's waist belt, and evidently bolted with the rest of its awful meal.

"Him eat Raalt!" gasped Blackbird.

"And more than Raalt!" cried Winstone. "A knife—quick—quick!"

His sharp eye had discovered a square black object attached to the sanguinary scrap of cloth.

"The Golden Fetich, by all that's horrible!" he cried. "The wretch fastened it to his loin cloth for safety; and from there it went straight into the lion's belly. Providence—Providence is responsible for this! Now I also shall be forced to maintain that the trinket has a value at present hidden from us. Time will show. But the skin of this lion I keep at any cost."

The Golden Fetich proved to be quite uninjured by its singular adventure, and a couple of hours later, laden with the big lion's skin and some zebra and lion meat, which is excellent fare, the party returned to camp and feasted royally. But it needs not be said that the lion of the Fetich formed no part of their repast, for, as Blackbird declared:

"Him eat Raalt, an' if we eat him, we get Raalt him wicked spirit in us."

"Exactly so," acquiesced his master. "You stick to the cubs, for lion cub is jolly good eating—better than veal, in my judgment."

The night passed without sign of the runaway Zanzibaris and when, early on the following morning, Winstone's detachment fell in with that of Dan Hook, it transpired that no sign of either Abdullah or Mabruki had rewarded them.

Together the parties turned their faces backwards to the Ruaha River, and, three days later, reached camp without further adventure. Good sport had waited on the rifles of Winstone and his hunter, however; and into camp were brought rations of meat sufficient for four days. The ammunition, unearthed by the way, together with nearly all the stolen property, was also restored to its rightful owners.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A DOSE OF THUNDER MEDICINE.

The expedition pushed steadily forward up river, and three days after its journey was renewed, a starved, ulcer-bitten wretch struggled into camp and flung himself at the feet of Roy Meldrum. It was the man Mabruki, and, bidden to speak, he quickly told the sequel of the last chapter.

When Raalt was stricken down by the lion, both Zanzibaris, casting their goods from them and even discarding their rifles in their terror, fled for dear life from the scene.

For two days they wandered helplessly about, and on one occasion were nearly slain at the hands of a small body of natives armed with spears and bows, who fired upon them and wounded Abdullah in the back; but from this peril they escaped and, at last, by absolute chance, found themselves again at the spot where Raalt met his death.

Then they discovered that a tall pile of stones evidently concealed the corpse of the faithless Arab, that their guns and goods had all vanished, and that the carcasses or rather clean picked skeletons of two lions lay close at hand.

Convinced of the truth, they carefully followed the signs of the punitive party backwards to the river.

On the third day Abdullah Sokoto had died of the arrow-wound in his back, but Mabruki pushed forward and, after terrible marches through the wood and wastes, succeeded in regaining the expedition.

"And now," he said, "I pray you shoot me if you will, but suffer me to die with a full belly, that I may know what it is to eat once more. I did wrong and I was punished for it. I listened to the wicked man and lived to see a terrible death overtake him. And Abdullah died very thirsty and hungry. But suffer me to die full. Yet, do as you will and kill me hungry if you think I have not been punished enough. Mambu kwa munga. Who can escape his appointed end?"

The man was fed and presently forgiven; while it is interesting to note that more than once in after times Meldrum had cause to congratulate himself upon his leniency; for Mabruki speedily regained health and strength, as did also the Kaffir boy, Bungani, and both lived to distinguish themselves favourably. For long the latter was deprived of old privileges, but Bessie begged for him many times, pointed out the nature of his temptation, and reminded Roy that the poor little wretch had been forced to choose between treachery and death.

"Besides," she said, "he tried to come back to me." So Bungani found himself reinstated, and his dog-like fidelity to his mistress was never known to waver again.

Within a month the navigable limits of the Ruaha

were reached and, having received presents in proportion to their services, King Unyah's warriors and boatmen departed. Meldrum's route now extended through Urori country, well to the southeast of Lake Leopold.

Nearly two months had passed since the farewell to Unyah; it was now June and the rainy season had ended; while the increasing heat of the hours of day made it desirable to pursue a path on high ground or over the foothills of mountains when possible. The next important point to make for upon the journey was that track or route known as the Stevenson Road, between the great lakes Tanganyika and Nyassa. It was desired to hit this some distance above the centre of Nitinga, and to do so the chart showed that it would be necessary to keep northerly round the Yoma-lemma Mountains, or take a direct course over them.

The former plan was deemed the wiser, and with about two hundred miles between him and the Stevenson Road, Meldrum and his band set forth through the Urori country and preserved a steady rate of progress during an uneventful month.

Various minor incidents marked each day, but the advance did not suffer, and some of the recent delay was amply atoned for by a regular daily progress of four miles. For the most part small tribes occupied the district, but as a rule they proved friendly enough and very willing to barter the usual plantains and goats for fair exchange in beads and trinkets. Some,

however, did not trust the travellers, but fled incontinently at their approach. In these cases the expedition helped itself, though more than one of the carriers incurred a bad spear wound by wandering off alone into the plantain patches.

Further on, when the end of August was nearly reached and it became a question of days only to the Stevenson Road, the natives assumed the offensive, and threatened serious trouble. They regularly deserted their villages before the column, and so saved the output of beads and brass wire; but they persisted in unfriendly actions, assembled in large numbers on the uplands and hills through which Meldrum's party was progressing, and harassed the rear with threats and insults.

Several individuals of this tribe had been captured and sent back to their companions with gifts and protestations of friendship; but they continued unamiable and at last, after a more than usually trying day with gathering crowds of the aborigines on either side of the expedition, Winstone advised Meldrum to deal more sharply with them, and try the effect of a little counter-demonstration. Accordingly, on the following morning, about the hour that luncheon was taken, the Soudanese were drawn up in fighting trim and with them the four Englishmen, ten Zanzibaris, and two Arabs—a detachment of five and twenty guns.

Fire!" rang out the great voice of Roy; then twenty-four rifles bellowed out together and a little

storm of lead hissed into and shrieked over the enemy, where they were massed some hundred and fifty yards distant. Five men fell instantly and a mighty shriek of amazement and horror rose from the host. Others among them appeared to be wounded, and these were lifted between their friends and conveyed away as speedily as possible; while the crowd hastily climbed up the hills out of harm's way.

Then it was that Lord Winstone, who had not yet fired, took his Winchester, calculated the range as only a man with his experience could do, and fired thrice at the head of the retreating force.

They were now nearly half a mile distant, and Winstone felt doubtful of a workmanlike shot at that range; but fortune favoured him, and instantly upon the treble report of the repeating rifle a man, viewed through a field-glass by Fain, threw up his arms, dropped his weapons and fell amidst his companions.

"They don't know who's hit 'em!" cried Tracy. "Ah! now they see the smoke," he added, "and they're off like hares. They've dropped their wounded, too, the cowardly wretches! They evidently feel that as long as they're in sight they're in range."

"I hope so," answered his lordship. "We must do nothing to disabuse them of that opinion. The shot was good enough to try, and now that it has come off we'll reap the moral effect. They'll be civil at any rate. To-morrow we'll burn a village—only one. That, too, will serve to teach them manners."

A pleasant peace and freedom from anxiety succeeded upon this incident, and next morning, as good as his word, Winstone advised the destruction of a village which had been vacated as usual on the approach of the expedition.

Three prisoners were fortunately captured here—an old lame man and his two wives. By these folks renewed messages of friendship were sent to the people, and it was made clear that the strangers did not come as slave-raiders, but as peaceful hunters travelling for pleasure. They desired nothing but peace and plenty. They came with gifts in their hands and expected to be treated with hospitality and friendliness; but if the tribes wanted war, then war it should be, and the thunder tubes would flash by night and by day until there was not another soldier or fighting man left among the people.

Lastly, Meldrum explained that if the tribes would stop in their villages he would greet them as a brother and buy what they could sell and be to them a good friend; but that if they fled away before him, as though he was a man of war instead of a man of peace, he would continue to fire their homes, ravage their cultivation, and destroy the things that were held precious by them.

Bessie was introduced to the decrepit personage, and endeavours made to convince him and his wives that she was a White Queen from afar, now travelling



in friendship with all queens, kings, monarchs, and chiefs whatsoever.

This, in part, they apprehended, and when Bessie herself heaped gifts upon them of a sort that, as Fain declared, would probably get the poor souls knocked on the head by the first stronger savage who met them, their fear lessened and they departed with evident delight to dangle the toys before their kinsfolk and great men.

The value of this series of actions became apparent two days later when a considerable encampment was reached just before dark. Instead of the usual loneliness, as of a village of the dead, bonfires blazed, torches were passed from hand to hand, and the leaders of the place, headed by their chief in person, came forward and greeted the travellers.

Their fear was evidently considerable, but efforts were successfully made to set them at their ease, and a few gifts, with half a bale of cloth for the chief's womankind, speedily created a feeling of confidence and trust. This Meldrum and Winstone did their utmost to ripen.

A feast was spread for the white folks and large stores of poultry and grain laid at their disposal. Food in considerable quantities was also sent out to the camp, and many quarts of malwa were drained that night by the thirsty Zanzibaris. Indeed, they became too jovial for safety, and a few broke bounds; but returned penitent from the native village at dawn.

Upon the following day a great war dance was celebrated in honour of the travellers, and on the succeeding morning they proceeded on their way once more, having won the friendship of their former enemies and received from the chief a passport, in the shape of a painted shell, which he promised them would prove protection sufficient to the entire expedition until they reached "the great track between the waters." Beyond that extended country unknown to him, and he marvelled at the courage of the white wanderers, who could thus brave the perils of strange kingdoms, and pass forward and onward without fear of death.

"It is the Thunder Gods!" explained Lord Winstone. "Without them we are even as you are; but they wake while we sleep, their eyes are always open to guard us from danger, they know who are friends and who are enemies. They lift up their voice and spit forth their words by night and by day; and their voices are fire and cloud, and their words are death."

"You say they never sleep?"

"Never. We are mortal and must sleep, for after toil and food our eyes close, as yours do; but our Thunder Gods are awake, and the light of the camp fires gleams in their watchful eyes, and they whisper together where we have placed them. And if danger threaten from savage beast or man, our Thunder Gods leap to our hands and we awake and clasp them and face the most terrible foe that earth can bring against

us without fear, because we know man is powerless against us."

The chief nodded.

"Be good to your Thunder Gods," he said, "for I have known gods turn upon those who forgot to worship them, and give their bodies to their enemies and the vultures. Be kind to your great roaring gods, and feed them well, and give them sweet water to drink and ripe plantains to eat; else they will talk fire at you too, and it will be ill with you, and the hyenas will have a strange taste upon their tongues."

"You speak very wisely and I thank you. Farewell. We shall never forget your goodness," concluded Lord Winstone.

"Farewell. I am glad you came to my country, but I do not want you to come back again unless your Thunder Gods tell you to do so."

So the palaver ended, and the expedition wound forward upon its way. Good progress was made, and at the end of August, or rather less than eight months from the beginning of their journey, Meldrum's little band reached the Stevenson Road.

They had now travelled about six hundred and fifty miles, and a distance of three hundred at least still separated them from the Wambasi—that tributary of the Luapula River on which the Batoncas had their stronghold.

Death and disaster had thinned their numbers; Raalt was gone, with not a few of the Zanzibaris and

Soudanese—seven in all; but the leaders of the expedition, though each had suffered more or less, were for the most part little the worse.

Bessie had surprised everybody and delighted Roy by her splendid pluck and sustained physical health. Her poor donkey had not been so fortunate, for he fell very lame in the off hind leg, and for two days in the hilly country she walked to rest him. Now he had recovered, and was once more invaluable to his rider.

A high rate of health had been maintained from the outset, and Fain pointed out that the regularity of good food might be thanked for that fortunate fact. In most cases of Central African travel one of the great, indeed the greatest of perils, results from the danger of starvation. Thus far, however, that awful calamity had not threatened Meldrum's expedition, and it still carried ample reserves of tinned goods, soup, and milk.

As for the individual members of the party, all pulled well enough with Roy, and he was an ideal leader, the life of the expedition, always cheery and cheerful, always with sufficient reserves of good spirits and pluck to impart both, where there appeared signs of failing hope or of courage broken under suffering.

The lesser evils even—the evils of stinging and biting and poisoning, the evils of insect life, of the noisome creeping things that bury themselves in a tired

man's flesh while he sleeps and rot there—these plagues were not enough to quench his unconquerable spirit.

Lord Winstone represented the brains of the party, and with Roy and Bessie he got on uncommonly well; but Dan Hook was frightened of him, while between his lordship and Fain there had arisen a very evident lack of sympathy.

Tracy Fain's part, up to this stage in the expedition, was not of a nature to excite special attention or require particular description. He snapped and snarled a good deal, and was heartily disliked by the carriers and soldiers, to whom he always spoke with insolent and short-sighted disrespect. In truth he was not happy, and his nebulous idea of acquiring the diamonds for himself became less and less promising as he regarded it in the light of his present experiences. Not that he had altered in his real attitude towards Roy; indeed, the old contempt quickly ripened into hatred after Bessie Ogilvie had made her choice.

All that was worst in the man now ran riot in secret, when darkness fell upon the camp and only the red eyes of the fires, the monotonous tread of the sentries or the roar of a hungry beast disturbed the night. At such times he suffered his passion to shake him while Winstone and Meldrum slept; at such times he felt a kinship with the lion, and yearned to fall headlong upon his innocent foe.

But these ebullitions were hidden from mortal eye.

In public Fain preserved scrupulous politeness, studied Bessie and his cousin, shirked no trial or difficulty in which they had to participate, and bore his share of the burden and heat of the day without flinching.

Definite plans for the future he had none. He cherished his secret still, but lost heart about performing the act of villainy, from no prompting to rectitude and honour, but because he doubted much if his scheme would prove possible of execution.

So far as Bessie was concerned he still hungered for her in secret, and even debated the possibilities of creating a division in the camp to aid him; but he was too unpopular to win followers, and not made of the stuff to achieve his purpose against odds by courage and force of character.

"Life is precarious here: it hangs on a thread for all of us. He may be the next." That was Tracy Fain's secret thought. And so he watched and waited, eating his heart out; and more than once it was not fever but passion that Meldrum saw in his eyes when he commiserated with the man, bid him be of stout heart and take more quinine.

The Stevenson Road was duly passed and good progress made. Then there came a day—early in September—when the expedition found itself in the Urungu country, at the confines of a powerful monarch's territory, and before the capital of a potentate who could place full twenty thousand spears in the field.

Meldrum's road lay directly through this gentleman's kingdom, and as the friendship of Ongassé would be absolutely necessary before further progress, a strong position was chosen, camp pitched, and zaribas of extra stoutness erected in case of difficulties.

"To-morrow we'll pay him a friendly call, if he doesn't take the initiative," said Roy. "He's got a big town, by Jove!"

As he spoke his eyes roamed over the capital of the Nangattos, where it spread with grey and golden thatches set in green acres of plantain and encircled by the silver arm of a little river. A mile separated the expedition from the village, and Roy's camp was situated on rising ground at an elevation of some five hundred feet above the valley.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE BLOOD BROTHERHOOD.

King Ongassé slept but ill that night, and his head turned many times upon its little wooden pillow. He was a young monarch, barely five-and-twenty years of age, but a man of some intelligence, and the expedition now camped over against him caused him much uneasiness, for he was not unfamiliar with fire-arms in the hands of remorseless Arabs, and he knew that they meant death and misery and destruction.

That he could easily wipe out the little band above him on the mountain-side, he had no shadow of doubt, however, and the only problem in his mind as he waited uneasily for dawn was a question of policy, and a dim uncertainty concerning the strange people who thus thrust themselves into the lion's jaws.

They came in such small force that he found it hard to believe they designed any act of aggression; while, on the other hand, it was impossible to conceive of their business in the Nangatto territories, if not upon mischief bent.

Early next morning the monarch determined to settle the matter as soon as might be, so, with a body-guard of five hundred fighting men, he marched boldly up the hill under a banner of yellow cloth—an idea



evidently copied from some Arab slave raiders—and demanded to know the nature of the expedition.

Meldrum and Winstone with two of the Soudanese proceeded fearlessly from the zariba, while unknown to the advancing force, the rest of the expedition that could muster arms lay ready behind their frail fortifications twenty yards distant.

“Why do you come upon my land?” inquired Ongassé shortly.

“We do not come upon your land until you give us leave,” answered Winstone, who knew the dialect, having had a couple of the tribe with him on a former hunting expedition near the shores of the Tanganyika. “We are here as friends and have no quarrel with any man.”

“You come with some intent to steal or do evil? It is vain.”

“Truly, Ongassé, it would be vain for a handful of men, even though armed with guns, to stand before the face of your legions. We are not so foolish. And if our numbers were not enough to convince you, know, King Ongassé, that we are the servants of a White Queen, the Queen of the Silver Sunrise. She is travelling through these regions to see her fellow monarchs and exchange gifts with them and win their regard and friendship. Should we bring our beautiful White Queen if we came to fight? She has countless legions of armed men, yet she leaves them all at home, for she is very good and very true and honest

and all men who see her love her. Therefore she fears nothing."

"Tell her to come to me."

"Nay, great King; that is not how we may speak to the Queen of the Silver Sunrise. She is robing to meet you and pay you proper respect. You have not robed to meet her."

"I knew not you had a Queen among you."

"Yet there is time. She sends you by my hand this gift, and bids me say that she will be glad to see the wonder of the Nangatto people, the Monarch Ongassé, to eat and drink with her if he wills friendship."

The gift was a purple umbrella with white spots. This Meldrum opened and presented to the King.

"I will go and make ready to meet your Queen," declared the other. "I thank your White Queen, and I will eat with her and drink with her before the sun has reached above the edge of the high hills."

He retired, making quite unregal haste, while an attendant held the purple parasol above his head.

"We're in luck," said Winstone. "Here's a boy King for once, and if Miss Ogilvie doesn't win his young heart, I'm a Dutchman."

A banquet was spread and some delicacies sorted from the stores; then Bessie, enthroned on a Union Jack, was seated at the head of affairs. Anon the King returned, with very elaborate adornments, and

the meeting between him and his visitor was impressive to a degree.

Everybody took the incident seriously enough; indeed it was a serious matter, for much depended upon it. Four head men accompanied Ongassé, and all were invited to join the meal; but they were not permitted to eat from the same dish as their King.

The young pride of the Nangattos ate and drank solemnly, and his big black eyes rarely left Bessie's face. He asked several questions as to her nation and its resources, and he showed considerable scepticism at some of Winstone's answers. Then he desired to know if the Queen was married.

"No, Ongassé; but she will be married when she returns to her own kingdom."

"To a King?"

"To a Prince. He sits here. His name is Roy, Prince of Meldrum. He is a very big man in his own land, and we call him Bana Mkuba, the Great Master."

"I like your Queen, though she would be more beautiful if she were black."

"She likes you, too; but she would think still better of you if you were white."

Ongassé reflected awhile. Then he said:

"Bana Mkuba is not so great as I am."

"We are in your country, Ongassé; therefore he is not."

"That is well said. Now ask your White Queen if

I appear to her a more comely thing to see than Bana Mkuba."

Lord Winstone both translated this question and told Bessie the answer to it in a breath.

"Bana Mkuba is the Queen's right hand, and he has her heart. But King Ongassé is the most splendid man, after Bana Mkuba, that the Queen has ever seen."

"That is well said. Now tell the Queen that Ongassé will marry her instead of Bana Mkuba. Tell her that Ongassé is very pleased with her."

What Bessie answered to Lord Winstone was this:

"Horrid little imp! How does he dare to say such a thing?"

What Lord Winstone replied to the King ran in a different fashion.

"The Queen of the Silver Sunrise would have gladly wedded with the King of the Nangattos; but, alas! she has given her word to Bana Mkuba; and in our country a Queen's word is more sacred than a common man's oath. She cannot wed any other than Bana Mkuba."

"Then tell her to kill Bana Mkuba. His life is hers if she is a Queen."

Winstone did not take the trouble to translate this sinister suggestion.

"She loves Bana Mkuba with her whole heart. In our country no woman has more than one husband,

even though she be a Queen; and no man has more than one wife."

"A strange country! Then tell Bana Mkuba that I will give him twenty wives if he will suffer the White Queen to wed with me."

"It is useless, King Ongassé; our people love in a way unlike your people. Two hundred of your most beautiful maidens would not take the place of the White Queen in Bana Mkuba's heart."

"A man must have a small heart if he can only be good to one woman."

"Before marriage all white men think one wife will be enough."

"And after?"

"Afterwards I believe they often find one wife is too many," answered his lordship, who was a bachelor.

"Ha! ha! You are a wise man. And as for your big Prince there, I will give him good store of cattle and lands, and I will give him four of my own wives and make him a mighty leader among my people if he yields the Queen to me. Now, tell him that."

Lord Winstone interpreted the offer and Meldrum's face grew fiery red through its tan and freckles.

"Tell him I'll knock his ugly black head off in half a minute! *HIS* wives, indeed! And Bessie to marry him! Impudent little monkey!"

The other translated.

"Bana Mkuba grows hot, Ongassé, according to the custom of his country. He has never been among

great Kings before, and has our ideas about these matters. He says he will fight for you and work for you and love you, but the White Queen is the apple of his eye; he cannot break his word to her; and she cannot break her word to him. If that happened they would both be disgraced for evermore, and never laugh or be happy again."

"Well, well," said the young potentate, "they needn't make such a fuss about it. I thought it would be a nice thing to marry a Queen; but it doesn't matter. I am your friend and will accept your friendship, if I find that it is worth accepting. Now, tell me whither you are going and why."

The other then explained that the expedition was one of sport, pleasure and discovery; that the travelers had come out into the world to make friends of the mighty ones of the earth, and that Ongassé had naturally been amongst those the Queen of the Silver Sunrise most desired to propitiate and honour.

"It is our wish to pass in peace through your kingdom," concluded Lord Winstone. "We then desire to proceed, if it is well, through the land called Lunda to the Luapula River, that flows between the great waters."

"And then?"

"Then we desire to see the country of the Batoncas; and then, if all is still well, we shall return to our own land."

"It will take many moons."

"Ongassé is always right. It will."

Subsequently the King informed Meldrum that, two days later, he and a band of his warriors were marching some fifty miles to the western quarter of his territory. There had been trouble on the frontiers with a strong tribe in the Lunda country—the Mas-segi. Already the Nangattos were in force against the enemy, but it was felt that the presence of the King and his picked troops would be necessary to restore peace.

"Our road is your road," explained his majesty. "We will travel henceforth as friends. The road is good."

A map of the country was shown to Ongassé after Fain had carefully printed the King's name upon his territory in red ink. This pleased the monarch much. He traced their route and showed Meldrum that the proposed escort would extend over about sixty miles of country; but as it was explained to Roy that such a march would occupy ten days, he realised that the Nangattos would go somewhat too fast for his own carriers.

This was a difficulty speedily surmounted, however, for Ongassé promptly ordered off thirty of his own men to share the burdens of the expedition and thus accelerate its progress.

"You will have rich and rare gifts for me, I know full well," he said; "but keep them until we reach our journey's end. Then it may be that you will love me

more than at present, so that the gifts will be still better. And I will give you great store of food, that you may not starve in the hungry kingdom of the Massegi before you reach the river."

Amicable relations were thus established and once more the travellers had good cause to bless fortune. Indeed, Dan Hook oftentimes shook his head.

"'Tis tu much happiness, an' theer'll come a reg'lar twister of a King some fine day as'll eat us, body an' bones, afore he'll let us go 'pon his ground. They'm all tu civil by half so far; but us'll get our evil fortune come bimebye so sure as it takes all sorts o' luck to make up life. However, I ban't one to meet trouble half-way, as be well knawn."

Though the element of personal risk and anxiety lacked from this combined progress, it was not without incidents requiring careful adjustment. Tact often saved friction, and the heads of the respective companies continued on excellent terms, but the rank and file quarrelled not a little, and on the third day of the march came news of the theft of a rifle and a cartridge belt. One Ben Soud, a Soudanese, had slept with his weapons beside him and awakened to find them gone. He had promptly thrashed two Nangattos and, in his turn, been roughly mauled by a dozen others.

Ongassé took the matter very seriously when rigid search failed to find the culprit, who had doubtless hidden his treasure on the night of the theft. The King's concern at this circumstance appeared perfectly



genuine, and he decreed that one course of action alone would serve to unite the forces in friendly bonds and prevent further misunderstandings and mischief.

"I have asked my wise men," he said, "and my medicine woman—she who is carried by bearers, and who sleeps not under the stars, but lies beneath a tent of leopard-skin. I have asked them all, and they speak with one voice. There must be Blood Brotherhood performed between myself and the White Queen's head counsellor. Between her and me there can be no Blood Brotherhood, in that she is a woman and I am a man."

"It is well," answered Bessie, mightily relieved to learn some more or less unpleasant ordeal had been escaped. "I will appoint my own dear Bana Mkuba to represent me, great King."

They were proceeding at the head of the line as usual. Bessie rode her faithful white donkey, and the King, with Lord Winstone as interpreter, walked beside her, while Bungani, carrying a ragged plantain leaf, kept the flies off the donkey and occasionally fanned his mistress.

A halt of one day was called and the ceremony of Blood Brotherhood enacted with all fitting pomp and circumstance. The aged medicine woman, who lived in a leopard-skin tent and was carried by bearers upon the march, proved to be a power in the ceremony; for, though a feeble and ailing crone apparently, she yet rose to great heights of tragic significance during the

operation, attired herself for it in amazing raiment, and herself handled the knife and poured the salt.

Unluckily for Meldrum, the Nangattos' particular ritual of Blood Brotherhood was not as simple or inoffensive as that of many tribes. Their rite followed the procedure of the Congo savages, and involved sundry operations that Roy viewed with much inward disgust. But he flinched not, and conducted himself with all proper propriety and self-control from first to last.

The day began in rejoicings and beating of drums and dances; then a sort of rough daïs was spread with fresh green leaves, and around it there gathered the prominent representatives of both parties.

A special seat within sight of the operation was arranged for Bessie, and about her collected Tracy Fain, Lord Winstone, Hook and Omar Laluzi, the remaining Arab head man; while in an outer ring the Zanzibaris stood with the Soudanese and formed the lesser part of a circle which was completed by the natives. On the other side Ongassé's general officers and wise men assembled; then the priestess appeared. She was attired, like a veritable harpy, in rags and feathers, with red paint on her hideous breast and withered face, and a petticoat of cloth woven from reeds and daubed with many colours.

The old woman shrieked and sang awhile, but presently quieted down and took from an attendant a

knife of shining metal set in an ivory handle, with a big cowrie shell containing salt.

At this point in the ceremonial Roy and Ongassé appeared and squatted together upon the leaf-strewn daïs. The priestess then began her mad song again, and the chant was participated in by the natives, who yelled a sort of savage chorus. Presently Ongassé bared his left arm, and a hum of admiration followed as Meldrum did the same and showed a tremendous limb, tanned rosy red to the elbow, but white as marble above. His huge biceps rolled up like a wave as he doubled his elbow.

Then the King and Roy held each other by the left hand, and the sibyl with the glittering knife approached and upon the shoulders of both made four light gashes. A lozenge-shaped space was left in the midst and upon this the hag poured a little salt from her shell.

Now came the most trying part of the operation—and Ongassé, whose arm had many cicatrices indicating similar operations in the past, bent over to Meldrum, put forth a red tongue and licked the blood and salt from Roy's great shoulder. Then it was the other's turn, and the representative of Queen Bessie performed his cannibal feat with perfect good grace, whereupon the Nangattos howled and the Zanzibaris fired their guns and all was rejoicing and good fellowship.

Presently Meldrum withdrew and had a nip of

whiskey in the seclusion of his tent; but for the rest of the day he was forced to be very much in evidence. Splendid presents came from Ongassé in the shape of various food stuffs, chiefly plantain. He offered some really fine ivory also; but this was gratefully declined, as to carry it must be out of the question.

A day and night of feasting completed the function of Blood Brotherhood, and on the morrow, soon after reveille woke the echoes, both Meldrum's expedition and the black hosts of his friends were on the move once more.

Perfect friendship between both parties had resulted from the ceremony of the previous morning, for the aboriginal code of honour in Central Africa, if strange, is strict under certain conditions; and as the joint forces proceeded day by day together towards their parting-place, no further trouble was experienced.


## CHAPTER XVIII.

### CHECK TO THE WHITE QUEEN.

On the fringe of the Lunda country Ongassé bid his friends farewell. He had no desire that Meldrum should be embroiled with the natives through whose domain he must now pass; but it proved to be a case of Kanatto and Unyah over again, and as soon as the Massegi heard that Roy's expedition had travelled in peace through Ongassé's territory, they assumed that the whites must be their enemies, and held aloof from all intercourse. Little, however, was seen of them, though they were known to be a strong tribe.

Luckily, they now had the Nangatto warriors upon their hands, for after leaving his white friends, King Ongassé started for the Eastern borders of his kingdom, where the Massegi were making head and giving trouble.

For two days Meldrum pushed steadily forward through a country almost deserted. All the fighting men were to the east, and in their train had passed many women and children. There were some vague rumours of a body of six or seven hundred spears said to be pushing rapidly through the Lunda country to join their fellow warriors against Ongassé; but no sign of these appeared, and in three villages nothing



was found but aged men and women and young children.

Such apparent security led to some slight relaxation of the rules of march, and the roads being fair and danger apparently remote, the people often scattered a little after camp was formed and foraged or amused themselves as they pleased.

So excellent and well worn were the native tracts of this district that five miles occupied scarcely more than three hours, but, as this distance was considered sufficient for a day's work, some leisure accrued to the members of the expedition after all labours of pitching camp were ended. Unhappily this circumstance, combined with the conviction of continued and perfect safety, was now responsible for a shattering disaster.

It happened that on a fine afternoon in early October, Lord Winstone, Meldrum, Blackbird and two Zanzibari bearers went out to hunt for wild pig and the bush antelopes that abounded in the district; Tracy Fain, as usual, stayed in camp, while Bessie, with Bungani, Dan Hook, and an escort of six followers, proceeded back along the road to a watercourse under lofty tamarind trees and dense masses of pepper-bush, amona with snowy flower chalices, huge creepers, with leaves like elephants' ears, wildernesses of wonderful tree ferns and strange, gigantic fungi of many colours.

Here, as they passed by an hour earlier, Bessie had noted certain new orchids of wondrous beauty; and

now, amid great hanging nests of insects, like brown paper bags, and in strange sunlit glades alive with butterflies and brilliant beetles, she crept along guarded by Hook, while a couple of the men unwound a thread of stout twine three hundred yards long which began at the main track and marked the way back to it.

Suddenly, however, when the limit of wandering was nearly reached, Hook heard a native call aloud in the woods and another answer him.

Almost instantly a dozen, and then, as it seemed, a hundred voices took up the cry, and like magic up rose dense masses of dusky figures in full war paint and armed with shields and spears. They closed around the little party, outnumbering Bessie's body-guard by fifty to one.

The girl preserved her presence of mind wonderfully, and seeing that their only chance lay in submission, bid no man fire his rifle, though her faithful fellows were now closing in round her with finger on trigger.

"Stow it!" bawled Hook. "They'm tu thick on the ground. Us must yield an' make a bargain, for if once that forest of spears begins flyin', 'tis Kingdom Come for the whole boilin' of us!"

There was no time for more words, as the savages were upon them and round them in an instant. Expostulations, threats, entreaties proved vain. The warriors were evidently obeying some superior com-

mand, and it seemed that with the capture of Bessie herself their mission was ended. They showed no warlike intention, but were evidently bent upon the execution of a definite plan at the utmost speed.

Unhappily, neither party could make itself understood by the other, though the savages had little difficulty in rendering their meaning clear. They swarmed round the scanty company of Bessie's followers like hornets and appeared to engulf and assimilate the entire band.

In the space of five minutes the tangled luxuriance of the watercourse was again deserted, and the black horde had swept in and swept out again with their prey. Only a handful of plucked orchids, a tract of trampled grass and a hundred bruised and broken boughs and fern fronds marked the incident.

The butterflies danced as before; the sun, swiftly sinking westwards, flooded the woods with misty shafts and pencils of red gold; and far away to the east a sound, steadily fading into a whisper, told where three hundred savages were pushing on their way with the poor Queen of the Silver Sunrise.

Suddenly from the deserted woodland came a rustle and movement as a thin black object crept out into the grass from under a fallen log. He picked the ants off his shining body, listened like a wild beast for any sound, and peered about to see that he was alone. Then he rose and, his teeth still chattering with terror,



proceeded cautiously in the direction of Meldrum's camp.

It was Bungani, who had succeeded in escaping the raid. Some gleam of intuition had inspired his action, and feeling that he might best serve his mistress by escape and return to camp, the boy had dived like a rabbit into a hole at the first approach of danger and remained in the agony of the ants' attentions until all was over and the road clear for return. Now he reached the string, followed it to the main track, then ran without stopping over the mile of ground that separated him from the zariba.

The news fell like a thunderbolt upon the camp and Fain found himself nearly frantic before it. Yet two endless hours had to be endured before any definite action could be undertaken, for the hunting-party did not return until the moon was up. Then, desperately weary and hungry, they trudged back to camp with one solitary wild pig which had fallen to Blackbird.

It is not easy to describe poor Meldrum's awful grief at this catastrophe, or the blame, just enough in great measure, which he now heaped upon himself. For a time his self-control deserted him. He was like a madman, and raved wildly through the camp, calling for volunteers to set forth upon the instant to save his love.

Many prepared to start, weary as they were, to face the dangers of the night; but better counsels prevailed,

and Winstone, a man whom no ill fortune or sudden reverse ever found unready, exerted his mental force and brought Roy to reason by sheer strength of will.

"Are you a girl yourself?" he asked sternly. "You—the leader of the party—to play the child before them and scatter the little sense that is left to the poor fools? Be a man and face this thing like a man! Raving won't mend it. We must use the brains that Heaven has given us, and do all that poor mortals can do before this great trial. To despair is to be unworthy of yourself and your country. Get yourself in hand, man; be steel! Look to your guns, and put your trust in God.

Thus admonished, the distraught Roy made an effort, set a tight grip on his bursting heart, and did as he was told. To obey another blindly is indeed not seldom a comforting action when the soul is torn with conflicting passions, and we find ourselves helpless, unready and paralysed before some terrific stroke of Fate.

Lord Winstone's first action was to call Bungani and question him closely as to what had occurred. The Kaffir lad gave a vivid and truthful account of the scene and, in cross examination after his statement, he made a further revelation as unexpected as it was startling.

"Now describe these Massegi," said his lordship; "what manner of men were they, and what weapons did they carry?"

"I saw no Massegi at all. The natives were those we believed our friends—a great band of the Nangattos."

"Nangattos! What do you mean?"

"It is so; if I die now and speak no more, it is so. They carried the blue feather of Ongassé in their hair. They burst upon us like a hurricane and swept all away. Our men were going to fire, but the Mistress, seeing that six guns were vain against many hundreds of spears, bid them stay. Then all were swept away together and vanished like a dream from before my eyes."

Meldrum found additional cause for agony in this fact, but Lord Winstone pacified him and explained that the circumstance, mysterious though it was, might yet have a significance far from sinister.

"It is very rarely indeed that an African breaks the sacred tie of Blood Brotherhood," he said. "But the future will soon be cleared to us and, through the weary hours that remain before we can be up and doing, I pray you to take some physical rest. At least lie down and try to feel sanguine. Before dawn we will get on the march. To-night we must be busy, and bury everything not absolutely necessary for our return journey to Ongassé. If he has done this thing we must enlist the Massegis against him; but black as the case looks, I still think an explanation may be forthcoming."

"The King is dead, perhaps," suggested Fain. "In that case——"

"In that case," interrupted Winstone, "his warriors wouldn't be a two days' march into the Lunda country. They would have retreated into their own. It is idle to speculate upon what has really happened at present," he continued. "My main source of comfort is that Dan Hook was taken with her. Ongassé liked Dan almost as much as Unyah did; and the old salt won't spare words or deeds either, if evil is meant. Now let us get to work. Tell those lazy devils to light some more fires, and Fain and I will look over the stores and see what we can bury here, and what we must take. You, Meldrum, just review the men and tell them the story of what has happened. Even your deplorable Swahili will be understood by them, and when they realise that the White Queen and six of their own friends are in possible danger, the fellows will be active and eager enough, if I know them rightly."

Meldrum, heartened somewhat by this exhortation, pulled himself together and spent the time before dawn in busying his men in necessary labours. One and all responded with a will. The stores and much ammunition was buried and concealed under creepers and brushwood; the sporting guns and all unnecessary articles were also hidden, but the Winchesters were taken, to be used if necessary, and even Tracy Fain, though he knew little more than how to fire it, was

provided with a rifle; while each member of the fighting force received two hundred rounds of ammunition.

The night passed and the sun shone upon a haggard face as Meldrum took his station at the head of the column, and a grim and silent body of men set forth to the task before them. What duty awaited the little regiment none could say; but one and all were prepared to fight to the bitter end, if battle there was to be; one and all were ready to yield their lives in the cause of their cherished Queen.

Through that day and long after the fireflies spangled the sombre night did Meldrum and his companions retrace the route into Ongassé's territory.

The boy, Bungani, pointed out the spot at which the disaster had taken place, and from there onwards a sharp lookout was kept for some sign, some scrap of paper or shred of familiar cloth, that might tell its story; but no such thing greeted their straining eyes, and at length, after a march of full fifteen miles, the party halted, lighted their fires and set about the preparation of food before rest.

They were now some twelve miles from Ongassé's kingdom and hoped to reach it before night on the following day.

Rest was the one thought in men's minds, and all slept soon enough save the sentinels and Roy Meldrum. Grief kept him open-eyed, and he lay with his elbow on his blanket, his face supported by his right

hand. The tent was slightly open and through the entrance Roy could see the red gleam of the fire and the prone shapes of the sleeping men around it. From time to time the watchmen challenged the night and cried each to the other that all was well.

Winstone snored steadily from under his blanket; Fain also slept close at hand. Meldrum's wild eyes ranged every moment to the sky to see the first premonition of dawn. An hour, long as eternity to the unhappy victim of Fate, crawled by; then Roy fell into a reverie, retraced the past, dwelt on the magic advent of Bessie into his life, remembered the moonlit nights aboard the *Morning Star*, and so for a while forgot time's tardy passage.

He was brought back to the present by a sudden, strange and unfamiliar sound. Through the dead waste of the night came a curious long-drawn cry as of some nocturnal bird. The laugh of the hyena, the bellow of the lion, the howl of the jackal were all familiar enough to the wanderers by this time, but this sound, now mournfully echoing through the great walls of nocturnal blackness that rose around the little red radius of the camp fires' united light, was like nothing that had fallen on Roy's ear until that moment. It rose and fell and rose and fell and crept, ape-like, as though it had hands, in the tall trees, or, beast-like, through the sword grasses and dense underwood beneath them. It was everywhere—a strange, weird, crooning ring of sound; and the ring

was closing steadily in upon the camp. Presently it ceased altogether.

Unutterable silence fell upon all things, and Roy suddenly caught himself waiting anxiously for the cry and answering cry of the sentinels. But though he listened long and anxiously, no voice broke the night. Only from the bush came the noise of moving bodies and occasional breaking of twigs—sounds familiar during each hour of darkness.

Meldrum rose, took his revolver and crept out of the tent. Suspecting that the sentinels slept, he moved as silently as possible to the nearest, who occupied one corner of the zariba and whose post should have been beside the fire built at that point about twenty-five yards from the centre of camp. The fire itself had sunk much too low for safety, and the Zanzibari whose duty it was to tend it until two o'clock in the morning, lay extended beside the dying blaze.

With purpose to give the man a lesson, Roy crept alongside him and suddenly brought down his hand upon the sleeper's back; but the recumbent figure did not move, and drawing back his palm, Meldrum found it blood red. The sentinel was dead as a stone. He had been stabbed in the back and fallen without power to raise an alarm almost at the feet of his sleeping companions.

Stupefied by this discovery, Meldrum hesitated as to what course to pursue, and decided that he must

visit the other sentries before raising an alarm. Two he found slain and weltering in blood; the last stood at his post, and, from the shadow of a tall tree just without the protecting fires, Roy watched the man.

He was awake, but evidently very drowsy. He nodded over the muzzle of his gun, then pulled himself up only to nod again. Once he cried out in feeble accents the watchman's challenge, but was too sleepy to note that no man replied to him.

Meldrum now prepared to rouse the slumbering company, but suddenly, as he turned, his eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, caught sight of a beast at the edge of the bush not ten yards from the drowsy sentry. Its shape was so peculiar and its motions so strange that Roy watched it for a moment. At first glance it appeared to be a clumsy dog, then he saw that it was built more upon the lines of an anthropoid ape. But he had little time for doubt. The thing shambled about at the edge of the wood, pulled down leaves and moved awkwardly like a crab on all fours.

Now the somnolent sentinel also saw the creature as it came into the firelight and challenged it, then laughed stupidly, for the beast, of course, took no notice, but went on eating leaves and grubbing in the earth.

Some sort of mesmeric fascination held Meldrum spellbound. A black alarm weighed upon his spirit like lead; the spot of fire, the nodding sentry and the



misshapen ape crawling at the thicket edge presented one nightmare picture painted lurid red upon the dark hour before dawn; and somewhere terribly near, perhaps at his own elbow, Death stalked with bloody blade seeking another victim.

Suddenly the misshapen beast moved forward, quick as a spider, and glowed ruddy under the flame of the fire. The sentry's back was towards it, and before he could turn the demon thing reared itself up, leapt upon him from behind and buried a heavy knife under his left shoulder. The Zanzibari uttered one choked groan and fell face downward, while his murderer threw off a hairy head covering, and revealed a black man's low brow and shining eyes.

Meldrum, who had witnessed the tragedy from a distance of barely twenty yards, instantly lifted his revolver and dashed forward upon the assassin. Twice he fired; then, as the savage shrieked and toppled to the earth, incarnate hell appeared to be suddenly let loose in the darkness. With a noise like a hurricane, from the sombre meshes of the surrounding night, there poured forth a yelling, black tempest of the Massegi; on every side they swarmed over the zariba, and not a few of their victims, rudely awakened out of rest, did no more than open terrified eyes from sleep to close them again in death.

But tactics, different in some measure to those usually employed by aboriginal armies, marked this sudden and victorious raid. Only those who showed

fight at close quarters were either speared or clubbed to death in hand-to-hand battle.

Many of Meldrum's force escaped under the darkness; but others were seized and bound hand and foot before they had time to reach their rifles. Lord Winstone and Fain found themselves overpowered in the tent and securely manacled half a minute after the crack of Roy's revolver had awakened them; while as for the leader himself, after a tremendous tussle with a dozen naked blacks, he was wounded in the right breast and right arm, then stunned by a blow on the head and so made a prisoner.

In all, the three white men, two Soudanese, four Zanzibaris, and Bungani were captured; while eight of the Zanzibar men and one Soudanese soldier were slain, including the poor wretches murdered while half asleep on sentry duty. The rest had escaped—at least for the time being.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### FROM DEATH TO LIFE.

When Meldrum came to his senses, he found himself bound hand and foot in the grey light of dawn that outlined the mouth of a building. As the illumination strengthened, the prisoner perceived that he lay in an ancient hut. The mouldering thatch dripped with wild vines and other vegetation; the timbers were dank and mildewed; wriggling insects disturbed by his intrusion rustled and twisted on the dead leaves and grass.

Presently he discovered that he was not alone, for out of the grey light loomed two recumbent forms; and in a moment Meldrum realised that Fain and Winstone were his fellow sufferers.

The ruined native hut was a long, low erection, and they lay within it at the further end. Their bonds were such that neither could move, and any chance of escape was out of the question. With the last fact the natives appeared to be familiar, for no guard had been set over the ruin, and the pinioned men found it possible to speak freely without attracting attention. Indeed, the hut was somewhat out of the camp, though through its open door a busy scene could be witnessed some fifty yards distant.

"It's an old village they've pitched in," said

Winstone. These are the brutes that we heard rumours about, who were marching east to join forces with their friends against Ongassé. We didn't believe in the stories of them; but judging by our present fix, it's rather a pity we didn't."

He spoke to Fain, but Meldrum answered from where he lay.

"Then these are not the savages who captured Bessie?"

"Hullo, old man! Come round again? That's a good job. I began to fear uncomfortable things for you."

"I'm pretty right as far as that goes, but as powerless as a man in a nightmare. How is it with you?"

"Right, so far. But—well, I'm not happy. I don't like what I've been watching from the mouth of this cheerful hole. D'you see the fires? They're cannibals!"

"God in Heaven, Fred, how do you know?"

"By the evidence of my eyes. There's 'long pig' going there, and more than one poor faithful devil of a Zanzibari has been butchered to make a Massegi breakfast."

"D'you mean it will be our turn presently?" asked Fain.

"Why, yes; unless something very unexpected turns up. Do either of you fellows know more than I do? I am only aware I went to sleep a free man, and woke with about ten of these ruffians on my chest and ten

on my stomach. What happened? How did they get into the camp and settle the guard without waking us? A shot from a revolver was all I heard from first to last, but it roused me too late."

Roy explained the position, and asked Winstone to give some general outline of what the future might hold for them.

"Can't tell until we get a yarn with the beggars. They may not, however, give us any opportunity to talk. In that case it's a short life that's left and not a particularly merry one, I fear. If they once begin eating human flesh in earnest, they'll keep going until the supply fails. There are five hundred of them, so in all probability, we shan't have to wait long. They'll have some uneasy moments with *me*; but you boys will suit their constitution better. Ah! I thought so! They're coming to get their lunch ready!"

As he spoke a party of twenty or thirty savages approached the hut; but proceeded at a distance of thirty yards from it instead of entering. One, however, flung a spear into the mouth of the ruin, and the great leaf-shaped blade of it plunged with a thud into the rotting woodwork of the hovel a short yard from Roy's head, where he lay upon his back. With yells of laughter the warriors then pushed forward and disappeared.

"A respite," said Winstone; "they're going for

some of our poor carriers first. We shall come in with dessert probably."

Nobody answered, for Fain was occupied with his own thoughts, and Meldrum stared at the great knife still quivering in the wood beside him. Without speaking he endeavoured to get nearer to it, but found himself pegged to the ground by the neck. He strained and sweated awhile, then muscles that the Massegi had not bargained for conquered the obstacle and the peg was dragged up out of the ground, though the action nearly choked the operator and set his recent wounds bleeding again. However, he was now free to roll, and in this manner succeeded in getting alongside the spear.

"What's the game, old chap?" asked his friend.

"It's sharp as a razor," answered the other, his thoughts upon the weapon. "If I can once get these bonds against its edge, they'll part like pack-thread!"

"By Jove, that's interesting! But I'm afraid there's no chance; it's a yard above your head and you can't get up."

"But I can lift my feet, I think."

Meldrum suited the action to the word, and in a second the shining steel had bitten into and severed the thong which confined his ankles. No eye was upon them; indeed, from outside, the darkness of the ruined hut's interior effectually concealed their actions.

Life seemed more precious as the possibility of

saving it was forced upon the sufferers. Roy now found himself able to stand upright and bring his hands in contact with the spear. They were bound behind him, but after an unsuccessful first effort, he cut the bond at the wrists, then that at the elbows and a moment later stood a free man. To drag the heaven-sent spear from its billet in the wall was a speedy task; and then Meldrum liberated his friends and relieved their bruised and bleeding limbs from the cruel restraints.

How to proceed was the next problem that faced the party. To leave the hut by the entrance would be certain death, and whether it might prove possible to quit it in another fashion remained to be seen.

Meldrum himself it was who quickly settled their mode of exit, for he put his shoulder to the wall at a point as far as possible from the doorway and exerted his strength. Thereupon the ant-eaten wood, long since reduced to a rotten shell, promptly gave way and a hole of size sufficient for the purpose appeared. To creep through it, crawl like snakes over the rough cleared land of the old village and escape into the adjacent heavily timbered region was their next task; then, fairly free of their foes for the moment and in temporary safety, the three held a hurried conversation.

Roy was for returning and rescuing their unhappy companions if possible, while Fain, who suffered somewhat from fever, desired to get back to the cache, and

the quinine buried there. But Lord Winstone approved of neither design. His advice was to push forward at all hazards into the Nangattos' country and demand the protection of Ongassé under the sacred seal of Blood Brotherhood. Their only personal chance of prolonged life lay in this course, while it would also serve to clear the mystery of Bessie, Dan Hook and the rest.

As for their poor friends, Winstone mourned their fate as much as Meldrum could, but to save them was absolutely impossible, situated as they now were. The only hope for any of them must lie in a speedy rescue at the hands of a stronger body than their present conquerors.

Luckily the savages had left Roy's compass in his pocket, under the impression that it was a fetich, and now, by its aid, some idea of the road could be come at. After half an hour's cautious work they got out of sound of the horror behind them, and, an hour later, struck what was evidently the main trail they had intended to pursue that morning. A little water, some fungus and a handful of wood beans formed their midday meal, and they set forth once more, weary and feeble enough, but resolved not to stay their progress until they should be in Nangatto territory.

Then while yet some six or seven miles separated them from their goal, the wanderers unexpectedly found themselves at the end of their journey, for, as



they surmounted some rising land and scanned the wide grass plain subtended beneath, their eyes fell upon an advancing host in whose van waved the familiar yellow flag of Ongassé.

Lord Winstone made his grey eyes small and scrutinised the coming army.

"They mean business," he said. "The cream of the tribe is here, and they wouldn't be pushing into the heart of Massegi lands for nothing. Probably they've broken the back of the rival power already in some recent battle, and want to strike again while the iron is hot."

But Meldrum did not hear. He was staring down upon the black regiments winding under a bristling forest of spears below. Suddenly he lifted his voice.

"God be thanked! God be thanked! I see her—my jewel! She is walking by the flag—alongside the King."

"And Dan Hook is there, too," said Fain. "You can't mistake his gait."

"Then we may thank God, indeed," declared Winstone with intense feeling; "for Dan wouldn't be alive and unhurt if any harm had come to his mistress. It was as I thought. There has been a misunderstanding, and the Nangattos responsible for our misery were doubtless ignorant of our relations with their King."

Half an hour later, a wave of sound like the

thunders of great seas on granite cliffs and the shriek of wild sea birds above them, rose from the advancing army as Meldrum, Winstone and Tracy Fain appeared and hastened into the presence of the King. A moment afterwards and his sweetheart was sobbing in Roy's arms and Winstone nearly wringing off the right hand of Dan Hook.


All was well with the White Queen and her sailor servant; while their Zanzibari companions, who had been hurried into captivity with them, were also at hand, their arms upon their shoulders. With them Winstone rejoiced to see more than twenty of the men who had escaped from camp on the night of the Massegi attack.

Ongassé himself, after a hearty welcome and expressions of gratification that they still dwelt in the land of living men, explained the nature of the mystery that had cost Meldrum's expedition so dear.

"Two days after you departed," he said, "it came to my ear through scouts that the reserve forces of the Massegi, full six hundred spears strong, were pushing rapidly forward to join their friends before they should meet my warriors. Then I knew that the Massegi must surely fall in with the White Queen, and, holding her and her subjects as my friends, they would offer battle and perhaps achieve a victory by force of numbers. Upon this subject I debated for the space of one night; but in the morning I discovered that my uncle and First Man of State

had set forth, with a small, swift band, upon the track of the White Queen, intending to reach her before she should be attacked by her enemies. My uncle is a man of single thought, and he said to himself, as he proceeded at a jackal-trot through the dawn, that as my will was to rescue the White Queen at all costs, so should his be. And therefore when his men of war fell in with a handful of the White Queen's folk, they only satisfied themselves of her safety and in no way troubled concerning the safety of her people. Among the Nangattos was no man who could understand the White Queen or make himself understood. Therefore, until now, she has not known that my action was one of kindness, in that I desired to save her and her people from a superior and unfriendly force. Now tell me how it fares with you, and how you come before me thus unattended, unprotected and alone. Yet I can guess by your raw wrists and sunken cheeks that it was as I foretold. You have fallen in with the Massegi and escaped with bare life. That much indeed is clear."

Meldrum's story was soon told, and Ongassé, who two days before had given battle and a murderous beating to those of the Massegi who opposed him on his own frontiers, now undertook to engage the cannibal regiment from which Roy and his friends had so miraculously escaped. The Nangattos pushed on to the crest of the hill and there camped for the night.



Then Bessie told her story, and the black-eyed warriors of Ongassé watched with interest as she walked up and down in a place apart with her future husband and lord, the gigantic Bana Mkuba.

Many times during the strange recital had Meldrum cause to bless the extraordinary goodness of this boy King. He had indeed treated poor frightened Bessie like a Queen, showed her the utmost respect and politeness, fed her with the best his country furnished, caused a tent of great war shields to be built for her every night, and was hastening forward into foreign territory to rejoin her main expedition and save it if possible from the threatened danger, when Roy and his friends had met him.

Since the appearance of the fugitive Zanzibaris and Soudanese with their grim tale of a midnight attack and the wholesale slaughter of every soul save themselves, Bessie's life had looked black enough. Even the thought of Death was welcome then, for she doubted not that Roy was slain and that life held no shadow of brightness in it for her more. But with the unexpected escape and advent of her lover, hope and joy revived. Only her thin face, wild eyes and hysterical manner showed the nature of her past tribulations.

At dawn Meldrum mustered his own shattered force and discovered that he now commanded eight-and-twenty Zanzibaris, and five Soudanese. A few others might yet be alive with the Massegi, but it was

improbable. Bungani also remained with the enemy, and in their possession were about twenty rifles and fifteen hundred rounds of ammunition.

"Luckily they don't know how to use 'em," commented Lord Winstone. "But I hope they won't smash them, for we're in a tight place henceforth if they do."

Ongassé determined to give instant battle, and, leaving camp with the bulk of his warriors, and Meldrum and Winstone as guides, he set out at an early hour while yet only the white light of coming day was beginning to kill the stars.

It was midday before Ongassé's yellow banner fluttered into sight of the foe. Then Nangattos and Masegi met, both columns on the march at the time. The rival armies came each upon the other in open land, diversified by clumps of lofty grasses and tamarind trees, and they rushed to battle at such headlong speed that Ongassé himself had barely time to escape to the rear before the shock of contact. But the conflict proved one-sided, for the Nangattos outnumbered their adversaries by five to one and were, moreover, their superiors as fighting men.

In the battle with great leaf-shaped spears that ensued, hideous wounds were dealt even through the hide shields; blood flowed like water; a Babel of sound rang over the little plain and echoed from the amphitheatre of surrounding hills; while aloft,

circling in clouds at a tremendous altitude, vultures already congregated for the approaching feast.

The battle, pursued with tremendous courage on both sides, lasted scarcely twenty minutes, during which time Ongassé's men had twice hacked their way through the lines of the enemy. At the third advance the decimated Massegi wavered and a moment later they broke, and offered their backs to their conquerors. So strife ended in sheer carnage, and the victorious warriors followed their foes right and left, ran them to earth, pinned them in corners, and ruthlessly stabbed and destroyed. No quarter was asked or given.

Then, while the yells of the victors and the groans of the vanquished rent the air around him, Ongassé, accompanied by his cherished yellow flag and his white friends, stepped down into the shambles. Dead and dying writhed and groaned around him, and the man at Ongassé's side slew every lacerated Nangatto with a blow from his club, as an act of mercy to those who had given their lives for king and country; but the mutilated soldiers of the conquered foe received no *coup de grace*.

Lord Winstone and Meldrum were chiefly concerned with the spoils which had belonged to them. A dozen of the twenty missing rifles appeared intact; and at the rear of the line, evidently deserted by their guards at the first moment of battle, the two Zanzi-

baris and the Kaffir boy, Bungani, were discovered fastened together in a slave collar. They were unhurt, but all the other prisoners taken during the nocturnal raid, including the faithful Arab, Omar Laluzi, had been slain.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE GOLDEN FALLS.

ONGASSE's march through the Massegi country was now a mere triumphal procession. He had shattered the enemies' forces, slain many of their foremost men, destroyed several of their large villages by fire, and laid the rival monarch at his mercy. Upon the day, a fortnight later, when Meldrum's company prepared to bid him a grateful farewell, the King of the Nangattos arrived before the kraals of the Massegi capital to find that his royal enemy had fled. Food sufficient both for Meldrum's party and Ongassé's warriors appeared in abundance, however, and Roy, whose expedition now numbered thirty-two men, all told, with thirty guns, not including the sporting weapons of Lord Winstone and Meldrum, prepared to set out for the Luapula, now distant but ten days' march.

On their way they had revisited the cache to find it safe, and henceforward the expedition moved but slowly for, despite being lightened by another two hundred pounds' worth of presents, gladly bestowed upon the invaluable king of the Nangattos, the party was so seriously reduced in numbers that it now possessed more burdens than there were bearers. Good health happily prevailed with those still remaining, and hope ran high among the hardy, faithful fellows



as the knowledge that their goal was near at hand reached them. But the last words of Ongassé proved full of solemn warning.

"Be cautious," he said, "and even though the friendship of Pomba, King of the Batoncas, is offered to you, trust him not, and believe him not. He and I have never met, and I am glad that mountains and rivers and the wide lands of the Lunda country separate us; but my father knew him before me, and loved him not, and trusted him not at all, although there was always peace between them.

"Pomba, King of the Batoncas, has a demon—a familiar spirit—who works evil against the nations. No man has seen the demon; yet his deeds are known, for he has strengthened the hand of Pomba against his enemies and mightily increased the strength of the nation at the expense of the nation's foes. Be guarded, therefore, and trust not the voice of honey, for it comes from a bitter throat, and Pomba's tongue is but the fair shield that hides a foul heart.

"Now, farewell, thou Queen of the Silver Sunrise; farewell, Bana Mkuba; farewell, ye great men of the White Queen. May the Unknown be kind to you; may death forget you until you cry to him and remind him that your turn has come; may prosperity attend you; and may your eyes presently grow bright when they mirror once more the mountains and hills, the rivers and grass lands, the forests and villages and the head kraals of your own country."

A fitting answer was returned to the young ruler. Winstone and the other Englishmen took his hand, British fashion, and Hook, when his turn came, made the royal finger-bones crack with a grip like a vise. Then Meldrum went upon his way, and the expedition, after some ten days' progress by short marches, at last arrived on the banks of the Luapula.

Before that event, however, and indeed, soon after their departure from Ongassé, the leaders had an interesting conversation. It related to their friend's last words of advice and the King of the Batoncas, whose character promised so much difficulty.

"No doubt the name is common enough," said Meldrum, "but it's a rum thing that the chap should be called 'Pomba,' because that was the name of the faithful savage of the manuscript. The poor fellow who wrote our message and got toppled over for good and all before he finished it, dwells much upon his humble friend; and if the nigger was all the white man thought him, he doubtless went down at the same time and died in the same rush of the Batoncas."

"Probably that is what happened. Pomba is not an uncommon name," admitted Lord Winstone. "The gold disc and the manuscript which was wrapped round it," he continued, "can have nothing to do with one another, I imagine, but if, as you have told me, when the former chief of the tribe, M'wenga, was killed, the Batoncas clamoured for his fetich to be returned, they clearly attached importance to it. The

disc may mean some great secret to the tribe; the paper cannot, of course, signify anything to them, because they would not understand a word of it."

Fain listened to this conversation without joining in it. He was now in good health again, and the prospect of the near approach of his opportunity fortified him. Of late he and his cousin had differed on many minor matters and each trivial quarrel added a goad to the younger man's determination.

He had now determined, in the dark places of his mind, to utilise his secret knowledge but impart it to nobody. He designed to find the diamonds single-handed, to secure as many about his person and in his garments as he possibly could, and to say no word concerning their position even after he had helped himself to the best of them.

With the exception of sanguine Roy himself, not a member of the party who knew the real object of the expedition had the smallest belief in its success. Winstone openly laughed at the hopes of his friend; Bessie mourned the certain disappointment awaiting her loved one; and Dan Hook only felt desirous to know how long the party was to remain in Batonca territory and which way they proposed to start out of it again for home.

Once upon the Luapula, which river the expedition hit about a hundred miles south of Lake Mweru, progress was speedy, for since the destruction of the Mas-segi forces the numerous adjacent enemies of that tribe

rejoiced in more hopeful prospects, and Meldrum's party was understood to have assisted in the good work. Canoes were furnished readily, and the position of the Wambasi tributary defined.

But all the aboriginal races united in hearty dread of the Batoncas; their record appeared black indeed, and the monarch Pomba was said to be cruel beyond the limits of belief—a reputation of some significance in a country where every possessor of power enjoyed the perpetration of fiendish cruelty as a daily amusement.

But Meldrum had no intention of turning back at the portals of his destination. When the Wambasi was reached, the expedition returned the canoes to those primitive people who had lent them, and promised handsome rewards if the boatmen would meet the expedition upon that day month at the same spot.

Bengillo, the headquarters of Pomba and the seat of his government, now lay but two marches distant, and the day being the first of December, the outward journey, embracing roughly a distance of a thousand miles, had been accomplished in three hundred and twenty-eight days, which produced an average rate of a shade more than three miles daily progression, and almost exactly realised Lord Winstone's original prophecy.

The Golden Falls of the manuscript proved easy enough to discover; but upon reaching the district, Meldrum found that the capital of the tribe had been

shifted two miles further up the Wambasi. The ruins of the old settlement were not difficult to trace, however, and Roy gazed upon the desolate scene with mingled emotions as it spread before him at the end of the first day's march through Batonca country.

Beneath his standpoint lay the desolate spot where a fellow Englishman had yielded up his life. A wide slope extended to the river, and it was covered with grass-grown tracks between the bleached skeletons of ruined huts. Above this plain, huge cliffs rose, jagged and peaked, under a red sunset sky, and down the eternal faces of them leapt, in a succession of sharp and gushing cascades, the Golden Falls. The cliff front inclined inwards at a distance of a hundred feet from its base in the river, and the torrent, crossing this gulf at a bound, fell with endless roar upon the broad bosom of the stream beneath.

The usual noise of the men pitching camp was drowned by the tremendous and reverberating echoes of the Golden Falls, and as light waned, and all detail vanished from the solemn scene, Roy turned away and sought his friends that he might escape for a little space from his own thoughts.

For one brief moment there came into his mind a shadow of the scepticism that Winstone and Fain openly professed. Seen afar off, the difficulties appeared small enough; viewed closely, faced directly as now, they gained detail, oppressed even Meldrum's

sanguine spirit, and towered tremendous as the vast encircling cliffs themselves.

As yet no sign of the Batoncas had been reported, although their capital lay but a few miles distant, and Winstone's advice to his friend was to waste no time.

"Pursue your quest for the hidden gems and convince yourself of its futility as quickly as possible; then retreat from a territory wherein it is very sure we shall receive no friendly welcome," he said.

The point to make for was the house of the dead man—that described in the manuscript as lying outside the boundaries of the old capital. Upon the morning after their arrival, therefore, a regular search was instituted, and the puzzled Zanzibaris and Sou-danese were bid to skirt about the confines of the old village, to poke and probe the underwood for evidences of any solitary ruin or indications of a bygone dwelling-place.

Several of such outlying habitations were found at varying distances from the camp, and within half a mile at most of the Golden Falls, but none of them stood under an umzibete tree, a point specially mentioned in the manuscript. As dead stumps and old, time-bleached fragments of vanished forest giants abounded, however, and many young shoots and saplings were rising about the deserted village to take the places of their dead ancestors, no certainty of being upon the wrong tack followed from the absence of a big tree. Young examples of the umzibete abounded,

and both Roy and Fain were soon familiar with the shape and size of the "stony seed pods" mentioned in the dead man's direction.

"Close at hand" were the words he had employed, and upon the strength of this direction Meldrum planned his future actions. In all six fallen dwellings and the foundation of one other, from which evidences of the fabric itself had vanished, were discovered within a radius that might fairly include the habitation of the bygone pioneer; and around and about each of these ruins, to a limit of one hundred yards every way and to a depth of three feet, Roy determined to explore.

For the most part the soil was of a light alluvial nature and presented no formidable problems. This task would occupy ten days with all hands busy, and as food sufficient for four days alone remained, some understanding with the inhabitants of the land and Pomba, their chief, must needs be come to as soon as possible.

The Batocas still held aloof and as yet scarcely one had been seen. The need for a visit to Bangillo became the more urgent, therefore, and the scouts, thrown out daily to bring instant notice to Meldrum's strong camp in event of the enemy's approach, were told to capture any stray Batoca if they could possibly manage to do so.

On the following morning a regular system of operations was instituted and alternate shifts of men either

worked under Meldrum's direction or stood guard, heavily armed, to cover the retreat of the operatives upon any sudden attack. The camp was only a hundred yards distant and a stout double zariba had been erected about it; while upon one side the cliff face effectively protected the party from any surprise.

The work progressed steadily and Meldrum and Bessie watched each spade of earth as it was thrown up from the foundation of the most promising ruin; while Winstone remained in camp, overhauling his cherished guns, and Fain, free of sentry duty for the time being, strolled away alone upon private ends towards the waterfall.

He alone realised the waste of time and labour before the little company; he alone could guess at the weary hours and days of toil that must be thrown away during the forthcoming fortnight; and he alone foresaw the fever of dying hope, the bitterness of a gigantic and ruinous failure that awaited Roy Meldrum and Bessie in the immediate future. But such reflections weighed nothing with him, for his heart was hardened against one who had done him no wrong at any time.

Now, passing beyond the outlying ring of sentries, he proceeded upon his own secret quest and speedily reached the Golden Falls.

His eyes roamed eagerly towards west and south, then he lifted them up to the tremendous forehead of the cliff. The crown of the precipice was clothed with



lofty vegetation, dwarfed by distance to mere scrub; and here, no bigger than ants, as it seemed, Fain observed a dozen or more natives. They were perched upon the very edge of the Golden Falls, and, from their gestures, the Englishman perceived that they had observed him.

At the most liberal computation, however, he judged that the savages could not reach him in less than five minutes, and as their road must lie upon the jagged and precipitous face of the crags to the north of the waterfall, he knew that ample time would suffice for retreat if the Batoncas threatened.

A moment later and an incident caused him to dismiss the distant foe from his mind and forget all about them, for, while roaming forward, he opened up a further scarp of the cliff and gasped before what was revealed.

The thing that he had desired, longed for and looked for, now quickened his pulse-beat by its sudden appearance; and so astoundingly like its name was this lofty bluff, jutting forth from the cliff at an elevation of two hundred feet above the river, that Fain could scarcely believe the work of nature alone appeared before him.

There, aloft, breaking through the strata of the country, appeared a crag of limestone, and its crown, sharply lifted up in twin peaks, exactly resembling the lofty horns of an animal, while the rock below had been outlined and carved by the storm and stress of

ages into striking semblance of an antelope's head and neck. The whole effigy was upon a colossal scale; but to mistake this jutting crag appeared impossible; and that he now stood before Antelope Head Bluff, Tracy Fain felt well assured.

For more than a year he had known by heart the secret message cut from the manuscript; but now, with shaking fingers, he opened his pocket-book that his eyes might read the actual words and the direction contained in them.

*"Stand where the peaks of the Antelope Head Bluff are in one line. Then wait till the hour when the rainbow shines upon the mist of the falls, and where the purple of the arch touches the forest—there—in white ants' nest."*

Nothing could be clearer than this direction, and, dead to any danger, Fain set forth in frantic haste to find a point from which one vast antler of the stone antelope should conceal the other. But this proved a difficult task, and after a dozen attempts to obtain such a position, the treasure-hunter fell back fifty yards or so and began to realise that the necessary point of view must lie considerably above him, on some ledge or in some cranny of the cliff-face.

Now he essayed a series of climbs, and it was not until after an hour of rough and fruitless work, that he at least reached a solitary shelf, perched high above the river, from which the great stone head presented the necessary appearance. Two eagles, frightened

from their eyrie, screamed in the air so close that he could see their crooked beaks and golden eyes, but his mind was not upon them.

As he lay panting and weary under a cloudless sky, he took in the bearings of his position and realised two things: that the mist of the Golden Falls could only throw a rainbow soon after the sun had risen, and that the point which he now occupied was the sole spot on his side of the river from which Antelope Head Bluff might be seen in the necessary position.

An hour later Fain was back in camp. He explained his fatigued condition as the result of a stiff and difficult climb; and the next morning, having declared over night that he designed another exploration on the cliff-face, set off alone with his rifle and a day's provision.

The enterprise somewhat mystified Roy, and Fain's lack of interest in the great search nettled him; but the leader of the band had plenty to think about, so he contented himself by warning his cousin to keep within call of the scouts and incur no unnecessary risks or dangers.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WHITE ANTS' NEST.

Fain soon found himself upon the ledge of the cliff, and there waited impatiently for the rainbow's directing arch to lead him to his goal.

It was long, however, before the critical moment came, and meantime the young man had opportunity to scan the surrounding scene, note how the river turned sharply below Antelope Head Bluff, and observe that, immediately beneath him and on the same side of the stream as himself, though beyond the abrupt bend of the river, there extended a considerable tract of forest land.

If it should happen that the rainbow fell here, all chance of Meldrum securing his prize without Fain's intervention was practically impossible, for the woods lay half-a-mile at least from camp and more than a quarter of a mile from any of the ruined houses that Roy had determined to explore.

Slowly the sun ascended and the Golden Falls justified their name as they trembled and tossed in a streak of sheer, radiant glory down the face of the cliff. From the tremendous impact, where the water struck the surface of the river after its last long leap, arose a fine mist of vapour, and upon this it was that Tracy

Fain fixed his eager eyes as it began to brighten under the advancing sunshine.

At last the magic colours trembled out in sparks and gleams upon the mist, and anon the fraction of a shining bow appeared opposite the watcher and stretched its circle sharply down across the distant woods. Then Fain realised how necessary had been the special directions of the dead man, for the breadth of the rainbow embraced the whole tract of forest; but the innermost or purple ring of the arch fell upon a narrow spot—a small, separate clump of trees as it appeared—divided by a belt of grass land from the adjacent forest.

Fain waited and watched the rainbow. It endured but a brief space, and as the sun rose and the angle of refraction was changed the brilliant iris tints disappeared and the splendid moment was gone by for that day. Like a gorgeous flower the phenomenon withered and died, leaving only grey mist behind it.

But Fain had seen all that he needed, and very soon afterwards, marking his route and destination carefully upon a little map, that he had sketched from his bird's eye point of view, the man descended to the Wambesi River, followed it round a wide bend until he came abreast of the forest land, then struck inwards and presently sighted one tree of special size, that had towered above the spot where the purple ring of the rainbow fell. So Tracy Fain, inspired with one idea, and one alone, pushed rapidly forward, dead to danger.

It was not long before the explorer found himself in the narrow band of grass that separated the tree clump from the main wood, and on the lofty precipice above, watching as before, full fifty Batoncas followed his movements, observed him reach his destination, then slunk, cat-like, down the cliffs behind him and intercepted his retreat.

Elsewhere another pair of eyes had witnessed the scene, had observed Fain scramble down from his post on the face of the cliff, had watched him disappear in the direction of the woods and had marked half a hundred dark shapes sneak and slip quickly down the hill as soon as the Englishman retreated from it.

Luckily Lord Winstone, for it was he, had observed the scene we have described. He liked Fain little enough, but he felt that a comrade's life was now in very real danger, and he hastened to Meldrum with information of what he had seen through his glasses at a distance of about half a mile from camp.

"The beggars have cut him off," his lordship explained, "and it will go hard with him if we are not pretty quickly on our legs. There were about fifty niggers—no more, I think. A dozen of us, including you and me, will answer for them. And if we can get speech with the brutes and come to some agreement, so much the better."

Meldrum, all anxiety for his cousin, quickly gave the alarm, and ten minutes later, with Winstone, Blackbird, and nine armed Zanzibaris, he was push-

ing rapidly in the direction that Fain had been seen to follow.

Meantime, the diamond-hunter, innocent of any fear, pressed on to the very hiding-place of the treasure. Within the clump of trees he passed, moved carefully forward, with sharp glances to right and left, then came upon the object of his search planted at the heart of the little glade.

There, in shape like a huge but clumsy and broken sugar-loaf, reared a white ants' nest. Its base was draped in green things and grass sprouted upon it. A part had crumbled away and the decaying mass presented many evidences of disintegration, but that it was an ants' nest Fain knew without question, and that it must be the identical structure he sought seemed also certain, for no other similar erection appeared within the radius of the trees.

To the deserted nest he went, and his heart beat high as he stood beside it and knew that the treasure might be—nay, must be—within reach of his extended hand.

The base of the nest was coated with moss and it rose from wild undergrowth. To cut this away was the man's first task, and, setting down his rifle, he pulled out a heavy knife and began to clear the base of the earthen pillar. This task was quickly accomplished, and Fain found himself before a smooth but soft erection of fine earth. That it must be hollow inside he knew, and doubted not that the adventurer,

who trusted his treasure to it in the past, had cut a hole somewhere at the bottom or in the side of the mound, then dropped in the Umzimbete seed-pods and, afterwards, made all secure again.

For a moment he reflected as to what course was the most simple, then set to work at the base of the cone and soon had a hole, big enough to creep through, driven to the centre. Then he discovered what had not appeared from the surface: there was another entrance from underground into the nest. The channel ran a foot beneath the earth and came out ten yards away. That the deserted dome had been used by some small beasts of prey for a lair was evident, and now Fain began digging down through a mass of bones and fragments of mouldy fur to reach the umzimbete seeds, which he knew must be hidden beneath.

The soil was light and he made rapid progress, but never a sign of what he desired was there. He sweated on; but his heart almost hurt him with its thumping, his head was throbbing and his eyes aching as failure came nearer and nearer. He threw aside the stick he had been using and buried his hands in the soft mould. He tore it up, and as the subsoil grew harder, he still used his fingers until they were torn, one of his nails was broken and both his hands began to bleed. Then he stopped and stared blankly before him while the sweat dripped from his face into the great hole he had dug.

The precious stones were not in the ants' nest. They



had vanished from it, and Fain stood, faced not only with his treachery, but with the knowledge that it had utterly failed. His sin was vain; the sting of the memory might last forever; but there was nothing to make him bear the bitterness of his wicked action with indifference. Absolute failure stared him in the face, and in that black moment he cursed his existence and wished that he was dead. The wages of sin are death, indeed, oftentimes; and now it seemed that the traitor was to be taken at his word.

Dazed and stricken by his terrible disappointment, shattered before this crushing reverse, the man moved blindly away and lifted his eyes to scan further and satisfy himself that in reality there was no other white ants' nest within the indicated space.

What he saw, however, quickly dragged his mind back to reality. The Batoncas were upon him. Silent as snakes they had crept in on every side and now, finding themselves discovered, they raised a simultaneous cry and leapt forward.

Seeing his deadly peril, Fain dashed for his rifle, but he was too late to reach it, and in a moment the yelling mob closed in. Now, face to face with death, and powerless to fend a single stroke of the spears poised round him or held at his throat, Fain dropped his hands and bent his head to the blow he knew must fall; but no merciful and decisive stroke at short range ended his life.

His captors had other ideas and clearly desired no

such speedy termination to their amusement as the instant death of their victim.

Fain was bound hand and foot with the tough and trailing vine of the wild grape. Then four men picked him up and bore him some hundred yards distant. A swift interchange of views followed; some of the savages were in favour of carrying the prisoner to Pomba, their King, while others of the younger bloods held that the monarch need know nothing of the matter.

"He is ours by right of capture. The day is yet young. We will have our pleasure with him and none shall know it," cried one.

"So be it, so be it," shouted another. "This grubber in ants' nests—we will show him the black and the red ants. He will like them better than the white."

The rest roared with laughter, and in a few moments started to put in force the hideous suggestion of their comrade.

Better had it been for Fain—a thousand times better—had the black fiends, whose prisoner he now was, thrown him to a hungry lion or before a charging elephant. Then, though death had come in shape horrible enough, it had been speedy and merciful as the lightning; but for the wretched man, now strappd with living vines, his cruel captors designed an end unutterably horrible; and a moment later, almost before Fain had realised their intentions, they threw him on the earth beside a low black mound.

Here, in shape of a St. Andrew's cross, they stretched him; then pegged down hands and feet so that no effort could free the tortured sufferer; and that done a dozen with their spears hacked and tore at the dark mound hard by, then jumped nimbly away as a black and enraged swarm—relentless and savage as the Batoncas themselves—crawled forth to find the cause of this earthquake in their citadel.

Very quickly the pinioned soul upon the ground knew what depths of torment were reserved for him, and he stared into the unpitying sky and prayed, as he had never prayed before, that death might hasten to him in any other shape than this.

But the black army of soldier ants fell upon him in their myriads; he felt them upon every inch of his exposed skin, and knew they were burrowing beneath his garments. He shuddered under this literal formication, and ice-cold shivers shook him to the deep sources of his life.

Then began an universal stabbing—now on his feet and legs, now upon his arms and fingers, now over his heart, his breast, his neck. On they swept in irresistible legions.

He clenched his fingers and slew five hundred; but two thousand crawled over the corpses of their fellows. In five minutes he was a writhing, heaving mass of ants, a mere brute fighting for its life and bellowing in agony, with the cursed things in his eyes and

nose and mouth and ears with a million of them simultaneously burying their pincers in his tortured skin.

To smother a man to death in mustard leaves would be a similar death. The end could not have been long delayed; but Providence had further work for Tracy Fain, and it was half a dozen of his tormentors, not the maddened choking wretch himself, who passed at that moment into the Land of Shadows.

The Batoncas, intent on their devilish pleasure, had not heard or seen the approach of Meldrum and his little force, and now, at a range of barely a hundred yards, a very effective volley was poured into the savages and six of them fell, their wild laughter choked in their throats. Two others were wounded and despatched, without a thought, by Blackbird, when he reached them; while thirty more, who stood firm for a moment and flung their spears, were charged by Meldrum and the Zanzibaris as Winstone, with his crane-like gait, ran to the man upon the ground and at the cost of a terrible biting himself, loosened the bonds and bid him rise.

Fain for the time appeared lunatic. He screamed and laughed in a fit of frenzied hysteria; and it was long before his nerves even approached tranquillity. His awful experience made his cousin mad also, but with anger, and three of the Batoncas fell to his fury, while the Zanzibaris answered for four more.

Thus, in the space of five minutes, no less than fif-

teen of the savages were dead, and the rest had vanished to carry the news of their defeat to their King.

Winstone's chief fear was for Tracy Fain's eyes; but, though his head was much swollen and his features almost unrecognisable from the action of the ant poison, he could see. They half led, half carried him to the river, and there stripped and immersed him to the chin. This course served to allay some of the excruciating torment from which he suffered, but he still raved and babbled incoherently, and it remained to be seen whether his life would be spared or whether the terrific shock endured by his system was more than nature could repair.

Presently they took him back to camp, opened a can of tinned milk and dressed the whole of his fevered body with the stuff. A little very weak stimulant was also given and every effort made by fanning and sprinkling of water, to keep the air in the tent as cool as possible.

Through the night Dan Hook, Bessie and Roy took turn and turn about to watch the sufferer, who now tossed and cried aloud in the delirium of fever dreams; now sank into silence; now spoke of strange matters and bid the listeners for God's love keep his secret; now moaned in sheer physical agony, and cried helpless tears, or swore bitter curses on his enemies.

Presently, the watcher then being Meldrum himself, a thread of sense and coherence began to wind through the fever-stricken man's wild utterances.

"Not there," he said, "not there; and I've been a knave, a traitor, a rogue for this! God of Justice! was ever a sinner punished so quickly upon his sin? Yet—yet—the words were plain enough. And the purple of the rainbow fell upon the very spot, made it a fairyland fit to harbour gems and hide the richest jewels ever bred in the earth. But the white ants' nest was empty and I have the crime on my heart without the diamonds in my pocket. Why did they rescue me? One more pang and I should have been out of it all—but—this—this is the punishment; to walk shoulder to shoulder with the man I would have robbed, to see him toiling and wasting his heart away. Now all is vain, all labour useless. The white ants' nest has been robbed, and Heaven knows where the precious stones are. We shall never see them."

He was silent again, then rambled on upon other topics. Suddenly, he turned to where Meldrum sat with wide, horrified eyes, fixed upon him. A sort of unconscious mesmerism on the man's part appeared to have dragged Fain round to look at him; but now the demented sufferer failed to recognise his nurse and thought a woman ministered to him.

"You, Bessie?" he said. "Have you come to me after all and thrown Bana Mkuba over? I thought you'd find out you loved me best sooner or later; but it's too late now, sweetheart, too late, too late, too late. Curse the words! They ring in my ears like a knell. They are the full stops that block my road, turn which

way I will. Too late! It's always too late with me. I was born too late; I have lived too late; I shall die too late. You laugh, I see you laugh; but you should cry, for there'll be no glimmering sky-blue, sea-green, blood-red stones to deck your bosom now; there'll be no diamonds, like the white, eternal stars for brightness; no opals, as full of colour and fire as the tears of the fallen angels. All gone—all stolen by some devil—may Heaven send him his reward. Not there—vanished—hidden deep, deep down by the earth spirits or the wood spirits. Too late again, though, by the throne of the highest archangel, I swear you should have had them all. Not one for Roy—all for you—and we would have left him to rot in this land of demons; we would have departed by night——”

Here Roy Meldrum could suffer his utterances no more, and departed from beside his pillow to walk the starry night in a maze of mysterious wonder.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### POMBA OF THE BATONCAS.

But Meldrum, though alive to the fact that he had overheard some dark secret and stood upon the threshold of most unexpected treachery, yet kept his own counsel. That Tracy Fain had not succeeded in an effort to circumvent him was all that mattered at present.

Failure had, upon his own confession, attended some enterprise hidden from the rest of the expedition, and this fact was now in Meldrum's possession—hurled at him amid the long hours of night by a fevered and frantic man; but he very gladly dismissed the subject when dawn broke, though henceforth he was awake and alive to protect himself, ready to leap at any future hint of knavery, determined to have a full and complete explanation of his actions and utterances from the sick man when health should be restored to him.

Morning brought with it perceptible improvement in Fain's condition, and at the breakfast hour he slept so soundly that Winstone advised he should not be awakened.

Soon matters of more general importance than Fain's health occupied those responsible for the welfare of the expedition. Two days' food supply only



remained, and the difficulty of obtaining any more in Batonca territory was greatly increased since the previous morning. Indeed, after the destruction incidental to the rescue of Fain, any hopes of a friendly understanding with Pomba appeared remote. The King must surely resent this assault on his subjects, and it was unlikely that it would be possible to make him understand the justice of it.

Plans were hastily formed, and a foraging party of a dozen men under Hook despatched a day's march backward for further provisions. There were plenty of friendly natives at the junction of the Wambasi and Luapula rivers; and here Dan's little party would be able to purchase plantains and possibly goats and fowls. In forty-eight hours they would return with four days' more provisions.

Meanwhile the exploration was pushed on, and Winstone advised that a messenger should be sent to Pomba with gifts; but here was a problem, for no white man could be spared, and neither Zanzibaris nor Soudanese would volunteer. Bungani and Blackbird indeed offered their services, but they were not accepted, and what course to pursue was still an object of discussion when the question was settled, once for all, from the other side.

About an hour after Hook had departed on his food-seeking mission, upon the edge of the woods, at the limit of the ruins of the old town there appeared large bodies of natives; and Winstone rubbed his eyes

and his glasses when he saw them, for their movements were wholly unlike those usually employed and displayed by savages.

"It's a deputation or something, but, Great Scott! look at the formation! They're moving as regularly and steadily as English infantry. Who in thunder came here to drill the rascals?"

But Meldrum had only stopped to see the advancing horde. Now he sounded a bugle and soon everybody outside the zariba was back behind it.

The scouts fell in one by one; the openings of the little fortress were closed and every preparation made for fighting if it became necessary.

Bessie, well accustomed to the farce of appearing as a queen before the local potentates, retired to her tent, and on this occasion bedecked and adorned herself with greater care than usual. Moved by a sudden whim, she took the Golden Fetich from its case, threaded a needle and quickly stitched the talisman upon a red ribbon and fastened it round her forehead.

"Now we shall very soon know if it means anything or not," she thought.

Meanwhile, marching with the regularity and discipline of civilised troops, a regiment of about five hundred Batoncas approached; and as they came nearer, it was clear that half a dozen men of mark walked before them.

Among these, one savage of great size was conspicuous, and presently, when within one hundred yards

of the wanderers' encampment, the big man shouted an order, his force halted and drew up in serried lines, while he himself and the other leaders came forward with a small bodyguard of some fifty fighting men.

Seeing that no immediate attack was designed, but converse invited and intended, Winstone and Meldrum, with half a dozen armed followers, immediately left camp and proceeded to meet the approaching natives.

Then, to their undying astonishment, the big man, who appeared scarcely smaller than Roy himself when seen at close quarters, lifted up his voice and addressed them in English.

"You milk-white wanderers, what do you do here? Why do you come to Pomba of the Batoncas? He has nothing for you—nothing at all; but you kill his soldiers, and he expects good gifts for his dead soldiers before you leave his land."

The King, for it was Pomba himself who stood before them, appeared to be a man of about fifty years old. His evil but intelligent face was partly covered by a thin beard already turning grey; his eyes were set close together in his head, his jaw was very square. He was attired somewhat curiously for a savage, and wore more garments than commonly appear upon an African monarch.

"We are amazed, great King Pomba, that you can speak our language," began Winstone, "but it is only what we should have expected from one whose fame

is so widespread. We are here with our White Queen, and we ask for the hand of friendship and the palm branch of peace. We slew your warriors because they took one of our white men prisoner and horribly tortured him. Had you been with your soldiers, you would not have permitted such wickedness."

Pomba laughed, and his eyes gleamed cold and dull, like a toad's.

"You speak of a Queen," he said, "but you have only one Queen, you English. You lie to me. Your Queen would never come among my people with no more than a handful of white men and coast folk. You have no Queen."

"She is our Queen, notwithstanding, and when you see her, you will know that it is so. You cause us to marvel much, King Pomba, for your soldiers walk in line, like our soldiers at home, and you speak in our own tongue and have much learning and knowledge hidden from the races of the black men."

Pomba regarded Winstone, who made this speech, with a doubtful and suspicious eye.

"It is so," he answered. "I have learned many things of your ways and customs. But that concerns you not. Now answer me. What do you do in my country, and why this upturning of land beside the river? You search with great searching. It is for more than ground nuts that you hunt where the broken earth meets my eye yonder. I am very wise and I have a Familiar Spirit that tells me the secrets of the

sun and the stars, of the thunder and the falling waters, of the ways and language of beasts and of the thoughts of men's hearts. You cannot lie to me without I know you lie."

"We have a Familiar also," answered Meldrum boldly; "and our Familiar has told us that here, within the fringe of the Batoncas's country, hidden without the boundaries of this deserted town, there are great store of precious gems—diamonds, rubies, and emeralds. These things are of no service to Pomba, king of this nation, but to white people they are precious; and we come that we may dig up the stones, if Pomba wills it, in exchange for great store of rare fabrics and treasures."

This speech produced an extraordinary effect on the savage king. He glared speechless at Meldrum for a moment, then at Winstone.

"By the Lightning! this is a small earth that we live upon—so small that you heard of that matter in your land—yet how should you know? Let me think—let me think."

"How should you know that white men walk in step when they march, that we are English? Your Familiar—did he teach you English?" asked Winstone.

"It is so; he did."

"And our Familiar taught us where the jewels are."

"Your Familiar lied—the jewels are not there, and

they never were there. The precious stones came from far. I know—I, Pomba, know all, and I—but wherefore should I tell you these things?"

"That raises the first question. Are you going to be our friend or our foe?" asked Winstone quietly.

Pomba hesitated before answering. Then the small size of the party, their apparent wealth, and his own much greater power evidently determined him to be insolent.

"My warriors could eat you up and not know they had partaken of food; you have not beads enough to give one to each fighting man in my army. Why should I be your friend? You are no use to me."

"You speak as one ignorant of the facts," answered Winstone. "Yet your Familiar knew something about repeating rifles, I'll wager, if he was an English demon."

"I, too, have rifles."

"Possibly; but no powder. Your Familiar wasn't clever enough to teach you how to make that. We can give you great store of powder. We have brought it for your friendship, but we cannot trust you yet. If you advance towards us with your soldiers we will burn all the powder away, at them. So you would lose a precious thing."

Pomba did not answer this point immediately. He said something in his own language to one of his

head men, who retired to the main body; then he turned to Winstone.

"You speak of rare gems and jewels. Tell me more about them. How did you learn that such things were in the Batonca country?"

"That we learnt from our Familiar. Tell us how it is that you speak our language, and we will tell you how we know there are rare gems hidden here."

"You will not like the story, but I will tell you; and I will tell you what you refuse to tell me. I know, now that I have taxed my brain, where you heard of the shining stones. Let me be seated and I will relate it to you. Then you will know whether I am a friend or an enemy."

A light folding chair was placed for Pomba and a big umbrella opened and held over his head. Oblivious to this attention he proceeded with his cynical narrative. His English was by no means as perfect as that with which we credit him, but, for the purposes of the story, and in order to save trouble in reading, we may allow the monarch a somewhat choicer diction than in reality he exhibited.

"Know, then, that long, long ago, when I was a young man, I left the land of the Batoncas, moved by some inner spirit, to see and to know more than my own country offered me. There had come a slave-raiding expedition into our territory and though I escaped the Arabs, yet after they had gone, I was sorry that I had escaped; for in me a spirit moved and told me

that the white men were wiser than the black, and I longed to share their wisdom and store it in my heart.

"So I ran after them and travelled far through the heat of a long season of drought and until four moons had waxed and waned. But I never found them, though I had news of them once or twice in the shape of burnt-out villages and the bones of men picked clean by hyænas. So I saw the white men were very strong and held the black men in their hand; and I yearned with increasing desire to know what the white men knew.

"Then, in the Kalonga country, I was at death's door from hunger, and I sank by the way and had perished there; but another wanderer found me; and he also was white."

Lord Winstone and Meldrum exchanged glances. Roy only thought of the moment and already suspected the sequel of the King's story; while Winstone, not concerned with details, looked on ahead and guessed that the man before them knew where the treasure was hidden. The characters of the two friends stood revealed.

Meldrum's big chest began to heave with suppressed indignation that Pomba had deserted the Englishman and was alive to tell the tale of his death; Winstone's mind actively concerned itself on the main grand problem: how to make Pomba a friend.

Seeing the huge disparity between the opposed



forces, one only way to success presented itself—a cordial and complete understanding with the Batonca chief. At present everything rested with him. Indeed, their very lives were in his hand.

The king continued:

“You show some mutual understanding in your eyes. I shall tell you why presently, for I know what you are thinking about; but now listen further, and do not busy your brains until you have heard what I am to speak to you.”

“The white man saved my life. He gave me food and drink. He learnt my language and I learnt his after many days. By night I struggled and sweated with my tongue and teeth to fit them to the words he used. I never slept until I had repeated the hardest sounds many times over and made them come right. And then the white man poured great store of white wisdom into my brain, and I gathered and gathered and gathered, as the bee gathers honey—to use in time future.

“Meanwhile the white man wandered far, seeking for a road to his people; but I did what was in my power to keep him from them and soaked his wisdom up, as thirsty ground soaks rain.

“Then, on the banks of a river, that attracted him in his wisdom of metals, and minerals and the things hidden under the earth, the man found great store of small stones of divers colours that were very good to him; and he told me that these small dull pebbles,

many of them less in size than beads, were more precious than cowries or ivory, than skins or gunpowder, than glass or any other thing in the whole wide world. Whereat I saw that too much learning and wisdom and deep knowledge of the ways of the stars and eclipses, and of the sun and moon, had poisoned the man's head, that wandering through the world, and never resting his thinking parts, had at last turned the man's brain sour in his skull; and I feared that I should win no more wisdom from him and that he would soon babble empty nothings, like an aged man, or an infant, or those who are born with wind in their heads instead of brains.

"But it was not so. The man's mind continued to send forth great stores of learning. And while each day he packed my understanding with a new thought and a new thing, I, on my side, worked for him and befriended him and made his ways easy; for we were now approaching my own land, because the man desired to go to the M'wootan N'zigo, the Great Waters to the north of Batonca land—those sweet, vast lakes that you call after your Queen and her husband, who is dead. You see, I know all these things. My thought was to bring the white man to my own people, that he might spread his knowledge there, and that I might win greatness.

"So the time passed by, and all the while I grew in knowledge and wisdom until one day, when we were camped in the land of my fathers, the man said:

'Lo! Pomba, my faithful friend and follower, you are now grown as wise as I. There is no more that I can teach you.' Then said I, 'There is yet another thing. Teach me why this dust and gravel that you have gathered by the way is valuable. Tell me wherefore these little hard stones are precious beyond all earthly things.'

"Then he answered: 'I cannot tell; but men have agreed that they shall so be esteemed. The stones will be cut and polished until the fire hidden within them flashes forth and gleams and sparkles, like the eyes of the wild beasts by night. And then our women will wear them about their necks and wrists, upon their fingers and in their hair, for they love them better than the brightest beads of gold or silver.'

"So I knew that he was too mad to teach me any more. Then we came to my native land and built a house there beside that ground you are vainly digging yonder. M'wenga was king of the Batoncas in those days, and his village stood here long ago; but mine is a march distant.

"Next I schemed how best to become very great, and I found that with M'wenga, not with the white man, my hopes rested. So I played a double part and tempted the white man to say harsh things to M'wenga, and translated the white man's speech wrongly, and made M'wenga his enemy and the people his enemy. Then arose the Batoncas against the white man and he began to go in fear.

"We had already planned to fly with such stones as we could carry, but the rest he had hidden in the forest beside the Golden Falls, hoping that on a better day, in time to come, he might return again with many white men and regain his gems. But he did not know that I had changed against him; he only knew that the Chinkakko, the Fetich of the Batoncas, was against him, according to the chief, M'wenga.

"The Chinkakko was a Fetich of Gold, the Guardian of the Batoncas, and it grew bright, if a man had good heart towards the tribe, and dull against him if he was evil-minded against us, according to the words of the medicine-men.

"So I threw in my lot against the white man, and, going softly, went up to him while his back was towards me and his pen busy making silent words, and stabbed him, so that he rolled over at my feet. And I took the silent words he had set on paper and gave them to the king. And he was very glad, and having no son of his loins, made me his son and set me at his right hand. But the silent words did M'wenga take for high Fetich, and he wrapped them round about Chinkakko, and wore them upon his bosom for power and protection, according to the fancy of the ignorant who know not wisdom.

"As for me, I could tell where the white man had hidden many of his precious stones, and where he carried the others that he meant to take with him; and I was in a mind to fling them all away upon the wind;

but yet I chose to keep them, so I gathered them up from the girdle of the white man and from the heart of the ants' nest, and placed them in safety and sealed them with the seal of Chinkakko.

"The end is soon to come. M'wenga, four moons after these things that I have told you, went out before his warriors and met white men with rifles that slew at a mile distant. He fell, and many of his great men with him.

"Then the Batoncas came to me, and I spoke in the way with the white men, for I knew their tongue; and we made a peace and gathered up the dust of M'wenga and buried him as it is fitting to bury a king. But upon his breast we found no Fetich, for the white men had stolen Chinkakko from our father's neck, and with it the high Fetich of the silent writing. Therefore the silent writing and the Chinkakko of the Batoncas passed beyond the distant sea, and I reigned over my people by force of wisdom and power until this day.

"There is one thing more. You had not come amongst us, but for lust of the shining stones that the white man hid. You had not braved the unnumbered perils of this land but for keen desire towards the splinters of red and green and white dust. Therefore you, too, are mad in this even as the first man was. And, further, you had known nothing of all this but for the silent speech upon the paper. That came into your hands, and so you set forth; and with it there

also came into your hands our long-lost Chinkakko—our Golden Fetich—with the sign of the Batoncas set upon its face.

“See how wise I, Pomba, am become in my green age! You have heard from the tribes of my Familiar Spirit. It is most true: I have such a spirit; and his name is Wisdom.”

The King made an end of his long speech and his eyes looked far away over the heads of the crowd about him.

For a moment Lord Winstone did not answer. He, too, was deep in thought. Then, ignorant of what had passed and bearing the Golden Fetich—the Guardian of the Batoncas—on her white forehead, Bessie came forth, attended by her black boy and two of the Soudanese.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE KING'S FAMILIAR.

The girl came forward and stood beside Roy. Then Pomba lifted his dark eyes to her face and she saluted him gravely.

Both Winstone and Meldrum saw the Golden Fetich and shivered with apprehension; but the king did not immediately perceive it. He was intently observing Bessie's features nevertheless. They puzzled him a little—a circumstance not strange considering that never before this moment had he seen a white woman.

But his followers, with quicker eyes than their monarch, had already perceived Bessie's scarlet frontlet and the ornament it carried. They pointed, stared in blank astonishment, then became petrified with amazement, and finally raised their voices in one huge shout.

"Chinkakko! Chinkakko!"

The magic word strongly affected not only the troop of Batoncas behind them, but also Pomba himself. His attention was now called to the Golden Guardian of the tribe, where it sparkled on the white woman's forehead; and as he gazed, a scene of weird significance was enacted among the rank and file of the monarch's bodyguard. Before the precious sym-

bol each man passed, gazed at the familiar figure on the gold, then dropped upon his knees and touched the earth with his head.

Winstone was relieved to see that Bessie herself had become an object of some reverence at this crisis, and there was no effort made to crowd upon her or regain the Fetich. She clearly stood under the sheltering ægis of it—a sacred thing, sharing the indescribable virtues of the golden amulet upon her forehead.

Pomba, however, did not partake in this general veneration for the disc, but, as a statesman, he very fully realised the value of the toy to himself, and now demanded it.

"So! I spoke true words. I told you what you would not tell me; and here is confirmation. Bid yonder woman remove Chinkakko from her brow. 'Twas borne above the heart of M'wenga for many long years; now it has returned into Batonca territory, and, by virtue of my kingship, belongs to me. Quick! Bid the woman take it from off her forehead!"

But Winstone had not noted the awe and respect of the Batoncas towards the Fetich for nothing. He appreciated its possible priceless value at this juncture and determined to play a big game.

"Oh! King Pompa," he cried, "let it be known that the Fetich confers sovereignty, and that the dark hidden gods, who control men's lives and crown monarchs and dethrone them at will, have chosen the



White Queen to take the place of Pomba, have sent the White Queen from afar to the great tribe of the Batoncas. The sign of power, the writing of the hidden gods, is upon her forehead, and there is no strength in ten thousand spears that can avail against one chosen of the gods!"

"What mad speech is that?" roared back the King. "Am I a child to be frightened by your talk of Gods? There are no Gods. My Familiar hath oftentimes told me there are none."

"Have a care, King Pomba. Your Familiar may lie, to gain his own ends. The hidden Gods are everywhere. They roll the clouds together when it thunders; they flash their eyes when it lightens; they weep for the wickedness of bad monarchs when it rains. We come as the servants of the Gods, and under the sign of Chinkakko—sacred of old in this land—we conquer. Therefore give heed to me, and, if you would retain your kingdom, meet us in friendly spirit, yield up to the uttermost splinter the treasures of shining stone, and we on our part will make no claim upon your kingdom, but render to you the Chinkakko and restore to your tribe this Fetich of healing and power."

"Fool! I have but to raise my hand and you and your puny party are swept away!"

"Raise your hand, Pomba, and you die," said Winstone quietly. There was a revolver in his hand. Each had his eye fixed upon the other. Ten yards

off the Batoncas were still doing obeisance to Bessie and the Golden Fetich ; while Roy, with the help of the Zanzibaris, had opened a big case of beads and wire, and was presenting the warriors and head men with gifts of exceptional value.

Pomba answered his lordship's threat.

"What is death to me? I do not fear it."

"Nor I; but a man is a fool to die if he can help it before life has lost its salt. You are in your prime. Power is sweet and knowledge is sweet. Why fling a kingdom away when you might live to reign over it for fifty years more? Consider your added strength if Chinkakko returns to you. And all you give in exchange is a handful of gravel and dust, as useless to you as the ground you walk on."

"Who are you to offer terms to me?"

"The stronger party, in that the Gods are on my side. Regard your own followers. They are under the power of the White Queen already. Bid them destroy her! You hesitate, Pomba—you fear them. You have ruled by hard ways so long that they would fling off your yoke to-morrow if they but dared."

Pomba glared at his dauntless antagonist.

"You play with a wild elephant," he said. "I have but to return to my capital city and send forth my chosen troops under my men of blood, and you vanish like the grass before the fire."

"You speak as one of little memory," answered Winstone. "It is not thus that the Batoncas will treat

the possessor of Chinkakko; it is not with naked spears that they will welcome the White Queen, who has travelled through a million perils to bring them back their Guardian, that M'wenga, the King, lost in death."

"Then the need of more words ceases between us. I will return to my people and we shall see who is strongest, my Familiar and myself, or your milk-white girl and that golden toy."

"So be it, Pomba. Until the day after to-morrow we will await your decision. Longer we cannot wait. You boast your wisdom; be wise now if you want to keep your crown upon your head. Farewell."

"You have the lion's voice, white man; but you lack the lion's paws. Farewell."

Pomba rose from his folding chair, and Bessie approached him carrying a handsome coat of red cloth trimmed with golden braid. A similar gift had delighted many dusky kings; but this one waved it aside, while his followers looked on in fear.

For a moment he stared at the Golden Fetich, then spoke to his bodyguard and foremost men in harsh and angry accents. That he had directed them to relinquish their gifts was evident, but only a few immediately obeyed him. He repeated his command in a voice of thunder, and the rest dropped their newly-acquired treasures, though with no small show of surly reluctance. Then they took military order and fell back upon the main body of the Batoncas.

For one critical moment Winstone apprehended an immediate attack; but his big words and mysterious threats had not been uttered in vain. There were, moreover, other causes in Pomba's camp why an immediate onslaught was impossible. At any rate the Batoncas presently vanished, and Meldrum's expedition was left in peace for a while.

Winstone hastily put the case to his friend and explained how, in his judgment, the Golden Fetich might, after all, prove the salvation of the expedition and the means whereby the main object should yet be achieved.

"Pomba knows where your jeweller's shop is—that's very clear. The cold-blooded brute killed the poor beggar who found them, then hid them somewhere and sealed the treasure with the seal of Chin-kakko—whatever that means."

"It means this strange design on the Fetich, I expect," hazarded Roy. "But what's our next move?" he continued. "Shall we wait for the two days? I suppose we must. Any way that will give Dan time to rejoin us."

"Yes, and meanwhile I must take a lesson or two from Mabruki. The chap says he knows Batonca or a little of it—so I'm glad we didn't hang him. We must appeal to the mass of these people through their superstition and reverence for the Golden Fetich. My own belief is that our friend Pomba has foes in his own household. If we could get his war-

riors to mutiny against him we might score a bloodless victory after all and witness the exhilarating spectacle of Miss Ogilvie crowned Queen of the Batoncas in right of the Golden Fetich; but that would lead to a good many subsequent difficulties. My hope is that Pomba, seeing danger, and perhaps not too certain of how his troops would like making war against their blessed Chinkakko, will climb down and hand over the gems in exchange for the Fetich."

Mabruki's alleged knowledge of Batonca amounted to very little, but some few useful words proved to be at his command, and half a dozen phrases were learned by Winstone and Meldrum. These they taught their little force, and it was explained that should it be necessary to fight the people of the land, they must advance to battle shouting, "We conquer under Chinkakko!" "The Guardian of the Batoncas leads us to Victory!" "The White Queen is the chosen of Chinkakko!"

Winstone hoped that these war cries might carry weight, and he also trusted that the King's bodyguard—those Batoncas who had seen the Fetich and witnessed Bessie's kindly intentions towards them—would blaze abroad the wonder amongst their friends.

Later in the day, with a view to getting general information of the land and ascertaining the position of Bangillo, King Pomba's capital, Meldrum, Blackbird, Mabruki and two others of the hardiest and speediest from among the Soudanese started just be-

fore sunset for a nocturnal survey of the adjacent Batonca headquarters. A full moon would light them, and as there was but one main road carved through thick forest from the old capital to the new, no chance of a mistake existed. Any force sent against the expedition would have to meet Meldrum and his scouts.

They took their Winchesters only, and thus lightly cumbered proceeded at the trot and made rapid progress. The ground sloped southwesterly when two miles of the forest had been traversed, and as the moon flooded the plain with light and the river with silver, Meldrum, who had called a halt of ten minutes on leaving the woods, walked forward some fifty yards alone.

An open space, much trampled and evidently used for meetings or ceremonies here extended. It was surrounded on three sides by the woods, while on the fourth side a path wound downwards to the valley plains and, far below, on both sides of the Wambasi, glimmered the thatched beehive roofs of Bangillo.

It appeared a colony of exceptional size spread under the moon; and though the night was now far advanced no immediate signs of slumber had yet overtaken the native settlement. Red lights gleamed and twinkled everywhere, hurrying hither and thither, like sparks on a piece of paper that has just been burned; and presently, from this winding, ever-changing galaxy of torches, a definite formation took shape

and a little shining band, dwarfed by distance to a mere worm of fire, crept out of Bangillo and slowly ascended the hill in the direction of Roy.

As this troop departed Meldrum noticed that the bustle and stir behind it ceased, and before the detachment under its ruddy torches had proceeded a mile from the village, all lights had been extinguished about the dwelling-houses and streets. Bangillo slept, but the red worm climbed onward until Meldrum saw that it was approaching by the steep path up the hill and would soon be where he himself was standing.

The extreme smallness of the native force now approaching impressed Roy not a little, and served to render the incident void of alarm. Five-and-twenty to thirty persons represented the full strength of the procession, and as they came nearer, under flickering torchlight, Meldrum made out some detail, observed that many figures in fantastic raiment marched together, that a litter, on which lay a single shape, was carried in the midst, and that one man of great size with torch-bearers on his right and left marched at the head of the approaching company.

Guessing that their destination was the open space at the edge of the wood behind him, Roy now fell back and informed his companions of the approaching procession. A hasty survey of the meeting-place showed a ring of rough stones at its centre, and one loftier boulder in the midst. This hypæthral circle was evidently much frequented, and Meldrum sus-

pected it must be a sort of parliament house or council-hall of the tribe.

Immediately outside the ring appeared another stone, black with blood long shed, while also at hand lay the charred ashes of numerous fires—indications that led the beholder to change his mind and assume he stood within some grim Golgotha or place of sacrifice and execution.

Now, however, came sound of approaching voices and the torchlight and moonlight strove for mastery, whereupon Meldrum and his party fell back into the fringe of the forest, and there, in safe hiding, watched the Batoncas. Some thirty of them appeared, set their torches in a ring around the circle of stones, and immediately busied themselves about various matters.

Their burden they first deposited upon the ground; then ten aged men, attired in bizarre garments of many colours, sat round the stone rostrum; their gigantic leader mounted it to harangue them from the summit; while the rest of the party were active with preparations among the dead fires close by. These men planted two heavy tree stumps, each six feet high, at a distance of six yards apart, then built up between them a square and solid pile of brushwood.

Meantime Mabruki, at Meldrum's ear, translated, as best he could, the speech of Pomba to his medicine-men. For Pomba himself it was who presided at this strange scene of fiery words and savage deeds under the moon.



"Know, my wonder-workers, and ye, honoured fathers of my Kingdom, that things are come about that call for actions. The spirit of M'wenga moves where in time past he reigned a King, and in the song of the river and the rustle of the ripe seeds on high trees, he has spoken to me.

"Chinkakko has come again! Chinkakko is at our doors! How then must we regain the treasure, the Guardian of the Batoncas, so that our light may be lifted up among the nations and the sad spirit of M'wenga sleep in peace? I will tell you, even as the ghost of a greater than I told me.

"These white people are strong because Chinkakko is with them; that is their only strength. There is a Hand that holds the scales and a Voice that calls for a great sacrifice from me—the sacrifice of that which is most precious to me in the wide world. For my people I would give my life; but that is not demanded from me. The Voice spoke and bid me seek my Familiar Spirit, and I spoke with him, as you know, and he made answer thus: 'What is that which is most precious in the wide world to you, King Pom-ba?' And I said, 'You, my Familiar Spirit, are most precious in the wide world to me.' Then he said, 'Take me, then, by night to the Death Place and burn me alive, so that my inner Demon shall return to the stars. Do this, if you love your people more than you love yourself. And it shall happen that you prevail instantly against the white man, and blot them from

the land of the living, and regain the Guardian of the Batoncas: Chinkakko, the Fetich of Gold. And that shall take my place as your Familiar Spirit, for when their Guardian is restored to the tribe, you will want me no more.'

"Thus he spoke; and I obey him, for love of my people, and make this great sacrifice, that my warriors may stiffen their knees and find their hearts stout against their enemy. My black ants shall travel forth against these white ants and devour them altogether, so that there is not a bone of their bodies but shall be ground to powder and flung into the wind."

"It is well," answered one of the old men; "the Familiar Spirit must be burned alive, according to the word of his own mouth. His words were good, but Pomba has all his wisdom now, and Chinkakko is wiser even than the Familiar. Therefore we will slay him upon the fire, and send his inner Demon back again to the Lord of all the Demons. Now bring him forth, and hang him between the pillars by his hands and his feet, and let the flames slowly lick up his life before the moon shall depart."

All assented to this proposition, and, rising, the aged men walked in procession to the litter and removed its covering.

Meldrum, who had gathered from Mabruki the general purport of the speeches just recorded, was in two minds whether to rescue the unhappy wretch who would now appear or let him suffer. Discretion

suggested the latter course; and he hoped that the Familiar Spirit might prove to be some animal other than human—a goat or crocodile or bird.

But doubt upon the point was very speedily dispelled, and Meldrum's heart stood still as he watched a tall figure rise from the litter and stand face to face with Pomba.

"My God!" he cried, "it's a white man!"

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A DISCOVERY INDEED.

Roy's cry startled the savages, and the workers hurried round their wise men, picking up spears and shields as they came. But the handful of aborigines proved no match for five armed foes securely posted in the darkness and safety of the wood.

A rescue was of course the one thought in Mel-drum's mind, and now he called to his men to fire a volley at the Batoncas, then advance, shouting the war-cry they had been taught that morning.

Roy himself singled out Pomba with purpose to shoot him, but all was now movement, and the light of the torches and the shadows of the night played such pranks upon the dark skins of the savages that, even at this short range, straight shooting proved difficult.

The danger of striking the strange figure in their midst also appeared considerable. A white man he was without doubt. His beard flowed down upon his chest; his bald head glimmered under the moonlight; his feet and hands were fast bound; yet there lacked not dignity in his mien; and, upon the cry of Mel-drum, he started, then remained motionless with his eyes shining and his face raised to the sky. The man appeared suddenly stricken into white marble, and

presented a marked contrast to the agitated Batoncas, who rushed hither and thither, like frightened sheep.

The first volley dropped one warrior and wounded two others; but Pomba was uninjured, and his party, ignorant of the numbers of their enemy and stricken with terror before an attack so unexpected and delivered at such close quarters, hurled their spears wildly and aimlessly into the forest, then fled, as Meldrum and his men crashed from the wood.

For a second Pomba hesitated, but he, too, beat an unkingly retreat, and his huge form shewed itself capable of marvellous activity as it vanished into darkness and safety. The aged medicine-men also decamped, and their lives were spared for, having put the would-be murderers to flight, Meldrum desired no slaughter, and now turned all his attention to their intended victim.

Pomba's Familiar Spirit gazed upon his rescuer like a man in a dream. He made some strange inarticulate sounds, as one just waking from sleep, then he lifted both manacled hands and stretched them out to his deliverer. Meldrum shook them in his own, and a moment later the prisoner's bonds were cut and he stood free.

"Do you know English?" asked Roy. "It is the only language I can speak; but we have those in camp who will understand any European tongue."

"You are an Englishman! It was fated that one of my own race should set me free."

"Strange indeed. But I'm a proud man to-day, for I've saved a life. Can you walk or shall a couple of my men carry you? Are you hungry?"

"I can walk slowly. I am only stiff and cramped. No, I am not hungry. It must all be a dream—I shall wake presently. I have seen some such event in visions many times."

"No dream, thank God. Walk with me, and talk if you are equal to it. But do not speak if you would rather not. Come, take my arm on this side and my servant's on the other. Did you know they were going to kill you?"

The rescued Briton moved slowly, but increased his pace as he felt the support on either side. Meldrum sent on a speedy Zanzibari, to bid them make preparations for a special meal in camp.

The stranger answered.

"Not until we reached the Death Place did I realise that I was to be sacrificed. The king's proclamation to his medicine men was, of course, his own invention, and he is evidently beset by some difficult and dangerous problems the nature of which I cannot guess. He spoke of Chinkakko—an old-time Fetich of the tribe—and its return to this land; but what should I know? I have been the prisoner of the Batoncas for more years than I can count. This human devil has kept me alive for his own ends after having endeavoured to take my life in the past; and I have dwelt a hermit's life, a slave's life, seeing only

the faces of my gaolers and my tyrant through countless ages of time as it has seemed to me."

"Do not weary yourself with speaking."

"No, for my tongue is stiff. But presently you shall hear my story. It is a long one, yet told in a few words, for since I was struck down and left for dead, by that serpent—the man I nourished and whose life I saved—I have lived a brute's existence. I have slept and awakened, eaten and drunk, and slept again. By day I have been hidden and fastened up like a dog; at night I have many thousands of times been roused from sleep by Pomba, who would then lead me into the moonlight and make me talk and talk and instruct him in all that I knew of civilisation. In exchange he allowed me my life, and I, cur that I have been, clung to the wretched existence Fate put upon me. Now—now I begin to hope it was all a dream, that my hair has not grown grey in captivity, that my life has not been running to rot through years without count."

"It is no dream; but now you are free. Tell me one thing and I will trouble you no more. Did Pomba owe his life to you? Was it you he struck from behind when you were about to escape from the Batoncas? That he did this I know from his own lips, but I understood from him that he had slain his master."

"Not so; I am the man. He meant to kill me and I rolled over and believed as I felt the steel through

my back that all was ended. But I did not die; I was even nursed and kept alive that I might afford some sport at another time. And then the King, in those days one M'wenga, went to war and lost his life, and Englishmen were within half a day's march of me and never knew it!

"Pomba, instead of slaying me, as the other had purposed, decided that I should live and proclaimed me his Familiar Spirit before the nation. For years—how many you know better than I can—have I dwelt with the Batoncas. Sometimes I thought to kill myself, but life is precious under any circumstances and I lived on.

"That is the outline of my story. The details will take long to fill in, but now relieve my own curiosity a little. Who are you, and how did it come about you were hidden at the very spot on which I was to be brutally murdered? What do you do in the heart of this cursed land?"

"I will tell you everything," answered Roy, "but first one question more. The precious stones you had hidden—what of them? Where are they now?"

"My emeralds and rubies and diamonds! Why, it is years since I so much as thought of them. I hid the bulk of them in an ants' nest beside the Golden Falls. I was writing a description of my hiding-place when Pomba's knife passed into my back. That man! I would have trusted him with untold gold—indeed, I did do so, for he had my secret; he knew where



the treasure was buried. Now, please God, I may stand face to face with the fiend once more—only once more.”

“And you heard no more of your treasure afterwards?”

“Never a word. Sometimes I speculated drearily on the value of it, hidden in the mouldering ants’ nest; and I also wondered what became of those gems I had concealed upon my person when I was struck down; for I remained long insensible and after I came to myself the precious stones were gone.”

“Pomba could have told you,” said Meldrum; and he proceeded to describe the incident of the Golden Fetich and the paper it was wrapped in.

The white man listened with amazement to the strange sequel of his own story; then, when the party finally reached camp at daybreak, he ate and drank a little, suffered Winstone to tend his ailments, and soon afterwards sank into comfortable repose.

Meldrum’s adventure, as may be imagined, excited the deepest interest in his friends, and a little council was held among them almost as soon as their rescued fellow-countryman slept.

“This incident alters the entire aspect of the position, of course,” began Roy. “I’m sorry for you, Tracy; but, after all, we’ve done a bigger thing by rescuing a white man, and one who has suffered so much, too—we’ve done a bigger thing by saving his

life than we should have done by discovering all the gems in the world."

"We may do both," said Lord Winstone.

"Yes; but the gems are his now, not ours—that's the point," explained Meldrum's cousin.

Fain had come near complete recovery during the past four-and-twenty hours. His mind, however, was undergoing a great change, and the shock of his failure to find the precious stones, together with his subsequent narrow escape from a hideous death, had tended for the time at any rate to modify his ambitions if not his character.

He craved the stones no more. He looked back on his past with loathing; and under present circumstances a thought, in his mind before the discovery and rescue of the owner of the stones, now returned with tenfold force. He had already determined to confess to Meldrum; but the advent of the stranger made it more difficult, in that the self-conscious and unhappy man feared that his cousin would read a wrong motive into confession at this juncture.

If Fain did not explain how he had mutilated the document found in M'wenga's Fetich, the writer of the missive might himself do so. He would certainly want to see his manuscript, and was likely to realise that a part had been cut off from the rest.

The moment was not opportune for private conversation with Meldrum, however, and the contrite and smitten sinner said no more at that time. Win-

stone continued, and his advice appeared sound enough.

"More we cannot do now, and to beat a retreat before the overwhelming odds represented by the Batoncas is only common-sense. We know exactly where the treasure is, and if we work north up to Tanganyika, we shall soon reach missionary settlements and can there refit, or from there return with a strong party to the coast. This is not to abandon our goal altogether. Let this old man grow better of his ulcers and he will put himself at the head of another expedition and, with his knowledge of the country and people, probably achieve his object. But to try and secure his treasures for him at present appears to me beyond our power."

"I'm for waiting a little myself," declared Roy; then Blackbird, with great humility, asked to be permitted to speak.

"It dis way, gem'men. T'ings is bery difficult wif Marse Pomba now, 'cause ebberyting go wrong wif him. We near kill de great man last night, an' we take his Familiar Spirit away from him in de name of Chinkakko. So he go back to his people, an' dey hear dat Chinkakko hab conquered again. What dey tink ob dat, sars? Why, dey begin tink Chinkakko's stronger dan Pomba."

"By Jove, you're right, and I'm wrong!" said Winstone frankly; "I had not thought of the significance of this last incident. We must wait certainly.

I hoped great things from the Chinkakko, after that first interview, but I'd forgotten all about it before this startling development. To think this poor chap has been living as a savage King's Familiar Spirit for all these years! By the way, what was his name?"

"Blessed if I asked him," answered Meldrum. "Shouldn't blame him if he'd forgotten it. What of his health? Is there any chance that he'll pull through?"

"Every chance. He has suffered a bit from neglected ailments and lack of proper physics; but he has a powerful frame and his reserves of strength are by no means worn out. The marvel to me is his intellect is clear and unclouded through it all. The man's face bothers me, curiously enough. Haggard and hairy though it is, his features constantly put me in mind of others that were at some time or another familiar to me."

At this moment Bessie's voice reached Meldrum's ear. She had just taken a little dish of soup to the beehive tent of straw where the stranger lay sleeping, and now, a moment later, her loud scream startled Meldrum, who hastened to the spot accompanied by Winstone and Fain and followed by several of the Zanzibaris.

Within the little chamber Bessie lay extended in a dead faint, while the stranger sat up amid his blankets and looked with wild grey eyes at the approaching men.

"What in God's name is this? What has happened? I was dreaming of days long past and living again my youthful life, when a scream cut short my dreams and I awoke to find this girl lying here at my feet insensible."

The Zanzibaris peeped and chattered at the entrance; Winstone answered the unknown one and Roy set about restoring his sweetheart.

Bessie had evidently been much moved or startled, for the girl did not faint easily; but seeing that it was her cry that had awakened the sleeper, it appeared difficult to understand what had happened to occasion her such concern. Soon, however, she came to her senses and then explained what had occurred.

In his sleep the rescued sufferer was living again the life of the past and a name upon his tongue roused the girl's interest, while his subsequent utterances chained it.

The man was Richard Ogilvie, the long-lost wanderer, the brother of Alister Ogilvie and the father of Elizabeth.

The parent and child, thus miraculously restored each to the other, were left together awhile, for Bessie had now recovered and was well able to tell her story to her father; and acquaint him with the death of his wife, and the terrible end of his brother.

In camp meantime there were matters to occupy all hands, and at sunset Dan Hook and his party returned with four days' rations. The sailor's trip had

proved uneventful, for outside Batonca territory the natives continued both friendly and willing to trade.

Profound agitation had fallen upon Richard Ogilvie after the knowledge that his only child, whom he remembered as an infant more than twenty years before, now stood beside him.

Bessie, who had naturally aroused these deep emotions, did all in her power to soothe them. But it proved not easy, and her own heart was throbbing at the discovery that her father yet lived. The man was in no condition to discuss the affairs of the expedition that night, and Roy decided not to challenge his attention until the following day.

"To-morrow we will question him concerning the Batoncas and their strength. To-night we will let him delight in his daughter in peace. Poor fellow! It was his likeness to his brother that puzzled me," said Lord Winstone.

"To think that we have rescued a man—and this man—from death. To think that Bessie should have been sent as a sort of guardian angel to her own father!" declared Meldrum, and the other nodded.

"Pomba said truly at our first meeting that the world is a mighty small place."

Until near the dawn Bessie talked with her father, and Meldrum presently joined them and listened to the strange incidents of Richard Ogilvie's eventful life; while for the rest, Lord Winstone, anticipating a busy day on the morrow, turned in as soon as pos-

sible; and Fain absented himself, feeling that he belonged no more to the united party that had faced so much and whose anxieties and experiences were not yet at an end. Now he only desired to make a clean breast to Roy, and cared nothing for what might happen after his confession.

A day of uneventful peace succeeded upon these incidents, a day spent chiefly in listening to Richard Ogilvie's strange story of his savage life; but upon the following morning, while breakfast was in progress, considerable numbers of the Batoncas began appearing upon the edges of the adjacent forest. They were in war array and evidently designed a combined approach if not attack.

Lord Winstone scrutinised them carefully through his field-glasses, then turned and spoke.

"They look like fighting, I'm afraid. Better call the men to quarters. A good few of their leaders accompany the force, as far as I can make out; but I don't see their giant King among them."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE BATTLE OF BANGILLO.

But Ogilvie it was who allayed the immediate alarm of Meldrum and his friend. Attired in a suit of Tracy Fain's, the rescued man moved about camp with wonderful briskness and spirit; and now he borrowed Winstone's glasses, but returned them again after one glance at the coming force.

"They don't mean fighting," he said; "at least their signals are friendly. These people are a part of Pomba's army—not his veterans—but about five or six hundred of the younger men. Rather more than a quarter of the total troops, I should guess. They are coming to talk, either with a message from him, or on their own account. Pomba's son, Latossi, is with them; so they've probably arrived with a letter or ultimatum of some sort. They're carrying provisions, too—I can't understand that."

Presently certain of the chiefs, including Latossi, approached, and Meldrum and Winstone, with a bodyguard, and Richard Ogilvie to interpret, went out of camp to meet them. Then the nature of the visit appeared, and news of a remarkable dissension in the councils of the Batoncas was made public.

Utmost discord indeed prevailed; the nation was



divided against itself, and the party now awaiting Roy's word had seceded and split from the rest of Pomba's army, being moved thereto by recent events, and a superstitious conviction that, only under the sign of the returned Chinkakko, could Batoncas expect to fight and conquer. The recent failure of his proposed sacrifice had gone far to deepen an inner ferment throughout Pomba's army.

Thanks to Ogilvie and his years of instruction, something like modern military order and severity prevailed amid the Batonca forces, and their training had shewed itself in many triumphs; but before the shattering advent of the White Queen and the Golden Fetich even the high discipline of these savage regiments was not proof.

Efforts had been made by Pomba to hide his moonlit disasters at the Death Place, and it was given out on the following morning by the Medicine-men that the Familiar Spirit had been duly sacrificed and that success must now attend the King; but truth on such a matter could not be concealed for long.

It became known that under Chinkakko, the white men had rescued Pomba's Familiar from the death prepared for him, and this intelligence confirmed many in their determination to go over to the enemy.

A spirit of disaffection spread like wild-fire among the younger troops, and Latossi, Pomba's own son, fostered it. Every man regarded his neighbour with suspicion and the air was full of dread and danger,

of pending change and of the murmur of frightened men and women.

Pomba, however, stood firm. He had determined to use his army while yet it acknowledged him, and fight the intruders to the death, thus giving the timid and fearful an object lesson. He harangued the troops and pretended not to observe the spirit abroad among them. His words inspired some doubtful warriors, but they could not stem the pending wave of flight.

The veterans stood firm and were prepared to fight for Pomba while life was in them; but, under cover of night and by secret and preconcerted signals, many hundreds of the younger men crept singly and in small parties out of Bangillo slew the guards of the main entrance who were there to prevent this action, then departed to gather at the Death Place under Latossi. Thence by a swift march the rebels reached Meldrum's camp at daylight.

Now they announced their intention to enlist under Chinkakko, and this attitude and determination in a body amply large enough to have wiped out Meldrum's entire force, had it so desired, naturally demanded a grave conference.

"Our hands are forced," declared Winstone. "If we refuse these beggars our support, they will grow desperate and very likely revenge themselves on us. Certain it is that they cannot go back now. Their own side will cut them to pieces if they do. The

question is, are we strong enough, with this reinforcement, to make a fair show against Pomba? He won't yield apparently; though I should have imagined a man of his brains would have gladly handed over the precious stones in exchange for our still more precious Chinkakko."

"What guns have you?" asked Richard Ogilvie. "With thirty repeating rifles and men who can use them, added to those black troops, you would have a good chance of beating Pomba. He commands rather more than a thousand men still—say twelve hundred and fifty. And they're better troops than these, because older and experienced. However, I understand them pretty well by this time. If you've got thirty repeaters, and can rely upon the shooting, you ought to win."

"Thirty-two, as a matter of fact," said Meldrum.

"Then go ahead. Accept the service of these people; make blood brotherhood with Latossi, who is a very good Batonca, and promise him the throne of the Kingdom in a week.

Ogilvie's advice was followed. Meldrum, through Bessie's father, proclaimed that Chinkakko received the warriors gladly, and as the Batoncas brought two days' rations for six hundred men with them, they were welcome enough in more ways than one.

Roy now decided to waste no time in giving battle, and it was determined to march against Bangillo at dawn on the following morning.

All that day stragglers kept dropping in from Pomba's forces, and they brought news that the King, still obdurate and alive to what he must expect, was fortifying Bangillo in some measure, to protect the women and children; but he had decided that the pending battle should be fought upon the plain, outside the city stockades. Here, immediately below steep tracks that wound down from the Death Place to the valley beneath, Pomba meant to challenge the further approach of his enemies.

"His plan will be to hem us in, and he will probably have a good force hidden on the mountain side, in such a position that it can rush down upon us from above after we have descended," explained Ogilvie; "but our object is otherwise. We must clear the way as we go—both to right and left—then use the hill as a base. Our guns must do all they can to lessen the numbers against us before the Batoncas meet at close quarters. Once they are at grips, it will be difficult to know who are friends and who are foes."

That night the order of battle was arranged and Pomba's son informed of the part he and his warriors must take. He showed great intelligence, and offered several practical hints from his personal knowledge and experience of such savage warfare as lay before them.

After dark an advance column of fifty Batoncas and five Zanzibaris, with Winstone and Blackbird, set out to establish themselves on the hillside over-

looking Bangillo. It was hoped by this means to anticipate the enemy and prevent the establishment of any secret force that might subsequently attack Meldrum's army from the rear at a critical moment in the battle.

The hillside was, up to the present, at the mercy of either party, and such was its constitution that a thousand men might have lain concealed in its patches of dense bush and broken piles of volcanic rock. A system of signals, with red, white and yellow handkerchiefs for flags, was hastily arranged between Meldrum and Winstone.

Thus on reaching the top of the hill next morning Roy would learn where his party was posted, and at what point, if any, the Batoncas lay. Supposing a company of them to be concealed on the high ground, Meldrum's first move would be to charge them and sweep them into the valley before him.

Few slept that night. All looked to their arms; the riflemen received two hundred rounds apiece, and while Meldrum arranged for Bessie and a strongly armed force to remain well at the rear upon the following day, and be under no immediate danger at any time, Ogilvie borrowed the Golden Fetich, and having cut half a dozen gaudy flags from the rolls of brightly-coloured fabrics, with his daughter's aid, he stitched upon each the black design of Chinkakko on a huge scale.

"Our fellows will hold these rags sacred," he ex-

plained, "for they have the badge of the Guardian of the tribe upon them, and where a flag waves there will be Batoncas to protect it while they can crawl. The biggest—this white and green one—I shall hammer to a lofty pole to-morrow and it must be carried before you. The niggers are fighting for the White Queen, the possessor of Chinkakko: remember that."

"The more they see of me the better then?" said Bessie.

"Yes, it will put heart into them; but be cautious. God knows that I would never forgive myself and Meldrum would never forgive me if harm happened to you through word of mine."

"You are my dear father," she said. "I cannot accustom myself to the word yet. But it is very beautiful to me to speak it. And you—you will run into no danger either. You are old now and you have suffered enough."

"Do not fear for me. I want my own—that is all. I have suffered enough as you say. I can only revenge a part of it. But there is one must answer to me for what is mine and for the hell on earth my years have been; there is one traitor I would—but what idle talk is this! Come, child, take your rest and pray to God for those who are dearest to you in the world to-morrow. Kiss me—there! Strange it is, but my brain stands still, when I think of you. I cannot realise yet that you are my daughter, Elizabeth. I remember her as though it was yesterday—

a tiny round-eyed thing at her mother's breast. And now she is a woman, and Providence has willed that she shall be the first factor in her unhappy father's salvation!"

He left Bessie in her tent, and Bungani, according to custom, laid his own blanket at the entrance and curled up within call of his mistress.

And then the noise and jangle of steel gradually subsided and the camp slept, while only the dark forms of the watchmen prowled around its outskirts under the moon to the wakeful thunder of the river.

Before a first white finger of approaching dawn was laid upon the forehead of the Golden Falls, Roy Meldrum had blown his bugle, half a hundred fires had sprung into being, and the little army sat busy at breakfast. None of the camp furniture was taken, but the force, in full fighting trim, set forth, with nothing but their gourd water-bottles and weapons of war.

Each regiment comprised a hundred Batoncas under their own leaders. Of these there were four, and all went forward the prouder for one of the flags manufactured by Ogilvie; while Latossi, with a body of one hundred and fifty men, marched next, and the Zanzibaris with the Soudanese, Meldrum, Fain and Ogilvie brought up the rear of the fighting men.

Dan Hook had undertaken the task of commanding the little bodyguard of Bessie, and Bungani carried her flag. They were to show themselves

upon the hillside when the fight began; but Dan was to look to it that they never approached within spear-shot of the combatants.

As each detachment reached the Death Place of the Batoncas, it drew up out of sight of the plain beneath, and then, when his army was assembled, Meldrum stole forward to look for Winstone's signal. But he found it possible to communicate with his friend by a scout, as Winstone was only a quarter of a mile or less down the hill, and Mabruki soon crept unnoticed to his ambush.

His lordship reported that, with the exception of one body of the Batoncas, about a hundred strong, who had left Bangillo at dawn and were now posted in a rocky fastness within eight hundred yards of the summit of the mountain, the road was clear to the plain beneath.

Far below, Pomba's troops were astir and moving out of the capital. As yet scarcely half of them had taken the field, and not a moment was to be lost if Roy's forces desired to reap the advantage of their early start. Now the smaller army advanced and the blacks moved steadily and swiftly, keeping wonderful formation considering the steepness and roughness of the way.

The regiments proceeded at great pace; and Roy, with Fain, four of the best Zanzibaris, three Sudanese and fifty of the Batoncas, advanced at the double to sweep before them the enemy hidden on



the hillside in the rocky pile ahead. But the Batoncas posted here had vantage of ground and, though unprepared for any attack, they made instant preparation upon finding themselves discovered, and greeted Meldrum's force with a shower of spears which dropped two men before a shot was fired.

Winstone from his secret hiding-place cursed his big friend's method of attack, but Meldrum pushed impetuously forward and soon little puffs of smoke leapt along the hillside as the Zanzibaris, Fain and Roy opened fire.

A couple of volleys brought the Batoncas tumbling out of the rocks, and soon the rival forces joined in a swaying, struggling mass, while the sharp incessant crackle of revolver fire proclaimed that Roy and his companions were in the thick of it with their black friends. The position was rushed in less than five minutes, but at heavy cost.

When all was practically over, Meldrum himself charged five of the foe hemmed like rats in a trap between some heavy boulders open above to the sky. But their position rendered the warriors desperate and, after one had fallen, Roy discovered that his revolver was empty.

Other weapon he had none, for he had flung down his rifle outside the opening; and now, at close quarters, he dropped a second Batonca by hurling his heavy revolver at him. It hit the naked man over the heart and he went down like a stone, but at the

same moment his companions were upon their huge enemy and a spear gashed open his shoulder. He hit out and staggered the man; then he felt another stab on the face and was turning again, when two more Batoncas sprang from hiding and advanced at a run to their companions.

Meldrum was hidden from the eyes of his own party, but had just time to raise one tremendous shout. He set his back to the rocks and must, one moment later, have perished in that position, for two spears thrown simultaneously from close quarters would both have transfixed him, but between Meldrum and this flying death, like some shield of a tutelary goddess dropped from heaven, there fell or leapt a heavy object from the rock above. In this the spears buried themselves, and Meldrum, blinded by the blood that poured from his face, slipped at the same moment and half rolled down a sharp declivity between the rocks.

His shout had brought half a dozen friendly Batoncas to his aid, and they now climbed upwards and slaughtered their caged enemy, while Meldrum, staggering back to where he had left his rifle, reloaded it, bound up his head and pushed on down the hill as fast as he was able.

Firing had now become general and the riflemen at long range were making very good practice on the dense ranks of the Batoncas. They poured in a steady fusilade from a position above their own black

friends, and Ogilvie, seeing the advantage of this manoeuvre, now signalled to Winstone to bring up his force, for every shot was telling at a range of a quarter of a mile, and the powerless Batoncas could do nothing.

As Winstone came into position and added his fire to the rest, Roy regained the ranks. Then, after enduring another volley, the enemy, at a word of command, began to open out, in order to lessen their losses.

To hold back the Batoncas under the Chinkakko banners was no light task at this juncture, but at length, as Pomba's forces received the word to charge, Meldrum, only waiting until the veterans of the enemy were on the foot-hills of the slope, released his own party and the battle began in earnest.

Behind the oncoming foe, however, extended a grim black line of dead and dying, and Winstone computed that Pomba's active warriors must exceed those of the expedition by little more than two hundred when the actual crash of contact came.

Meldrum, with advantage of ground, looked like holding the day at first, but the old soldiers began to do terrible execution at close quarters, and soon the hill was running red streams of blood upon its dusty face.

Under the gleam of the rising sun—where it flashed on shining, sweating skins, bright spear-heads and swaying piebald shields, the savages fought in

clouds of dust, hacking, stabbing, disembowelling, and shrieking like demons. Everywhere along the struggling lines, in the wild whirl of writhing figures and spattered blood, they were at death grips, choking one another on the ground, tearing at each other's throats, stabbing, rending, slaughtering and being slaughtered.

Maimed men fought on till they were knocked upon the head; strong men leapt over the twisting bodies of their stricken companions; here a dozen went down in a glittering mass, like a Rugby football scrimmage, but few ever rose to their feet again; here dusty, bloody fiends forced a way through their enemies, then turned with reeking knives to hack a road back again; here individuals, separated from their friends and foes, fought hand to hand, wrestling and falling and blindly groping with dying hands or seeking with eyes already growing dim, for fallen knife or spear.

A noise like the ebb and flow of a heavy sea rose from the battle, and it was punctuated by yells and curses, screams of agony, howls of triumph.

Under Winstone and Meldrum the riflemen kept apart for awhile, but it was soon apparent that their aid must be given quickly and freely. So revolver in hand they plunged into the line and strove to support the swaying flags, which waved along the face of the fight.

All the banners still stood. Then a sudden sortie

threatened one, and Meldrum, calling to Mabruki and Blackbird, made for the spot. He was fighting with a clubbed Winchester, and the butt of the weapon showed the hideous nature of the blows it had dealt. Now, himself covered with blood and a spectacle of terror, Roy went forward, and in a moment had mowed a way for himself through the enemy. He turned instantly and fought his way back, while Blackbird performed the same feat with equal success.

But Mabruki was less fortunate. The poor fellow slipped, recovered, slipped again and went down, while, before Roy could reach him, half a dozen spears had passed through his body. A second later two of the men who had killed the Arab were themselves dead on top of him, one with a smashed skull and scattered brains, another shot by Blackbird. Then the hunter and Roy struggled clear from the conquering advance of their friends to note how the battle raged elsewhere, and at what point their aid was most required.

On one side Winstone's small force had joined Latossi, and success was attending them, for they were fighting in splendid order and with a solid front that crumbled the opposition before it. They moved over gory red ground, and the reek of blood hung in the air behind them.

But to the right Roy's friends appeared to be barely holding their own. Here the Batoncas were

unaided, for the full force of the Zanzibaris and Soudanese was now thrown into the centre of the battle, and Meldrum saw with alarm that many of his own men lay among the black corpses that strewed the hillside.

Neither Ogilvie nor Fain was visible, and Meldrum only had Blackbird and one armed Zanzibari at his back; but, picking up a loaded rifle from a dead man, he pushed ahead with the others, and soon his presence inspired his followers with confidence and checked a threatened panic.

The expedition was now gaining ground, and the combined forces under Roy had carved their way to the plain. Desperate fighting still continued; then an unpremeditated action went far to decide the issue.

Up aloft, Dan Hook, finding that the battle was retreating from beneath him, and never for an instant in his own mind doubting its final issue, proceeded to nearer quarters, and the few Batoncas told off to stand by him now advanced gladly enough under Bessie's great green and white flag.

Even through the din of the battle, the shouts of the approaching company could be heard, and the cry of "Chinkakko! Chinkakko comes!" fell on the ears of a foe already worsted at most points.

A last frantic effort the veteran Batoncas made, and at the bitter end of the battle, those that could do so stood and fought like despairing demons. For

a terrible five minutes, that seemed to the onlookers a century, the balance trembled; but Fate was on the side of the smaller and stronger battalions.

The encounter had much diminished in extent, and now, instead of ranging over half a mile of hillside, it centred to a point. Here, in smoke and smother of dust and blood, the exhausted warriors of Pomba made their last stand and dealt death to right and left, killing two for one.

But, though they knew it not, the lines behind them were in flight, for Pomba himself, who watched the battle from a knoll upon the plain, had hastened off the field, knowing defeat to be but a question of minutes; and behind him retreated many of his soldiers.

"The King has fled! Your King has given you to us!" shrieked Meldrum's men when the truth crept through the battle; and upon that all fighting ceased as if by magic.

Without a king or commander the savages would risk their lives no more, and now they flung down their arms and willingly surrendered to the victorious servants of Chinkakko.

So the battle of Bangillo ended, and the conquerors had breathing space to look about them and count the cost.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### DEATH OF KING POMBA.

When the duration of this fight came to be considered, it was seen that the death roll had proved terribly heavy. About equal numbers of the Batonicas had fallen as a result of their hand-to-hand encounter; but ere they met, Meldrum's guns had gone far to equalise the contending forces, and more than two hundred of the savages were slain by bullets before and after they joined issue with their opponents.

Another hundred or so had been wounded and put out of action before the civil battle of Batonica against Batonica began, and in round numbers, at the end of the conflict, not four hundred uninjured members of Pomba's force were left upon the field to acknowledge Chinkakko victorious.

Another hundred or more had fled with their King; and the total number of killed and wounded amounted to nearly seven hundred men—an extraordinarily high proportion considering that Pomba's total force hardly exceeded thirteen hundred. Of these more than three hundred were slain outright; while, upon the other hand, Meldrum had lost about two hundred and fifty Batonicas killed and a hundred



wounded, while eight of the Zanzibaris were slain, including poor Mabruki, and two of the Soudanese.

Four Zanzibaris were wounded, none dangerously; two were missing; and, of the heads of the combined force, Roy himself and the King's son, Latossi, were wounded; Winstone was safe; Bessie, Dan Hook and their guard were all unhurt; and Richard Ogilvie and Tracy Fain were both missing.

Of the second, none had seen any sign since the original attack on the hillside; of the first, several of the Zanzibaris avowed that on Pomba's retreat, Ogilvie, who was the first to witness it, had called a dozen Batoncas to him, addressed them hurriedly in their own language, and led them into Bangillo.

The surviving warriors now set about the business of ministering to their wounded friends, but the appalling magnitude of such a task made it impossible of effective execution, and many poor wretches, who would have lived with adequate attention, perished miserably during the long hours that followed the battle.

Soon, after noon, it was felt that the city must be taken; but before reorganizing his forces and marching into Bangillo, Roy, Bessie and her Kaffir boy with half a hundred of the Batoncas roamed the hillside to seek for Tracy Fain.

Their first point of search was the elevation from which Meldrum, Fain and their little force had driven the Batoncas. And beyond this spot there was

no need to look, for there, where Meldrum's life had been mysteriously saved—how, he did not know—lay Fain with two mortal spear wounds in his body and a broken leg. He was alive, but quite unconscious, and it seemed certain that death must be but a question of minutes.

Winstone was signalled and, desisting from his kindly work among the wounded and dying, he approached.

"We can only help him to pass in peace," he said. "He will never recover consciousness. The life is flickering away fast."

"He died for me," said Roy Meldrum. "One had to perish; and I thought the end was come; but now I see what was a mystery at the time. He leapt from that rock there—fifteen good feet it must be—leapt between me and these spears; and took them."

"It was a great death. God forgive me, for I wronged the man in thought oftentimes," said Lord Winstone.

Meldrum was silent. For one moment he remembered the dead man's ravings during his fever. Then he sank them to the bottom of his heart and banished them from his mind forever.

Whatever his cousin had done in the past, however great his sins had been, here was a deliberate death which blotted out the record of them. In cold blood, with his eyes open to the inevitable sequel, Tracy

Fain had given his life for his friend. The fact that he was weary of living, that existence stretched before him a hopeless thing, stained by futile sin, was not in Meldrum's knowledge, nor would it have counted with him had it been so. All he knew was the certainty that Fain had died to save him.

For the first time since his childhood Roy Meldrum wept, and the salt tears stung the gash in his face with their brine. He took Fain's hand, and while he held it, the other's spirit passed and he was dead.

"'Greater love hath no man than this'," said Winstone calmly. "Come; we will carry the poor fellow away and bury him beside the river. One may envy such a grand death. And I thought him a coward! It is a lesson to judge no man."

The dead was borne to the valley, and a flag, that recently had fluttered in the van of the battle, now covered him. Under the sign of the Golden Fetich he lay, his course run, his good and bad, engraved on time past, to be added to or altered no more.

A party of half a dozen men and Dan Hook—those who had stood guard over Bessie and were fresh and unwearied by battle—now set off to camp to bring along some tents and necessities; while Meldrum, Latossi and the bulk of their active force marched into Bangillo. Bessie walked with them and it was soon apparent that the place had surrendered.

The conquerors were greeted with trembling fear.

Women who had lost husbands, fathers and mothers who had lost sons in the battle, all hastened to fling themselves at the feet of the victors. Many brought pitiful gifts of rubbish that they treasured. The troops who had fled surrendered; from every alley and lane and street in Bangillo the people flocked and fell on their faces before Meldrum and the rest.

Thus did Chinkakko return to the Batoncas, and the poor savages raised a cry of rejoicing, even in the midst of their bitter losses, as the Golden Fetich passed among them on the forehead of the White Queen.

But in Pomba's kraal there was mourning, and his wives and children and aged servants wept, for the King had not returned from the battle, and it was believed that he had fallen. Only the venerable Medicine-men, who now hurried to pay homage to the victors, could tell of the defeated monarch.

"He passed from the battle back to his city," said one; "and he returned not to his palace, but sought the Mystery House of the high Medicine where it is only permitted the King of the Batoncas to enter. Thither he fled alone and, looking again, I saw another fellow—a being with flowing beard, the King's Familiar Spirit, who was taken from amongst us under the moonlight at the Death Place by the servants of Chinkakko."

The so-called Mystery House of the King proved to be a small hut with scarlet thatch standing apart

in a square of naked black earth and having around it lofty walls of bamboo splashed and streaked with bright colours.

"It is the secret place of Pomba, where he speaks with the spirits of the air and the water," explained the aged man who guided them. "The dwelling was erected at his command when he came to the throne of the Batoncas, and oftentimes in the hours of darkness he passed thither unattended to commune with those invisible beings who speak with kings alone."

Meldrum, Winstone and Latossi, ordering back the savages who swept round them to learn the fate of their monarch, entered the house of mystery together, and a moment later stood not only before their goal, but faced the last bloody page in the red chapter of the day's work.

A fiery sunset threw brilliant light into the chamber and revealed at its centre a curious mound of black earth, in shape like a grave, but with a wider and flatter surface. Upon it, fashioned in human skulls for the knobs, and with leg and arm bones for the connecting bars, extended the sign of Chinkakko, the same hieroglyphic that appeared upon the Golden Fetich; and at one corner lay the broken parts of a broad, leaf-shaped spear, with which it was evident somebody had been digging in the mound.

Pomba it was who thus, at the hour of defeat, and conscious that the hidden treasure of Richard Ogilvie was the object of the attack, had sped to the hiding-

place, doubtless with intention to move the precious stones elsewhere and so make peace on advantageous terms despite his overthrow. But another, equally anxious to possess his own, had marked the defeated King's flight and followed him.

In the Mystery House, black man and white had met; but the awful death struggle that took place between them could never be chronicled, for no human eyes other than their own had witnessed it. And both were dead.

They lay together, their distorted faces not a foot apart, and it appeared that knives had been their weapons, for both were hideously gashed and slashed. Then each, as it seemed, had got home a simultaneous death blow.

Ogilvie had been stabbed through the heart, while the dripping knife he still clutched in his hand had severed the artery in his enemy's neck and inflicted other fatal wounds.

"Take the girl away," whispered Winstone. "Lead her out of camp and break it to her gently that her father has lost his life."

Roy obeyed, and presently their dead King was returned to the Batoncas and borne with howlings and lamentations to his palace; while the natives also carried Ogilvie outside Bangillo and laid him beside the other British victim of the day.

Thus poor Bessie's father, suddenly restored to her after twenty years, was as suddenly snatched

again from his daughter's love. The awful carnage of the day, with Fain's death and this crowning tribulation, affected the girl very seriously. But soon Dan Hook arrived, Bessie's tent was set up and she hid her grief from the multitude of strange eyes.

Still Meldrum's work was far from completed. A watch had been set over the Mystery House, and thither with torches and a trusty party of armed Zanzibaris, Winstone and Roy marched after the camp was pitched. The men stood round the blood-stained chamber, and under the fitful flicker of torches the explorers flung the bones from the black mound and dug into it.

Thus did the object of the expedition come to light at last. The spear with which Meldrum dug soon hit a hard substance and, burying his hand in the earth, he brought forth a seed-pod of umzimmete. Then his thoughts leapt like lightning along the strange courses of past time, and the scene before his mind's eye was of an ancient room, a little object on the wall, and the cutting open of a lionskin packet in the presence of his cousin.

Five-and-fifty seed-pods he dug out, and in each about twenty to twenty-five dull different-coloured stones, like coarse gravel and small pebbles, appeared.

Then, before the mound was laid flat and the hard undisturbed earth appeared beneath it, Roy made a further find, and discovered the remainder of Richard

Ogilvie's hoard tied up in a large piece of hide and bound about with many coils of wire. This contained the richest part of the treasure—those gems the defunct explorer had designed to carry with him when Pomba struck him from behind and shattered his hopes and ambitions.

In the hide, stones weighing in all nearly ten pounds were found, and though many appeared to be but coarse lumps of rough metal, none of the party could appraise their value, so all were taken. Full five-and-twenty pounds the total treasure weighed, without the seed pods that contained the larger part of it.

"The extent of this fortune must remain a secret until we get home with the stuff," said Lord Winstone. "For Bessie's sake and yours, old man, I hope it may turn out the jeweller's shop we came to find. Of course, gems and such things look rather discouraging in the rough, but we may say of them what we say of rich old miserly relations when they pop off: that we hope they'll cut up well. We must take it for granted that Richard Ogilvie, an old and experienced prospector, knew his business."

"I've got Bessie, anyway."

"Yes, that's as much good luck as a man has any right to expect for his own share in this lopsided globe. You've got your lady, and you've got your life, though how you expect that ugly wound in the



shoulder to do anything but kill you at the rate you're going, I can't guess."

"It's all right. I washed it before we came out. It wasn't as bad as I thought."

"Back we go then, and Blackbird can carry part of the stuff while I'll take the rest. A terrible day—a terrible day altogether. God knows how much of that poor black carrion on the hill I was responsible for; but it's always the way when white men come amongst the black. We can never reach their hearts—excepting as we have to-day, with lead."

"Don't make it worse by talking about it, old man. The thing's done and we've bought our crystals with blood instead of beads. Come to camp and let us do the last dismal duty this dismal day has left for us. I bid Dan dig their graves together, and dig them deep. Our friends, I mean."

"Yes, we will see them laid in the earth and safe from further tribulations," said Winstone. "Look!" he added. "Who shall declare these people do not share our common emotions and affections? There are our camp-fires ahead, and that twinkling constellation of red stars winding and turning and wandering on the hillside—what is it? That sound of wailing, what is it? Why, man, there's a heart torn with suffering under each of those red lights. There go women and children, fathers and mothers and wives and daughters seeking the big strong men,

gathering up the clay that ruled them and saving their dead from the fangs of the hyænas."

"They can do no more."

"And to-morrow we shall proclaim Latossi King under the Golden Fetich, and tears will be dried and the people will eat and drink and be merry. They are too wise to mourn long for those who die. 'As well mourn for those who go to sleep before you,' said a nigger to me once; 'we shall all go to sleep very soon'."

"Come along, Fred, and get this over. I'm sick of life to-night—sick to death of it for the first time since I came into the world. If it were not for Bessie, I could envy these poor fellows who have died on both sides doing their duty and fighting for a cause each thought noble. They are well out of it, and they made a good end. They sleep worthily and sweetly, too."

"And so will we," said Lord Winstone.

"Yes, with the smell of death in our nostrils."

"It isn't a night to be particularly cheerful, I admit," replied the other; "I won't try to be. These things had to happen. It's been one of life's nightmares. We shall wake up presently. Whew! I hope this stuff I'm carrying is as precious as it's heavy!"

Without more words they returned to camp and set about the business of burying their comrades. Dan and others at his bidding had done their work

well, and soon both Fain and the ill-fated Ogilvie were lying in twin graves six feet underground. The Zanzibaris had also buried their own dead.

A great silence brooded under the moon; the lights on the hillside vanished one by one; from the distant town faint sounds of sorrow fretted the still night; and at the fringe of the forest, where two new-made mounds lay together beyond the last flicker of the red camp-fires, there came the cry of a lemur calling to its mate.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### FAREWELL.

On the following morning Meldrum and Winstone were early at their chart, and the question of the return journey and the route of it was speedily determined.

"I hoped, if our progress had proved but a little smoother, to have made an interesting if lengthy journey back to the coast," said his lordship; "that is, of course," he added, "supposing that you were of the same mind. I pictured our expedition as passing southwards by the Luapula to Lake Bangweolo, then proceeding along the 12th degree of latitude to Lake Nyassa, and so, by way of the River Msinje and the huge Rufuma river, reaching Lindi, on the Ukeredi, and returning thence to Zanzibar; but that's a good year's work, and we are in no trim for it now.

"Our stores are low, our beads and native stuff will be nearly exhausted before we leave Bangillo, and our numbers, bad luck to it, have been terribly thinned. Besides, the safest way home is the best in any case, seeing that the object of the expedition is achieved, and we carry with us poor Ogilvie's treasure, not to mention his daughter. He was to have told us, by the way, the point and the stream down south where

he made his discovery; but only he and Pomba knew, so the secret must wait for a generation yet unborn to rediscover it.

"To return to the problem of our route, the journey by way of Bangweolo and Nyassa being out of the question, an alternative is to proceed north to Tanganyika and abide there, at the first missionary settlement we fall in with, until a strong party is starting for the coast of Victoria Nyanza. At the latter lake we can count upon support and reinforcements."

"All right; that we will do, and the sooner we are off up the Luapula, the better I shall like it."

"We must be patient. There is much to be done, and our wounded at the most favourable computation will require three weeks or a month before they can travel. However, Bangillo will offer its hospitality, and our first care is to see Latossi on the throne of his father. He must then prepare adequate quarters for us inside the capital."

"He will clamour for the Golden Fetich," said Roy.

"Let him. He must wait for that until we part company. Then, I fear, we cannot deny it to him, though for my part I would give a thousand pounds for it to-morrow and regard it as the most precious curio in my museum," declared Lord Winstone.

"We can't deny the beggar his Chinkakko though," answered Roy. "He fairly earned it."

"He certainly did; and I would rather he had that

spear wound in his calf than I. However, he'll limp on to his throne all right this day week."

"Is it to be a week off, old man?" asked Meldrum impatiently.

"Yes," answered his lordship. "This coronation must be conducted with tremendous pomp and solemnity, after approved British methods, as far as we can burlesque them in Central Africa. The savage attaches profound importance to ceremony and ritual. But don't worry. You'll very likely be home again in plenty of time to eat your Christmas pudding in old England."

"Seeing this is the beginning of January, I rather hope I shall," grumbled Roy.

"Patience is the first virtue in Equatorial Africa," answered Lord Winstone.

\* \* \* \* \*

And here the curtain must fall, for the story I set forth to tell you—that of the Golden Fetich—is told. In due course, Latossi, the Batonca Prince, sat upon the throne of his father, and Winstone, with Dan Hook for first assistant and Master of Ceremonies, looked to it that the crowning of the new monarch should be a very imposing and splendid circumstance. Then the expedition, after a stay of five weeks in comparative comfort and idleness at Bangillo, started homewards some five-and-thirty strong.

But Latossi himself travelled with his friends to within four days' march of the southern extremities of Lake Tanganyika; and there, upon a torrential and stormy morning at the beginning of another rainy season, did the King of the Batoncas receive with joy and utmost reverence the guardian of his tribe, Chin-kakko.

So the Golden Fetich returned southwards, and those who had brought it from afar took leave of it, not without some sentiment, and pushed northwards to the great waters of the Tanganyika.

In April they reached their desire and struck a settlement, where sundry German missionaries extended to them a hearty welcome and opened their blue eyes at the strange story they brought from the Inner Darkness.

Six weeks later a trading caravan departed direct for Zanzibar, and with them went Meldrum and his force. The journey, though slow, proved devoid of incident and early in November the coast was reached, and the Zanzibaris wept and embraced each other at sight of their home.

There the faithful servants and survivors of the expedition were left with genuine sorrow on their broad faces and well-filled purses in their pockets; while the widows and orphans of those who had fallen by the way were not forgotten, and all, directly or indirectly interested, received handsome returns for service done.

Indeed, Lord Winstone would take no denial in this matter, and he wrote big cheques at Zanzibar with a grim determination. Meldrum's ten thousand pounds had practically vanished, and the prospect of being the poor husband of a rich wife was far from pleasant to him, until Bessie laughed him out of it and seriously enquired who was responsible for her fortune. But that happened upon the passage home and after many sad leave-takings and eternal farewells.

Blackbird, secure in the certainty that his greatest hero on earth, Lord Winstone, would once more require his services at no distant date, regarded the parting with his master as temporary; but there were tears in his brown eyes when he shook Bessie by the hand and gave Meldrum a last grip.

Bungani absolutely refused to leave his mistress at all, but as it was felt that one winter in England would probably reconcile this child of the sun to his native land, Bessie had her will and the Kaffir came home with his friends.

The voyage was uneventful, and Lord Winstone's prophecy proved a true one, for Roy ate his Christmas dinner in England, and what is more, ate it in good company.

And now among all the papers, memoranda, notes and communications from which, at Lord Winstone's desire, I have compiled this chronicle for the brave



boys of old England and America, there is but one document left—a letter. That I may reproduce verbatim, though I need hardly say that it did not reach me from the recipient, for his modesty would be proof against any entreaty to publish such a heartfelt tribute to character. Thus, then, runs the missive:—

TUNBRIDGE WELLS,

12th Dec., 18—.

“MY DEAR FRED.

“I’ve taken a jolly good house with a big garden and fifty acres of rough shooting, almost within sight of the dear old place at Tamlin. That will tell you without more words how the ‘shining pebbles’ went off. I put myself in the hands of an expert, Mr. Fielder, who has forgotten more about precious stones than anybody else ever knew, so they tell me. He kept them a month, during which time I was on tenterhooks for my girl’s sake, not to mention my own. Then he sent in a report to the effect that there were about five-and-twenty stones in the treasure worth all the rest put together.

“I pulled a long face at that, but went on to read that the five-and-twenty were worth rather more than a thousand pounds apiece, and that one—an emerald—is such a swagger affair altogether that Bessie ought to ask five thousand quid for it.

“And, what is more to the point, Fielder knows a collector who will not hesitate at that figure. There’s

thirty thousand right away, and the rest will fetch about the same sum. So I may reckon my lady is good for somewhere between fifty and sixty thousand pounds. And Fielder very much wanted to know where the things came from, but I couldn't help him there; only the dead know that, unfortunately.

"Of course, it's a vile thing having no stuff—I mean money—of my own, but Bess won't pity my position at all. Women really have no logic in these matters. And when I say I'm going to add to our income by my own work, she asks me what I can do. Which is the most trying and tactless question anybody could possibly put to me, of course.

"But the banns are up; And you, who have been my best man so long, must see me through. I know you'd rather face lions and rhinos again than the marriage service, but you are made of tough stuff and, after all, there is no danger from your point of view.

"My best man you must be, Fred, as you have been through these past two long years, and not only my best man, but *the* best man, the best, truest, pluckiest, biggest-hearted Englishman these eyes will ever see.

"It is idle to bleat about all I feel when I think of Africa; but you know. There are things men can't talk about. They can only think about 'em alone. I've got a toy for you when we meet—not the Golden Fetich, worse luck—but a little gold cigar-case with a very tidy *fac-simile* of the ever-to-be-blessed and admired Chinkakko.

"By the bye, Bungani is pruning his dusky pinions for flight. He has an idea he will die if he stops in England, and he also feels that his occupation is gone, for where Bessie is stopping in this ancient town with a dear old aunt of mine, the nigger is not permitted to sleep on her door-mat, so his occupation has, of course, gone. He stays until after the wedding, and has a sort of idea that he will be invited to give away the bride, I fancy! Then I am going to ship him home, for the poor beggar is out of his element in our climate.

"By the way, good old Dan Hook called at my diggings yesterday. He brought his wife and the pick of his children, so he said. He is very fit and going to turn our five hundred pounds into a hostelry at Plymouth—his native place. There he will sniff the sea, but never go on it again.

"'No, not me, Mr. Meldrum, sir. I've had my bellyful o' salt water, I assure 'e, an' 'twould take a team o' wild hosses to drag me on the h'cean again, specially when such a butivul, Christian way o' life be thrawed open to me as keepin' a corner pub. An' as for you an' his lordship, damn my weather eye if I can tell 'e which I reckon be the boldest hero betwixt 'e, beggin pardon for the fiery word!'

"Does that bring him back to you?

"And the wedding is on December 28th next, as ever was, and if you're not doing anything particular until the New Year, come down and spend a week

with me and eat your Christmas beef at Tunbridge Wells. I know you're free until after the great event, and therefore you'll have to come. So that's all right.

"Yours, always, from the bottom of his heart,

"BANA MKUBA."





