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Allan Quatermain

By H. RIDER HAGGARD.

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SHE," "JESS," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

CHAPTER III—CONTINUED.

Meanwhile we had been walking up the slope of the hill, the lower portion of which was fenced off, sometimes with quince fences and sometimes with rough stone walls, into Kaffir gardens, just now full of crops of mealies, pumpkins, potatoes, etc. In the corners of these gardens were groups of neat mushroom shaped huts, occupied by Mr. Mackenzie's mission natives, whose women and children came pouring out to meet us as we walked. Through the center of the gardens ran the roadway up which we were walking. It was bordered on each side by a line of orange trees, which, although they had only been planted ten years, had in the lovely climate of the uplands below Mt. Kenia, the base of which is about 5,000 feet above the coast line level, already grown to imposing proportions, and were positively laden with golden fruit. After a stiffish climb of a quarter of a mile or so—for the hillside was steep—we came to a splendid quince fence, also covered with fruit, which inclosed, Mr. Mackenzie told us, a space of about four acres of ground that contained his private garden, house, church and outbuildings, and, indeed, the whole hill top. And what a garden it was! I have always loved a good garden, and I could have thrown up my hands for joy when I saw Mr. Mackenzie's. First there were rows upon rows of standard European fruit trees, all grafted; for on the top of this hill the climate was so temperate that very nearly all the English vegetables, trees and flowers flourished luxuriantly, even including several varieties of the apple, which, generally speaking, runs to wood in a warm climate and obstinately declines to fruit. Then there were strawberries and tomatoes (such tomatoes!) and melons and cucumbers, and indeed every sort of vegetable and fruit.

"Well, you have something like a garden!" I said, overpowered with admiration not untouched by envy.

"Yes," answered the missionary, "it is a very good garden, and has well repaid my labor; but it is the climate that I have to thank. If you stick a peach stone into the ground it will bear fruit the fourth year, and a rose cutting will bloom in a year. It is a lovely clime."

Just then we came to a ditch about ten feet wide and full of water, on the other side of which was a loopholed stone wall eight feet high, and with sharp flints plentifully set in mortar on the coping.

"There," said Mr. Mackenzie, pointing to the ditch and wall, "this is my magnum opus; at least, this and the church, which is the other side of the house. It took me and twenty natives two years to dig the ditch and build the wall, but I never felt safe till it was done; and now I can defy all the savages in Africa, for the spring that fills the ditch is inside the wall, and bubbles out at the top of the hill winter and summer alike, and I always keep a store of four months' provisions in the house."

Crossing over a plank and through a very narrow opening in the wall, we entered into what Mrs. Mackenzie called her domain—namely, the flower garden, the beauty of which it is really beyond my power to describe. I do not think I ever saw such roses, gardenias, or camellias (all reared from seeds or cuttings sent from England); and there was also a patch given up to a collection of bulbous roots, mostly collected by Miss Flossie, Mr. Mackenzie's little daughter, from the surrounding country, some of which were surpassingly beautiful. In the middle of this garden, and exactly opposite the veranda, a beautiful fountain of clear water bubbled up from the ground, and fell into a stone work basin which had been carefully built to receive it, whence the overflow found its way by means of a drain to the moat round the outer wall, this moat in its turn serving as a reservoir, whence an unfailing supply of water was available to irrigate all the gardens below. The house itself, a massively built single storied building, was roofed with slabs of stone, and had a handsome veranda in front. It was built on three sides of a square, the fourth side being taken up by the kitchens, which stood separate from the house—a very good plan in a hot country. In the center of this square thus formed was, perhaps, the most remarkable object that we had yet seen in this charming place, and that was a single tree of the conifer tribe, varieties of which grow freely on the highlands of this part of Africa. This splendid tree, which Mr. Mackenzie informed us was a landmark for fifty miles round, and which we had ourselves seen for the last forty miles of our journey, must have been some 300 feet in height, the trunk measuring about 16 feet in diameter at a yard from the ground. For some seventy feet it rose a beautiful tapering brown pillar without a single branch, but at that height splendid dark green boughs, which, looked at from below, had the appearance of gigantic fern leaves, sprang out horizontally from the trunk, projecting right over the house and flower garden, to both of which they furnished a grateful proportion of shade, without—being so high up—offering any impediment to the passage of light and air.

"What a beautiful tree!" exclaimed Sir Henry.

"Yes, you are right; it is a beautiful tree. There is not another like it in all the country round, that I know of," answered Mr. Mackenzie. "I call it my watch tower. As you see, I have a rope ladder fixed to the lowest bough, and if I want to see anything that is going on within fifteen miles or so, all I have to do is to run up it with a spyglass. But you must be hungry, and I am sure the dinner is cooked. Come in, my friends; it is but a rough place, but well enough for these savage parts; and I can tell you what we have got—a French cook!" And he led the way on to the veranda.

As I was following him, and wondering what on earth he could mean by this, there suddenly appeared through the door that opened on to the veranda from the house a dapper little man, dressed in a neat blue cotton suit, and shoes made of tanned hide, and remarkable for a bustling air and most enormous black mustaches, shaped into an upward curve, and coming to a point for all the world like a pair of buffalo horns.

"Madame bids me to say that dinner is served. Messieurs, my compliments;" then suddenly perceiving Umslopogaas, who was loitering along after us, and playing with his battleax, he threw up his hands in astonishment. "Ah, mais quel homme!" he ejaculated in French, "quel sauvage affreux! Take but note of his huge choppare and the great pit in his head."

"Ay," said Mr. Mackenzie, "what are you talking about, Alphonse?"

"Talking about!" replied the little Frenchman, his eyes still fixed upon Umslopogaas, whose general appearance seemed to fascinate him; "why, I talk of him"—and he rudely pointed—"of ce monsieur noir."

At this everybody began to laugh, and Umslopogaas, perceiving that he was the object of remark, frowned ferociously, for he had a most lordly dislike of anything like a personal liberty.

"Parbleu!" said Alphonse, "he is angered—he makes the grimace. I like not his air. I vanish." And he did with considerable rapidity.

Mr. Mackenzie joined heartily in the shout of laughter which we indulged in. "He is a queer character—Alphonse," he said. "By and by I will tell you his history; in the mean while let us try his cooking."

"Might I ask," said Sir Henry, after we had eaten a most excellent dinner, "how you came to have a French cook in these wilds?"

"Oh," answered Mrs. Mackenzie, "he arrived here of his own accord about a year ago, and asked to be taken into our service. He had got into some trouble in France, and fled to Zanzibar, where he found an application had been made by the French government for his extradition. Whereupon he rushed off up country, and fell in, when nearly starved, with our caravan of men, who were bringing us our annual supply of goods, and was brought on here. You should get him to tell you the story."

When dinner was over we lit our pipes, and Sir Henry proceeded to give our host a description of our journey up here, over which he looked very grave.

"It is evident to me," he said, "that those rascally Masai are following you, and I am very thankful that you have reached this house in safety. I do not think that they will dare to attack you here. It is unfortunate, though, that nearly all my men have gone down to the coast with ivory and goods. There are 200 of them in the caravan, and the consequence is that I have not more than twenty men available for defensive purposes in case they should attack us. But, still, I will just give a few orders;" and calling a black man who was loitering about outside in the garden, he went to the window and addressed him in a Swahili dialect. The man listened, and then saluted and departed.

"I am sure I devoutly hope that we shall bring no such calamity upon you," said I, anxiously, when he had taken his seat again. Rather than bring those bloodthirsty villains about your ears, we will move on and take our chance."

"You will do nothing of the sort. If the Masai come they come, and there is an end on it; and I think we can give them a pretty warm greeting. I would not show any man the door for all the Masai in the world."

"That reminds me," I said, "the consul at Lamu told me that he had a letter from you, in which you said that a man had arrived here who reported that he had come across a white people in the interior. Do you think that there was any truth in his story? I ask because I have once or twice in my life heard rumors from natives who have come down from the far north of the existence of such a race."

Mr. Mackenzie, by way of answer, went out of the room and returned, bringing with him a most curious sword. It was long, and all the blade, which was very thick and heavy, was, to within a quarter of an inch of the cutting edge, worked into an ornamental pattern exactly as we work soft wood with a fretsaw, the steel, however, being invariably pierced in such a way as not to interfere with the strength of the sword. This in itself was sufficiently curious, but what was still more so was that all the edges of the hollow spaces cut through the substance of the blade were most beautifully inlaid with gold, which was in some way that I cannot understand welded on to the steel.

"Then," said Mr. Mackenzie, "did you ever see a sword like that?"

We all examined it and shook our heads.

"Well, I have got it to show you, because this is what the man who said he had seen the white people brought with him, and because it does more or less give an air of truth to what I should otherwise have set down as a lie. Look here; I will tell you all that I know about the matter, which is not much. One afternoon, just before sunset, I was sitting on the veranda, when a poor, miserable, starved looking man came limping up and squatted down before me. I asked him where he came from and what he wanted, and thereon he plunged into a long, rambling narrative about how he belonged to a tribe far in the north, and how his tribe was destroyed by another tribe, and he with a few other survivors driven still further north, past a lake named Laga. Thence, it appears, he made his way to another lake that lay up in the mountains, 'a lake without a bottom' he called it, and here his wife and brother died of an infectious sickness—probably smallpox—whereon the people drove him out of their villages into the wilderness, where he wandered miserably over mountains for ten days, after which he got into a dense thorn forest, and was one day found there by some white men who were hunting, and who took him to a place where all the people were white and lived in stone houses. Here he remained a week shut up in a house, till one night a man with a white beard, whom he understood to be a 'medicine man,' came and inspected him, after which he was led off and taken through the thorn forest to the confines of the wilderness, and given food and this sword (at least so he said) and turned loose."

"Well," said Sir Henry, who had been listening with breathless interest, "and what did he do then?"

"Oh! he seems, according to his account, to have gone through sufferings and hardships innumerable, and to have lived for weeks on roots and berries, and such things as he could catch and kill. But somehow he did live, and at last by slow degrees made his way south and reached this place. What the details of his journey were I never learned, for I told him to return on the morrow, bidding one of my headmen look after him for the night. The headman took him away, but the poor man had the itch so badly that the headman's wife would not have him in the hut for fear of catching it, so he was given a blanket and told to sleep outside. As it happened, we had a lion hanging about here just then, and most unhappily he winded this unfortunate wanderer, and springing on him, bit his head almost off without the people in the hut knowing anything about it, and there was an end of him and his story about the white people; and whether or no there is any truth in it is more than I can tell you. What do you think, Mr. Quatermain?"

I shook my head, and answered, "I don't know. There are so many queer things hidden away in the heart of this great continent that I should be sorry to assert that there was no truth in it. Anyhow, we mean to try and find out. We intend to journey to Lekakisera, and thence, if we live to get so far, to this Lake Laga; and if there are any white people beyond, we will do our best to find them."

"You are very venturesome people," said Mr. Mackenzie, with a smile, and the subject dropped.

CHAPTER IV.

ALPHONSE AND HIS ANNETTE.

After dinner we thoroughly inspected all the outbuildings and grounds of the station, which I consider the most successful as well as the most beautiful place of the sort that I have seen in Africa. We then returned to the veranda, where we found Umslopogaas taking advantage of this favorable opportunity to clean thoroughly all the rifles. This was the only work that he ever did or was asked to do, for as a Zulu chief it was beneath his dignity to work with his hands; but such as it was he did it very well. It was a curious sight to see the great Zulu sitting there upon the floor, his battleax resting against the wall behind him, while his long, aristocratic looking hands were busily employed, delicately, and with the utmost care, cleaning the mechanism of the breech loaders. He had a name for each gun. One—a double four bore belonging to Sir Henry—was the Thunderer; another, my 500 Express, which had a peculiarly sharp report, was "the little one who spoke like a whip;" the Winchester repeaters "the women, who talked so fast that you could not tell one word from another;" the six Martins were "the common people;" and so on with them all. It was very curious to hear him addressing each gun as he cleaned it, as though it were an individual, and in a vein of the quaintest humor. He did the same with his battleax, which he seemed to look upon as an intimate friend, and to which he would at times talk by the hour, going over all his old adventures with it—and dreadful enough some of them were. By a piece of grim humor he had named this ax "Inkosi-kaas," which is the Zulu word for chieftainess. For a long while I could not make out why he gave it such a name, and at last I asked him, when he informed me that the ax was evidently feminine, because of her womanly habit of prying very deep into things, and that she was clearly a chieftainess because all men fell down before her, struck dumb at the sight of her beauty and power. In the same way he would consult "Inkosi-kaas" if in any dilemma; and when I asked him why he did so, he informed me it was because she must needs be wise, having "looked into so many people's brains."

I took up the ax and closely examined this formidable weapon. It was, as I have said, of the nature of a poleax. The haft, made out of an enormous rhinoceros horn, was three feet three inches long, about an inch and a quarter thick, and with a knob at the end as large as a Maltese orange, left there to prevent the hand from slipping. This horn haft, though so massive, was as flexible as cane, and practically unbreakable; but, to make assurance double sure, it was whipped round at intervals of a few inches with copper wire—all the parts where the hand gripe being thus treated. Just above where the haft entered the head were scored a number of little nicks, each nick representing a man killed in battle with the weapon. The ax itself was made of the most beautiful steel, and apparently of European manufacture, though Umslopogaas did not know where it came from, having taken it from the hand of a chief he had killed in battle many years before. It was not very heavy, the head weighing two and a half pounds, as nearly as I could judge. The cutting part was slightly concave in shape—not convex, as is generally the case with savage battleaxes—and sharp as a razor, measuring five and three-quarter inches across the widest part. From the back of the ax sprang a stout spike four inches long, for the last two of which it was hollow, and shaped like a leather punch, with an opening for anything forced into the hollow at the punch end to be pushed out above—in fact, in this respect it exactly resembled a butcher's poleax. It was with this punch end, as we afterward discovered, that Umslopogaas usually struck when fighting, driving a neat round hole in his adversary's skull, and only using the broad, cutting edge for a circular sweep, or sometimes in a melee. I think he considered the punch a neater and more sportsmanlike tool, and it was for his habit of pecking at his enemy with it that he got his name of "Woodpecker." Certainly in his hands it was a terribly efficient one.

Such was Umslopogaas' ax, Inkosi-kaas, the most remarkable and fatal hand to hand weapon that I ever saw, and one that he cherished as much as his own life. It scarcely ever left his hand except when he was eating, and then he always sat with it under his leg.

Just as I returned his ax to Umslopogaas Miss Flossie came up and took me off to see her collection of flowers, African liliums and blooming shrubs, some of which are very beautiful, many of the varieties being quite unknown to me, and also, I believe, to botanical science. I asked her if she had ever seen or heard of the Goya lily, which central African explorers have told me they have occasionally met with, and whose wonderful loveliness has filled them with astonishment. This lily, which the natives say blooms only once in ten years, flourishes in the most arid soil.

To my great delight Miss Flossie told me that she knew the flower well, and had tried to grow it in her garden, but without success, adding, however, that as it should be in bloom at this time of year, she thought that she could procure me a specimen.

After that I fell to asking her if she was not lonely up here among all these savage people, and without any companions of her own age.

"Lonely?" she said. "Oh, indeed no! I am as happy as the day is long, and besides I have my own companions."

"And are you never afraid among all these wild men?"

"Afraid? Oh, no! they never interfere with me. I think they believe that I am 'Ngai'" (of the Divinity), "because I am so white and have fair hair. And look here," and diving her little hand into the bodice of her dress she produced a double barreled, nickel plated Derringer. "I always carry that loaded, and if anybody tried to touch me I should shoot him. Once I shot a leopard that jumped upon my donkey as I was riding along. It frightened me very much, but I shot it in the ear and it fell dead, and I have its skin upon my bed."

Just then the spies whom our host had sent out in the morning to find out if there were any traces of our Masai friends about returned, and reported that the country had been scoured for fifteen miles round without a single Elmoran being seen, and that they believed that those gentry had given up the pursuit and returned whence they came. Mr. Mackenzie gave a sigh of relief when he heard this, and so indeed did we, for we had had quite enough of the Masai to last us for some time. Indeed, the general opinion was, that finding we had reached the mission station in safety, they had, knowing its strength, given up the pursuit of us as a bad job. How ill judged that view was the sequel will show.

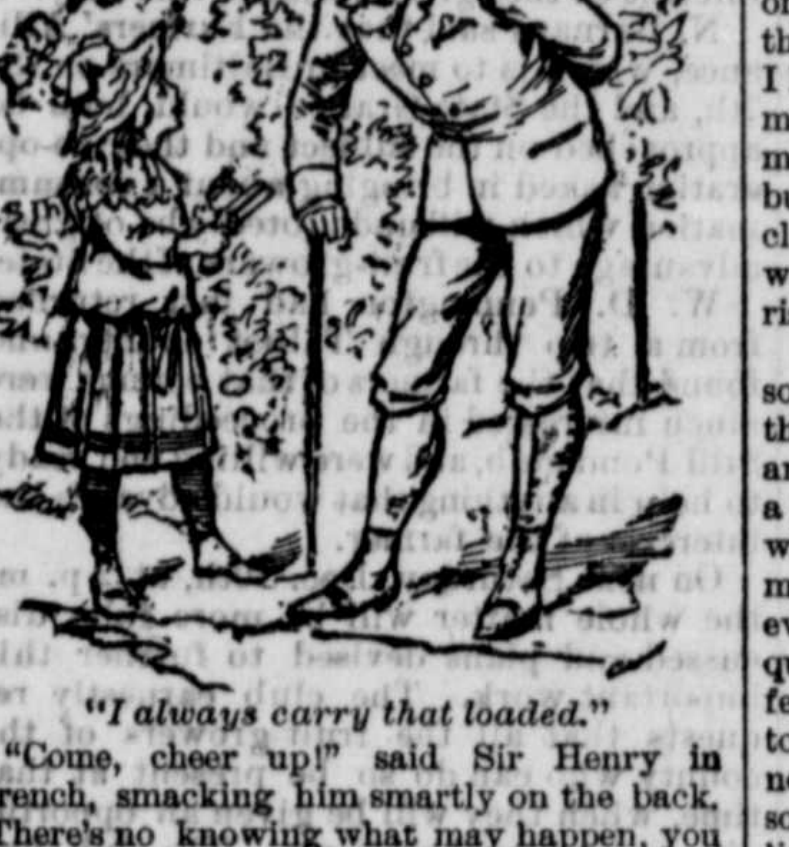
After the spies had gone, and Mrs. Mackenzie and Flossie had retired for night, Alphonse, the little Frenchman, came out, and Sir Henry, who is a very good French scholar, got him to tell us how he came to visit Central Africa, which he did in a most extraordinary lingo, that for the most part I shall not attempt to reproduce.

"My grandfather," he began, "was a soldier of the guard, and served under Napoleon. He was in the retreat from Moscow, and lived for ten days on his own leggings and a pair he stole from a comrade. He used to get drunk—he died drunk, and I remember playing at drums on his coffin. My father"—

Here we suggested that he might skip his ancestry and come to the point.

"Bien, messieurs!" replied this comical little man, with a polite bow. "I did only wish to demonstrate that the military principle is not hereditary. My grandfather was a splendid man, six feet two high, broad in proportion, a swallower of fire and gaiters. Also he was remarkable for his mustache. To me there remains the mustache and—nothing more.

"I am, messieurs, a cook, and I was born at Marseilles. In that dear town I spent my happy youth. For years and years I washed the dishes at the Hotel Continental. Ah, those were golden days!" and he sighed. "I am a Frenchman. Need I say, messieurs, that I admire beauty? Nay, I adore the fair. Messieurs, we admire all the roses in a garden, but we pluck one. I plucked one, and alas, messieurs, it pricked my finger. She was a chambermaid, her name Annette, her figure ravishing, her face an angel's, her heart—alas, messieurs, that I should have to own it—black and slippery as a patent leather boot. I loved to desperation, I adored her to despair. She transported me—in every sense; she inspired me. Never have I cooked as I cooked (for I had been promoted at the hotel) when Annette, my adored Annette, smiled on me. Never"—and here his manly voice broke into a sob—"never shall I cook so well again." Here he melted into tears.



"I always carry that loaded."

"Come, cheer up!" said Sir Henry in French, smacking him smartly on the back. "There's no knowing what may happen, you know. To judge from your dinner today, I should say you were in a fair way to recovery."

Alphonse stopped weeping, and commenced to rub his back. "Monsieur," he said, "doubtless means to console, but his hand is heavy. To continue: We loved, and were happy in each other's love. The birds in their little nest could not be happier than Alphonse and his Annette. Then came the blow—sapristi—when I think of it. Messieurs will forgive if I wipe away a tear. Mine was an evil number; I was drawn for the conscription. Fortune would be avenged on me for having won the heart of Annette.

"The evil moment came; I had to go. I tried to run away, but I was caught by brutal soldiers, and they banged me with the butt end of muskets till my mustaches curled with pain. I had a cousin, a linen draper, well to do but very ugly. He had drawn a good number, and sympathized when they thumped me. 'To thee, my cousin,' I said, 'to thee, in whose veins flows the blue blood of our heroic grandparent, to thee I consign Annette. Watch over her while I hunt for glory on the bloody field!'

"'Make your mind easy,' said he; 'I will.' As the sequel shows, he did!

"I went. I lived in barracks on black soup. I am a refined man and a poet by nature, and I suffered tortures from the coarse horror of my surroundings. There was a drill sergeant, and he had a cane. Ah, that cane, how it curled! Alas, never can I forget it.

"One morning came the news: my battalion was ordered to Tonquin. The drill sergeant and the other coarse monsters rejoiced. I—I made inquiries about Tonquin. They were not satisfactory. In Tonquin are savage Chinese who rip you open. My artistic tastes—for I am also an artist—recoiled from the idea of being ripped open. The great man makes up his mind quickly. I made up my mind. I determined not to be ripped open. I deserted.

"I reached Marseilles disguised as an old man. I went to the house of my cousin—he in whom runs my grandfather's heroic blood—and there sat Annette. It was the season of cherries. They took a double stalk. At each end was a cherry. My cousin put one into his mouth, Annette put the other in hers. Then they drew the stalks in till their lips met—and alas, alas that I should have to say it!—they kissed. The game was a pretty one, but it filled me with fury. The heroic blood of my grandfather boiled up in me. I rushed into the kitchen. I struck my cousin with the old man's crutch. He fell—I had slain him. Alas, I believe that I did slay him. Annette screamed. The gendarmes came. I fled. I reached the harbor. I hid aboard a vessel. The vessel put to sea. The captain found me and beat me. He took an opportunity. He posted a letter from a foreign port to the public. He did not put me ashore because I cooked so well. I cooked for him all the way to Zanzibar. When I asked for payment he kicked me. The blood of my heroic grandfather boiled within me, and I shook my fist in his face and vowed to have my revenge. He kicked me again. At Zanzibar there was a telegram. I cursed the man who invented telegraphs. Now I curse him again. I was to be arrested for desertion, for murder, and que sais je! I escaped from the prison. I fled, I starved. I met the men of Monsieur le Curé. They brought me here. I am here full of woe. But I return not to France. Better to risk my life in these horrible places than to know the Bagne."

He paused, and we nearly choked with laughter, having to turn our faces away.

"Ah! you weep, messieurs," he said. "No wonder—it is a sad story."

"Perhaps," said Sir Henry, "the heroic blood of your grandparent will triumph after all; perhaps you will still be great. At any rate we shall see. And now I vote we go to bed. I am dead tired, and we had not much sleep on that confounded rock last night."

And so we did, and very strange the tidy rooms and clean white sheets seemed to us after our recent experiences.

CHAPTER V.

UMSLOPOGAAS MAKES A PROMISE.

Next morning at breakfast I missed Flossie, and asked where she was.

"Well," said her mother, "when I got up this morning I found a note put outside my door, in which— But here it is, you can read it for yourself," and she gave me the slip of paper, on which the following was written:

"DEAREST M——.—It is just dawn, and I am off to the hills to get Mr. Q—— a bloom of the lily he wants, so don't expect me till you see me. I have taken the white donkey, and nurse and a couple of boys are coming with me—also something to eat, as I may be away all day, for I am determined to get the lily if I have to go twenty miles for it.

"FLOSSIE."

"I hope she will be all right," I said, a little anxiously. "I never meant her to trouble after the flower."

"Ah, Flossie can look after herself," said her mother; "she often goes off in this way like a true child of the wilderness." But Mr. Mackenzie, who came in just then and saw the note for the first time, looked rather grave, though he said nothing.

After breakfast was over I took him aside and asked him if it would not be possible to send after the girl and get her back, having in view the possibility of there still being some Masai hanging about, at whose hands she might come to harm.

"I fear it would be of no use," he answered. "She may be fifteen miles off by now, and it is impossible to say what path she has taken. There are the hills;" and he pointed to a long range of rising ground stretching almost parallel with the course followed by the river Tana, but gradually sloping down to a dense bush clad plain about five miles short of the house.

Here I suggested that we might get up the great tree over the house and search the country round with a spyglass; and this, after Mr. Mackenzie had given some orders to his people to try and follow Flossie's spoor, we did.

The ascent of the mighty tree was rather a jumpy performance, even with a sound rope ladder fixed at both ends to climb up, at least to a landsman; but Good came up like a lamp lighter.

On reaching the height at which the first fern shaped boughs sprung from the bole, we stepped without any difficulty upon a platform made of boards, nailed from one bough to another, and large enough to accommodate a dozen people.

But look as we would, we could see no signs of Flossie and her donkey, so at last had to come down disappointed. On reaching the veranda I found Umslopogaas sitting there, slowly and lightly sharpening his ax with a small whetstone he always carried with him.

"What dost thou, Umslopogaas?" I asked.

"I smell blood," was the answer; and I could get no more out of him.

After dinner we again went up the tree and searched the surrounding country with a spy glass, but without result.

Shortly after the people whom Mr. Mackenzie had sent out to search for Flossie returned, stating that they had followed the spoor of the donkey for a couple of miles, and had then lost it on some stony ground, nor could they discover it again. They had, however, scoured the country far and wide, but without success.

After this the afternoon wore drearily on, and toward evening, there still being no signs of Flossie, our anxiety grew very keen. As for the poor mother, she was quite prostrated by her fears, and no wonder, but the father kept his head wonderfully well. Everything that could be done was done; people were sent out in all directions, shots were fired, and a continuous outlook kept from the great tree, but without avail.

And then at last it grew dark, and still no sign of fair haired little Flossie.

At 8 o'clock we had supper. It was but a sorrowful meal, and Mrs. Mackenzie did not appear at it. We three also were very silent, for in addition to our natural anxiety as to the fate of the child we were weighed down by the sense that we had brought this trouble on the head of our kind host. When supper was nearly at an end I made an excuse to leave the table. I wanted to get outside and think the situation over. I went on to the veranda, and having lit my pipe sat down on a seat about a dozen feet from the right hand end of the structure, which was, as the reader may remember, exactly opposite one of the narrow doors of the protecting wall that inclosed the house and flower garden. I had been sitting there perhaps six or seven minutes when I thought I heard the door move. I looked in that direction and listened, but being unable to make out anything concluded that I must have been mistaken. It was a darkish night, the moon not having yet risen.

Another minute passed, when suddenly something round fell with a soft but heavy thud upon the stone flooring of the veranda and came bounding and rolling past me. For a moment I did not rise, but sat wondering what it could be. Finally I concluded it must have been an animal. Just then, however, another idea struck me, and I got up quick enough. The thing lay quite still a few feet beyond me. I put down my hands towards it and it did not move; clearly it was not an animal. My hand touched it. It was soft and warm and heavy. Hurriedly I lifted it and held it up against the faint starlight.

It was a newly severed human head.

I am an old hand and not easily upset, but I own that ghastly sight made me feel sick. How had the thing come there? Whose was it? I put it down and ran to the little door way. I could see nothing, hear nobody. I was about to go out into the darkness beyond, but remembering that to do so was to expose myself to the risk of being stabbed, I drew back, shut the door, and bolted it. Then I returned to the veranda, and in as careless a voice as I could command, called Curtis. I fear, however, that my tones must have betrayed me, for not only Sir Henry but also Good and Mackenzie rose from the table and came hurrying out.

"What is it?" said the clergyman, anxiously.

Then I had to tell them.

Mr. Mackenzie turned pale as death under his red skin. We were standing opposite the hall door, and there was a light in it so that I could see. He snatched the head up by the hair and held it in the light.

"It is the head of one of the men who accompanied Flossie," he said, with a gasp. "Thank God, it is not hers!"

We all stood and stared at each other aghast. What was to be done?

Just then there was a knocking at the door that I had bolted, and a voice cried, "Open, my father, open!"

The door was unlocked and in fled a terrified man. He was one of the spies who had been sent out.

"My father," he cried, "the Masai are on us! A great body of them have passed round the hill and are moving toward the old stone kraal down by the little stream. My father, make strong thy heart! In the midst of them I saw the white ass, and on it sat the Waterlily" (Flossie). "An Elmoran" (young warrior) "led the ass, and by its side walked the nurse, weeping. The men who went with her in the morning I saw not."

"Was the child alive?" asked Mr. Mackenzie, hoarsely.

"She was as white as the snow, but well, my father. They passed quite close to me, and looking up from where I lay hid, I saw her face against the sky."

"God help her and us!" groaned the clergyman.

"How many are there of them?" I asked.

"More than two hundred—two hundred and half a hundred."

Once more we looked one on the other. What was to be done? Just then there rose a loud, insistent cry outside the wall.

"Open the door, white man! open the door! A herald—a herald to speak with thee." Thus cried the voice.

Umslopogaas ran to the wall, and reaching with his long arms to the coping, lifted his head above it and gazed over.

"I see but one man," he said. "He is armed and carries a basket in his hand."

"Open the door," I said. "Umslopogaas, take thine ax and stand thereby. Let one man pass. If another follow, slay."

The door was unbarred. In the shadow of the wall stood Umslopogaas, his ax raised above his head to strike. Just then the moon came out. There was a moment's pause, and then in stalked a Masai Elmoran, clad in the full war panoply that I have already described, but bearing a large basket in his hand. The moon shone bright upon his great spear as he walked. He was physically a splendid man, apparently about thirty-five years of age. Indeed, none of the Masai that I saw were under six feet high, though mostly quite young. When he got opposite to us he halted, put down the basket and struck the spike of his spear into the ground, so that it stood upright.

"Let us talk," he said. "The first messenger we sent to you could not talk;" and he pointed to the head which lay upon the paving of the stoop—a ghastly sight in the moonlight; "but I have words to speak if ye have ears to hear. Also I bring presents," and he pointed to the basket and laughed with an air of swaggering insolence that is perfectly indescribable, and yet which one could not but admire, seeing that he was surrounded by enemies.

"Say on," said Mr. Mackenzie.

"I am the 'Lygonani'" (war captain) "of a part of the Masai of the Guasa Amboni. I and my men followed these three white men," and he pointed to Sir Henry, Good, and myself, "but they were too clever for us, and escaped hither. We have a quarrel with them, and are going to kill them."

"Are you, my friend?" said I to myself.

"In following these men we this morning caught two black men, one black woman, a white donkey, and a white girl. One of the black men we killed—there is his head upon the pavement; the other ran away. The black woman, the little white girl, and the white ass we took and brought with us. In proof thereof have I brought this basket that she carried. Is it not thy daughter's basket?"

Mr. Mackenzie nodded, and the warrior went on.

"Good! With thee and thy daughter we have no quarrel, nor do we wish to harm thee, save as to thy cattle, which we have already gathered, 240 head—a beast for every man's father."

Here Mr. Mackenzie gave a groan, as he greatly valued this herd of cattle, which he bred with much care and trouble.

"So, save for the cattle, thou mayst go free; more especially," he added, frankly, glancing at the wall, "as this place would be a difficult one to take. But as to these men it is otherwise; we have followed them for eight days, and must kill them. Were we to return to our kraal without having done so, all the girls would make a mock of us. So, however troublesome it may be, they must die.

"Now, I have a proposition for thine ear. We would not harm the little girl; she is too fair to harm, and has besides, a brave spirit. Give us one of these three men—a life for a life—and we will let her go and throw in the black woman with her also. This is a fair offer, white man. We ask but for one, not for the three; we must take another opportunity to kill the other two. I do not even pick my man, though I should prefer the big one," pointing to Sir Henry; "he looks strong, and would die more slowly."

"And if I say I will not yield the man?" said Mr. Mackenzie.

"Nay, say not so, white man," answered the Masai, "for then thy daughter dies at dawn, and the woman with her says thou hast no other child. Were she older I would take her for a servant; but as she is so young I will slay her with my own hand—ay, with this very spear. Thou canst come and see an' thou wilt. I give thee a safe conduct," and the fiend laughed aloud at his brutal jest.

Meanwhile I had been thinking rapidly, as one does in emergencies, and had come to the conclusion that I would exchange myself against Flossie. I scarcely like to mention the matter for fear it should be misunderstood. Pray do not let any one be misled into thinking that there was anything heroic about this, or any such nonsense. It was merely a matter of common sense and common justice. My life was an old and worthless one, hers was young and valuable. Her death would pretty well kill her father and mother also, while nobody would be much the worse for mine; indeed, several charitable institutions would have cause to rejoice thereat. It was indirectly through me that the dear little girl was in her present position. Lastly, a man was better fitted to meet death in such a peculiarly awful form than a sweet young girl. Not, however, that I meant to let these gentry torture me to death—I am far too much of a coward to allow that, being naturally a timid man; my plan was to see the girl safely exchanged, and then to shoot myself, trusting that the Almighty would take the peculiar circumstances of the case into consideration and pardon the act. All this and more went through my mind in very few seconds.

"All right, Mackenzie," I said, "you can tell the man that I will exchange myself against Flossie, only I stipulate that she shall be safely in this house before they kill me."

"Eh?" said Sir Henry and Good, simultaneously. "That you don't."

"No, no," said Mr. Mackenzie, "I will have no man's blood upon my hands. If it please God that my daughter die this awful death, his will be done. You are a brave man" (which I am not by any means) "and a noble man, Quatermain, but you shall not go."

"If nothing else turns up I shall go," I said, decidedly.

"This is an important matter," said Mackenzie, addressing the Lygonani, "and we must think it over. You shall have our answer at dawn."

"Very well, white man," answered the savage, indifferently; "only remember, if thy answer is late thy little white bud will never grow into a flower, that is all, for I shall cut it with this," and he touched the spear. "I should have thought that thou wouldst play a trick and attack us at night, but I know from the woman with the girl that your men are down at the coast, and that thou hast but twenty men here. It is not wise, white man," he added with a laugh, "to keep so small a garrison for your 'boma'" (kraal). "Well, good night, and good night to you also, other white men, whose eyelids I shall soon close once and for all. At dawn thou wilt bring me word. If not, remember it shall be as I have said." Then turning to Umslopogaas, who had all the while been standing behind him, and shepherding him, as it were, "Open the door for me, fellow, quick now."

This was too much for the old chief's patience. For the last ten minutes his lips had been, figuratively speaking, positively watering over the Masai Lygonani, and this he could not stand. Placing his long hand on the Elmoran's shoulder, he griped him and gave him such a twist as brought him face to face with himself. Then, thrusting his fierce countenance to within a few inches of the Masai's evil, feather framed features, he said, in a low, growling voice:

"Seest thou me?"

"Ay, fellow, I see thee."

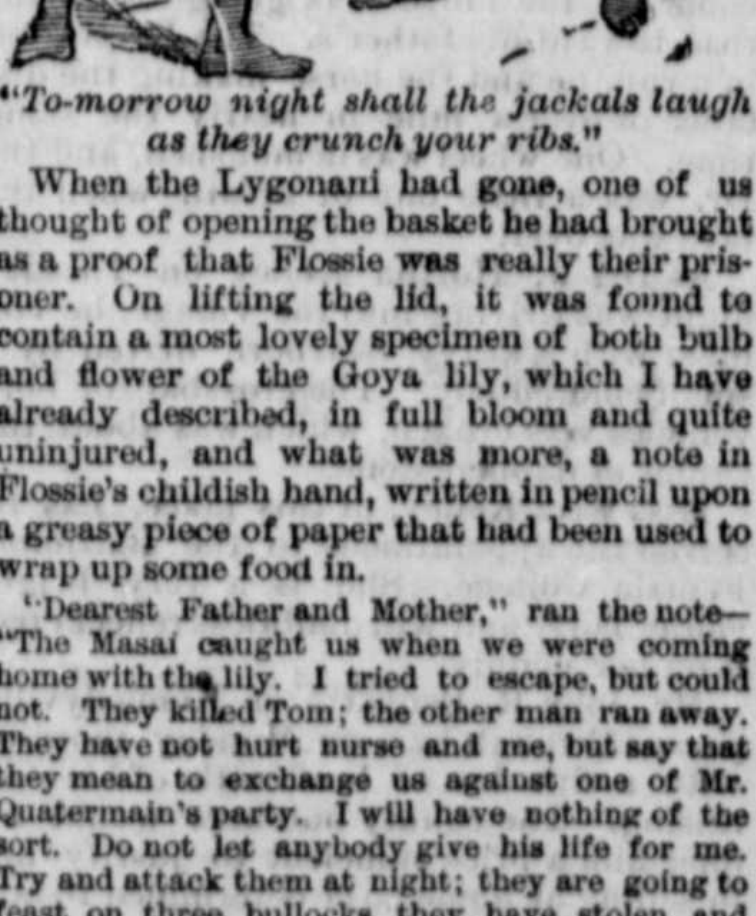
"And seest thou this?" and he held Inkosi-kaas before his eyes.

"Ay, fellow, I see the toy; what of it?"

"Thou Masai dog, thou boasting windbag, thou capturer of little girls, with this 'toy' will I hew thee limb from limb. Well for thee that thou art a herald, or even now would I strew thy members about the grass."

The Masai shook his great spear and laughed long and loud as he answered, "I would that thou stoodst against me man to man, and we would see," and again he turned to go, still laughing.

"Thou shalt stand against me man to man, be not afraid," replied Umslopogaas, still in the same ominous voice. "Thou shalt stand face to face with Umslopogaas, of the blood of Chaka, of the people of the Amazulu, a captain in the regiment of the Nkomabakosi, as many have done before, and bow thyself to Inkosi-kaas, as many have done before. Ay, laugh on, laugh on! to-morrow night shall the jackals laugh as they crunch thy ribs."



"To-morrow night shall the jackals laugh as they crunch your ribs."

When the Lygonani had gone, one of us thought of opening the basket he had brought as a proof that Flossie was really their prisoner. On lifting the lid, it was found to contain a most lovely specimen of both bulb and flower of the Goya lily, which I have already described, in full bloom and quite uninjured, and what was more, a note in Flossie's childish hand, written in pencil upon a greasy piece of paper that had been used to wrap up some food in.

"Dearest Father and Mother," ran the note—"The Masai caught us when we were coming home with the lily. I tried to escape, but could not. They killed Tom; the other man ran away. They have not hurt nurse and me, but say that they mean to exchange us against one of Mr. Quatermain's party. I will have nothing of the sort. Do not let anybody give his life for me. Try and attack them at night; they are going to feast on three bullocks they have stolen and killed. I have my pistol, and if no help comes by dawn I will shoot myself. They shall not kill me. If so, remember me always, dearest father and mother. I am very frightened, but I trust in God. I dare not write any more, as they are beginning to notice. Goodby. FLOSSIE."

Scrawled across the outside of this was, "Love to Mr. Qautermain. They are going to take up the basket, so he will get the lily."

When I read these words, written by that brave little girl in an hour of danger sufficiently near and horrible to have turned the brain of a strong man, I own I wept, and once more in my heart I vowed that she should not die while my life could be given to save her.

Then, eagerly, quickly, almost fiercely, we fell to discussing the situation. Again I said that I would go, and again Mackenzie negatived it, and Curtis and Good, like the true men that they are, vowed that, if I did, they would go with me, and die back to back with me.

"It is," I said at last, "absolutely necessary that an effort of some sort should be made before the morning."

"Then let us attack them with what force we can muster, and take our chance," said Sir Henry.

"Ay ay," growled Umslopogaas, in Zulu; "spoken like a man, Incubu. What is there to be afraid of? Two hundred and fifty Masai, forsooth! How many are we? The chief there" (Mr. Mackenzie) "has twenty men, and thou, Macumazahn, hast five men, and there are also five white men—that is, thirty men in all—enough, enough. Listen now, Macumazahn, thou who art very clever and old in war. What says the maid? These men eat and make merry; let it be their funeral feast. What said the dog whom I hope to hew down at daybreak? That he feared no attack because we were so few. Knowest thou the old kraal where the men have camped? I saw it this morning; it is thus," and he drew an oval on the floor; "here is the big entrance, filled up with thorn bushes, and opening on to a steep rise. Why, Incubu, thou and I with axes will hold it against an hundred men striving to break out! Look, now, thus shall the battle go. Just as the light begins to glint upon the oxen's horns—not before, or it will be too dark, and not later, or they will be awakening and perceive us—let Bougwan creep round with ten men to the top end of the kraal, where the narrow entrance is. Let the men silently slay the sentry there, so that he makes no sound, and stand ready. Then, Incubu, let thee and me and one of the Askari—the one with the broad chest—he is a brave man—creep to the wide entrance that is filled with thorn bushes, and there also slay the sentry, and armed with battle axes, take our stand also one on each side of the pathway, and one a few paces beyond, to deal with such as pass the twain at the gate. It is there that the rush will come. That will leave sixteen men. Let these men be divided into two parties, with one of which shalt thou go, Macumazahn, and with one the 'praying man'" (Mr. Mackenzie), "and, all armed with rifles, let them make their way one to the right side of the kraal and one to the left; and when thou, Macumazahn, lowest like an ox, all shall open fire with the guns upon the sleeping men, being very careful not to hit the little maid. Then shall Bougwan at the far end and his ten men raise their war cry, and, springing over the wall, put the Masai there to the sword. And it shall happen that, being yet heavy with food and sleep, and bewildered by the firing of the guns, the falling of men and the spears of Bougwan, the soldiers shall rise and rush like wild game toward the thorn stopped entrance, and there the bullets from either side shall plow through them, and there shall Incubu and the Askari and I wait for those who break though. Such is my plan, Macumazahn; if thou hast a better, name it."

When he had done, I explained to the others such portions of this scheme as they had failed to understand, and they all joined with me in expressing the greatest admiration of the acute and skillful programme devised by the old Zulu, who was, indeed, in his own savage fashion, the finest general I ever knew. After some discussion we determined to accept the scheme as it stood, it being the only one possible under the circumstances, and giving the best chance of success that such a forlorn hope would admit of—which, however, considering the enormous odds and the character of our foe, was not very great.

"Ah, old lion!" I said to Umslopogaas, "thou knowest how to lie in wait as well as how to bite, where to seize as well as where to hang on."

"Ay, ay, Macumazahn," he answered. "For thirty years have I been a warrior, and have seen many things. It will be a good fight. I smell blood—I tell thee, I smell blood."

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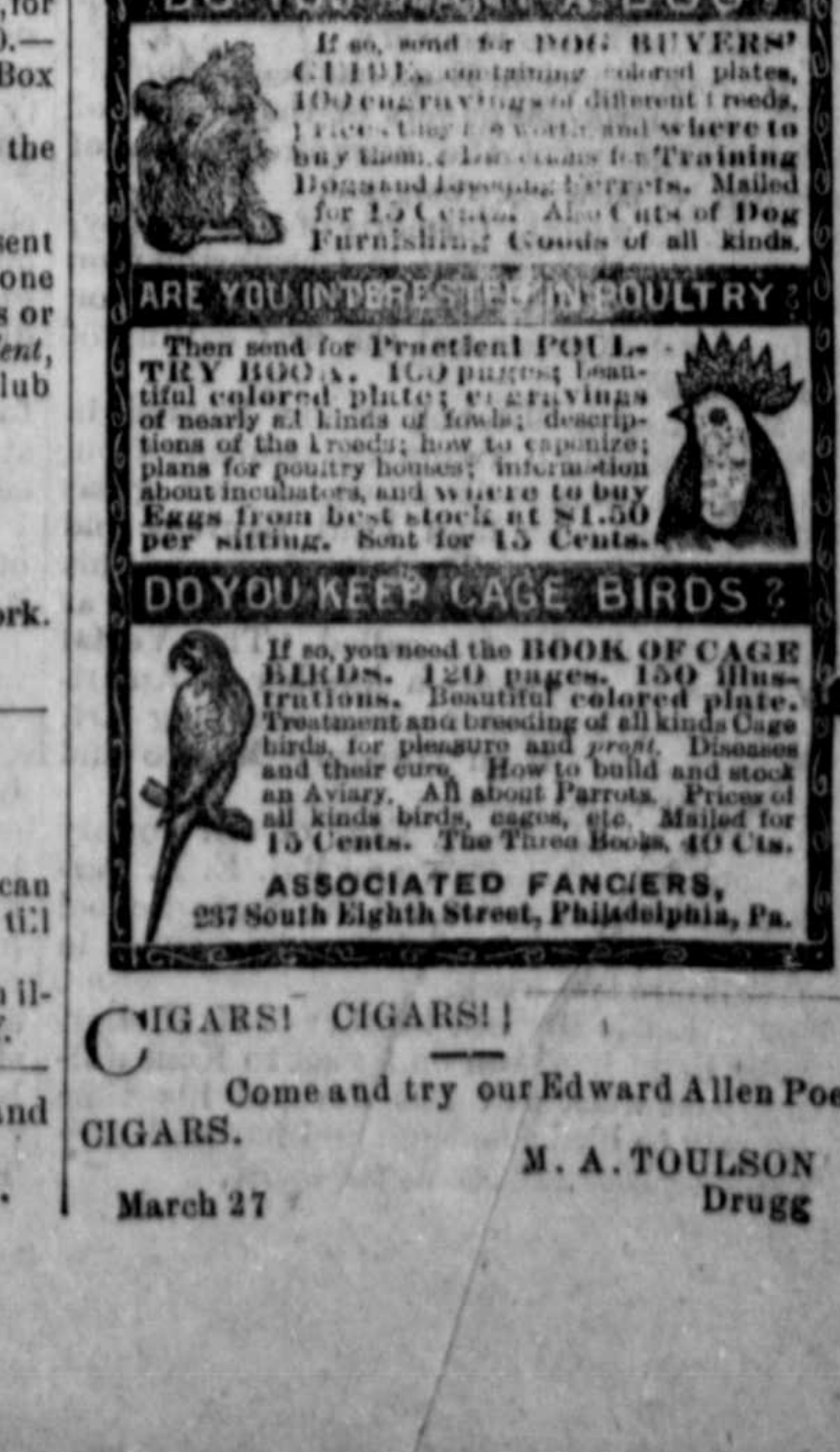

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