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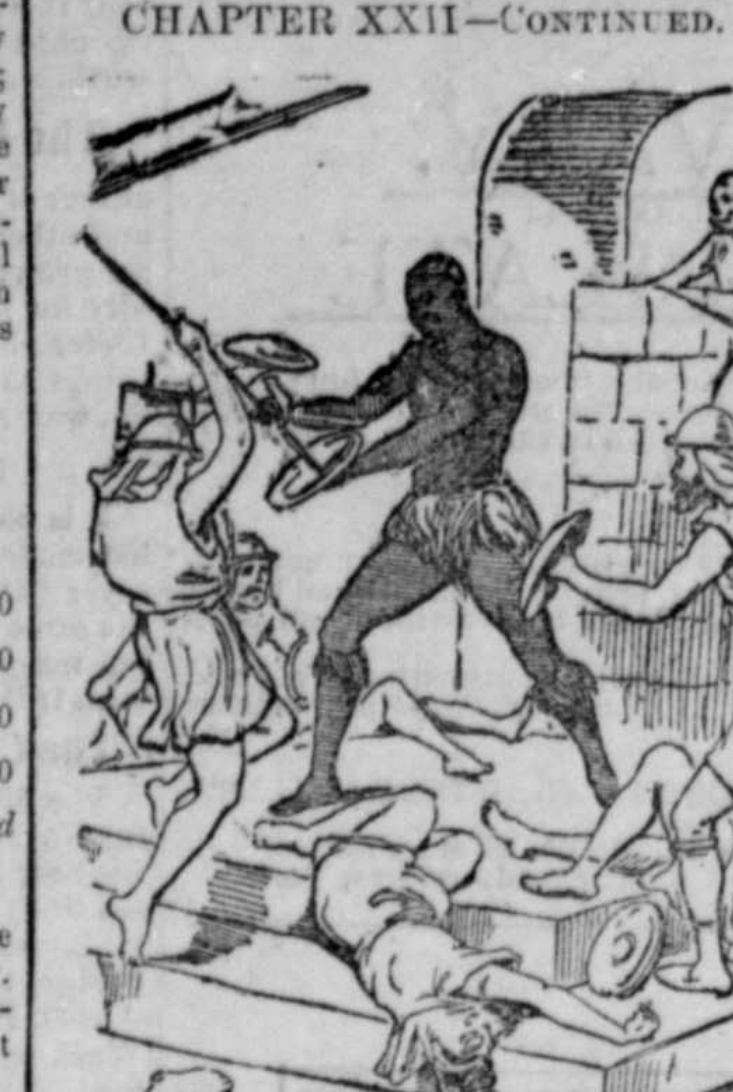
AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SHE," "JESS," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

CHAPTER XXII—CONTINUED.



Umslopogaas held the stair.

In another second the sturdy Kara had also slain a man, and then began a scene the like of which has not been known to me

Up rushed the assailants—one, two, three at a time—and as fast as they came the ax crashed and the sword swung, and down they rolled again, dead or dying. And ever as the fight thickened, the old Zulu's eye seemed to get quicker and his arm stronger He shouted out his war cries and the names of chiefs whom he had slain, and the blows of his awful ax rained straight and true, shearing through everything they fell on. There was none of the scientific method he was so fond of about this last immortal fight of his he had no time for it, but struck with his full strength, and at every stroke a man sank in his tracks and went rattling down the marble steps.

They hacked and hewed at him with swords and spears, wounding him in a dozen places till he streamed red with blood, but the shield protected his head and the chain shirt his vitals, and for minute after minute, aided by the gallant Zu-Vendi, he still held the stair

At last Kara's sword broke, and he grappled with a foe, and they rolled down together, and he was cut to pieces, dying like the brave man that he was.

Umslopogaas was alone now, but he never blenched or turned. Shouting out some wild Zulu battle cry, he beat down a foe, ay, and another and another, till at last they drew back from the slippery, blood stained steps, and stared at him in amazement, thinking that he was no mortal man.

The wall of marble block was four feet six high now, and hope rose in my heart as I leaned there against it, a miserable, helpless log, and ground my teeth, and watched that glorious struggle. I could do no more, for I had lost my revolver in battle.

And old Umslopogaas, he leaned, too, on his good axe, and, faint as he was with wounds, he mocked them, he called them "women"—the grand old warrior, standing there, one against so many! And for a breathing space none would come against him, notwithstanding Nasta's exhortations, till at last old Agon, who, to do him justice, was a brave man, mad with baffled rage, and seeing that the wall would soon be built and his plans defeated, shook the great spear he held, and rushed up the dripping steps.

"Ah, ah!" shouted the Zulu, as he recognized the priest's flowing white beard, "it is thou, old 'witch finder!' Come on! I await thee, white 'medicine man;' come on! come on! I have sworn to slay thee, and I ever keep my faith."

On he came, taking him at his word, and drove the big spear with such force at Umslopogaas that it sunk right through the tough shield and pierced him in the neck. The Zulu cast down the transfixed shield, and that moment was Agon's last, for before he could free his spear and strike again, with a shout of "There's for thee, rain maker!" Umslopogaas griped Inkosi-kaas with both hands, and whirled her on high, and drove her right on to his venerable head, so that Agon rolled down dead among the corpses of his fellow murderers, and there was an end of him and his plots together. And even as he fell a great cry rose from the foot of the stair, and looking out through the portion of the doorway that was yet unclosed we saw armed men rushing up to the rescue, and called an answer to their shouts. Then the would be murderers who yet remained on the stairway, and among whom I saw several priests, turned to fly, but, having nowhere to go, were butchered as they fled. Only one man stayed, and he was the great lord Nasta, Nyleptha's suitor, and the father of the plot. For a moment the black bearded Nasta stood with bowed face leaning on his long sword as though in despair, and then, with a dreadful shout, he too rushed up at the Zulu, and, swinging the glittering sword around his head, dealt him such a mighty blow beneath his guard that the keen steel of the heavy blade bit right through the chain armor and deep into Umslopogaas' side, for a moment paralyzing him and causing him to drop his ax.

Raising the sword again, Nasta sprang forward to make an end of him, but little he knew his foe. With a shake and a yell of fury, the Zulu gathered himself together and sprang straight at Nasta's throat, as I have sometimes seen a wounded lion spring. He struck him full as his foot was on the topmost stair, and his long arms closing round him like iron bands, down they rolled together struggling furiously. Nasta was a strong man and a desperate, but he could not match the strongest man in Zululand, sore wounded though he was, whose strength was as the strength of a bull. In a minute the end came. I saw old Umslopogaas stagger to his feet—ay, and saw him, by a single gigantic effort, swing up the struggling Nasta, and, with a shout of triumph, hurl him straight over the parapet of the bridge, to be crushed to powder on the rocks 200 feet below

The succor which had been summoned by the girl who had passed down the stair before the assassins passed up was at hand, and the loud shouts which reached us from the outer gates told us that the town was also aroused, and the men awakened by the women were calling to be admitted. Some of Nyleptha's brave ladies, who, in their night shifts and with their long hair streaming down their backs, just as they had been aroused from rest, had worked so gallantly at blocking the passage through the wall, went off to admit them at the side entrance, while others, assisted by the rescuing party outside, pushed and pulled down the marble blocks they had placed there with so much labor

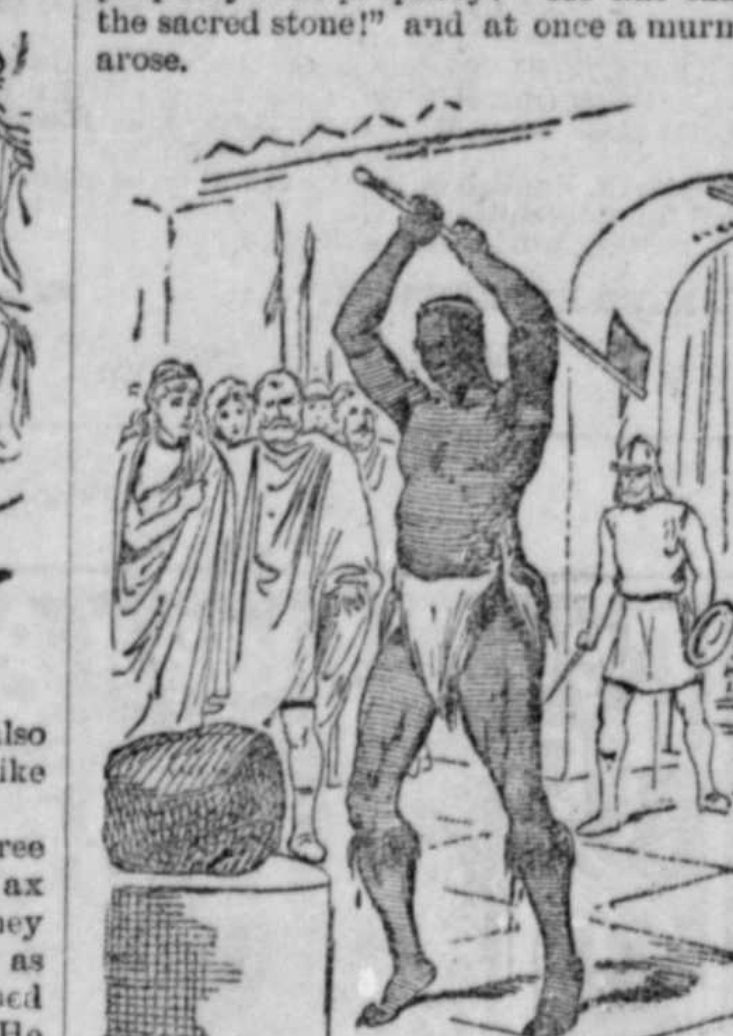
Soon the wall was down again, and through the doorway, followed by a crowd of rescuers, staggered old Umslopogaas, an awful, and, in a way, a glorious figure. The man was a mass of wounds, and a glance at his wild eye told me that he was dying. The "keshla" gum ring upon his head was severed in two places by sword cuts, one just over the curious hole in his skull, and the blood poured down his face from the gashes. Also, on the right side of his neck was a stab from a spear, inflicted by Agon; there was a deep cut on his left arm just below where the mail shirt sleeve stopped, and on the right side of his body the armor was severed by a gash six inches long, where Nasta's mighty sword had bitten through it and deep into its wearer's vitals.

On, ax in hand, he staggered, that dreadful looking, splendid savage, and the ladies forgot to turn faint at the scene of blood, and cheered him, as well they might, but he never stayed or heeded. With outstretched arms and tottering gait he pursued his way, followed by us all along the broad shell strewn walk that ran through the court yard, past the spot where the blocks of marble lay, through the round arched doorway and the thick curtains that hung within it, down the short passage and into the great hall, which was now filling with hastily armed men, who poured through the side entrance. Straight up the hall he went, leaving behind him a track of blood on the marble pavement, till at last he reached the sacred stone, which stood in the center of it, and here his strength seemed to fail him, for he stopped and leaned upon his ax. Then suddenly he lifted up his voice and cried aloud:

"I die, I die—but it was a kingly fray Where are they who came up the great stair! I see them not. Art thou there, Macumazahn, or art thou gone before to wait for me in the dark whither I go? The blood blinds me—the place turns round—I hear the voice of waters."

Next, as though a new thought had struck him, he lifted the red ax and kissed the blade "Farewell, Inkosi-kaas!" he cried. "Nay, nay, we will go together; we cannot part, thou and I. We have lived too long one with another, thou and I. One more stroke, only one! A good stroke! a straight stroke! a strong stroke!" and, drawing himself to his full height, with a wild heart shaking shout, he with both hands began to whirl the ax around his head till it looked like a circle of flaming steel. Then suddenly with awful force he brought it down straight on to the crown of the mass of sacred stone. A shower of sparks flew up, and such was the almost superhuman strength of the blow that the massive marble split with a rending sound into a score of pieces, while of Inkosi-kaas there remained but some fragments of steel and a fibrous rope of shattered horn that had been the handle. Down with a crash on to the pavement fell the fragments of the holy stone, and down with a crash on to them, still grasping the knob of Inkosi-kaas, fell the brave old Zulu—dead. And thus the hero died.

A gasp of wonder and astonishment rose from all those who witnessed the extraordinary sight, and then somebody cried, "The prophecy! the prophecy! He has shattered the sacred stone!" and at once a murmuring arose.



"One more stroke, only one!"

"Ay," said Nyleptha, with that quick wit which distinguished her—"ay, my people, he has shattered the stone, and behold the prophecy is fulfilled, for a stranger king rules in Zu-Vendis. Incubu, my lord, hath beat Sorais back, and I fear her no more, and to him who hath saved the crown it shall surely be. And this man," she said, turning to me and laying her hand upon my shoulder, "wot ye that, though wounded in the fight of yesterday, he rode, with that old warrior who lies there, one hundred miles 'twixt sun set and rise to save me from the plots of cruel men. Ay, and he has saved me, by a very little, and therefore because of the deeds that they have done—deeds of glory such as our history cannot show the like—therefore I say that the name of Macumazahn and the name of dead Umslopogaas, ay, and the name of Kara, my servant, who aided him to hold the stair, shall be blazoned in letters of gold above my throne, and shall be glorious forever while the land endures. I, the queen, have said it."

This spirited speech was met with loud cheering, and I said that after all we had only done our duty, as it is the fashion of both Englishmen and Zulus to do, and there was nothing to make an outcry about; at which they cheered still more, and then I was supported across the outer court yard to my old quarters, in order that I might be put to bed. As I went my eyes lit upon the brave horse Daylight that lay there, his white head outstretched on the pavement, exactly as he had fallen on entering the yard; and I bade those who supported me take me near him that I might look on the good beast once more before he was dragged away. And as I looked, to my astonishment, he opened his eyes, and, lifting his head a little, whinnied faintly. I could have shouted for joy to find that he was not dead, only unfortunately I had not a shout left in me; but as it was grooms were sent for and he was lifted up and wine poured down his throat, and in a fortnight he was as well and strong as ever, and is the pride and joy of all the people of Milosis, who, whenever they see him, point him out to the little children as the "horse which saved the White Queen's life."

Then I went on and got off to bed, and was washed and had my mail shirt removed. They hurt me a good deal in getting it off and no wonder, for on my left breast and side was a black bruise the size of a saucer

The next thing that I remember was the tramp of horsemen outside the palace wall some ten hours later I raised myself and asked what was the news, and they told me that a large body of cavalry sent by Curtis to assist the queen, had arrived from the scene of the battle, which they had left two hours after sundown When they left the wreck of Sorais' army was in full retreat upon M'Arstuna, followed by all our effective cavalry Sir Henry was encamping the remains of his worn out forces on the site (such is the fortune of war) that Sorais had occupied the night before, and proposed marching on to M'Arstuna on the morrow Having heard this, I felt that I could die with a light heart, and then everything became a blank.

When next I awoke the first thing I saw was the round disk of a sympathetic eye glass, behind which was Good

"How are you getting on, old chap?" said a voice from the neighborhood of the eye glass

"What are you doing here?" I asked, faintly "You ought to be at M'Arstuna, have you run away, or what?"

"M'Arstuna!" he replied, cheerfully "Ah, M'Arstuna fell last week—you've been unconscious for a fortnight, you see—with all the honors of war, you know, trumpets blowing, flags flying, just as though they had the best of it, but for all that weren't they glad to go! Israel made for his tents, I can tell you—never saw such a sight in my life."

"And Sorais?" I asked.

"Sorais—oh, Sorais is a prisoner; they gave her up, the scoundrels," he added, with a change of tone—"sacrificed the queen to save their skins, you see She is being brought up here, and I don't know what will happen to her, poor soul!" and he sighed.

"Where is Curtis?" I asked.

"He is with Nyleptha. She rode out to meet us today and there was a grand to do, I can tell you. He is coming to see you to-morrow; the doctors (for there is a medical 'faculty' in Zu Vendis as elsewhere) thought that he had better not come today."

I said nothing, but somehow I thought to myself that notwithstanding the doctors he might have given me a look; but then, when a man is newly married, and has just gained a great victory, he is apt to listen to the advice of doctors, and quite right too.

Just then I heard a familiar voice informing me that "Monsieur must now couch himself," and looking up perceived Alphonse's enormous black mustaches curling away in the distance,

"So you are here?" I said.

"Mais oui, monsieur, the war is now finished, my military instincts are satisfied, and I return to nurse monsieur."

I laughed, or rather tried to but whatever may have been Alphonse's failings as a warrior (and I fear that he did not come up to the level of his heroic grandfather in this particular, showing thereby how true is the saying that it is a bad thing to be overshadowed by some great ancestral name), a better or a kinder nurse never lived. Poor Alphonse! I hope he will always think of me as kindly as I think of him.

On the morrow I saw Curtis and Nyleptha with him, and he told me the whole history of what had happened since Umslopogaas and I galloped wildly away from the battle to save the life of the queen. It seemed to me that he had managed the thing exceedingly well, and showed great ability as a general. Of course, however, our loss had been dreadfully heavy—indeed, I am afraid to say how many perished in the desperate battle I have described, but I know that the slaughter has appreciably affected the male population of the country He was very pleased to see me, dear fellow that he is, and thanked me with tears in his eyes for the little I had been able to do. I saw him, however, start violently when his eyes fell upon my face.

As for Nyleptha, she was positively radiant now that "her dear lord" had come back with no other injury than an ugly scar on his forehead.

"And what art thou going to do with Sorais?" I asked her.

Instantly her bright brow darkened to a frown.

"Sorais," she said, with a little stamp of the foot, "ah, but Sorais!"

Sir Henry hastened to turn the subject.

"You will soon be about and all right again now, old fellow," he said,

I shook my head and laughed.

"Don't deceive yourselves," I said. "I may be about for a little, but I shall never be all right again. I am a dying man, Curtis. I may die slow, but die I must. Do you know, I have been spitting blood all the morning? I tell you there is something working away into my lung; I can feel it. There, don't look distressed; I have had my day, and am ready to go. Give me the mirror, will you? I want to look at myself."

He made some excuse, but I saw through it and insisted, and at last he handed me one of the disks of polished silver, set in a wooden frame like a hand screen, which serve as looking glasses in Zu-Vendis. I looked and put it down.

"Ah," I said quietly, "I thought so; and you talk of my getting all right!" I did not like to let them see how shocked I really was at my own appearance. My grizzled stubby hair was turned snow white, and my yellow face was shrunk like an aged woman's and had two deep purple rings painted beneath the eyes.

Here Nyleptha began to cry, and Sir Henry again turned the subject, telling me that the artists had taken a cast of the dead body of old Umslopogaas, and that a great statue in black marble was to be erected of him in the act of splitting the sacred stone, which was to be matched by another statue in white marble of myself and the horse Daylight as he appeared when, at the termination of that wild ride, he sank beneath me in the court yard of the palace. I have since seen these statues, which, at the time of writing this, six months after the battle, are nearly finished; and very beautiful they are, especially that of Umslopogaas, which is exactly like him. As for that of myself, it is good, but they have idealized my ugly face a little, which is perhaps as well, seeing that thousands of people will probably look at in the centuries to come, and it is not pleasant to look at ugly things.

Then they told me that Umslopogaas' last wish had been carried out, and that instead of being cremated, as I shall be, after the usual custom here, he had been tied up Zulu fashion, with his knees beneath his chin, and, having been wrapped in a thin sheet of beaten gold, entombed in a hole hollowed out of the masonry of the semicircular space at the top of the stair he defended so splendidly, which faces, as far as we can judge, almost exactly toward Zululand. There he sits and will sit forever, for they embalmed him with spices and put him in an air tight stone coffer, keeping his grim watch beneath the spot he held alone against a multitude; and the people say that at night his ghost rises and stands shaking the phantom of Inkosi kaas at phantom foes. Certainly they fear during the dark hours to pass the place where the hero is buried.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I HAVE SPOKEN.

It was a week after Nyleptha's visit, when I had begun to get about a little in the middle of the day, that a message came to me from Sir Henry to say that Sorais would be brought before them in the queen's first antechamber at midday, and requested my attendance if possible. Accordingly greatly drawn by curiosity to see this unhappy woman once more, I made shift, with the help of that kind little fellow Alphonse who is a perfect treasure to me, and that of another waiting man, to reach the antechamber I got there indeed, before anybody else, except a few of the great court officials who had been bidden to be present, but I had scarcely seated myself before Sorais was brought in by a party of guards, looking as beautiful and defiant as ever, but with a worn expression on her proud face. She was, as usual, dressed in her royal kaf emblazoned with the emblem of the Sun, and in her right hand she still held the toy spear of silver A pang of admiration and pity went through me as I looked at her and struggling to my feet I bowed deeply at the same time expressing my sorrow that I was not able owing to my condition, to remain standing before her.

She colored a little and then laughed bitterly "Thou dost forget, Macumazahn," she said, "I am no more a queen, save in blood; I am an outcast and a prisoner, one whom all men should scorn, and none show deference to"

"At least," I replied, "thou art still a lady and therefore one to whom deference is due. Also thou art in an evil case, and therefore it is doubly due."

"Ah!" she answered, with a little laugh, "thou dost forget that I would have wrapped thee in a sheet of gold and hung thee to the angel's trumpet at the topmost pinnacle of the temple."

"No," I answered, "I assure thee I forgot it not; indeed I often thought of it when it seemed to me that the battle of the Pass was turning against us, but the trumpet is there, and I am still here, though perchance not for long, so why talk of it now?"

"Ah!" she went on, "the battle! the battle! Oh, would that I were once more a queen, if only for one little hour, and I would take such a vengeance on those accursed jackals who deserted me in my need, that it should only be spoken of in whispers, those women, those pigeon hearted half breeds who suffered themselves to be overcome:" and she choked in her wrath.

"Ay, and that little coward beside thee," she went on, pointing at Alphonse with the silver spear, whereat he looked very uncomfortable, "he escaped and betrayed my plans. I tried to make a general of him, telling the soldiers it was Bougwan, and to scourge valor into him" (here Alphonse shivered at some unhappy recollection), "but it was of no avail. He hid beneath a banner in my tent and thus overheard all my plans. I would that I had slain him, but, alas! I held my hand. And thou, Macumazahn, I have heard of what thou didst, thou art a brave man and hast a loyal heart. And the black one, too, ah, he was a man. I fain would have seen him hurl Nasta from the stairway."

"Thou art a strange woman, Sorais," I said "I pray thee now plead with the Queen Nyleptha, that perchance she may show mercy unto thee."

She laughed out loud. "I plead for mercy!" she said, and at that moment the queen entered, accompanied by Sir Henry and Good, and took her seat with an impassive face. As for poor Good, he looked intensely ill at ease.

"Greeting, Sorais!" said Nyleptha, after a short pause. "Thou hast rent the kingdom like a rag, thou hast put thousands of my people to the sword, thou hast twice basely plotted to destroy my life by murder, thou hast sworn to slay my lord and his companions and to hurl me from the stairway. What hast thou to say why thou shouldst not die? Speak, O Sorais!"

"Methinks my sister, the queen, hath forgotten the chief count of the indictment," answered Sorais, in her slow musical tones. "It runs thus 'Thou didst strive to win the love of my lord Incubu.' It is for this crime that my sister will slay me, not because I levied war. It is perhaps happy for thee, Nyleptha, that I fixed my mind upon his love too late.

"Listen," she went on, raising her voice, "I have naught to say save that I would I had won instead of lost. Do thou with me even as thou wilt, O queen, and let my lord the king there" (pointing to Sir Henry), "for now will he be king, carry out the sentence, as it is meet he should. for as he is the beginning of the evil, let him also be the end;" and she drew herself up and shot one angry glance at him from her deep fringed eyes, and then began to toy with her spear.

Sir Henry bent toward Nyleptha and whispered something that I could not catch, and then the queen spoke.

"Sorais, ever have I been a good sister to thee. When our father died, and there was much talk in the land as to whether thou shouldst sit upon the throne with me, I being the elder, I gave my voice for thee and said, 'Nay, let her sit. She is twin with me; we were born at a birth; wherefore should the one be preferred before the other?' And so has it ever been 'twixt thee and me, my sister. But now thou knowest in what sort thou hast repaid me; but I have prevailed, and thy life is forfeit, Sorais. And yet art thou my sister, born at a birth with me, and we played together when we were little and loved each other much, and at night we slept in the same cot with our arms each around the other's neck, and therefore even now does my heart go out to thee, Sorais.

"But not for that would I spare thy life, for thy offense has been too heavy; it doth drag down the wide wings of my mercy even to the ground. Also, while thou dost live the land will never be at peace.

"Yet shalt thou not die, Sorais, because my dear lord here hath begged thy life of me as a boon; therefore as a boon and as a marriage gift give I it to him, to do with even as he wills, knowing that, though thou dost love him, he loves thee not, Sorais, for all thy beauty. Nay, though thou art lovely as the night in all her stars, O Lady of the Night, yet is it me his wife whom he loves, and not thee, and therefore do I give thy life to him."

Sorais flushed up to her eyes and said nothing, and I do not think that I ever saw a man look more miserable than did Sir Henry at that moment. Somehow Nyleptha's way of putting the thing, though true and forcible enough, was not altogether pleasant.

"I understood," stammered Curtis, looking at Good—"I understood that you were attached—eh—attached to—to the Queen Sorais. I am—eh—not aware what the—in short, the state of your feelings may be just now; but if they happen to be that way inclined, it has struck me that—in short, it might put a satisfactory end to an unpleasant business. The lady also has ample private estates, where I am sure she would be at liberty to live unmolested so far as we are concerned, eh, Nyleptha? Of course I only suggest."

"So far as I am concerned," said Good, coloring up, "I am quite willing to forget the past; and if the Lady of the Night thinks me worth having I will marry her to-morrow, or when she likes, and try to make her a good husband."

All eyes were now turned to Sorais, who stood with that same slow smile upon her beautiful face that I had noticed the first time that I ever saw her. She paused a little while and cleared her throat, and then thrice she courtesied low, once to Nyleptha, once to Curtis and once to Good, and began to speak in measured tones.

"I thank thee, most gracious queen and sister, for the loving kindness thou hast shown me from my youth up, and especially in that thou has been pleased to give my person and my fate as a gift to the Lord Incubu—the king that is to be. May prosperity, peace and plenty deck the life path of one so merciful and so tender, even as flowers do. Long mayest thou reign, O great and glorious queen, and hold thy husband's love in both thy hands, and many be the sons and daughters of thy beauty And I thank thee, my Lord Incubu—the king that is to be—I thank thee a thousand times in that thou hast been pleased to accept that gracious gift, and to pass it on to thy comrade in arms and in adventure, the Lord Bougwan. Surely the act is worthy of thy greatness, my Lord Incubu. And now, lastly I thank thee also my Lord Bougwan, who in thy turn hast deigned to accept me and my poor beauty. I thank thee a thousand times, and I will add that thou art a good and honest man, and I put my hand upon my heart and swear that I would that I could say thee 'yea.' And now that I have rendered thanks to all in turn"—and again she smiled—"I will add one short word

"Little can ye understand of me, Nyleptha and my lords, if ye know not that for me there is no middle path that I scorn your pity and hate ye for it that I cast off your forgiveness as though it were a serpent's sting and that standing here, betrayed, deserted, insulted and alone, I yet triumph over ye, mock ye and defy ye, one and all, and thus I answer ye," and then of a sudden, before anybody guessed what she intended to do, she drove the little silver spear she carried in her hand into her side with such a strong and steady aim that the keen point projected through her back, and she fell prone upon the pavement.

Nyleptha shrieked, and poor Good almost fainted at the sight, while the rest of us rushed toward her. But Sorais of the Night lifted herself upon her hand and for a moment fixed her glorious eyes intently on Curtis face, as though there were some message in the glance, then dropped her head and sighed, and with a sob her dark yet splendid spirit passed.

Well, they gave her a royal funeral, and there was an end of her.

* * * * * *

It was a month after the last act of the Sorais tragedy that there was a great ceremony in the Flower Temple, and Curtis was formally declared king consort of Zu-Vendis. I was too ill to go myself; and, indeed, I hate all that sort of thing; with the crowds and the trumpet blowing and banner waving; but Good, who was there (in his full dress uniform), came back much impressed, and told me that Nyleptha had looked lovely, and Curtis had borne himself in a right royal fashion, and had been received with acclamations that left no doubt as to his popularity. Also he told me that when the horse Daylight was led along in the procession, the populace had shouted "Macumazahn, Macumazahn!" till they were hoarse, and would only be appeased when he, Good, rose in his chariot and told them that I was too ill to be present.

Afterwards, too, Sir Henry, or rather the king, came to see me, looking very tired, and vowing that he had never been so bored in his life, but I dare say that that was a slight exaggeration. It is not in human nature that a man should be altogether bored on such an extraordinary occasion; and, indeed, as I pointed out to him, it was a marvelous thing that a man who but little more than one short year before had entered a great country as an unknown wanderer should today be married to its beautiful and beloved queen, and lifted amid public rejoicings to its throne; and I even went the length to exhort him in the future not to be carried away by the pride and pomp of absolute power, but always to strive to remember that he was first a Christian gentleman, and next a public servant, called by Providence to a great and almost unprecedented trust. These remarks, which he might fairly have resented, he was so good as to receive with patience, and even to thank me for making them.

It was immediately after this ceremony that I caused myself to be moved to the house where I am now writing. It is a very pleasant country seat, situated about two miles from the Frowning City, onto which it looks. That was five months ago, during the whole of which time I have, being confined to a kind of cough, employed my leisure in compiling this history of our wanderings from my journal and our joint memories. It is probable that it will never be read, but it does not much matter whether it is or not, at any rate, it has served to while away many hours of suffering, for I have suffered a deal of pain lately. Thank God, however, there will not be much more of it.

* * * * * *

It is a week since I wrote the above, and now I take up my pen for the last time, for I know that the end is at hand. My brain is still clear and I can manage to write, though with difficulty. The pain in my lung, which has been very bad during the last week, has suddenly quite left me and been succeeded by a feeling of numbness of which I cannot mistake the meaning.

And so this is the end of it—a brief space of troubling, a few restless, fevered, anguished years, and then the arms of that great angel death. Many times have I been near to them, many and many a comrade have they embraced even at my side, and now it is my turn at last, and it is well. Twenty-four hours more and the world will be gone from me, and with it all its hopes and all its fears.

Well, it is not a good world—nobody can say that it is save those who willfully blind themselves to facts. How can a world be good in which money is the moving power and self interest the guiding star? The wonder is not that it is so bad, but that there should be any good left in it.

Still, now that my life is over, I am glad to have lived, glad to have known the dear breath of woman's love, and that true friendship that can even surpass the love of woman; glad to have heard the laughter of little children, to have seen the sun and the moon and the stars, to have felt the kiss of the salt sea on my face, and watch the wild game trek down to the water in the moonlight. But I should not wish to live again!

Everything is changing to me. The darkness draws near, and the light departs. And yet it seems to me that through the darkness I can already see the shining welcome of many a long lost face. Harry is there, and others; one above all, to my mind the sweetest and most perfect woman that ever gladdened this gray earth. But of her I have already written elsewhere, and at length, so why speak of her now? Why speak of her after this long silence, now that she is again so near to me?

The sinking sun is turning the golden roof of the great temple to a fiery flame, and my fingers tire.

So to all who have known me, or who can think one kindly thought of the old hunter, I stretch out my hand from the far off shore and bid a long farewell.

And now into the hands of Almighty God, who sent it, do I commit my spirit.

"I have spoken," as the Zulus say.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BY ANOTHER HAND.

A year has elapsed since our most dear friend Allan Quatermain wrote the words "I have spoken" at the end of his record of our adventures. Nor should I have ventured to make any additions to that record had it not happened that by a most strange accident a chance has arisen of its being conveyed to England. The chance is but a faint one, it is true, but as it is not probable that another will arise in our lifetimes, Good and myself think that we may as well avail ourselves of it, such as it is. During the last six months several frontier commissions have been at work on the various boundaries of Zu-Vendis, with a view of discovering whether there exists any possible means of ingress or egress from the country, with the result that a channel of communication with the outer world hitherto overlooked has been discovered. This channel, apparently the only one (for I have discovered that it was by it that the native who ultimately reached Mr. Mackenzie's mission station, and whose arrival in the country, together with the fact of his expulsion, for he did arrive about three years before ourselves, was for reasons of their own kept a dead secret by the priests to whom he was brought), is about to be effectually closed. But before this is done a messenger is to be dispatched bearing with him this manuscript, and also one or two letters from Good to his friends, and from myself to my brother George, whom it deeply grieves me to think I shall never see again, informing them, as our next heirs, that they are welcome to our effects in England, if the court of probate will allow them to take them, inasmuch as we have made up our minds never to return to Europe. Indeed it would be impossible for us to leave Zu-Vendis even if we wished to do so.

The messenger who is to go, and I wish him joy of his journey, is Alphonse. For a long while he has been wearied to death of Zu-Vendis and its inhabitants. Oh, oui, c'est beau," he says, with an expressive shrug; "mais je m'ennuie; ce n'est pa chic." Poor Alphonse! we shall be very sorry to part with him; but I sincerely trust, for his own sake and also for the sake of this history, which is, I think, worth giving to the world, that he may arrive in safety. If he does, and can carry the treasure we have provided him with in the shape of bars of solid gold, he will be, comparatively speaking, a rich man for life, and well able to marry his Annette, if she is still in the land of the living and willing to marry her Alphonse.

Anyhow, on the chance, I may as well add a word or two to dear old Quatermain's narrative.

He died at dawn on the day following that on which he wrote the last words on the last chapter. Nyleptha, Good and myself were present, and a most touching and yet in its way beautiful scene it was. An hour before the daybreak it became apparent to us that he was sinking, and our distress was very keen. Indeed, Good melted into tears at the idea—a fact that called forth the last gentle flicker of humor from our dying friend, for even at that hour he could be humorous. Good's emotion had, by loosening the muscles, naturally caused his eye glass to fall from its accustomed place, and Quatermain, who always observed everything, observed this also.

"At last," he gasped, with an attempt at a smile, "I have seen Good without his eye-glass."

After that he said no more till the day broke, when he asked to be lifted up to watch the rising of the sun for the last time.

"In a very few minutes," he said, after gazing earnestly at it, "I shall pass through those golden gates."

Ten minutes afterward he raised himself and looked us fixedly in the face.

"I am going a stranger journey than any we have taken together. Think of me sometimes," he murmured. "God bless you all. I shall wait for you together," and with a sigh he fell back dead.

And so passed away a character that I consider went as near perfection as any it has ever been my lot to encounter.

Tender, constant, humorous, and possessing many of the qualities that go to make a poet, he was yet almost unrivaled as a man of action and a citizen of the world. I never knew any one so competent to form an accurate judgment of men and their motives. "I have studied human nature all my life," he would say, "and I ought to know something about it," and he certainly did. He had but two faults—one was his excessive modesty, and the other a slight tendency which he had to be jealous of anybody on whom he concentrated his affections.

Good read the burial service over him in the presence of Nyleptha and myself, and then his remains were, in deference to the popular clamor, accorded a great public funeral, or rather cremation. I could not help thinking, however, as I marched in that long and splendid procession up to the temple, how he would have hated the whole thing could he have been there to see it, for he had a horror of ostentation,

And so, a few minutes before sunset, on the third night after his death, they laid him on the brazen flooring before the altar, and waited for the last ray of the setting sun to fall upon his face. Presently it came, and struck him like a golden arrow, crowning the pale brows with glory, and then the trumpets blew, and the flooring revolved, and all that remained of our beloved friend fell into the furnace below.

We shall never see his like again if we live a hundred years. He was the ablest man, the truest gentleman, the firmest friend, the finest sportsman, and, I believe, the best shot in all Africa.

And so ended the very remarkable and adventurous life of Hunter Quatermain.

* * * * * *

Since then things have gone very well with us. Good has been, and still is, busily employed in the construction of a navy on Lake Milosis and another of the large lakes, by means of which we hope to be able to increase trade and commerce, and also to overcome some very troublesome and warlike sections of the population who live upon their borders. Poor fellow! he is beginning to get over the sad death of that misguided but most attractive woman Sorais, but it is a sad blow to him, for he was really deeply attached to her. I hope, however, that he will in time make a suitable marriage, and get that unhappy business out of his head. Nyleptha has one or two young ladies in view, especially a daughter of Nasta's (who was a widower), a very fine imperial looking girl, but with too much of her father's intriguing, and yet haughty, spirit to suit my taste.

As for myself, I should scarcely know where to begin if I set to work to describe my doings, so I had best leave them undescribed and content myself with saying that, on the whole, I am getting on very well in my curious position of king consort—better, indeed, than I had any right to expect. But, of course, it is not all plain sailing, and I find the responsibilities very heavy. Still I hope to be able to do some good in my time, and I intend to devote myself to two great ends, namely, to the consolidation of the various clans which together make up the Zu-Vendi people under one strong central government, and to the sapping of the power of the priesthood. The first of these reforms will, if it can be carried out, put an end to the disastrous civil wars that have for centuries devastated this country; and the second, besides removing a source of political danger, will pave the road for the introduction of true religion in the place of this senseless Sun worship. I yet hope to see the shadow of the cross of Christ lying on the golden dome of the Flower temple; or, if I do not, that my successors may.

There is one more thing that I intend to devote myself to, and that is the total exclusion of all foreigners from Zu-Vendis. Not, indeed, that any more are ever likely to get here; but if they do, I warn them fairly that they will be shown the shortest way out of the country. I do not say this from any sense of inhospitality, but because I am convinced of the sacred duty that rests upon me of preserving to this, on the whole, upright and generous hearted people the blessings of comparative barbarism. Where would all my brave army be if some enterprising rascal were to attack us with field guns and Martini-Henrys? I cannot see that gunpowder, telegraphs, steam, daily newspapers, universal suffrage, etc., have made mankind one whit the happier than they used to be, and I am certain that they have brought many evils in their train. I have no fancy for handing over this beautiful country to be torn and fought for by speculators, tourists, politicians and teachers, whose voice is as the voice of Babel, just as those horrible creatures in the valley of the underground river tore and fought for the body of the swan; nor will I endow it with the greed, drunkenness, new diseases, gunpowder and general demoralization which chiefly mark the progress of civilization among unsophisticated peoples. If in due course it pleases Providence to throw Zu-Vendis open to the world, that is another matter; but of myself I will not take the responsibility, and I may add that Good entirely approves of my decision. Farewell.

December 15, 18—. HENRY CURTIS.

P. S.—I quite forgot to say that about nine months ago Nyleptha (who is very well, and, in my eyes at any rate, more beautiful than ever) presented me with a son and heir. He is a regular curly haired, blue eyed young Englishman in looks, and though he is destined, if he lives, to inherit the throne of Zu-Vendis, I hope I may be able to bring him up to become what an English gentleman should be, and generally is—which is to my mind even a prouder and a finer thing than being born heir apparent to the great house of the Stairway, and, indeed, the highest rank that a man can reach upon this earth. H. C.

NOTE BY GEORGE CURTIS, ESQ.

The MS. of this history, addressed to me in the handwriting of my dear brother, Henry Curtis, whom we had given up for dead, and bearing the Aden postmark, reached me in safety on December 20, 18—, or a little more than two years after it left his hands in the far center of Africa, and I hasten to give the astonishing story it contains to the world. Speaking for myself, I have read it with very mixed feelings; for though it is a great relief to know that he and Good are alive and strangely prosperous, I cannot but feel that for me and for all their friends they might as well be dead, since we can never hope to see them more.

They have cut themselves off from old England and from their homes and their relations forever, and perhaps, under the circumstances, they were right and wise to do so.

How the MS. came to be posted I have been quite unable to discover; but I presume, from the fact of its being posted at all, that the little Frenchman, Alphonse, accomplished his hazardous journey in safety. I have, however, advertised for him and caused various inquiries to be made in Marseilles and elsewhere with a view of discovering his whereabouts, but so far without the slightest success. Possibly he is dead and the packet was posted by another hand, or possibly he is now happily wedded to his Annette but still fears the vengeance of the law and prefers to remain incognito. I cannot say. I have not yet abandoned my hopes of finding him, but I am bound to say that they grow fainter day by day, and one great obstacle to my search is that nowhere in the whole history does Mr. Quatermain mention his surname. He is always spoken of as "Alphonse," and there are so many Alphonses! The letters which my brother Henry says he is sending with the packet of manuscript have never arrived, so I presume that they are lost or destroyed.

GEORGE CURTIS.

THE END.

AN OCEAN RACE.

In the spring of '68 or '69, I forget which now, I was mate of the schooner Willington, 279 tons register, in the Bermuda trade. At that time our vessel was comparatively new, having only been in commission about a year, and was considerably ahead of anything else in that trade in the way of speed. We had a first rate captain and a good crew, whose personnel was superior to the majority of coaster crews, also we were better manned for our size than most of those vessels are, and our owners were liberal in everything conducive to the comfort of the men. The Willington had the record of the fastest passage from Bermuda, and we were all proud of our beautiful schooner.

During the winter sundry rumors were afloat of a vessel building in Boston for a rival firm of produce dealers, of about our tonnage, and, as it was supposed, she was to be put on the line at the opening of the season of which I am writing.

On arriving at New York from our first trip of the year, we heard that the Invincible (for so had her owners named her) had arrived from Boston, been put in commission and cleared for Bermuda the day previous. She was apparently a beauty and our captain was very anxious to try conclusions with her, but somehow it seemed a difficult matter to get a trial, and during the busy season all rivalry had to give way to the pressure of business.

However, patient waiting was at length rewarded, and, one day after we had finished unloading and were awaiting orders, the skipper came aboard with his weather beaten face all aglow with excitement. "We've got a chance to show our mettle at last, Joe," he said, as he joined me on the deck. "Smith & Co. (our owners) have heard a good deal of blowing about that new craft and asked my advice about putting up $1,000 or $2,000 on the Willington. I told them that I had not tried her against the Invincible at all yet, but, from what I had seen of the latter, I thought we could win his money for him. Anyway we would try mighty hard. So he has taken a bet of Brown's (the Invincible's owner) of $2,500 for a race from our pier, around Bermuda and back, the start to take place a week today."

This was short notice to prepare for a race with a vessel just off the stocks and clean below the water as a new pin. Nevertheless, we set to work with a will, and that very evening had her hauled up and a gang of men cleaning her bottom, the crew, under my directions, seeing to her rigging and spars.

Monday was the day fixed for the start, and on Saturday at noon we tied up at Smith's pier ready and anxious for Monday to come.

A good twenty-four hours' rest after the exertions of the week prepared the crew for anything, and on the call for "all hands" in the morning as fine and sailor like looking lot of men trod the deck as ever manned a coaster of our tonnage.

The start was to be by a powder flash from opposite our pier in the North river at 10 o'clock a. m., so as to get the ebb tide through the Narrows. By 9:30 both vessels were maneuvering about the line for a start, standing back and forth across the river under all their canvas, the breeze being of fair strength from the south. The Invincible was a beautiful craft to look at, and I had my doubts as to our victory (for win we must) being an easy one as I watched the way she plowed through the sunlit waters, although not being sailed full half the time.

Our skipper stood near the helm, watch in hand, the rest of the crew being at their posts, ready for the beat down the upper bay and through the Narrows.

At precisely thirty seconds before 10 our captain again measured with his eye our distance above the line, replaced his watch in his pocket and gave orders for the start; "Stand by to haul your wind—luff you may, now—flatten all sheets fore and aft," and, as the helm was put down and sheets hauled in, the good schooner Willington came up to the wind in beautiful style and lay over at an angle that showed she meant business as she headed for the line on the starboard tack. "Keep her full, now," roared the skipper, "another pull on that fore sheet—so, that will do," and as a cloud of smoke rose from the end of the pier, showing that time was up, we dashed over the line ahead of our rival, who crossed on the port tack several seconds later. Down the upper bay we sped, keeping almost tack and tack, through the Narrows, past Forts Hamilton and Lafayette and out into the waters of the lower bay. Then a breeze from the east brought the wind abeam, sheets were started, and, with the Invincible a couple of cable's lengths astern and to windward, we reached down for Sandy Hook. The buoys inside the Hook were rounded soon after 1 o'clock p. m., and we settled down for a beat out to the lightship. That was rounded in due order, and with a fresh breeze blowing east by north the two schooners were headed, close hauled on the port tack, on a southeast course for Bermuda, and the race had fairly begun. Our position was now about three-quarters of a mile to leeward of the other craft, which gain she had made in the beat out to the lightship, we having almost lost the wind when under the Hook. There was a choppy sea on, the increasing wind crossing the long Atlantic swell and kicking up considerable of a pother, and once clear of land, and at the mercy of the "rolling forties," the schooner began to get pretty lively. The sky had become overcast, the clouds seemed to be getting lower, and the wind increased as it gradually headed us off, and it began to assume the appearance of what would now be called "cutter weather."

I was watching the other vessel through a glass when I saw her luff and come up in th wind. "She's taking in her tops'ls," I shouted, and when she fell off and again headed on her course it was under mains'l, and forse'l and the jib only, and even then seemed to have all the sail she wanted.

And, indeed, it was high time we were doing something, too, for our skipper was driving his vessel beyond what I thought advisable, and I expected something to go every moment. She lay over at a fearful angle, the water to leeward hissing and bubbling along her rail, while clouds of spray broke continually over the forecastle, varied occasionally by a huge wave flooding her deck fore and aft. The crew, with the exception of a couple of hands at the wheel, were crouching under the weather bulwarks, every one of them wet to the skin, when at length the expected order came: "Stand by to take in your gaff tops'ls and outer jib, helm-a-lee, get them stowed smartly, now," and hardly were sheets slacked off and halliards manned, ere at a sign from the captain, the helm was put up and we were again tearing through the surges while the light canvas was being stowed. This eased her considerably for a time, but by sundown it was blowing half a gale while we plowed the whitecaps in grand style under a couple of reefs in main and fores'ls, our goal bearing about three points to windward of the best course we could lie. Before night closed in I took another squint at the other vessel and had the satisfaction of seeing that we had weathered on her some and were also gradually drawing ahead. The view around us was superbly grand, but things were rather too lively for any one not a seaman to enjoy it. The wind was blowing half a gale—good measure—the whole surface of the seething waters had that opaque, gray tint which the froth and bubbles of a heavy blow always give. Monstrous seas rose and fell and rose again, their tops torn to shreds as they broke into foam and spray under the fury of the gale, while the schooner, under her shortened canvas, was pitching in a way to make a landsman's hair stand on end as one moment her sharp stem split a huge wave in twain, her forefoot the next moment suspended clear of the water over the succeeding trough of the sea as her stern sank deep in the embrace of the divided wave.

As darkness came over the scene our last sight of the Invincible showed that we were at least holding our own, and, it being my watch below, I turned in, after changing my wringing wet clothes, to make the most of what bid fair to be only a short rest.

I was awakened by the hoarse shout of "all hands on deck," and tumbled up in a hurry to find the wind abating and the crew busy shaking out the reefs in the fore and mains'ls. It being nearly my time to take charge the skipper went below, while I walked the deck in command, occasionally stopping to glance at the compass to see how we kept our course. About midnight we got the gaff and jib tops'ls on her and before the captain again appeared we had the flying jib set as well.

By daylight it was only blowing a gentle breeze, but the swell was still heavy, and as the schooner had all sail set, including a maintop mast stays'l, all that could be done was to watch and wait. It is needless to tell that, as daylight broke over the still heaving surface of the ocean, every eye aboard the vessel was eagerly searching the expanse of water for a sight of our competitor, but, from the deck, there was not a sail in sight. A hand sent aloft to the fore cross trees hailed the deck with the news of a bark off the port beam, heading to the northwest, but that was all. Speculation was rife as to the whereabouts of the other craft, the generally accepted theory of her absence from view being that she must have laid to to weather out the gale and that we had consequently run her out of sight. This idea imparted a pleasurable feeling to every one on board, as each one of us had the promise of a liberal share of the winnings in case of crossing the line first—this being an offer of our owners as an inducement to the crew—besides the natural desire to win against a crack new boat.

The remainder of our run to and around Bermuda was uneventful, light winds prevailing all the way, and our course was laid for New York with the expectation of meeting the other craft on her outward journey. But no Invincible did we see, and on the early morning of the ninth day out Sandy Hook light was sighted. By noon we were running up the lower bay under a light, baffling breeze, shifting from east to east southeast and anxiously scanning every schooner in sight, but nothing was seen of the beautiful craft for which we looked. We reported at the finish and found that we had won our money, as the other vessel was not yet in, and right well were we satisfied with the race.

When did the Invincible arrive? some one asks. She was never heard of again. Whether she struck a floating wreck, or whether thrown on her beam ends and foundered, or sprung a leak under the pressure of the gale of the first day and night, has not, nor never will be known. Her fate is one of those mysteries in which the life of a mariner abounds, and, until the sea gives up its dead, naught will never be known of the crew who manned the good schooner Invincible in her ill fated race with the now old and weather beaten coaster Willington.—Carl Torp in Detroit Free Press.

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THE LARGEST STOCK of Stoves, Ranges and Heaters ever shown in Kent county. Our assortment is complete in every detail. In the line of COOKING STOVES we still sell the New Excelsior Cook (cannot be surpassed in operation); the Niagara, Coral Cook, Carroll Cook, Patrol Cook, Quaker City and others.

RANGES—We have the New Royal, Splendid, Magic, Ruby, and Victor Cook; all the above have been thoroughly tested and give satisfaction.

OUR HEATING STOVES are too numerous to mention; mention a few we handle. New Solar Light, (both double and single heaters); New Silver Moon (both double and single heaters); Favorite, Special Laurel Base, Magnet, Token Base, New Garnet, Crystal Egg, Vulcan Egg; also, have a nice assortment of Wood Heating Stoves.

Call and be convinced that we *do* handle a *superior* line of Stoves. Take pleasure in pointing out their good qualities. Resp't,

J. K. ALDAIDGE & CO.

DO NOT FORGET

THAT WE STILL HANDLE SPEAR'S GOLDEN SUN FIRE-PLACE HEATERS!

They still stand unexcelled in *every particular*,

J. K. ALDRIDGE & CO.

CRYSTALIZED and Zinc Stove Boards Zinc Coal Hods, Stove Shovels, Pokers, Mica and everything pertaining to the stove trade at the Glass Front Hardware of

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J. K. ALDRIDGE & CO. have the "Biggest Lot" of AXES ever seen in Chestertown. Call and see their stock in general.
Dec 1, 1887.

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REAL ESTATE BROKERS.
All kinds real estate bought, sold or exchanged.
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Same rates commission as those in force by the Real Estate Exchange of Baltimore city. Money to loan on land in sums to suit.
Oct 13—6m.

NOTICE.

THE RISING SUN SALOON is now prepared to accommodate the public with all the delicacies of the season, such as Spring Chickens, Soft, Deviled and Hard Crabs, Beefsteak, Ham and Eggs, Turtle Soup, Terrapin Soup and Ox Tail Soup.

June 2, 1887 WM. PERKINS, Proprietor.

IRON Cultivators! Iron Cultivators!! and Extra Cultivator Points complete at
J. K. ALDRIDGE & CO.'S.

WE HAVE A LARGE STOCK OF BOOTS AND SHOES, and will make it to the interest of buyers to call and examine goods and prices before purchasing.
J. H. SIMPERS