The Adventures of Dick Maitland: A Tale of Unknown Africa

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Harry Collingwood

Chapter One.

The Catastrophe.

Doctor Julian Humphreys was spoken of by those who believed that they knew him best as an eccentric; because, being a physician and surgeon of quite unusual ability, he chose—possessing a small independence amounting to a bare three hundred pounds per annum—to establish himself in the East-End of London, and there devote himself with zeal and enthusiasm to the amelioration of the sufferings of the very poor, instead of capitalising his income and setting up in Harley Street, where his exceptional qualifications would speedily and inevitably have brought him a handsome fortune.

An income of three hundred pounds per annum—out of which one has to feed, clothe, and house oneself—does not afford very much scope for the practice of philanthropy, as Dr Humphreys very well knew; his establishment, therefore, was of very modest dimensions, consisting merely of three rooms with the usual domestic offices, one room—the front and largest one—being fitted up as surgery, dispensary, and consulting room, while, of the other two, one served as a sleeping apartment for himself and his pupil, Mr Richard Maitland, the third being sacred to Polly Nevis, a sturdy and willing, but somewhat untidy person, who discharged the united functions of parlour maid, housemaid, chamber maid, cook, and scullery maid to the establishment.

The large red lamp which shone over Dr Humphreys' door at night was the one and only picturesque feature of Paradise Street—surely so named by an individual of singularly caustic and sardonic humour, for anything less suggestive of the delights of Paradise than the squalid and malodorous street so named it would indeed be difficult to conceive—and in the course of the four years during which it had been in position that lamp had become a familiar object to every man, woman, and child within a radius of at least a mile; for the Doctor's fame had soon spread, and his clientele comprised practically everybody within that radius.

The apparently insignificant event that initiated the extraordinary series of adventures, of which this is the narrative, occurred about the hour of 8 a.m. on a certain day of September in the year of our Lord 19—; and it consisted in the delivery by the postman of a letter addressed to Mr Richard Maitland, care of Dr J. Humphreys, 19 Paradise Street, Whitechapel, E. The letter was addressed in the well-known handwriting of Dick's mother; but the recipient did not immediately open it, for he was at the moment engaged in assisting the Doctor to dress and bind up the wounds of Mrs William Taylor, whose husband, having returned home furiously drunk upon the closing of the public houses on the previous night, had proceeded to vent his spleen upon his long-suffering wife, because, having no money and nothing that she could pawn, she had failed to have a hot supper ready for him upon his arrival.

When, however, Mrs Taylor, scarcely recognisable because of the voluminous bandages that swathed her head and face, and carrying with her a powerful odour of iodoform, was bowed out of the surgery by Dr Humphreys, with a reminder—in reply to a murmur that she had no money just then—that she was one of his free patients, and a message from the Doctor to Mr William Taylor, which the poor woman had not the remotest intention to deliver, Dick drew his mother's letter from his pocket and

opened it. As he mastered its contents he went white to the lips, as well he might; for this is what he read:

The Cedars, 14 South Hill, Sydenham.

September 10th, 19—.

"My dear Dick,—

"I am sorry to be obliged to call you away from your work, but I must ask you to please come home to me as soon as you can possibly get away, for I have just received news of so disastrous a character that I dare not put it upon paper. Besides, I am so distracted that I scarcely know what I am writing, as you will no doubt understand when I tell you that we are ruined—absolutely and irretrievably ruined! Come as soon as you can, my dear, for I feel as though I shall go out of my senses if I cannot soon have someone to counsel me as to what is the best thing to be done under these dreadful circumstances.

"Your loving but distracted mother,—

"Edith Maitland."

"Hillo, Dick! what's the matter?" exclaimed the Doctor, catching a glimpse of his assistant's drawn face and pallid lips as Maitland stared incredulously at the letter in his hand. "Nothing wrong, I hope. You look as though you had just seen a ghost!"

"So I have; the ghosts of—many things," answered Dick. "Unless this letter is—but no, it is the dear Mater's own handwriting beyond a doubt. Read it, Doctor; there are no secrets in it." And Dick passed the letter over to Humphreys.

“Phew!” whistled the Doctor, when he had read the letter twice—from the date to the signature; “that sounds pretty bad. You had better be off at once, and get at the rights of the thing. And when you have done so— By the way, have you any friends with whom you can consult, should you need help or advice of any sort?”

“Not a soul in the world, so far as I know, unless I may call you a friend, Doctor,” answered Dick. “Of course there is Cuthbertson, the family solicitor and the sole executor of my father’s will; but the suggestion conveyed by this letter from my mother is that something has somehow gone wrong with him, and he may not be available.”

“Quite so; he may not, as you say,” agreed the Doctor. “In that case, my dear Dick, come back to me after you have become acquainted with all the facts, and we will discuss the matter together. That you may call me your friend goes without saying, as you ought to know by this time; and although I am only an obscure East-End practitioner I am not wholly without friends able and willing to do me, or any friend of mine, a good turn, if necessary. So come back here when you have threshed out the matter, and we will see what—if anything—can be done.”

“Right! I will. And a thousand thanks to you for this fresh evidence of your kindly feeling toward me,” exclaimed Dick, grasping the doctor’s hand. “Are you quite sure that you will be able to get along without me for a few hours?”

“Absolutely certain,” was the cheery reply. “You are a very clever young fellow, Dick, and have proved a marvellously apt pupil since you have been with me, but I managed this practice single-handed before you came to me, and I have no doubt I can do it again, if needs be. So be off with you at once, my lad; for your mother seems to be in sore need of you.”

Five minutes later Dick Maitland had boarded a tramcar, on his way to London Bridge railway station, from whence he took train for the Crystal Palace, the nearest station to his mother's home, which he reached within two hours of his departure from Number 19 Paradise Street.

Now, as Dick Maitland happens to be the hero of this story it is necessary he should be properly introduced to the reader, and this seems as appropriate a moment as any.

To begin with, then, when we caught our first glimpse of him, assisting Dr Humphreys to dress and bind up those tokens of affection which Mr William Taylor had bestowed upon his wife, Dick Maitland was within three months of his eighteenth birthday, a fine, tall, fairly good-looking, and athletic specimen of the young public-school twentieth-century Englishman. He was an only son; and his mother was a widow, her husband having died when Dick was a sturdy little toddler a trifle over three years of age. Mrs Maitland had been left quite comfortably off, her husband having accumulated a sufficient sum to bring her in an income of close upon seven hundred pounds per annum. The provisions of Mr Maitland's will stipulated that the income arising from his carefully chosen investments was to be enjoyed by his widow during her lifetime, subject to the proper maintenance and education of their only son, Dick; and upon the demise of Mrs Maitland the capital was to go to Dick, to be employed by the latter as he might deem fit. But a clause in the will stipulated that at the close of his school career Dick was to be put to such business or profession as the lad might choose, Mr Maitland pithily remarking that he did not believe in drones. But since Mrs Maitland, although a most excellent woman in every respect, had no head for business, her husband appointed honest old John Cuthbertson, his own and his father's solicitor, sole executor of his will; and so died happily, in the full conviction that he had done everything that was humanly possible to assure the future welfare of his widow and infant son.

And faithfully had John Cuthbertson discharged his trust, until in the fullness of years he had laid down the burden of life, and his son Jonas had come to reign in the office in his father's stead. This event had occurred some three years previously, about the time when Dick, having completed his school life, had elected to take up the study of medicine and surgery.

This important step had involved many interviews between Mrs Maitland and "Mr Jonas", as the clerks in his father's office had learned to call him; for the said Mr Jonas had succeeded to the executorship of many wills—Mr Maitland's among them—as well as the other portions of his father's business; and so great had been the zeal and interest that he had displayed during the necessary negotiations, that Mrs Maitland had been most favourably impressed. Indeed Jonas Cuthbertson had honestly earned the very high opinion that Mrs Maitland had formed of him, displaying not only interest and zeal but also a considerable amount of acumen in the matter of Dick's placing. For, when Mrs Maitland, perhaps very naturally, expressed the wish that Dick should begin his studies under the guidance of some eminent Harley Street specialist, the solicitor strenuously opposed the idea, not only upon the score of expense, but also because, as he argued, Dick would certainly acquire a wider knowledge of diseases and their cure—and acquire it much more quickly—under some hard-working practitioner among the East-End poor of London; and that, as he very truly pointed out, was the great desideratum in such a case as Dick's, far outweighing the extra hard work and the sordid surroundings to which Mrs Maitland had at first so strenuously objected. Moreover, Dick agreed with the solicitor; and in the end the maternal objections were overcome, careful enquiries were instituted, and finally Dick found himself installed as a pupil in the somewhat Bohemian establishment of Doctor Julian Humphreys, M.D., M.R.C.P., M.R.C.S., and several other letters of the alphabet. And, queer though the arrangement was in many respects, it proved eminently satisfactory to Dick; for Dr Humphreys was not only an extraordinarily able

physician and surgeon, but also marvellously clever and learned outside the bounds of his profession, gentle and tender-hearted as a woman, and a thoroughly good fellow all round, in the best and highest sense of the term. As for Dick, he displayed from the outset a quite exceptional aptitude for the noble profession which he had chosen; study, instead of being irksome, was a pleasure—almost a passion—with him; his nerves were steel, he never for a moment lost his head even when assisting at the most sickening operation; his touch was light and sure; and knowledge seemed to come to him intuitively. No wonder that Doctor Humphreys persistently predicted a brilliant and successful career for his pupil.

Upon his arrival home Dick found his mother in such an acute state of distress that for the first few moments of their interview she seemed to be quite incapable of making any intelligible statement: she could do nothing but weep copiously upon her stalwart son's shoulder and gasp that they were ruined—utterly and irretrievably ruined! At length, however, the lad managed to extract from Mrs Maitland the statement that she had seen, in the previous morning's papers, an account of the suicide of Mr Jonas Cuthbertson, a solicitor; and, judging from the name and other particulars given in the published account, that it must be their Mr Cuthbertson, she had hurried up to town and called at Cuthbertson's chambers, where her worst apprehensions had received complete and terrible confirmation. From the particulars supplied by Mr Herbert, Cuthbertson's chief clerk, it appeared that "Mr Jonas", after walking worthily in his father's footsteps for two years, had become infected with the gambling craze, and, first losing all his own money, had finally laid hands upon as much of his clients' property as he could obtain access to, until, his ill luck still pursuing him, he had lost that also, and then had sought to evade the consequences of his misdeeds by blowing out his brains with two shots from a revolver. This final act of folly had been perpetrated two days before the account of it in the papers had fallen under Mrs Maitland's notice, and in the interim there

had, of course, been time only to make a very cursory examination into the affairs of the suicide, but that examination had sufficed to reveal the appalling fact that every available security, both of his own and of his clients, had disappeared, while sufficient evidence had been discovered to show pretty clearly what had led to their disappearance.

This was the sum and substance of Mrs Maitland's somewhat incoherently told story, and when Dick had heard it through to the end he had no reason to doubt its truth; but manifestly it was not at all the sort of story to be taken upon trust, it must be fully and completely investigated, if only for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not anything, however small, was to be saved from the wreck; accordingly, after partaking of a hasty lunch, young Maitland wended his way to the City, and there had a most discouraging interview with Mr Herbert, who was by this time busily engaged upon the preparation of a detailed statement of the position of affairs, for the information of his late employer's clients and creditors. This, Mr Herbert explained, was proving a task of much less difficulty than he had anticipated, since Cuthbertson had apparently kept an accurate account of all his gambling transactions—some of which had, latterly, been upon a gigantic scale—with the evidently desperate resolution of recovering his former losses, or ruining himself in the attempt, while he had not destroyed any of his papers, as so many suicides do before perpetrating the final act of folly. The position of affairs, as outlined by Mr Herbert, was gloomy enough, but he made it clear to Dick that for the moment he was speaking with reserve, as it was impossible for him to say anything of an absolutely definite character until the investigation—which was being conducted with the aid of a firm of chartered accountants of high standing—should be complete.

Having now ascertained all in connection with the deplorable business that was for the moment possible, Dick returned to his mother and did his best

to comfort and encourage her; but, as might have been expected, his efforts met with no very great measure of success, seeing that there was practically nothing of a comforting or encouraging character in the story told him by Jonas Cuthbertson's chief clerk.

The next morning Dick Maitland returned to Number 19 Paradise Street, where he found his friend Humphreys as busily engaged as ever in his work of healing the sick and comforting the sorrowing poor, and received a welcome from the cheery, genial medico that seemed to ease his shoulders of at least half their load of anxiety. But it was not until well on towards evening that the claims upon the Doctor's time and attention slackened sufficiently to afford an opportunity for Dick to tell his story, which, after all, was only an amplified edition of the story originally told in Mrs Maitland's letter.

When at length the tale was fully told, and Humphreys had, by dint of much cross-questioning, fully mastered all its miserable details, he sat for half an hour or more, smoking diligently and silently as he considered in what way he could best help his young friend. At length, however, an idea seemed to occur to him, for he looked up and said:

"Well, Dick, my friend, it sounds about as bad as anything that I have heard of for many a long day! Why in the world did that fool of a lawyer want to meddle with gambling? Why could he not have been content to devote his energies to the conduct of the business—a first-class one, according to his chief clerk's account—which his father left him, and which would have provided him with a very comfortable living all his days and, probably, a snug competency to retire upon when he found himself getting too old for work? I tell you what it is, my boy: this mad craving to get rich quickly is one of the great curses of these latter days. When it once gets a firm grip upon its victim it quickly converts the honest, upright man into a

conscienceless rogue, who soon becomes the centre of a widespread circle of ruin and untold misery! Look at this fellow Cuthbertson. He had an honest and honourable father; and, as I understand you, was, to start with, himself perfectly honest and honourable; yet look at him now! What is he? Why, simply a dishonoured corpse, hastily huddled away into a suicide's grave; a man who, having utterly spoiled his life, has presumptuously and prematurely hurried into the presence of his Maker, burdened not only with the heavy load of his own sin but also with the responsibility for all the ruin and misery which he has left behind him! Moralising, however, will not help you, my boy; for if I know anything at all about you it is that you are not the sort of character to make such a horrible mess of your life as that poor wretch has done. But now, the question is: What can I do to help you and your respected mother out of this slough into which another man's weakness and sin have plunged you both? Not very much, I am afraid; for I cannot restore to you the property of which you are robbed. That appears to be gone beyond recall. But I can do this for you—and it may possibly help you a little—I can give you a letter of introduction to a man who is under very heavy obligations to me, and who—being a thoroughly good fellow—will be more than glad to discharge those obligations if I will only afford him the opportunity to do so. You shall go to him and give him full and complete particulars of this terrible misfortune that has befallen you; and if there is anything at all to be saved out of the wreckage, he will save it for you, without fee and without reward—for my sake. He, too, is a solicitor, but an honest one, as many still are, thank God; and it is a solicitor whose aid will be most useful to you in the unravelling of this tangled skein."

"I say, Doctor, that is awfully good of you," exclaimed Dick, struggling to conceal his emotion of gratitude, after the manner of the Englishman, but not altogether succeeding. "If the matter concerned myself alone," he continued, "I would not let you do this thing for me; but I must think of my poor mother, and for her sake must humble my pride and suppress the

assertion of my independence so far as to accept your help, so kindly and generously offered. And here let me say that there is no man on earth whose help I would so willingly accept as yours," he blundered on, dimly conscious that there had been something of ungraciousness in his speech; and so stopped dead, overcome with shame and confusion.

"That is all right, my dear boy," returned Humphreys, smilingly laying his hand on Dick's shoulder; "I know exactly how you feel, and very heartily respect your sense of sturdy independence, which is very estimable in its way, so long as it is not carried too far. But, as a matter of fact, Dick, none of us is absolutely independent in this world, for almost every moment of our lives we are dependent upon somebody for assistance, in one shape or another, and it is not until that assistance is withheld that we are brought to realise the extent to which we are individually dependent upon our fellow creatures. But I am moralising again—a habit which seems to be growing upon me since I came among these poor folk down here, and have been brought face to face with such a vast amount of misery that can be directly traced to ignorance and crime. Just pass me over that stationery cabinet, will you? Thanks! Now I will write to my friend Graham at once, and you had better call upon him at his chambers in Lincoln's Inn to-morrow morning at ten o'clock sharp, which is about the only hour of the day when you can be reasonably certain of finding him."

When Dick called upon Humphreys' friend Graham, upon the following morning, and sent in his letter of introduction, he soon had abundant evidence that the rising young solicitor was quite as busy a man as the Doctor had represented him to be; yet he was not too busy to respond promptly to his friend's claim upon him, actually leaving an important-looking client waiting in his outer office while he interviewed Dick and listened with the utmost patience to the story which the latter had to tell, questioning him occasionally, and making notes of his answers upon a

writing pad. At length, after an interview of over half an hour's duration, Graham closed the pad sharply and, rising, extended his hand to Dick, saying:

"Thank you, Mr Maitland. I believe I have now all the essential facts; and you may assure my friend Humphreys that I will take up the case with the utmost pleasure, and without loss of time; also that I will do my best for you and your mother. From what you tell me I am inclined to imagine that the wreck of Cuthbertson's affairs will prove to be pretty complete, therefore I very strongly advise you not to reckon upon my being able to save anything for you out of the wreckage; but if there should by any chance be anything, you shall have it. And now, good morning! I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance; and as soon as I have anything definite to communicate I will write to you. Remember me very kindly to Humphreys. Good morning!"

The interview was certainly not very encouraging; but on the other hand it was by no means disappointing; for Dick had already quite made up his mind that every penny of his mother's money was lost. It was, therefore, a very pleasant surprise to him when, about a fortnight later, a letter came from Graham announcing that he had succeeded in rescuing close upon five hundred pounds for Mrs Maitland from the ruins of Cuthbertson's estate, and that the good lady could have the money by presenting herself at the writer's office and going through certain formalities.

Chapter Two.

Dick makes up his Mind.

It was late in the evening of the day upon which Mrs Maitland, having fulfilled the formalities required of her by Graham, had received from him a cheque for the sum of four hundred and eighty-seven pounds, seventeen shillings, and eightpence, which, apart from the house in which she lived, represented all that remained to her of the very comfortable fortune left to her by her late husband. Dick had escorted his mother up to town, and, upon the conclusion of the transaction, had taken her back to The Cedars; after which he had made the best of his way to 19 Paradise Street; for the moment had now arrived when he must come to an understanding with his friend Dr Julian Humphreys, and consult with him respecting the future. Ten o'clock had struck a few minutes ago, a belated patient had been attended to and dismissed, the surgery had been closed by the simple process of drawing down the blind and locking the outer door, and now the two friends were sitting opposite each other in that same drug-scented apartment, conversing earnestly together, as Humphreys pulled contemplatively, yet somewhat vexedly, at a brier pipe which had seen so much service that it was now charred down to about half its original size.

"The fact is," remarked Dick, in continuance of their conversation, "that there is no other course open to me; for I am resolved that I will not touch a farthing of the money that your friend Graham has so cleverly rescued from the ruins of Cuthbertson's estate; every stiver of it will be required for the maintenance of the poor Mater while I am away. And I must go away, because, as you yourself have admitted, there is no employment or occupation of any kind here at home to which, in my present condition of unpreparedness, I could turn my hand with any hope of earning a sufficient income to maintain her and myself, though ever so modestly; even if posts were to be had for the asking, which—in this country, at all events—they are not. You know that to be the plain, unvarnished truth, do you not?"

"Yes," Humphreys answered unhesitatingly, "it is true—unfortunately."

“Very well, then,” Dick resumed; “that being the case, the next question is: Where am I to go, and what am I to do, in order to earn enough money to maintain myself and my mother in the meantime, and eventually to restore her to that position of security of which she was robbed by that rascal Cuthbertson?”

“*De mortuis nil nisi bonum*!” reproved Humphreys gravely. “The poor chap has gone to answer for his sins, whatever they may have been, and there is an end of him, so far as you are concerned. To rail at him now, and speak of him disparagingly, will not hurt him, or do you any good, Dick, my friend, so do not unnecessarily bespatter his memory. This by the way. And now to return to our muttons. The problem that you propound is indeed a hard one to solve; to many it would probably appear an impossibility. But, although I am by no means an old man, I have been long enough in this world to have recognised that what many people deem impossibilities are nothing of the sort, if only one has the grit to face and tackle them. It is grit, my boy, that makes impossibilities possible, and I believe you possess that quality in sufficient measure to enable you to accomplish great things. The question is: What is the particular great thing which will meet your case? What is the work which you are best fitted to do? You are already very well up in the profession which you have chosen. There is many a man in successful practice to-day who knows less about it than you do; but, unfortunately, you are not yet ‘qualified’, therefore you cannot set up for yourself, even if you could afford the time to create a practice—which you cannot. And as to becoming an unqualified assistant, that of course is out of the question; the pay is altogether too poor to justify the entertainment of that idea. But there are countries where the restrictions are not nearly so great as they are in England; and there are others—beyond the pale of civilisation—where no restrictions at all exist, and where a clever man, with plenty of grit to back him up, might perhaps do remarkably well. Still, to penetrate to such countries a man must take his life in his hands, and, even then, all his

courage may prove insufficient to save him from an unspeakable, horrible death. Now, what can you do besides doctoring?"

"Nothing that will help me in my present strait," answered Maitland. "I can sail a boat, swim, ride, or drive a horse, and I can shoot straight; consequently if I possessed sufficient influence I might be able to get a job as groom, stableman, or even under-gamekeeper. But none of those things is good enough for me; I am capable of better things than grooming horses, cleaning harness, or looking after pheasants; I want employment that will bring me in good money, and I mean to have it too."

"That's right, Dick; that's the way to talk," returned Humphreys approvingly. "Modesty is all right, a very desirable and admirable quality in every young man's character, and one which is seen far too seldom nowadays. Modesty, however, is one thing, and self-depreciation quite another. It is a mistake for anyone to underrate his own value, and, as you very truly say, you are capable of doing much better work than that needed in either of the occupations that you have named; therefore you are justified in insisting upon having it. A man has a perfect right to the very best and most profitable work he is capable of doing; but he must get it for himself; it is no use for him to sit down supinely and demand that Providence shall put it into his hands. The man who is worth his salt will get up and 'hustle'—as the Americans tersely express it—and not rest until he has secured what he wants. Now, you, my boy, are very heavily handicapped. You have neither money nor influence to help you to what you want, therefore you will have to depend upon 'hustle' and grit alone; also you have no time to waste in looking about in this country for the kind of thing you want, which, even with all the 'hustle' and grit imaginable, may take you months, or even years, to find. No, as you said at the beginning of this conversation, you must go somewhere abroad to get what you want; and in a foreign land you may find even such despised accomplishments as riding,

swimming, and straight shooting of the utmost value to you. But in my opinion your mainstay must be the medical and surgical knowledge which you have acquired. Now, whereabout on the face of this old globe of ours are you likely to be able to employ your knowledge to the best and most profitable account? It should be where wealth is abundant, and where medical and surgical skill is pretty frequently in demand, also where there is plenty of scope for a young fellow who, like yourself, is imbued with the spirit of adventure. Now, let me consider for a moment—where is the country which most nearly answers to these conditions? What do you say to South Africa? It is the land of gold and diamonds; it is not, I believe, overrun with medical men; and as to adventure—" Humphreys shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands abroad expressively.

Dick's eyes sparkled and his face lit up with enthusiasm.

"South Africa is the place for me, without a doubt," he exclaimed with animation. "It is, as you say, rich; it is also a land of unbounded possibilities; and— But how am I to get there? The passage money amounts to something considerable, and I have no money to spare for that sort of thing; also, as I have said, I will not take a penny from the Mater."

"What about borrowing?" suggested Humphreys. "As you know, Dick, I am not a rich man, but I have no doubt I could manage to—"

"No!" interrupted Dick emphatically; "a thousand times no. It is like you, Doctor, to offer to help me out of your own exceedingly limited means, and I am more grateful to you than I have words to express; but I simply will not avail myself of your kindness, or that of anybody else indeed, for I should be starting with a millstone of debt hanging round my neck. No, I have thought of a better way than that; I will work my passage out."

“Work your passage out!” ejaculated the Doctor, staggered, in spite of his whole-hearted belief in the virtues of self-help, at this bold suggestion on Dick’s part. “In what capacity, pray?”

“Oh, as anything!” returned Dick buoyantly; “as ordinary seaman, cook’s mate, stoker—what does it matter? I will find a way, never fear. I’ll take a trot round the docks to-morrow, and it will be strange indeed if I cannot somewhere find a market for my labour. Why, even the elementary knowledge of nautical matters that I have acquired in sailing my little single-handed cutter during holiday time will be of service to me. I can steer, I can box the compass, I know the name of every sail on a full-rigged ship; and I will guarantee that before I have been forty-eight hours out I will know the function of every bit of running rigging, and where to lay my hand upon it in the dark.”

“Ay, I’ll bet that you will, Dick,” answered Humphreys, with enthusiasm as great as Dick’s own. “And I have not much doubt as to your being able to get a berth as ordinary seaman; for you are a big strong fellow, and for mere pulling and hauling purposes any skipper ought to be glad to get hold of you. Yes, I think we may consider that part of your problem solved. But what about after your arrival in South Africa? How do you propose to proceed at the end of the voyage when you have safely landed? For you must remember that in all probability you will have no wages to draw; people who work their passages are usually shipped at the princely rate of pay of one shilling per month.”

“Yes, I know,” said Dick. “Still, I shall have reached the scene of my great endeavour without cost, and that is the important thing. After that I shall of course be obliged to trust to my own push and ‘hustle’, as you call it, for it is impossible to make any definite plans at this distance from the scene of operations.”

“Quite so,” agreed Humphreys. “And you must also remember that there is always the element of luck, or chance, or whatever you please to call it, in the background, and to be watched for. Opportunity often presents itself literally at a moment’s notice and in the most unexpected fashion, and the one who profits by it is he who is alert enough to seize it as it passes. But there is one thing you must do, Dick; you must take with you a well-stocked chest of drugs, as well as your case of surgical instruments; and, since you will not let me lend you any money to help you on your way, you must allow me to make you a present of that medicine chest just as a token of my appreciation of the way in which you have conducted yourself as my pupil — Nay, boy, you must not refuse me, for if you do I shall be deeply hurt as well as seriously offended.”

“Very well, then,” acquiesced Dick, “since you put it in that way, and so very strongly, I will accept your generous gift with a thousand most hearty thanks, not only for the gift itself, but also for the kindly feeling that prompts it.”

“My dear Dick,” protested Humphreys, “there is really no reason at all why you should feel so extraordinarily grateful, for in doing what I propose to do I shall only be very inadequately repaying you for much valuable assistance rendered, and much very pleasant companionship during the time of your pupilage with me. And do not think that because I have not expressed much voluble regret at this abrupt severance of our connection I do not feel it, for I do very keenly, I assure you; but I see quite clearly that the thing is inevitable, therefore to complain about it would be both useless and foolish.

“Now, there is one other way in which I can help you; and when I have explained to you how tremendous is the power which I propose to place in your hands you will understand, more clearly than I could show you in any

other way, the absolute trust that I repose in you. For I tell you this, Dick, in all sincerity, there is not another person in the whole circle of my acquaintance—and it is pretty wide—whom I feel I could safely trust with this power, so potent is it for evil as well as good. But I am convinced that I can trust you; and that is why I have determined to endow you with the ability to perform deeds which to many people will seem positively miraculous.

“You have often expressed amazement at the uniform success which attends my treatment of even my most difficult cases, both medical and surgical, but especially the surgical; and I know, from the remarks you have made, that you attribute those successes purely to the extent of my knowledge. Well, of course, knowledge has something to do with it; but the true secret of my success lies in the free use which I make of hypnotism. Yes, no doubt you are surprised; for you have never seen me employ any of the well-known methods of the ordinary hypnotist. Very true. But my method is not the ordinary method at all; it is one which I claim as my own exclusive discovery, and it is as far in advance of ordinary hypnotism as that is in advance of the methods of the stage hypnotist.

“Almost at the outset of my professional career I directed my attention to the investigation of hypnotism, determined to ascertain whether or not there was anything in the claims set up by its exponents; and I soon discovered that there was something in it, despite the disrepute cast upon it by the grotesque performances of certain so-called entertainers. There is no need for me to detail to you the successive steps by which I at length attained my present knowledge of the marvellous powers of the science. Let it suffice me to say that by diligent study of it I eventually acquired such a mastery of it that it has enabled me to—well, to put it mildly—succeed where but for it I must have failed. And a large measure of this success is due to the fact that I have discovered an infallible method of instantly hypnotising a patient

without that patient’s knowledge. They are hypnotised, but they don’t know it; haven’t the remotest suspicion of it. Then I convey to them a powerful suggestion that my treatment of them is going to be absolutely successful, and—there you have the whole secret.”

Humphreys paused for a moment, as if considering whether or not he should say more; then he gazed abstractedly at his carefully kept finger nails, and his right hand wandered to his waistcoat pocket. Then, looking up, he extended the hand toward Dick, saying:

“Just lend me your penknife a moment, will you?”

Dick produced the knife and held it out to Humphreys, who looked at it, then shrank back.

“Good heavens, man,” he exclaimed, “I asked for a penknife, not for an adder! Where did you get that brute from?”

With an inarticulate cry, and an expression of unutterable disgust and loathing, Maitland dropped the penknife to the floor, and then stamped on it savagely, grinding the heel of his boot on it as though grinding the head of a snake into the ground.

“Why, Dick!” exclaimed Humphreys, looking his assistant square in the eye; “what are you doing? What has that good knife been doing to you that you should treat it in that barbarous manner?”

Maitland stared back blankly into the Doctor’s smiling eyes for a moment, then looked long at the penknife on the floor, and finally stooped and cautiously took it between his forefinger and thumb, eyeing it doubtfully the while. Then he suddenly sat down, pulled out his pocket handkerchief, and mopped off the perspiration that freely bedewed his face.

“Well, I’ll be shot!” he ejaculated. “What an extraordinary experience! Will you believe me, Doctor, when I tell you that as I drew this penknife out of my waistcoat pocket it actually seemed to change into an adder in my hand? There was the flat, wicked-looking head, the malevolent eyes, the characteristic markings of the body, and, above all, there was the feeling of it writhing strongly in my grasp, as though it were trying to get enough of its length clear to turn and strike me! Talk about Aaron’s rod and those of the old Egyptian necromancers turning into serpents! Why, I could have sworn that this knife of mine did precisely the same thing! Now, there is a problem for you, Doctor: What sort of mental aberration was it that caused me to imagine such an extraordinary thing as that, eh?”

“Simply, my dear boy, that I hypnotised you ‘unbeknownst’, so to speak, in illustration of what I have been telling you,” answered the Doctor, laying his hand upon Dick’s shoulder. “Hope I didn’t scare you very severely, eh?”

“N–o,” answered Dick slowly, “you did not actually scare me, Doctor; but you managed to give me such a thrill of horror and disgust as I have not experienced for many a long day. But, I say, do you really mean to tell me, in sober earnest, that that abominable experience was due to hypnotic suggestion on your part?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Humphreys. “I wanted to bring home to you in a very convincing manner the power which the hypnotist exercises over his subject. I could have done it even more convincingly, perhaps, by commanding you to take that perfectly cold poker in your hand, and then suggesting to you that it was red hot, when—despite the fact of the poker being cold—your hand would have been most painfully blistered. But probably the ‘adder’ experiment was convincing enough, eh?”

“It was indeed,” assented Dick with a little reminiscent shudder. “But look here, Doctor, you say that you hypnotised me. When did you do it? I didn’t

see you do anything peculiar."

"No, my boy, of course you didn't, because I adopted my own especial method, which is instantaneous and undetectable, and which I will teach you if you care to learn it; for I seem to foresee that there may be occasions, by and by, when you get out to South Africa, when you may find the power extremely useful to you, particularly if you should get any medical or surgical work to do. In such a case just hypnotise your patient in the way that I will teach you, then powerfully suggest to him that your treatment is going to cure him—and it will do so. As to when I got you under my influence, it was done while I asked you to lend me your penknife."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Dick; "it is marvellous, perfectly marvellous; and if I did not know you to be an absolutely truthful man I do not think I could bring myself to believe it. Now I can understand what you meant when you spoke of the potency of hypnotism for good or for evil, and why, as I understand, you have never yet dared to pass on the secret of your power to anyone else. But I swear to you, Doctor, that, if you will entrust it to me, I will never, under any circumstances whatsoever, use it except for a good purpose, nor will I ever pass on the secret to anyone else except with your express permission. And now that you have given me an idea of its capabilities I simply long to know the secret, for it seems to me that a chap with your powers could come very near to working miracles."

"Yes," assented Humphreys quietly, "that is so; indeed, even with my imperfect knowledge—for I have not yet nearly mastered all the possibilities of the science—I have done things that without its aid would have been impossible. And now, if you like, I will initiate you into the secret of my power, which is very simple after all, and which, once known, will enable you to do everything that I can do. First of all, however, I propose to throw you into a cataleptic sleep, in order that, while you are in

that condition, I may imbue you with an absolute faith in yourself, without which everything that I can teach you would be practically useless, at least until you had acquired faith in yourself by the somewhat slow and laborious process which I had to pursue. I had to acquire faith in myself and my powers by repeated experiments extending over a period of several months; but you have not time for that, so I must imbue you with it by the process of suggestion while you are in a state of trance. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, quite," answered Dick, with a quick indrawing of the breath; for now that it came to the point he suddenly found that to submit himself unreservedly to the hands of even his friend Humphreys, for the purposes of an experiment that smacked rather strongly of the uncanny, was something of a nerve-trying experience. Humphreys evidently noted his momentary hesitation, for he said:

"You need not have the least fear; you will be profoundly unconscious during the period of sleep, and will awake without the slightest trace of any unpleasant feeling. Now, stretch yourself out comfortably on that sofa, and do exactly as I tell you."

When Dick descended to the surgery, a few minutes late, the next morning, he found his friend Humphreys, with his coat off, his shirt sleeves rolled up, and his clothes protected by a white apron extending from his throat to the tops of his boots, busily engaged in dusting his bottles and the shelves whereon they stood.

As Dick entered, the Doctor, mounted upon a step ladder, looked down at him with a smile and nod of welcome, and said:

"Well, my boy, how did you sleep, and how do you feel after your ordeal of last night?"

Dick laughed joyously. “My ‘ordeal’!” he exclaimed. “I hope I may never have to undergo a more trying ordeal than that. I slept like a top, thank you, and feel as fit as a fiddle this morning, indeed I don’t know that I ever felt so fit in all my life before. But that is not all: I have not the remotest idea what mysterious thing you did to me last night, but this I know, that you have imparted to me a something that I have never hitherto possessed. I feel this morning a buoyancy of spirit that it seems to me no amount of disappointment could damp or lessen for a moment, and I have a belief in myself so complete, so boundless, that I feel I cannot help but be successful in this new venture of mine upon which I am about to embark.”

“Yes,” said Humphreys, nodding his head in a manner which very clearly expressed his satisfaction, “that is the result of your ‘ordeal’, and it will be quite permanent. Mind you, I don’t say that you will always feel quite so buoyant and confident as you do at this moment, for it is beyond the power of any man to make another absolutely immune to circumstances; but in spite of circumstances, however adverse, you will always retain some at least of your present buoyancy and confidence. I do not think you will ever sink into that condition of utter and abject despair which overwhelms some people and drives them to suicide. To change the subject. Are you still minded to go to the docks this morning in quest of a shipmaster benevolently enough inclined to allow you to work your passage out to South Africa?”

“Rather!” answered Dick. “That is to say, if you think you can spare me for a few hours.”

“Of course I can spare you,” answered Humphreys. “And I would advise you to go immediately after breakfast, for, as you know, ‘it is the early bird that catches the worm.’ But how do you propose to set about your quest? Not quite haphazard, I suppose?”

“No,” answered Dick. “I thought of getting the *Shipping Gazette*, and perhaps the *Telegraphy* and consulting their advertisement pages, with the view of learning what ships are on the berth for South African ports, where they are lying, and their date of sailing.”

“An excellent idea,” declared the Doctor. “As soon as Polly has put breakfast upon the table we will send her out to get the papers, and you can consult them and prepare a list of likely vessels before you go out.”

This was done; and by nine o’clock, Dick, having breakfasted, was ready to sally forth on the first stage of his journey in quest of fortune, duly armed with a slip of paper containing a list of some half-dozen ships loading for South Africa, “with quick dispatch.”

And two hours later he returned to the surgery, his visage beaming with satisfaction.

“Hurrah, Doctor!” he exclaimed, as he dashed in through the open doorway. “I’ve done the trick; got the skipper of the *Concordia* to allow me to work my passage out to Port Natal as ordinary seaman at a shilling a month. I ‘sign on’ at the shipping office the day after to-morrow, and have to be on board by eight o’clock the same evening in readiness to haul out of dock at daylight on the following morning.”

Chapter Three.

Before the Mast.

The remainder of Dick Maitland’s time in England was pretty fully occupied in comforting and encouraging his mother, in view of the pending separation, and in getting his somewhat slender wardrobe ready and packed

for the voyage. The first-mentioned part of his task proved very much more difficult than the other, for Mrs Maitland was rather a helpless kind of person, and had already come to look to Dick for advice and help in every sort of difficulty, whether great or small; the prospect, therefore, of being henceforth obliged to look after herself and manage her affairs unaided filled her at first with dismay. Besides, there was the separation from her son, the feeling that she knew not whether she would ever again set eyes on him in this world, and the terrible uncertainty generally of the future, to further distract her; but at length the buoyancy and unquenchable hopefulness of Dick's spirit had its effect upon her; and, finally, when the moment of parting came, she had been brought to a frame of mind that enabled her to say the last words of farewell almost with calmness. As for Dick, he had already received Humphreys' assurance that he would keep in touch with Mrs Maitland, and see, in conjunction with his friend Graham, the solicitor, that she came to no harm; therefore he had few fears for her immediate future; while, for the rest, he was confident that before his mother's little capital became exhausted he would have found means to replenish it. He spent with her the remainder of the day upon which he had interviewed the skipper of the *Concordia*, and practically the whole of that which succeeded it, finally bidding her farewell about six o'clock in the evening, in order that he might spend the remainder of the day with Humphreys, with whom he had still much of importance to discuss.

Upon Dick's return to Number 19 Paradise Street he found the genial Doctor so busily engaged in dispensing drugs and advice that the two had time for little more than a mutual nod of greeting; but later on, when the last patient had departed and business had been brought to a close for the night, they sat down together for a chat over a cup of coffee and—so far as Humphreys was concerned—a pipe. Dick had not yet taken to tobacco, and Humphreys, although an inveterate smoker himself, so far from urging his young friend to adopt the habit, had strongly dissuaded him from having

anything to do with the weed, at least until he had reached his twenty-first birthday, learnedly descanting upon the injurious effects of nicotine upon the immature constitution, and incidentally warning him to eschew narcotics generally, which, he insisted, were always injurious, and only to be resorted to, even medically, when it became a choice between a narcotic and some greater evil.

“Well, my boy,” remarked the Doctor, when they were at length comfortably settled in their respective chairs, “so you have parted with your mother. I hope you were able to cheer the poor lady and reconcile her to the separation. It is of course very hard upon her that at her time of life she should be left absolutely alone, but necessity is a pitiless jade, exacting her tribute of sorrow and suffering from all alike, from the monarch to the pauper, and when she lays her hand upon us there is no escape. But do not allow anxiety on behalf of your dear mother to worry you for a moment, lad, for I have promised to keep an eye upon her, and, as you know, I am a man of my word, and no harm shall befall her so long as I have the power to avert it. No, don’t thank me, Dick, there is no need; the satisfaction and pleasure that I shall derive from helping your dear mother will be reward enough for me, for I regard her as a personal friend, and shall consider it a privilege to be allowed to do all that I can for her.”

“And now, to pass on to another topic, let me show you the medicine chest which I intend shall be my parting gift to you. Here it is,”—producing a stout case measuring about eighteen inches long by fourteen inches wide and twelve inches high. “It is not inconveniently bulky or heavy, but it contains a practically complete assortment of drugs, sufficient in quantity to enable you to fight successfully about half a dozen cases of almost every known disease. More than that it would be inconvenient to carry about with you; and when any particular drug shows signs of exhaustion you must take timely steps to replenish your supply. And, with reference to that same

replenishment, you will find a little manuscript book, written by myself, containing full instructions in the art of preparing several of the drugs from their parent plants, which I believe you will find exceedingly useful." Here Humphreys' talk became professional and his speech surcharged with technicalities—for he was an enthusiast in everything relating to the combating and cure of disease, and far into the small hours he descanted learnedly upon his beloved science, confiding to and instructing Dick in many valuable secrets that, by dint of laborious research and much consumption of midnight oil, he had wrung from Dame Nature. And on many an occasion in the not-far-distant future Dick Maitland had ample cause to look back with gratitude upon that long midnight conversation.

With exemplary punctuality young Maitland presented himself at the shipping office at ten o'clock in the morning, and duly "signed on" as ordinary seaman in the good ship *Concordia*, bound for Natal; Mr Sutcliffe, the chief mate, privately congratulating Captain Roberts, the skipper of the ship, immediately afterwards, upon his good fortune in securing so "likely" a hand for the small sum of one shilling per month, and expressing his fixed determination to "make a man of him" before they reached the Line. At the private suggestion of the said chief mate, Dick lost no time in conveying his belongings to the ship and depositing his bedding in the best-sheltered bunk in the forecastle; after which he returned to Number 19 Paradise Street, where he spent the few hours of freedom remaining to him in assisting his friend the Doctor, and absorbing further knowledge from him. Finally, as the clocks in the immediate neighbourhood were striking the hour of eight in the evening, Dick stepped over the rail of the *Concordia* and formally reported himself to the chief mate, thereafter repairing to the forecastle and making his preparations for the night. He was the first hand to join the ship, notwithstanding the fact that the entire crew had been ordered to be on board not later than eight o'clock that evening; and it was not until close

upon midnight that the remainder found their way down from the neighbouring public houses, all of them as surly and quarrelsome as bears at the termination of their short period of liberty. Fortunately for Dick, all hands were too far gone in drink to admit of their quarrelsomeness going further than words, and eventually, by about one o'clock in the morning, he was able to compose himself to sleep, to the accompaniment of the snores and mutterings of his companions—thirteen in number.

Many lads in Dick Maitland's position, and brought up amid refined surroundings, as he had been, would have regarded with horror and loathing such a situation as that in which he now found himself, and would have been overwhelmed with self-pity at the cruelly hard luck which forced them to herd with such uncongenial companions in such a pig sty of a place as the *Concordia's* forecastle just then presented; but Dick was something of a philosopher, and was, moreover, full of "grit". He held the doctrine that a man can make what he chooses of his surroundings, and always find in them something of amusement or interest, if he cares to look for it; and now he consoled himself with the reminder that life in that forecastle, and among those men, whose highest ideal of happiness seemed to be helpless intoxication, would after all be but a brief experience, out of which it would be hard indeed if he could not learn some useful lesson. With this philosophic reflection, he curled himself up in his blankets and dropped into a sound, dreamless sleep.

At six o'clock next morning the mate came thundering upon the fore scuttle with a handspike, following up the resounding blows with a yell of:

"All hands ahoy! tumble up there, you sleepers, and don't wait to curl your hair. Hurry up, now, and give me a chance to see who are the 'smarties' among you!"

With low growls of disgust at such rude and untimely disturbance of their slumbers the fourteen occupants of the forecastle rolled unwillingly out of their bunks and proceeded to scramble into their garments, most of them anathematising the sea life generally, and their present ship in particular. For forecastle Jack is a curious creature, and, if you are to believe him, “last voyage” is invariably the supreme period of his life, wherein has been crowded the utmost comfort and pleasure and the most remarkable adventures, while the ship on board which he happens to be at the moment is, as invariably, the slowest, ugliest, most uncomfortable, and most rotten tub that he ever had the ill luck to ship in. And all this, mind you, as likely as not before the much-maligned craft has passed out through the dock gates, or Jack has done a hand’s turn of work on board her. Dick listened with a good-tempered grin to the chorus of grumbling that was proceeding around him, interjected a merry jest or two which caused the growlers to stop in mid-career in amazement at his audacity, and then, having slipped nimbly into his clothes, he sprang up through the hatchway and presented himself first on deck of the forecastle hands, to be greeted by the mate with a cheery:

“Well done, youngster! First to answer the call. That comes of joining your ship with an unmuddled brain. I think you and I are going to get on well together.”

“I sincerely hope so, sir,” answered Dick. “If we don’t it shall not be my fault. And although I am rather an ignoramus at present in respect of a sailor’s work generally, you will find me both willing and eager to learn.”

The mate stared at Dick for a moment with compressed eyebrows, rather taken aback at the lad’s refined tone and manner of speech; then he nodded, and remarked gruffly:

“That’s all right; if you are willing to learn I’ll take care that you have the chance. And, as a starter, you may get a broom and sweep up all this litter. But don’t heave it overboard, or you’ll have the dock people after you. Sweep it all together and put it into that empty barrel until we get out of dock and can heave it over the side.”

The rest of the forecastle hands now came stumbling up on deck, and were set by the mate to various tasks, pending the opening of the dock gates and the arrival of the tug which was to tow the *Concordia* down the river. At length the order was given to unmoor ship, the dock gates swung open, the vessel was warped through the opening to where the tug awaited her, the towrope was passed, and presently the *Concordia* was heading down the river toward Gravesend, from whence, having first shipped her passengers, she was to take her final departure for the southern hemisphere.

The *Concordia* was a steel barque of eight hundred and seventy-four tons register, Clyde built, and modelled upon lines that combined a very fair cargo-carrying capacity with high speed possibilities. She was a very handsome vessel to look at, and Captain William Roberts, who had commanded her since she left the stocks some two years prior to the date at which we make his and her acquaintance, was inordinately proud of her, sparing no pains either to himself or his ship’s crew—and especially, his boatswain—to keep her as trim and neat as a man-o’-war. The decks were regularly holystoned every morning when the ship was at sea—to the intense disgust of the crew—the brasswork was as regularly polished, not with the usual rottenstone and oil, but with special metal polish provided out of the skipper’s private purse; and there was no more certain way of “putting the Old Man’s back up” than for a man to allow himself to be seen knocking the ashes of his pipe out against any portion of the ship’s painted work. It was even asserted of Captain Roberts that, so anxious was he to maintain the smart appearance of the ship, he would, whenever she ran into

a calm, have the quarterboat lowered and manned, in order that he might pull round his vessel and assure himself that her masts were all accurately stayed to precisely the same angle of rake; and woe betide the unhappy boatswain if there seemed to be the slightest occasion for fault-finding.

The *Concordia* was a beamy ship in proportion to her length, and she carried a full poop extending forward to within about twenty feet of her mainmast, underneath which was a handsome saloon, or cuddy, fitted with berth accommodation for twenty passengers; for although the steam liners have, for all practical purposes, absorbed the passenger traffic, there still remains a small residue of the travelling public who, either for health or economy's sake, choose a well-found, well-built sailing clipper when they desire to make a sea voyage.

Such was the vessel in which young Dick Maitland was to make his first, and, as he hoped, his only, essay as a seaman before the mast, and after the slight sketch which has been given of her and her skipper, it will be readily seen that he could scarcely have hit upon a craft where he would be likely to have more hard work, or better opportunities for the acquirement of a large measure of seafaring knowledge in a very short time.

Mr Sutcliffe, the chief mate, had been favourably impressed by Dick from the moment when the two had encountered each other at the shipping office, and Mr Sutcliffe's method of showing his favour was to provide his favourites with an ample sufficiency of work to do. The ship had, therefore, not been out of dock half an hour when Dick was sent aloft with an able seaman named Barrett to get the fore and main royal-yards across; and so eager was the lad to learn as much as he could that Barrett very willingly permitted him to do all the work, merely directing him what to do and how to do it, and at the same time instructing him as to the nomenclature and purposes of the various parts of the gear which were manipulated during the

operation. Naturally, Dick, being a novice, took about twice as long as his companion would have taken over the job; but so eager was he to learn and such aptitude did he exhibit that he won the unqualified approval of Barrett, as well as of Mr Sutcliffe, who had been keeping a sharp eye upon what was going on aloft. As for Dick, although it was the first time that he had ever been aloft in anything deserving the name of a ship, and although the hull upon which he looked down seemed ridiculously inadequate to support the lofty spar upon which he was working—suggesting the idea that unless he exercised the utmost caution in the disposition of his weight he must inevitably capsize the entire complicated structure—he felt neither giddy nor nervous, but went about his work with all the coolness and confidence of a thoroughly seasoned hand.

Arrived off Gravesend, the anchor was let go, and the ship swung to the now fast ebbing tide, the quarterboat was lowered, and the skipper was rowed ashore, while Mr Sutcliffe went the rounds of the decks and satisfied himself that everything had been done to make the *Concordia* perfectly ready to get under way at a moment's notice; the yards were accurately squared by the lifts and braces, the running gear hauled taut and neatly coiled down, the decks once more swept; and then the worthy mate found himself compelled to admit, with a sigh, that nothing more could be done, at least to advantage, until the passengers should have come off and the ship be once more under way. These two events happened late in the afternoon, and meanwhile the occupants of the forecastle were sent below to snatch a few hours' rest in preparation for the coming night, during which Dick Maitland had an opportunity to become better acquainted with his messmates. For a wonder these proved to be without exception British, consisting of two Irishmen, five Scotchmen, and one Welshman, while the rest were English. There was nothing very remarkable about any of them, they were all just ordinary average sailormen, but it did not take Dick very long to make up his mind that, with the possible exception of the carpenter,

and Barrett, the A.B. who had been his companion and instructor aloft during the morning, the five Scotchmen were the pick of the bunch. But all hands seemed to be very decent fellows in their own rough way, now that they had had time to recover from their previous day's debauch, and manifested a distinct disposition to be friendly toward the young greenhorn whom they found in their midst, especially as they had already had an opportunity to see that the greenhorn's greenness was not of such a character as to entail upon them very much extra work.

The afternoon was well advanced when at length the passengers, seventeen in number, came off to the ship; and the moment that they and their baggage were embarked the anchor was hove up, the tug once more came alongside and took the towrope, and the *Concordia* proceeded upon her voyage, the hope being freely expressed, both fore and aft, that there would be no more anchoring until the ship should have arrived under the shadow, so to speak, of Natal Bluff. As soon as the ship was fairly under way, and the anchor at the cathead, the chief and second mates picked the watches, and Dick, to his satisfaction, found himself picked by Mr Sutcliffe as a member of that officer's watch.

As the ship drew down toward the lower reaches of the river she met a slight breeze breathing out from the north-east, to which she spread, first, her fore-and-aft canvas, and, later on, her square sails, so that by the time of her arrival off Deal, near midnight, she was practically independent of the tug, which at that point cast her off. Here also the pilot left her, taking with him a goodly packet of letters from the passengers to their friends ashore; and the *Concordia*, spreading her studding-sails, swept on into the broadening waters of the English Channel. With the other letters went one from Dick to his mother and another to Dr Humphreys, written during his watch below.

The fair wind which the *Concordia* fell in with at the mouth of the Thames lasted long enough to carry the ship, not only clear of the Channel, but also well to the westward of Ushant, Captain Roberts having availed himself to the utmost of the opportunity to make as much westing as possible, as his experience had taught him that at that season of the year the prevailing winds which he might expect to meet with to the northward of Madeira would most probably be strong from the south-westward. And the event proved the correctness of that mariner's surmise, for on his seventh day out from Gravesend he fell in with the expected shift of wind, and four hours later the *Concordia* was fighting her way to the southward, under double-reefed topsails, against a heavy and fast-rising sea.

Those seven days had made a vast amount of difference to Dick Maitland, so far as his usefulness as a seaman was concerned. In that comparatively brief period he had contrived not only to learn the name and function of every bit of running rigging in the ship, but also to lay his hand unerringly upon any required halyard, brace, sheet, downhaul, clewline, or other item of gear in the darkest night; he was as active and almost as handy aloft as the smartest A.B. in the ship; and he proved to be a born helmsman, standing his "trick" at the wheel from the very first, and leaving a straighter wake behind him than any of the other men, even when the ship was scudding before a heavy following sea. Mr Sutcliffe, the chief mate, was delighted with his young *protégé*, and declared, in unnecessarily picturesque language, that he would qualify the boy to perform the duties of an able seaman before Natal Bluff should heave in sight.

But Dick was to prove his mettle in quite another fashion before long; for the strong south-westerly breeze which the *Concordia* encountered on her seventh day out rapidly developed into so furious a gale that, after battling with it for some fourteen hours, Captain Roberts decided to heave-to under close-reefed fore and main topsails, and at eight bells—noon—the order

was accordingly given to clew up and furl the already reefed courses, and to haul down and stow the fore-topmast staysail. This, under the weather conditions of the moment, was a task requiring the services of all hands, and by the orders of the chief mate, who was conducting the operations, Dick was stationed at the weather fore clew-garnet, with three other hands. The men, having gone to their stations, were waiting for the word of command when suddenly the chain main-tack carried away, and the part attached to the sail, acting like a whip, struck one of the men who was standing by to ease it away, smashed the poor fellow's right arm above the elbow, shattered his jaw, and laid open his right cheek from the turn of the jaw to the right ear, which was all but torn away from the man's head; the force of the blow also was such as to dash the unfortunate fellow against the bulwarks so violently that he instantly fell to the deck senseless.

The accident, naturally, at once occasioned the utmost confusion, in the midst of which the mainsail promptly threshed itself to rags, the mate sprang down the poop ladder and rushed to the spot, yelling a whole string of orders, to which nobody paid the slightest attention, and Dick, with two or three others, abandoned their posts and ran to the injured man's assistance.

"Back to your stations, you skowbanks," roared the mate. "What d'ye mean by rushing about like a flock of frightened sheep? D'ye want to see the ship dismasted? Here you, Dick, and Joe, pick him up and carry him below to his bunk until the skipper can attend to him."

"I beg your pardon, sir," spoke Dick, "but I am afraid we may do the poor fellow some further injury if we attempt to carry him below. I understand that there is a spare bunk in the deckhouse where the boatswain and carpenter are quartered. May we not take him in there? And, if you will give me leave, I will attend to his hurts. I have studied both medicine and

surgery, and feel sure that I can do better for him than anyone else, excepting, of course, a qualified surgeon."

"The dickens! You don't say so?" ejaculated the mate, staring at Dick in amazement. "Very well, then, in that case you had better take charge of him. And—yes, of course, take him into the deckhouse. Now, lads, clew up that fore-course, and be lively with it; haul taut your clew-garnets, ease up your tack and sheet; man your buntlines and leach-lines; that's your sort, up with it; away aloft, some of you, and make a good, snug furl of it!"

Quickly, yet with the utmost care, the injured seaman was lifted up and carried into the deckhouse, where, in accordance with Dick's instructions, he was laid upon the table, a mattress having first been hurriedly dragged from one of the bunks and placed to receive him. Then, leaving the patient for the moment in charge of the other man, Dick hurried to the forecastle and brought up the medicine chest which had been Humphrey's parting gift to him, and his case of surgical instruments, which he opened and placed upon the carpenter's chest, to the undisguised admiration and horror of his assistant, who gazed as though fascinated at the array of highly polished saws, knives, scissors, and other instruments of queer and horribly suggestive shape. Then, dexterously removing the man's jacket and shirt while he still remained unconscious, Dick rapidly proceeded to give his patient a systematic overhaul, with the object of ascertaining the precise nature and extent of his injuries.

He had just completed this examination when the injured man showed signs of returning consciousness, at the same moment that the skipper, having heard from the mate the particulars of the accident, came bustling into the deckhouse with a bottle of brandy in one hand and a tumbler in the other, intent upon doing something, though he scarcely knew what, for the relief of the sufferer. The brandy arrived in the nick of time, and, seizing the

bottle and tumbler unceremoniously, Maitland poured out a small quantity and held the tumbler to the patient's lips. With difficulty the man contrived to swallow about a teaspoonful, which considerably revived him, and then, with a groan of anguish, strove to mumble a few words in spite of his broken jaw. Now, if ever, was the moment when Humphreys' doctrine of the efficacy of hypnotism might be effectively tested, and fixing the man's upturned gaze with his own, in the peculiar manner which Humphreys had described and illustrated, Dick said to his patient, in a quiet, yet firm and confident tone of voice:

"Now, Tom, don't attempt to say anything or ask any questions, but listen to me. You have met with an accident, but it is not at all serious; and I am going to put you right and make you quite comfortable. I shall be obliged to pull you about a bit, but understand this, you will suffer no pain whatever, and when I have finished with you you will fall into a quiet and refreshing sleep, from which you will awake without fever or complication of any sort. Now, turn over on your left side, and let me begin by attending to the injuries of your face."

To the utter amazement of the skipper and Joe—the man who had assisted Dick to carry the injured man into the deckhouse—the patient turned quietly over on his left side as directed, without a groan or any other sign of suffering, and resigned himself quite contentedly to Dick's ministrations. The latter, to all outward appearance perfectly calm and self-possessed, but inwardly full of astonishment at the complete success of his first experiment, at once proceeded with quick and deft hands to arrange in position the shattered fragments of the jaw, strapping them firmly in place with bandage and sticking plaster; then he deftly drew together the edges of the gashed cheek, stitched up the wound, applied an antiseptic dressing, and bound up the injured face in such a manner that the patient might be enabled to take liquid nourishment without disturbance of the dressings.

Lastly, he placed the broken bone of the arm in position, and firmly secured it there with splints and bandages. As Dick inserted the last pin in the bandage and arranged the arm in a comfortable position the patient closed his eyes, and a minute later his quiet and regular breathing showed that he was fast asleep!

Chapter Four.

Phil Grosvenor’s Proposition.

“Well, dash my wig,” exclaimed the skipper, his face the picture of blank astonishment, “that beats the record! Why, the man’s fast asleep, in spite of all your handling of him! How in the name of all that’s wonderful did you manage to work that miracle, youngster?”

“Oh, easily enough!” laughed Dick. “Everything is easy, you know, sir, when you understand how to do it. I learned how to do that, and a great many other very useful things, under one of the cleverest men in London, a man who would be famous but for the fact that he prefers to work in the obscurity of the East-End, and let the poor enjoy the benefit of his wonderful skill, instead of becoming a fashionable Harley Street practitioner. With your permission, sir, I will look after our friend Tom, here; and I guarantee to have him up and about again, as well as ever, before we reach the latitude of the Cape.”

“You do?” ejaculated the skipper. “Then by George, sir, you shall have the opportunity. But, look here, why didn’t you tell me that you were a doctor, when you came and asked me to allow you to work your passage out to South Africa?”

“Well, you see,” answered Dick, “I was rather down on my luck just then; I —or rather, my mother—had learned, only a few days before, that she had been robbed of all her money; and it was imperative that I should at once go out into the world and earn more for her, hence my anxiety to go to South Africa. But I was so badly off that I couldn’t even afford to pay my fare out there; I therefore determined to work my passage. And, as I considered that the fact of my being a doctor would be no recommendation to you, I decided not to mention it.”

“Ah!” remarked the skipper; “that is just where you made a big mistake; your services as a medical man would have been far more valuable to me than as an ordinary seaman. Besides, you can do better work than mere pulling and hauling and dipping your hands into the tar bucket. You are a gentleman in manner and speech, and will look like one when you get into another suit of clothes. Now, I tell you what it is; I am not going to waste you by allowing you to remain in the forecastle any longer, so just turn to and get the tar stains off your hands, shift into a white shirt and a shore-going suit of clothes, and come aft into the cuddy as ship’s surgeon. There is, very fortunately, a vacant cabin that you can have; and you may earn the rest of your passage by looking after the health of the passengers and crew —there are three or four ladies who are pretty nearly dead with seasickness, and if you can relieve ’em they’ll bless me for discovering you.”

“Oh yes,” answered Dick cheerfully, “I have no doubt I can relieve them all right! But there is one thing with regard to this arrangement that perhaps you have not thought of, Captain. Perhaps your passengers will not approve of your bringing me aft out of the forecastle to associate with them upon terms of equality.”

“Don’t you trouble your head about that, my son,” returned the skipper. “That is my affair. But I’m quite sure that they won’t object when I tell ’em

the facts of the case. Besides, they've already noticed you while you've been at the wheel, and have remarked what a well-spoken, gentlemanly young fellow you are. No, no; that'll be all right, never fear. Now, if you've finished with this poor chap for a while, you had better cut away and make yourself fit for the cuddy, and then shift aft, bag and baggage."

"Very well, sir, I will, and many thanks to you for the promotion," answered Dick. "But we cannot leave Tom here on the table, comfortable as he is. Therefore, with your permission, sir, I will call in a couple of hands, who, with Joe and myself, will be able to put him into the spare bunk, where he will be out of everybody's way, and where I can attend to him quite conveniently."

To this proposal the worthy skipper at once consented; and half an hour later Dick, having discarded his working clothes for a suit of blue serge, and otherwise made himself presentable, moved aft and established himself in the spare cabin which Captain Roberts placed at his disposal, the skipper having meanwhile ensured a cordial reception for him from the passengers by telling them such particulars of Dick's history as he was acquainted with, and also describing, with much picturesque detail, the masterly manner in which the lad had patched up the injured seaman.

Dick had no reason to complain of the manner in which the passengers received him among them; on the contrary, his reception was cordial in the extreme, especially by the women, to whose sense of romance the lad's story, as told by the skipper, appealed very strongly. The introduction took place just as the passengers—or at least those of them who were not too ill—were about to sit down to tiffin, and Dick was assigned a place at the long table halfway between the head and the foot, where Captain Roberts and Mr Sutcliffe respectively presided; but the young man declined to sit down

until he had visited and relieved his new patients, consisting of five ladies and three men.

His method of dealing with these unfortunates was simplicity itself. Relying wholly upon the wonderful power of hypnotism with which his friend Humphreys had endowed him, he prepared for each patient a draught consisting of sugar and water only, slightly flavoured with an aromatic bitter; and, as he presented this, he got the patient under his influence in the instantaneous manner which Humphreys had taught him, at the same time saying, in a quietly confident tone of voice:

“Now, I want you to drink this, please. It is an absolutely unfailing and instantaneous remedy for the distressing complaint from which you are suffering, and the moment that you have swallowed it every trace of discomfort will disappear, to return no more. You will feel so thoroughly well that very probably you will wish to rise and dress; but I do not advise that. On the contrary, I recommend you to remain where you are until you have had a few hours’ refreshing sleep, after which you can get up to dinner. That is right,”—as the patient swallowed the draught. “Now you feel quite all right, don’t you? Yes. You will feel very sleepy presently; just let yourself go; and when you awake you will find yourself as well as you ever were in your life.”

And, incredible though it may appear, that is precisely what happened. What was perhaps at least equally remarkable was that, although these good people had all suffered more or less from seasickness every day since leaving Gravesend, from that moment they were entirely free from it for the remainder of the voyage.

Among the passengers who were thus suddenly and completely cured was a Mr Philip Grosvenor, who, having been crossed in love, and, moreover, possessing far more money than he knew what to do with, while he had no

disposition to dissipate it on the racecourse or at the gambling tables, was going out to South Africa to shoot big game; and this young man—he was only a month or two over twenty-six years of age—at once struck up a warm friendship with Dick, originating, possibly, in a feeling of gratitude for his prompt relief from those sufferings which had hitherto made his life a burden to him, from the moment when the South Foreland light had sunk beneath the horizon astern of the *Concordia*.

He made his first advances after dinner on the evening of the day which had witnessed his cure. As Dick had foretold, he fell asleep immediately after swallowing the draught which the young medico had administered, had awakened, feeling absolutely well, just in time to rise and dress for dinner, had partaken of a very hearty meal, and thereafter had made his way up on the poop to gaze upon the stirring spectacle of the ship battling with and gallantly holding her own against the raging wind and sea—and possibly also to revel in his new-found immunity from the horrors of *mal de mer*. Here he had found Dick, a born sailor, walking the heaving and plunging deck and chatting animatedly with Mr Sutcliffe, who, honest man, felt somewhat at a loss to determine precisely the manner of his behaviour toward the youngster whom he had so recently patronised and ordered about, but who was now translated aft to the quarterdeck upon an equal footing with himself. Dick had just about succeeded in putting to flight the worthy chief mate's feeling of awkwardness and embarrassment when Grosvenor appeared and joined the pair, whereupon Sutcliffe, who was rather shy with the passengers, sheered off, upon the pretence of attending to his duty, and left the two together.

"By Jove, Doctor, but this is a grand sight, isn't it?" exclaimed Dick's recent patient. "Never saw the like of it before, and shouldn't be in form to see it now, but for you. 'Pon my word, you know, you are a wonder—a perfect wonder! Give me your arm and let's walk about a bit, shall we?

That’s right. D’you know I don’t think I ever felt more fit in my life than I do at this moment; and to reflect that only this morning I was—ugh! Tell you what it is, Doctor, you should patent that prescription of yours, have it made up, and sell it at five shillings the bottle. You would soon make your fortune. And I’ll write a testimonial for you. ‘Took one dose and never needed another!’ eh? No, hang it all, that wouldn’t do, either, rather too ambiguous, eh? sort of double meaning in that kind of statement—what? But, joking apart, old man, I’d very strongly advise you to patent the thing and advertise it extensively. I’m certain that there’s money in it.”

“Possibly,” agreed Dick, who had no intention of taking this young man into his confidence to the extent of explaining the actual character of the draught. “Unfortunately, however, to do as you suggest needs the preliminary expenditure of a good deal of money, which is a singularly scarce commodity with me. No, I am afraid that plan of yours will scarcely do; it is true that I am particularly anxious to make my fortune, and that, too, without a moment’s loss of time, but I am afraid I shall have to hit upon some other way of doing it.”

“Ah! Well, what is your plan, if it is a fair question? Excuse me, old chap, I’m not asking out of mere vulgar, impertinent curiosity, but at the dinner table to-night somebody mentioned that you are working your passage out to South Africa. What do you propose to do when you arrive there?”

“Heaven only knows; certainly I do not,” answered Dick with a lugubrious smile. “When I step ashore on the wharf at Port Natal I shall not know in what direction to turn my steps, or where to look for a meal or a night’s lodging. Also the whole of my available capital will consist in the wages which I shall take up when Captain Roberts gives me my discharge, amounting, probably, to a couple of shillings.”

“What?” ejaculated Grosvenor incredulously. “Oh, I say, my dear chap, you are not in earnest, surely?”

“Indeed I am, then, in deadly earnest,” answered Dick. “But I am not worrying. I am strong and more than willing to work, and I mean to take the very first job that comes to hand, let it be what it will. I believe that if a chap is willing to work he can always get something to do, though it may not be precisely the kind of work that he would like. And when once I have secured the means of providing myself with board and lodging I shall be able to look round for something better.”

“Yes—yes, of course you will,” responded Grosvenor, a little dubiously. “I say, old chap,” he continued admiringly, “you are a ‘gritty’ beggar, and no mistake! I wonder if you would mind telling me your story?”

“No, not at all,” answered Dick; “there is nothing in it that I need be ashamed of.” And forthwith he proceeded to give his new-found friend a brief yet clear account of the circumstances which had resulted in his being reduced to his present plight.

“By Jove, Maitland, I admire you!” exclaimed Grosvenor when Dick had come to the end of his story. “There is not one man in a hundred who, under similar circumstances, would have tackled the situation with the indomitable pluck and whole-hearted belief in himself that you have shown; and I feel sure that such courage will meet with its just reward. You are the kind of fellow that always comes out on top, simply because you will not allow yourself to be kept down. Now, look here, I am going to make a proposition to you—and, understand me, it is on purely selfish grounds that I am going to make it. I am going out to South Africa because I want to forget a—well, a very bitter disappointment that I have recently sustained, and the particulars of which I will perhaps tell you some day if you fall in with my proposition, as I hope you will. The way in which I propose to

conquer this disappointment of mine is to go in for a life of adventure—exploration of the interior, big-game shooting, and that sort of thing, you understand. I have heard some most thrilling stories of the wonderful things and people that are to be found in the interior of Africa, and, while many of them are doubtless lies, there is evidence enough of a perfectly reliable character to prove that there is at least a certain amount of truth in others; and it is my purpose to ascertain at firsthand the exact measure of that truth. Take, for example, the contention of certain antiquarians that the ruins of Ophir must exist somewhere upon the east coast. I have read pretty nearly everything that has been written upon that subject, and I am convinced of the soundness of the contention, as I am also of the contention that Zimbabwé is not ancient Ophir. Then, again, there is the statement of the existence of a mysterious white race in the far interior, which persistently crops up at intervals. It would be interesting in the extreme to be able to settle that matter beyond a doubt, wouldn't it? Very well, then; my idea is to attempt to find ancient Ophir, and also the mysterious white race, if possible.

"Of course I know that what I propose is scarcely in the nature of a picnic; it no doubt means a good deal of hardship, privation, and danger; in fact, my friends without exception pronounced me a fool for thinking of engaging in such an undertaking, while at least half of them confidently prophesy that if I make the attempt I shall never return. Well, that is as may be; plenty of better fellows than I have gone under in such excursions, but, on the other hand, as big duffers as I am have done great things and turned up again all right, so there is no particular reason that I can see why I should not do the same. And so far as money is concerned I have more than enough to enable me to equip the expedition in such a manner as to ensure the minimum of discomfort with the maximum of everything necessary to success. The only item that I have had any doubt as to my ability to obtain is—a suitable companion; for of course in my maddest moments I have

never been ass enough to contemplate going into so big a thing single-handed. But the precise kind of man that I want was not to be found either among my friends or elsewhere at home, so I came away without him, trusting that I should be lucky enough to pick him up somewhere on the way; and, by Jove, Maitland, the event has justified my trust; for I have found in you exactly the kind of man I have had in my mind all along—or, rather, somebody better, for in addition to your other qualifications you have very considerable skill as a physician and surgeon, which is what I never hoped to secure, even in my most sanguine moments."

"Do you wish me to infer, then, that you are proposing to take me as a hired assistant—or what?" demanded Dick.

"Well, yes—and no," answered Grosvenor, with a somewhat embarrassed laugh. "As a hired assistant, certainly, because the services of a fellow like yourself would be of incalculable value to me, especially when the inevitable sickness comes along. But I want particularly to secure you because—well, to be perfectly plain and blunt, because I have taken a great fancy to you, and because I recognise in you exactly the qualities that would make of you not only an invaluable assistant but also a perfectly ideal partner, friend, and companion. Therefore, in your capacity as medical attendant to the expedition I propose to offer you a regular fixed salary of, let us say, two guineas a day, or, taking one month with another, sixty-five pounds a month—the first six months to be paid in advance—and, in your capacity of partner, all the ivory, skins, and other matters which we may accumulate during the progress of the expedition, except what I may desire to appropriate as trophies wherewith to adorn the ancestral halls."

Dick laughed. "Thank you very much," he said, "but I couldn't possibly accede to your terms; they are altogether too glaringly unfair. The salaried part I don't at all object to, because of course if you desire to include a

medical man in your retinue you must pay him a fair salary, and two guineas a day is not too much, in my opinion. But when you come to talk about my share of the spoils, in my capacity of your partner, it becomes a different matter altogether, since I cannot contribute a farthing to the expenses of the expedition, therefore I cannot by any process of reasoning be entitled to any share of its possible profits. No; if you care to engage me as doctor, at the salary that you have named, I will accept the post with pleasure and my most hearty thanks, because the pay will suffice to keep the dear old Mater going; and when we return to civilisation—if we ever do—I shall be able to set about the task in earnest of 'making my fortune.'"

"But, look here my dear fellow," remonstrated Grosvenor, "it is just nonsense in you—if you will excuse my saying so—to refuse the second part of my proposal, for this reason. I am not undertaking this expedition as a speculation, or with any idea of making it pay. I have already a much larger income than I know what to do with, and for that and other reasons money does not come into the question at all. Like other fellows who go hunting, I shall naturally desire to have a few trophies to exhibit as tokens of my prowess; but, beyond those, I shall have no use at all for ivory, skins, horns, and such other matters as we may acquire; therefore you may as well have them as anyone else, especially as you are avowedly out fortune-hunting. Besides, two guineas a day is an altogether inadequate rate of remuneration for a young fellow of your exceptional ability—why, before you had been practising a month you would be earning four or five times that amount, and you will be sacrificing that possibility for an indefinite period if you elect to join forces with me. Therefore I contend that if any profits of any kind accrue to the expedition, you are justly entitled to them, and I shall not be content unless you consent to take them; indeed if you refuse I shall be obliged to withdraw my offer altogether, much as I shall regret having to do so."

Under those circumstances there was of course nothing more to be said; and finally Dick agreed to Grosvenor's proposal in its entirety, the more readily that, after all, when he came to reflect upon it, there was much truth in what Grosvenor had said with regard to the possible loss which Dick might sustain by attaching himself to the expedition and burying himself in the wilds for a more or less indefinite period.

As time went on there could be no doubt as to the fact that Grosvenor was genuinely pleased with the arrangement by which he had secured Dick as his companion in the projected expedition, nor did he make any secret of the fact that he regarded the terms of the agreement as eminently satisfactory from his own point of view; while Dick, for his part, felt that he had done not at all badly in securing a post at a salary of sixty-five pounds a month, to be enjoyed the moment that he set foot on shore. Moreover, that salary was a sure thing for at least six months, and since Grosvenor insisted upon paying in advance for that period Dick would be in a position to remit quite a nice little sum home to his mother, immediately upon his arrival on South African soil. Both parties to the agreement were thus equally satisfied, and thenceforward devoted much of their time to elaborating their plans, in order that no time should be lost upon their arrival.

Grosvenor, with the confidence of the inexperienced, was quite prepared unhesitatingly to plunge into the very heart of darkest Africa with no other companions than Dick, and a few Kafir or Hottentot "boys" as servants; but Dick, although the younger of the two, had discretion enough to understand that this would be a very unwise thing to do, and that it would be altogether more prudent in every way to secure the services of some white man, well acquainted with the country, and the ways and language of the natives, to act as a sort of general overseer and factotum, and this view Grosvenor at length somewhat unwillingly accepted.

Meanwhile, Tom, the injured man, made the most extraordinarily rapid progress toward recovery, under Dick's skilled treatment, much to the enhancement of that young gentleman's reputation; and some appreciable time before the period that Dick had named he was out again and on duty, very little the worse for his accident save that his right cheek bore a scar which he would carry with him to his grave.

At length a day arrived when Captain Roberts, having worked out his observations for the determination of the ship's latitude and longitude, made the welcome announcement that, if the wind held and all went well, the passengers, by this time thoroughly weary of the—to most of them—changeless monotony of sea and sky, might hope to feast their eyes upon the glowing picture of a South African landscape within the ensuing twenty-four hours; and at once everybody became cheerfully busy upon the task of packing up in preparation for the joyous moment when they might exchange the eternal movement of the rocking deck for terra firma, and rejoice once more in the sight of trees and grass and flowers, of busy streets, and of the much-talked-of beauties of suburban Berea. Dick Maitland's possessions were so few that they needed very little packing to prepare them for transit from ship to shore, and when he had finished he adjourned to Grosvenor's cabin to assist that gentleman, who, since dispensing with the services of a valet, seemed quite incapable of replacing his possessions in the receptacles from which he had taken them upon the beginning of the voyage. The remainder of the day was passed in the animated discussion of future plans and arrangements, while one effect of the imminent termination of the long ocean voyage was the sudden development of an amazing access of cordiality between people who had hitherto manifested but little interest in each other, accompanied by pressing invitations to "come and stay a few days at my place whenever you happen to be in the neighbourhood". Also a few of the more enthusiastic occupants of the cuddy remained on deck until midnight, in the hope of catching a

glimpse of the Bluff light before turning in, only to retire to their cabins, discontented and grumbling, because at eight bells the gleam still obstinately refused to appear on the horizon over the port bow, where Mr Sutcliffe, the chief mate, had been anxiously watching for it.

But full compensation came to the disappointed ones when, awakened on the following morning about six o'clock by the voice of the mate issuing certain sharp orders from the poop, followed by the flinging down of ropes upon the deck and the cheery "yo ho's" of the sailors, as they threw their weight upon various portions of the ship's running gear, the said disappointed ones leaped from their bunks and hastened out on deck clad only in pyjamas and overcoats; for they found the ship hove-to on the starboard tack with her head to the eastward, while stretching away astern of them, from the starboard to the port quarter, was the dominating eminence of the Bluff, bush-clad from base to crest, crowned with its lighthouse and signal staff—from the latter of which was fluttering the answering pennant, acknowledging the deciphering of the *Concordia's* number—with the long breakwater jutting out into the sea from its foot, while, nearer at hand, there stretched across the scene the low outline of the Point, also bush-crowned, with the roofs of a few houses and a flagstaff or two showing above the verdure, the sandy beach, with the eternal surf thundering upon it in long lines of rainbow spray, reaching for mile after mile athwart the ship's stern, and for background the far-stretching ridge of the bush-clad, villa-studded range of the Berea, the windows of its houses already ablaze with the ardent beams of the newly risen sun. The prospect is a charming one at any time, but never more so perhaps than when it is suddenly presented, fresh, green, and beautiful, in the clear atmosphere and the light of early morning, to the vision of those whose eyes, after seventy days of gazing upon sky and sea, are yearning to behold once more the beauties of the solid earth.

For a full hour the ship remained hove-to with her head to seaward, during which an early breakfast was served to the occupants of the cuddy; then, upon the appearance of the tug coming out over the bar, the *Concordia* wore round and headed inshore, the light sails were rapidly clewed up or hauled down, the towline was got ready for passing, and in a moment everything was bustle and apparent confusion upon the ship's decks, barefooted seamen rushing hither and thither, flinging down coils of rope on deck, casting off halyards and sheets, and dragging vociferously upon clew-garnets, clewlines, downhauls, and the other complicated paraphernalia of a ship's furniture, with the captain shouting orders from the poop, and the mate in charge of a gang of men on the forecastle getting the anchor a-cockbill ready for letting go, and preparing for the arrival of the tug alongside. Then up came the little steamer, rolling and pitching heavily upon the long ground swell, sweeping round in a long curve that brought her all but alongside the wallowing ship; a brief interchange of hails between her bridge and the *Concordia's* poop, the sudden snaking out of a whirling heaving-line from the forecastle of the latter, followed by the thin but tremendously strong steel towing hawser; and as the few remaining sheets of the ship's canvas shrivelled in to the masts and yards the tug passed ahead, the towrope rose dripping out of the water, tautened to the semblance of a metal rod, and away went the two craft, heading for the middle of the space of water that divided the two breakwaters. Half an hour later the *Concordia* came to an anchor in the spacious but shallow inner harbour opposite the railway station, and the long voyage was at an end.

But the eager passengers were not yet at liberty to go on shore. Although the *Concordia* carried a clean bill of health, certain formalities had yet to be gone through; the medical officer had still to satisfy himself that there was no sickness of any infectious kind on board before pratique was granted. And, as the medical officer happened to be a thoroughly conscientious man, the determination of this fact consumed a full hour. But at length the tedious

examination came to an end, the ship was pronounced perfectly healthy, and the boats which had been hovering round her were permitted to come alongside. Then ensued a few minutes of strenuous bargaining between passengers and boatmen, at the end of which time Dick and Grosvenor, having said goodbye to the captain and officers—Dick also included the crew in his farewell—found themselves being pulled across the few yards of water which intervened between ship and shore, and presently they stood upon the sun-blistered wharf fighting their way through an odoriferous crowd of shouting, laughing, gesticulating, and more than half-naked Kafir rickshaw-men who clamoured for the honour of dragging them the mile or so that separated the Point from Durban. But the Custom House officers had first to be placated, and Grosvenor disgustedly found himself obliged to disburse a goodly sum as duty upon his firearms and ammunition before he was permitted to retain possession of them. At length, however, the Customs barrier was successfully negotiated; and then Dick in one rickshaw, Grosvenor in another, and their baggage in a third, the two friends proceeded in triumph along the bush-bordered road, over the level crossing of the railway, and so up Smith Street to the Royal Hotel, where they purposed to put up for a day or two, and where, upon their arrival, they joined their fellow passengers at a hilarious second breakfast in accordance with an arrangement made at the cabin table a few hours earlier.

Chapter Five.

The Beginning of the Adventure.

The second breakfast over, farewells were spoken—with, in some cases, the promise to meet again speedily—and the voyagers separated, some to make their way home to their sugar or coffee estates in the neighbourhood, others to take train to more distant localities, some three or four being bound as far

afield as Johannesburg or Pretoria—and Dick, with his friend Grosvenor, set out to wander about the town of Durban, inspect the shops, pass through the aristocratic quarter of the Berea, per tram, and finally, on a couple of horses hired from the hotel stable, to ride out to the River Umgeni, and thence to Sea Cow Lake, in the vain hope of getting a sight of a few of the hippopotami that were said to still haunt that piece of water; finally returning to the hotel in time for dinner, hot, tired, but supremely happy, and delighted with everything that they had seen.

During the progress of the meal they made the acquaintance of a Mr Gerald Muspratt, a coffee planter, whose estate was situate some twelve miles distant, in the adjoining county of Victoria; and, the acquaintance ripening over the after-dinner coffee, with that breathless celerity which is one of the most charming characteristics of the Colonies, before retiring for the night the two friends had accepted Muspratt's very pressing invitation to ride out with him to his place next morning, and spend a couple of days there with him to look round the estate and be introduced to Muspratt's two or three neighbours. This they did in due course, the two days' visit lengthening itself into four, and ending by the acceptance of another invitation, this time from a sugar planter whose estate, Mount Pleasant, was situate some fourteen miles farther up the coast, on the other side of the Umhloti River. This invitation Dick would fain have declined, for he was impatient to begin the real business that lay before them; but Grosvenor was so charmed with the country and everything that he saw in it, and especially with the spontaneous kindness, friendliness, and hospitality of its people, that he seemed in no hurry to rush away from it all and bury himself in the wilderness. As it happened, neither of the young men had any reason to regret the time thus spent, for their host, an old-time transport rider, named Mitchell, had penetrated far beyond the Zambezi in his younger days, was an experienced hunter, knew the interior, its inhabitants, and their peculiarities as well as, if not better than, any other man living, and was

brimful of information and hints absolutely invaluable to the new arrivals, which he freely imparted. When told of the nature and scope of the young men's projected adventure, however, he shook his head dubiously, and strongly urged them to abandon the idea of attempting more than just a few months' big-game shooting.

"Mind you," he said, "I strongly sympathise with you in your very ambitious aims, ridiculous as many men would pronounce them, for I was animated by precisely the same desire myself when I was a youngster of about your age," turning to Grosvenor.

"By Jove! you don't say so?" ejaculated Grosvenor, surprised and delighted to meet a man of such wide experience as Mitchell who did not pronounce his plans chimerical; for it must be stated that thus far the enunciation of those plans had been almost invariably received with either covert or open ridicule. "Then," he continued, "do I understand that you believe in the possibility of finding the site of ancient Ophir?"

"Well—yes—you may understand me to mean that—in a general way," was Mitchell's somewhat guarded admission. "But," he continued, "if you ask whether I think it probable that you will discover either Ophir or the mysterious white race which rumour has asserted to exist somewhere in the far interior, I answer: Certainly not."

"The dickens!" exclaimed Grosvenor. "But why, my dear sir, why?"

"Well—if you will not be offended by my exceeding candour—chiefly because I think you both much too young and too inexperienced to have any chance of succeeding in so very formidable an undertaking," was the somewhat discouraging reply.

“Yes, of course,” admitted Grosvenor, “it is true that we are both quite inexperienced; but our youth is surely in our favour rather than against us, for we are strong and healthy, and no doubt will soon become inured to fatigue, hardship, and even privation. We both have splendid constitutions; and, moreover, my friend Maitland here is a doctor and surgeon of quite remarkable ability, which fact I regard as of the utmost importance. Then, as to the matter of experience, I imagine that we are bound to acquire that as we go on; we are not going to be transported into the heart of the wilds in a few hours by express train, you know.”

“No,” answered Mitchell, with a somewhat grim smile, “that is quite true, as is also your contention that you will acquire some experience as you go on. Then, of course, the fact that Mr Maitland is a doctor and surgeon—of which I was unaware—is a great point in your favour. But, when all is said, I still think that you will find the undertaking too much for you. Why— By the way, did you ever hear of a certain Charles Menzies?”

“The explorer, you mean? Yes, I have heard of him; in fact I believe it was an account of his travels that first put this idea into my head,” answered Grosvenor.

“Ah!” remarked Mitchell cryptically; “I wonder just how much you have heard respecting his travels?”

“Well, not very much, I must confess,” acknowledged Grosvenor. “So far as I can remember, it amounted simply to the statement that after one of his long absences from civilisation he returned with the story that he had actually discovered the site of ancient Ophir; and that he had gathered reliable information concerning the existence of the mysterious white race, which is to be one of the objects of my quest.”

“Just so,” commented Mitchell, relapsing into a pregnant silence. It was evident that he was intently considering some difficult question. Presently he looked up and said:

“I knew Menzies very well in my younger days. As a matter of fact I saved his life; for had I not happened to have fallen in with him and picked him up he must have inevitably perished; and in that case the public would never have heard any of the extraordinary rumours respecting his discoveries that afterwards leaked out. I was away up-country elephant hunting at the time, and I found him, some seventy miles this side of the Zambezi, in the last stages of exhaustion from starvation. He was then returning from the journey that made him famous, and had lost everything he possessed, even to his rifle; it is therefore nothing short of marvellous that he had contrived to make his way as far back as he did when I found him. He was too ill to talk much when I first picked him up, but afterwards, when he grew stronger, he told me the whole astounding story of his journey and his adventures. He talked of publishing the narrative, but I very strongly dissuaded him from doing so; for, as I pointed out to him, there were portions of that narrative which were of so absolutely incredible a character that nobody would believe them, and the story would lose all value from the fact that it would be regarded as merely a fantastic fabrication, and he would gain the reputation of an unblushing romancer. To tell you the truth, I was firmly persuaded at the time that what he had gone through had affected his brain, and that he was the victim of a series of the most weird and horrible illusions. But I had reason to modify my opinion in that respect a few years afterward, although I am still unable to make up my mind definitely as to just how much of his story was true and how much was due to an imagination that had become warped and distorted by peril and suffering.”

“By Jove!” exclaimed Grosvenor, with a sort of thrill in his voice. “I say, you know, all this is intensely interesting. Eh, what? I wonder if you would mind repeating to us a few of those statements that you found it so difficult to believe at the time, and with regard to which you were afterwards inclined to modify your opinion?”

“Well,” answered Mitchell, “I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me from doing that. You see, Menzies was my friend, and one of the finest fellows that ever lived. He is dead now, poor chap, and I would not willingly say a single word that might cause you or anyone else to think lightly of him, or picture him in your mind as other than the very soul of truth and honour. Yet if I were to repeat to you some of the statements that I have in my mind, I know that you two hard-headed, matter-of-fact Englishmen would at once set them down as the veriest fairy tales, their author a second Munchausen, and myself a credulous old fool for attaching the slightest weight to them. And yet, let me tell you, Africa is a very queer country—as you will discover if you persist in attempting to carry out your plan—and queer things happen in it, things that strain a man’s credulity to the breaking-point, until he has had personal experience of them. That remark of Shakespeare’s, that ‘there are more things in heaven and earth than are reckoned in our philosophy’ is nowhere more forcefully confirmed than in this continent of Africa, and especially in those parts of it which are practically unknown to the white man. Why, even here, close at hand, among our neighbours the Zulus, there have been happenings—well authenticated, mind you—that are absolutely unexplainable by any knowledge that we whites possess. But I think I have prosed enough for one sitting, and it is growing late—one o’clock, as I am a living sinner!—and you must be growing tired. Do you wonder why I have told you all these things? Well, it is because I should like to dissuade you from this mad scheme of yours, which my experience tells me can only end in disaster, and induce you to content yourselves with a two-months’ hunting trip in the

company of some good man who knows the country, and can be trusted to see that you come to no harm. Now, good night, both of you! think over what I have said; sleep well, and don’t dream of fantastic horrors such as my talk may have suggested.”

If Mr Joseph Mitchell, sugar planter, and thoroughly honest, well-meaning man, flattered himself that the foregoing conversation would have any other effect than to stimulate the curiosity of his guests and confirm them in their determination to carry out their plans in their entirety, he very greatly over-estimated his persuasive powers, and completely misread the characters of those to whom he had been talking. For both Grosvenor and Maitland were of a highly adventurous disposition, and what Mitchell had told them had simply whetted their curiosity to a keen edge, and had strongly suggested to them that the adventure promised to be of an even more alluring and thrilling character than they had ever ventured to hope, even in their most sanguine moments. So much, indeed, they made clear to their host when they met him the next morning at the breakfast table; and, when he would have made a further attempt at dissuasion, laughingly assured him that their minds were finally made up, and that the kindest thing he could now do for them would be to give them as much information and as many hints and wrinkles as he could think of to help them to a satisfactory conclusion of the adventure. This Mitchell proceeded to do, when at length the conviction had been borne in upon him that all his efforts at dissuasion were worse than useless; and when, two days later, they took leave of the genial planter, Dick carried away with him a notebook crowded from cover to cover with information that was destined to prove of incalculable value to him and his companion, as well as a sketch map showing the best route to follow, and certain localities that were to be most carefully avoided if they desired to return sane and sound to civilisation.

Arrived in Durban once more, after a most delightful jaunt, they at once set about making their preparations in earnest, one of the first things which Grosvenor insisted upon doing being the payment to Dick of six months' salary in advance, from the date of their landing upon South African soil. Practically the whole of this Dick was able to remit home to his mother, since Grosvenor would not hear of his contributing so much as a single penny toward the expenses of the expedition, therefore the junior member of the partnership had no need to spend anything, except for a few curios which he thought his mother might like to display to her friends; but he laid in a few additional drugs, and also added a spare instrument or two to his surgical case, to cover the possibility of loss or accident.

Three days later they started for Johannesburg, by way of Delagoa Bay and Pretoria, Grosvenor being very anxious to get a glimpse of life on the Rand and to gain some knowledge of diamonds and diamond mining before he finally bade farewell to civilisation. Since Johannesburg lay on the direct line of their route, and the knowledge sought might possibly prove useful in the future, Dick raised no objection to the proposal, especially as they went armed with letters of introduction from Mitchell to some of the most influential of the Rand magnates and others whose advice and assistance would be exceedingly helpful. A busy three weeks spent in the city and at Witwatersrand enriched them with much very valuable information, both particular and general, and also enabled them to acquire four excellent horses and an Indian coolie groom named Ramoo Samee, who not only bore a most admirable character, but also raised no objection when informed of the nature and scope of the adventure upon which his employers were bound. Here, too, and also at Pretoria, the partners endeavoured to secure the services of a hunter as guide and general superintendent, but were unable to meet with one who conformed in all respects to their requirements; they therefore ultimately decided to defer

their further quest until their arrival in Bulawayo, which was to be the point from which they would finally bid farewell to civilisation.

But upon their arrival at Bulawayo, although they met with no difficulty in providing themselves with a brand-new wagon and a team of twenty "salted" oxen, together with a Hottentot driver named Jantje, and a Kafir boy named 'Nkuku as voorlouper, no suitable candidate for the post of guide offered himself or could be found; and finally, after devoting a full week to fruitless search and enquiry, Dick and Grosvenor agreed to start without one, and trust to luck and their own good sense. Everybody, with one solitary exception, declared that it was a most risky thing to do; but the solitary exception, in the shape of an old Boer farmer named Van Zyl, applauded their pluck, and declared that they were far more likely to succeed by learning the lesson of the wild for themselves, and depending upon their own courage and adaptiveness, than if they set out under the guidance of another, and remained more or less in leading strings throughout the journey.

"What I would advise," he said, "is that you should look out for a good 'nigger'; he will be far more helpful to you than any white man, and will be content to be a good servant to you—if you are careful to keep him in his proper place—instead of trying to be your master."

This sounded like good, sensible advice, coming as it did from a man who had been born, brought up, and had spent a long life on the borderline separating civilisation from savagedom, and it finally confirmed them in the determination, to which they had already practically come, to do without a white guide.

According to Mitchell, their route from Bulawayo lay generally in a north-easterly direction, and accordingly, after transacting all their business, making every possible preparation for the long journey before them, and

writing their final letters home, announcing the fact that they were about to plunge into the wilderness, and that, therefore, no further news must be expected of them for an indefinite period, they set out about ten o’clock on a certain glorious morning, boldly striking straight out across the veldt, and directing their course by compass. Their wagon was already fully loaded, the load consisting of several air-tight cases of ammunition, six barrels of flour, a cask of sugar, a bag of coffee, a chest of tea, a small keg of brandy —to be used only in cases of the utmost emergency—a case containing pickles, condiments, preserves, salt, and other articles of a similar character, to be regarded as luxuries and used accordingly; their own personal belongings including clothes and firearms, a small tent made of waterproof material for sleeping in, two net hammocks with portable supports, a full set of cooking utensils, four sacks of mealie meal, and, finally, two large boxes of beads of various kinds, a quantity of brass wire, and a case of cheap mechanical and other toys, small mirrors, etcetera which Grosvenor had had the foresight to bring out from England with him, the last three items being destined to be employed in bartering with the natives. All this constituted quite as heavy a load as it was at all desirable to put upon the wagon, although the full team of twenty oxen made light of it, especially as it was now the dry season, and the ground was firm and hard for travelling. As for Dick and Grosvenor, they travelled on horseback, changing their steeds at every outspan, in order to accustom the animals to them, and gradually to get them into good, hard condition by working them to a certain extent every day. They rode armed each with a good, serviceable sporting rifle, capable of dealing with practically any game except elephant, a formidable hunting knife, and a revolver; and, in addition, each of them carried a pair of the finest and most powerful binocular glasses that Grosvenor had been able to procure in London. He had had the foresight to provide two pairs in case of accident, which was fortunate, for now each rider was independent of the other. Acting upon the advice of their friend Van Zyl, they confined

themselves strictly to short treks, averaging about five miles each, and three treks per day, for the first four days, in order to keep the oxen in good condition as long as possible.

Those first four days of their march were quite uneventful, the going was good, the grass still rich and abundant, water plentiful, and there was just enough game to keep the party well supplied with meat, while the animals worked well and improved in condition rather than otherwise, especially the horses, which proved to be even more promising than their owners had hoped for when they purchased them.

It was on the morning of the fifth day that the party encountered what might be spoken of as their first exciting incident, and it occurred, or rather began, as they were nearing the end of their first trek, about nine o'clock in the morning. Dick and Grosvenor, mounted as usual, with the half-dozen dogs that constituted their pack quartering the ground ahead of them, were nearly a mile ahead of the wagon, looking out for a suitable spot for the first outspan, when a sudden clamour on the part of the dogs, who had just disappeared over a low rise in the ground, caused the two riders to put spurs to their horses, in order to see what was the cause of the outcry. A short gallop sufficed to carry them to the crest of the ridge, when they beheld the dogs baying and snarling round a fine, well-set-up native "boy", who, armed with assagais and knobkerrie, constituted one of a party of some thirty in number who appeared to be guarding a herd of about three hundred grazing cattle, while about half a mile farther on was a native village of some fifty Kafir huts of the usual beehived shape, built in the midst of a number of mealie fields occupying an area of, roughly, about half a square mile, situated near the banks of a small stream.

Dick Maitland, who had early developed a rather remarkable aptitude for picking up the language of the natives, at once cantered forward, and,

calling off the dogs, demanded to know the name of the village, and where would be the best place at which to outspan. But the native whom he addressed, and who seemed to be labouring under considerable excitement, replied with such a rapid flow of words that his speech was utterly unintelligible, save that his communication had something to do with lions, the boy pointing first to a big clump of bush about a mile distant, and then to the village itself. Dick made several attempts to arrive at a better understanding of the nature of the communication, but without any very marked success, and at length suggested that Grosvenor should ride back to the wagon and hurry it forward, in order that Jantje, the Hottentot driver, might act as interpreter. This was done, and about twenty minutes later the wagon arrived, and the situation was explained to Jantje, who forthwith poured out a flood of eloquence upon the little band of natives, who by this time had gathered round Dick and were earnestly endeavouring to make him understand something that they evidently regarded as of very great importance. A brief but animated conversation at once ensued, at the end of which Jantje turned to his employers and explained:

“Dhese people say, sars, dat dhere is four, five lion in de bush yander and dhey won’ go ’way, and dhey wan’ to know if white gent’men be so kind as to kill dhem lion; because if dhey not be killed dhey kill de poor Kafirs’ cattle. Two day ago dhem lion kill two oxen and mos’ horrible maul de boy dat was herding dhem.”

“Phew! lions, eh?” exclaimed Grosvenor. “I say, Maitland, this is good news, eh, what? I am longing for the chance to have a pot at a lion. All right, Jantje; you tell them that we will kill the lions for them with the greatest of pleasure. We’ll outspan at once and set about the business forthwith. That will be the right thing to do, I suppose, Dick, won’t it?”

“Yes, certainly,” answered Dick, “by all means. But before we think of tackling those lions I must see that poor beggar who was mauled. Two days ago! By Jove, I dread to think of what the state of his wounds must be in this hot weather, that is, if he is still alive. Just ask them, Jantje, whether the boy who was mauled is still living, or whether the lions killed him?”

The question was put, and Jantje duly interpreted the reply.

“Yes, sar, de boy he still alive, but most drefful sick, dhese people say.”

“Good!” exclaimed Dick, dismounting from his horse. “Then say to them that I am a great doctor, and that I intend to save the poor fellow’s life if I can. I want one of them to carry my medicine chest for me, and to take me to the injured man’s hut. Then you had better take the wagon down and outspan near the river, where the grass is good, but where our oxen are not likely to get among the mealies, and then come to me, for I shall probably need you to interpret for me.”

The first part of this speech being interpreted to the little crowd of natives, one of them at once stepped forward, expressing himself as willing to carry the medicine chest and act as guide, while another volunteered to point out a suitable and convenient spot upon which to outspan, the others forthwith breaking into a song of thanksgiving in which they announced to all and sundry that this was their lucky day, inasmuch as that the white *’mlungus* were not only going to make well again their brother who was nigh unto death, but were also going to utterly root out and destroy those cunning beasts who refused to come out into the open and face their assagais. Grosvenor announced his intention of accompanying Dick, and five minutes later the pair, with their sable guide leading the way and carrying the medicine chest, were *en route* for the village, Dick carrying his case of surgical instruments under his arm. Their rifles they left with the wagon, deeming it unnecessary to cumber themselves with superfluous weapons in

face of the fact that the villagers were obviously quite friendly disposed to white men, indeed they were still too close to civilisation to anticipate anything else.

As they neared the village the “boy” who preceded them began to shout the great news that the white men were coming to make whole the injured man, and the occupants of the huts, to the number of about two hundred men, women, and children, swarmed out to gaze upon the strangers. The guide, who was inclined to put on airs, upon the strength of being the bearer of the white men’s *muti*, would fain have made the most of the occasion by pausing in the centre of the village and haranguing his fellows, but Dick nipped the intention ruthlessly in the bud by repeating several times, in an imperative tone of voice, the word *hamba* (go), and presently the procession —for every occupant of the village formed up and followed the trio—came to a halt in front of one of the huts.

As the bearer of the medicine chest pushed his burden in through the low, narrow entrance of the hut, and dropped on hands and knees in order to follow it, Dick turned and, perceiving a disposition on the part of the crowd to gather close about the entrance, and so exclude what little light and air might otherwise make its way in, took an assagai from the hand of an astonished native, and, holding it by the blade, waved the press back with the butt end of the weapon. Then, still waving the butt end, he described on the ground the arc of a circle of some twelve feet radius from the hut entrance, and, returning the weapon to its owner, pointed to the mark on the ground, and, addressing the curiosity-ridden mob, said impressively in English:

“Now, good people, please have the goodness to keep carefully outside that line, and oblige yours truly!”

There was not one of those odoriferous, dark-skinned Kafirs who comprehended a word of English, but Dick's actions and the tones of his voice were so expressive that his meaning was almost as distinctly understood as though he had spoken in the language of the tribe. He saw at once that this was so, and that his wishes would be obeyed, and signing to Grosvenor to precede him, forthwith passed into the hut.

Entering the windowless structure straight from the dazzling sunshine that flooded the outside world, the two Englishmen found themselves plunged for the moment in a darkness so profound that they could see nothing, and were fain to stand just where they rose to their feet after creeping through the low doorway, lest, moving, they should stumble over something—possibly the patient. But in addition to the hot, close odour of the interior of the hut there was another taint that assailed their nostrils, the taint of festering wounds, with which Dick was already familiar, and he shook his head doubtfully as he turned to the figure of Grosvenor, just beginning to reveal itself in the midst of the enveloping obscurity, and said:

"I don't like this at all. I can't see my patient as yet, but there is a certain something in the atmosphere of this hut which tells me that if the poor beggar's life is to be saved we have no time to waste. Where is he, I wonder? Oh, I think I see him, there on the ground at the far side from the doorway! Yes, there he is. Another minute and I shall be able to see him clearly. Meanwhile, perhaps his pulse will tell us something."

And, crossing to the far side of the hut, he knelt down by the side of the indistinctly seen man, felt for his hand, and, having found it, laid his fingers upon the wrist.

Chapter Six.

An Encounter with Lions.

“Um!” murmured Dick, as the feeble throbbing of the man’s pulse met his finger tips; “quite as I expected. Very low and weak. Evidently sinking from exhaustion. I must have him out of this into a better light, although I am almost afraid to run the risk of moving him. Still, it must be done. I can see nothing here.”

He went to the door of the hut and looked out, the crowd still grouped on the outside of the curve he had described on the ground respectfully making way before him. There was a small but densely foliaged tree growing at no great distance from the hut, and casting a strong shadow upon the ground; that, Dick decided, would be as good a place as any for his purpose. As he was about to re-enter the hut there arose a slight commotion upon the outskirts of the crowd, and presently Jantje, the Hottentot driver, appeared, endeavouring to force his way through to his master. The sight was a welcome one, for Dick felt very much at a loss with no one to interpret for him, and in tones of unmistakable relief he lifted up his voice and shouted:

“Come along, Jantje; you are just the man I wanted.” Then, as the Hottentot joined him, he continued: “See here, Jantje, I want the wounded man very carefully removed from the hut, and carried over yonder into the shadow of that tree. Just explain to these fellows, will you, and ask them to help me.”

No sooner said than done; with the passing of the last word through Jantje’s lips half a dozen stalwart Kafirs dived into the hut and in another moment reappeared, bearing between them the unhappy patient, stretched upon an eland’s skin. It was an exceedingly awkward job to get the poor fellow out through the low, narrow doorway of the hut, but they managed it somehow, and in another minute had him satisfactorily disposed beneath the shadow of the tree. Then Dick approached and proceeded to examine his hurts.

They had been severe enough to start with; but now, after nearly forty-eight hours of neglect, their condition was so indescribably loathsome that even Dick, seasoned hand though he was, nearly vomited at the sight of them, while as for Grosvenor, he was compelled to beat a precipitate retreat, but returned gamely, some five minutes later, to see if he could be of any assistance. Dick, however, although he had never in his life before beheld anything approaching such a dreadful sight, quickly pulled himself together and, his professional instinct promptly asserting itself, ordered some hot water to be brought to him, and, while it was being prepared, opened his medicine chest and his case of surgical instruments, the rest of the inhabitants of the village gathering round in a wide, silent, awestruck circle. They had often before seen similar sights, and were therefore in a measure accustomed to them; they knew what the patient's condition meant, and there was not one among them who did not regard the injured man as already as good as dead. Nevertheless their curiosity was powerfully aroused; for they had heard many wonderful stories of the white men who had lately come into the country toward the south, and were eager to see whether or not it was true that they could perform miracles, as had been asserted.

As for Dick, he found himself confronted at the outset by a very serious difficulty. His patient's condition was such that he could not possibly do what was necessary without inflicting upon the unfortunate man an amount of suffering that in his low and exhausted condition threatened to result in collapse and death. The man was too far gone, indeed, to justify the use of anaesthetics, yet without them Dick feared to proceed. What was he to do? Suddenly he bethought himself of hypnotism. Yet, how hypnotise a man whose language he could not speak? Then he remembered a very remarkable statement which Humphreys had made when discussing this same subject of hypnotism. "It is not the actual words which you address to a patient," Humphreys had asserted, "but the commands which your will

imposes on him that produce the desired effect, which can be obtained without the employment of words at all, if your will be strong enough. And remember, also, that no abnormal strength of will is needed if your patient be passive, unresisting." "Surely," thought Dick, "that ought to meet the present case, and at all events it is well worth trying; so here goes." Therewith he bent over his patient and, fixing the man's gaze in the peculiar manner which Humphreys had taught him, silently willed him to sink into so deep a sleep that he should feel nothing of what was about to be done to him. Almost immediately the man's eyelids fluttered, closed, and he sank into a profound sleep, breathing slowly and deeply, as could be seen by the regular rise and fall of his bare, brawny chest.

"*Wao! 'mtagati—'mkulu 'mtagati* (a wizard—a great wizard)!" murmured the astonished crowd of onlookers behind their hands, gazing wonderingly in each other's eyes.

Again Dick laid his fingers on his patient's pulse; already it was stronger and more steady. Very gently he raised one of the man's eyelids and lightly laid his finger upon the eyeball; the patient might have been dead for all the effect that the touch had upon him. Then, the warm water opportunely arriving, the young doctor got to work without further delay. Strongly impregnating the water with an antiseptic, he proceeded rapidly to cleanse the wounds, taking a pair of scissors or a knife from time to time and removing the already putrefying flesh; then he proceeded to dress the wounds, one after the other, with healing ointments, drawing the edges together, where necessary, with a few stitches; and when at length, after more than an hour's diligent, careful work, his labours came to an end, he ordered the wagon cartel to be brought to the village, the door of the man's hut to be enlarged, and a window opening to be made; and finally, when all these things had been done to his satisfaction, he caused a comfortable bed to be arranged upon the cartel, with skins borrowed from other huts, and the

man to be laid thereon and taken back to his hut. And all this time the patient had been sleeping as calmly as an infant! The time had now, however, arrived when he must be aroused, in order that an anti-febrifuge might be administered; Dick therefore once more bent over the man, strongly willing him to awake, which he instantly did, when, through Jantje as interpreter, the question was put to him how he felt. He immediately replied, in a wonderfully strong voice, considering his condition, that he felt much better, and that his wounds were no longer so painful as they had been; whereupon Dick administered the draught, telling him, still through Jantje, that immediately after taking it he would again fall asleep and so remain until the evening, when he would awake much refreshed and stronger. And while the words were being spoken Dick strongly willed that they should be fulfilled. The man obediently gulped down the draught, Dick gently lowered the patient's head to the pillow, and again deep sleep fell upon the poor fellow.

"Now," ordered Dick, "I want two women to come and watch by this man. They must constantly fan him with leaves, to keep him cool and prevent the flies from troubling him; and when he wakes someone must immediately fetch me. I shall be in my tent by the wagon, yonder." Then, turning to Grosvenor, who had remained at his elbow all the time, he said:

"No more trekking for us to-day, Phil, or for the next week, I expect. I must stay, and pull this poor chap through, if I can, now that I have taken him in hand."

"Oh yes! rather; of course; that goes without saying," cheerfully assented Grosvenor. "But, I say, Dick, old chap," he continued, "you have astonished me to-day, fairly taken my breath away; I hadn't the slightest notion that you were such a swell at your profession as you have just proved yourself to be. Never saw anything like it in my life before, y'know, and couldn't

have believed it if I hadn’t seen it. Why, I wouldn’t have given three ha’pence for that Kafir’s life when I first set eyes upon him; but now, dash it all, I believe you’re going to set him on his feet again. If you do, your fame will spread far and wide through the country, and do us a lot of good. But, I say, it was a jolly lucky thing for you that the poor chap dropped off into that sound sleep just when he did, eh? Because it enabled you to do several things that, it seems to me, you couldn’t possibly have done had he remained awake. What puzzles me is that he continued to sleep all through it. And I noticed that you didn’t seem to worry in the least about whether you awoke him or not. I suppose it was sleep, was it not?”

“Oh yes!” answered Dick airily; “it was sleep, right enough; nothing in the nature of swoon about it, if that is what you mean. But now, what about those lions? My patient will sleep for several hours to come, and I can quite well leave him. It is now,”—consulting his watch—“only a few minutes past eleven o’clock, and we ought to be able to organise the hunt and bag the beasts comfortably before tiffin. Are you game?”

“You bet I am, rather!” responded Grosvenor. “It is just what I was itching to suggest, but I thought it would seem callous to propose that you should leave your patient, and it would not have been sporting to have proposed to go off alone, leaving you behind.”

“Oh, that is all right!” returned Dick confidently; “my patient will not need me for hours yet, so let us see about it at once. Where is Jantje?”

Jantje was close at their elbows, and already “putting on side” among the villagers upon the strength of being in the service of an *’mkulu ’mtagati*. He stepped forward at the question and answered, with an air of proud humility:

“I’se here, sar. What you please to want?”

“Mr Grosvenor and I are going to have a try for those lions, Jantje, if they are still lurking in the neighbourhood,” observed Dick. “I believe you said that these people report the beasts to be somewhere in yonder clump of bush? Very well. Now, I want a party to enter the bush on the windward side and carefully beat down-wind in order to drive the brutes into the open. Mr Grosvenor and I will place ourselves on the down-wind side of the bush, and if the lions can be induced to break cover we will do our best to bowl them over. We shall also require two steady, reliable men to come with us to carry our spare rifles; but, understand this, they must be men of courage, who will not be scared out of their seven senses and bolt, carrying our rifles off with them, if the lions should show in the open.”

“Yes, sar,” answered Jantje, “I understan’ you puffekly. You leave everyt’ing to me, sar; I arrange it all, jus’ as you wish. An’ I will come wid you myself, sar, to carry gun. I am a brabe man, sar; no pusson in dhis worl’ more brabe as me; you shall see, sar.”

“Very well,” answered Dick, suppressing a smile at the Hottentot’s vainglorious boast; “you, being so exceedingly brave and reliable shall go with Mr Grosvenor; but you must pick me out a good man to come with me. Just see about it, will you, and bring the whole party to the wagon, where we are now going to get our rifles.”

Puffed up with the honour of having so important a matter confided to him, the Hottentot saluted, and turned to address the crowd that still hung about the white men awaiting possible further developments, explaining to them what was required. A few words sufficed, and the moment that the white man’s intentions and wishes were understood the crowd dissolved, as if by magic, the men hurrying away to their huts to procure their weapons, while Dick and Grosvenor sauntered away toward the wagon, noting, as they went, that their team of oxen had been driven to a spot where the grass was

especially good, close to the banks of the river, and that it was being zealously watched and guarded by a dozen well-grown lads armed with hunting assagais and knobkerries.

Arrived at the wagon, the two friends proceeded to bring forth and don their bandoliers, having first satisfied themselves that the belts were filled with the kind of cartridge required for the particular pattern of weapon which they were about to employ; and then, having taken down and loaded the four rifles which they intended to use, they awaited the arrival of the beating party, conscious now, for the first time, of a peculiar and not altogether pleasant feeling compounded of excitement and—was it "funk"? No, certainly not, for neither of them would have backed out of the adventure on any account; yet, if the sensation was not "funk", it bore some sort of family resemblance to it, something perhaps, in the nature of stage fright. The fact is that each realised, at nearly the same moment, that they were about to embark upon a perfectly new experience, an adventure in which they were as yet untried, in which courage and the most perfect *sangfroid* were of the utmost importance, and they were by no means certain how they would emerge from the ordeal. To put it plainly, they were just a little afraid that at the critical moment they might fail to exhibit that superlative coolness and aplomb, the slightest lack of which would cause each to feel for ever humiliated and disgraced in the eyes of the other. Besides, there were the natives, keen of eye, and quick to observe the smallest sign of anything approaching to perturbation; it would be awful beyond words to fail before them! By a curious coincidence the mind of each had been following precisely the same line of thought, and as they saw Jantje approaching, followed by some forty beaters and every mongrel cur belonging to the village, the same resolution came to each—they simply would not disgrace themselves and their colour by displaying the slightest sign of nervousness or trepidation in the eyes of those savages; so, drawing

a deep breath, they pulled themselves together and, resolutely dismissing their apprehensions, prepared to do or die.

Proudly leading his party of beaters, the Hottentot approached and, giving a sort of semi-military salute, announced that the villagers but awaited the orders of the white chiefs to proceed. Then, leading forward a tall savage of some thirty-five years of age, of magnificent physique, he introduced the man as Mafuta, the half-brother of the injured man, and informed Dick that he, Mafuta, had specially requested the honour of being allowed to act as gunbearer to his brother's benefactor on this occasion. Dick ran his eye over the man, noted the splendid development of his thews and sinews, marked several ugly scars on his body and limbs bearing mute testimony to the fact that he had already proved himself a warrior, met his unflinching glance, proud and resolute, yet respectful, and instantly decided that here was a man who might be absolutely trusted. Without hesitation he placed his spare rifle in Mafuta's hands, explaining to him, through Jantje, exactly what he wished him to do with it; and then issued his final instructions to the beaters, who at once moved off to work round to the windward side of the clump of bush in which the lions were said to be hiding, while Grosvenor and he, followed respectively by Jantje and Mafuta, took their leisurely way toward the points where they intended to station themselves. For a considerable part of the distance they walked together; and when at length they separated, Dick, who somehow seemed to have assumed the direction of affairs as a matter of course, with Grosvenor's tacit consent and approval, said:

"Now, Phil, anything that may break cover to the right of that baobab, as we stand facing it, belongs to you, while anything that emerges to the left belongs to me, neither of us to interfere with the other's chances unless the brutes seem likely to get away and make good their escape. And, just one caution, old chap: don't fire until your quarry has passed out clear of the

line of bush, or you may quite unintentionally shoot one of the beaters. Ah! there are the dogs giving tongue; the beaters are putting them into the bush. To your station, old man, and good luck to you!”

“Thanks! same to you, old chap,” cheerily responded Grosvenor, as he wheeled and strode away to the spot fixed upon as his station.

The clump of bush in which the lions were said to have secreted themselves was an isolated one, with nothing in particular to distinguish it from the thousands of other clumps that dotted the visible country, except that one extremity of it abutted upon the edge of a small shallow ravine, through which trickled a tiny rivulet discharging itself into the larger stream which flows through the long valley that intersected the landscape. Close to the spot where the clump of bush touched the edge of the ravine the rivulet flowed into and through a shallow basin of rock, which formed an ideal drinking place for animals; and it was possibly this circumstance that had caused the lions to take up their temporary abode in that particular clump. There was the possibility that the lions, when breaking cover, might attempt to escape by bolting into and up the ravine; and accordingly, when this fact had been pointed out and explained to Dick, he had very unselfishly placed his friend Grosvenor on that side in order that the latter might have the benefit of the most likely chances.

The barking and yelping of the dogs grew steadily louder and more insistent, and to it was presently added the shouts and shrill whistlings of the Kafirs as they forced their way through the thick undergrowth. A few birds flew out with startled cries, but for about a quarter of an hour there was no further result. Then suddenly the dogs burst into a chorus of sharp, savage barks, entirely different in character from their former utterances, and quite sufficient in itself to inform even the veriest novice that game of some sort was afoot; the Kafirs’ cries of encouragement were redoubled; an

occasional rustling and crackling of branches became audible to the intent watchers. Presently there arose a terrific outburst of furious snarlings, growls, and yappings, intermingled with the violent swishing and crackling of dry leaves and twigs, evidence conclusive that a fight was proceeding in the heart of the bush. Then the sudden, sharp, agonised pow-wow of a dog in pain rang out, accompanied by a horrible sound of worrying; a still further increase of the hubbub followed, then a heavy crashing of bushes, and out sprang a magnificent tawny-maned lion into the open. He broke into view immediately opposite to Dick, and not more than twenty yards distant, stopping dead as he sighted the lad standing rifle in hand, with Mafuta like a bronze statue behind him. As the splendid beast stood at gaze, with blazing eyes, and his tail switching in short, angry jerks from side to side, the feeling of anxiety and nervousness that had been oppressing Dick seemed to drop from him like a garment. In an instant he became absolutely cool, steady, and self-possessed, and lifting his rifle to his shoulder with a lightning-like movement, while the sights of the weapon seemed to line themselves of their own volition upon the centre of the beast's broad forehead, right between the eyes, he pressed the trigger. There was a flash, a sharp, whip-like report, a faint puff of smoke, and the lion dropped stone dead where he stood.

Meanwhile the hubbub in the bush was raging even more fiercely than ever, showing that the beast which had just fallen to Dick's rifle had not been the cause of it, and that the sport was by no means over. Dick's weapon was a magazine rifle, and with a quick movement he jerked another cartridge into position, just as the uproar grew so loud and near at hand that it became evident another break was imminent.

The next instant it occurred. A splendid lioness, carrying a small cub in her mouth, crashed into the open, with a dozen or more yapping and snarling curs at her heels. She broke cover well on Grosvenor's side of the baobab;

and, like the lion, came to an abrupt halt as soon as she saw Grosvenor, straight toward whom she was charging. In an instant the white man's rifle leapt to his shoulder, and the next instant he fired. But even as he pressed the trigger, a dog, more valiant or more foolhardy than the rest, dashed in upon her, and with the rapidity of lightning she turned to meet his rush, dropping her cub, and nearly tearing the miserable cur's head from his shoulders with a single stroke of her powerful fore paw. At the same instant Grosvenor's bullet, aimed at her head, crashed into her flank, passing right through it and utterly paralysing her hind quarters. With a whining, snarling roar the poor beast rolled over on her side, but instantly recovered herself so far as to raise herself on her fore legs—between which the cub, but a trifle bigger than a well-grown cat, took refuge—her jaws champing and foaming, and her eyes blazing lightnings at the dogs, which, recognising her helplessness, closed in round her.

"Save the cub!" shouted Dick; "don't let the dogs worry it; I want to keep the little beast alive." And, leaving his position, he hurried forward, regardless of danger, to beat off the dogs. Grosvenor and Jantje also rushed forward at his shouts, and were quickly joined by Mafuta, who seemed to divine what Dick required. Dashing fearlessly in among the snarling and snapping dogs, the Kafir and the Hottentot at length succeeded in beating them off, upon which Grosvenor stepped close up to the lioness and gave her the *coup de grace* by sending a bullet through her brain. As she rolled over dead, Mafuta sprang in and grabbed the cub by the skin of the neck, despite the fact that it snarled and spat like an angry cat and struck out viciously with its claws, which were already strong enough to inflict quite a painful scratch, and carried it off to the wagon, tying it to a wheel by a stout reim.

Having ensured the safety of the cub, Dick, carrying his own and the spare rifle which he had snatched from Mafuta, hurried back to the point which

he had so hurriedly deserted; for the commotion in the heart of the bush clearly evidenced the fact that the remaining members of the troop of lions still clung to cover, and that the beaters and dogs were doing their utmost to dislodge them. Laying the spare rifle at his feet, Dick stood facing the great clump, with the rifle in his hand at the ready, prepared for any emergency. The noise and confusion, however, seemed to indicate that the next event would occur in the area under Grosvenor's jurisdiction, and, sure enough, about a minute later another lion and lioness broke cover together, followed by the remainder of the dogs. The noble beasts, both of which were apparently young animals, and but barely full-grown, evidently intended to make for fresh cover in the ravine, but, finding Grosvenor blocking the way, came to a sudden halt, upon which the dogs instantly gathered round them, yapping and snarling furiously, while individual members made sudden feints of dashing in, only to retreat precipitately with their tails between their legs as the infuriated beasts turned this way and that to meet the rush.

The crowding, clamouring dogs, with their quick rushes, and the incessant twists and turns of the regal pair to meet those rushes, were anything but conducive to good shooting, and Grosvenor, with rifle to shoulder, held his fire, watching for a favourable opportunity. Suddenly it came: a dog more venturesome than the rest sprang at the lion, and was caught by him. Planting both his front paws on the body of the unhappy cur, the lion stood for a moment glaring at his foes, and in that moment Grosvenor pulled trigger, the bullet striking the great beast full in his massive chest. For perhaps a quarter of a minute the lion stood absolutely motionless, his eyes blazing defiance; then he suddenly collapsed, and, with a half-whine, half-roar, slowly rolled over on his side, his great head sank to earth, his limbs stretched themselves stiffly out, and with a violent shudder he yielded up his life.

Grosvenor chose this moment to inject a fresh cartridge into the chamber of his rifle. But something went wrong with the weapon, and while he was still fidgeting with it, forgetful of the fact that Jantje was standing behind him with a second rifle, fully charged, in his hand, the lioness, with a mighty, snarling roar that sent the dogs scuttling in all directions, crouched with the evident intention of springing upon the slayer of her lord. For a moment Dick, who was interestedly watching the scene, took no action, for, according to the arrangement come to between them, the lioness belonged of right to Grosvenor. Then, realising that his friend was in peril, he shouted excitedly:

“Shoot, Phil, shoot, or the brute will be upon you!” at the same time lifting his own weapon to his shoulder.

“Can’t,” returned Grosvenor, still struggling with his rifle; “the beastly thing’s—”

Crack! Dick instantly pressed the trigger; and as he did so the lioness rose into the air with a curious writhing movement, falling short of the spot where Grosvenor stood by about a foot. As she fell she rolled headlong, but instantly recovered herself, standing upon three legs, with the fourth broken close to the shoulder, while Grosvenor, stepping back hurriedly in the long grass to avoid her, was tripped up and fell flat upon his back. Fearing that, despite her broken leg, the lioness might spring upon his prostrate friend and badly maul him, Dick impetuously sprang forward, injecting a new cartridge as he ran, but stopped short, convulsed with laughter, at the sight of his friend, his long legs flourishing in the air, rolling with frantic energy out of the reach of the lioness. Then, as Grosvenor finally scrambled to his feet, minus his rifle, which he had dropped during his hurried retreat—while Jantje had incontinently bolted, carrying Grosvenor’s second rifle with him, as the lioness sprang—Dick again levelled his piece and bowled

the great tawny brute over with a bullet behind the ear, which penetrated the brain.

Thus satisfactorily terminated the adventurers' first experience with big game, each of the sportsmen bagging a lion and lioness, while the cub might be regarded as the joint property of the two. A very satisfactory feature of the day's sport was that nobody had received so much as a scratch, the actual casualties amounting to two Kafir dogs slain. As for the Kafirs, they fell upon the carcasses and with incredible rapidity and skill stripped off the hides and pegged them out preparatory to treating them in the native fashion, afterwards removing the heads and carefully depositing each in the near vicinity of an ants' nest, in order that the insects might remove—as they very speedily would—every atom of flesh from the bones. Then, having rendered this service to the champions who had delivered them from their formidable enemies, they departed, dancing, to the village, singing a triumphant song to the glory of the white men, in which each incident of the recent hunt was graphically described with appropriate gesture.

Chapter Seven.

The Makolo Country.

A full week was spent by the travellers among those friendly villagers, during which Dick Maitland assiduously tended the wounded man, who by the end of that time, thanks in part to his own healthy flesh and blood, the result of simple, frugal living, and, more largely, to the young doctor's skilful treatment, had advanced so far toward recovery that nature might safely be left to complete the cure. The week had been not altogether unprofitably spent in other respects, the two white men assiduously devoting themselves, with Mafuta's assistance, to the study of the native language, varied occasionally, on Dick's part, by a little botanising—during which he discovered some half a dozen plants that seemed to possess valuable properties—and the taming of the lion cub, which, after the first two or three days of captivity, responded with ever-growing alacrity to his young master's advances, until by the end of six weeks he had learned to answer to the name of Leo, to come at Dick's call or whistle, and, in short, had become as tame as a dog. This result, and the gentleness of disposition which Leo manifested, Dick attributed largely to the fact that the animal was never allowed to taste blood, or raw flesh of any kind, his food—after a milk diet for the first three weeks of his captivity—consisting entirely of well-roasted flesh.

The natives witnessed the preparations for the departure of their white friends with every manifestation of sincere regret, assisting to drive up and inspan the oxen, presenting a fine milch cow for Leo's especial benefit, as well as quantities of mealies, bananas, and other garden produce, warning the travellers of various difficulties and dangers that lurked on the next hundred miles or so of their route, and carefully instructing them how they

might best be avoided, and in many other ways making plain the sorrow with which they bade them farewell. Finally, when the oxen were inspanned and the wagon was on the very point of moving off, Mafuta, who had hitherto been missing, presented himself in full marching order, armed with shield, assagais, and knobkerrie, with plumed head-dress, and cows' tails bound about his legs below the knees, and curtly informed Dick that it was his fixed intention to join the party! Although both Dick and Grosvenor did their utmost to dissuade him, by representing to him the great length and exceeding danger of the journey upon which they were bound, and the possibility that they might never return, it was all of no avail, he alternately insisted and entreated, declaring that he wanted no wages or reward of any kind. Dick had pulled his brother back out of the grave, and he felt it to be his duty, as well as his pleasure, to devote himself henceforward to the service of the white man who had done this wonderful thing; and finally, when Dick, loath to take the man away from his kith and kin, definitely refused to take him, the Kafir countered by saying, in effect: "Very well; the veldt is free to all, and if you will not permit me to join your party, I can at least follow you at a distance, and be at hand whenever you require my services." After which, of course, there was no more to be said, and Mafuta was allowed to have his own way, to the great joy of his brethren of the village.

Nor was it very long before the travellers had abundant reason to congratulate themselves upon their decision in this respect, for Mafuta not only proved to be a most intelligent and devoted servant, but also a splendid guide, knowing the exact localities of the various streams and waterholes on their route, as far as the Zambezi, also the most favourable crossing places, where the best grass and the most game were to be found, and, most important of all, perhaps, the exact boundaries of the fly country. Indeed but for this last knowledge it is almost certain that in their anxiety to take the shortest possible cuts they would probably have lost practically all their

cattle, and thus have been obliged to bring their adventure to a premature end.

On their ninth day out from Mafuta's village they struck the Hanyani River, without meeting with any adventure worthy of record, and following its right bank for a couple of days, bore away in an easterly direction, skirting the northern slope of Mount Inyota, where they struck another small stream flowing to the northward and eastward; and as this was, broadly speaking, the direction in which they wished to travel, and as Mafuta assured them that it discharged into the Zambezi, they decided to follow it, and did so, finding eventually that it united its flow with another stream, which they followed, still without any particular adventure save such as daily occurred while hunting; and three weeks from the day on which Mafuta joined them the travellers found themselves gazing with delight upon the broad bosom of the Zambezi, its waters sparkling in the golden light of the westering sun.

Here again Mafuta's knowledge proved to be of the utmost value, for he was able to guide the party to a spot where the river was fordable, and where they succeeded in effecting a crossing that same evening before sunset. Once safely arrived on the left bank of the river, Grosvenor and Dick decided to camp for a few days, in order to give the oxen a rest, the grass being good. Also there was a small native village a few miles higher upstream, where canoes and their crews might be hired, and within easy paddling distance of which there was a spot where hippopotami still abounded, affording a prospect of good sport, of which Grosvenor was particularly anxious to avail himself. Accordingly, while the Hottentot Jantje, and 'Nkuku, the Kafir voorlouper, remained in charge of the wagon and oxen, Ramoo Samee, the groom, accompanied his masters to the native village, to look after the horses and attend to the cooking while his employers shot hippopotami and crocodiles from the two canoes which they chartered; Mafuta, meanwhile, taking four days' rations, and going off upon

a prospecting expedition in search of elephant and buffalo. Three days at this village sufficed to provide the hunters with more trophies than they cared to encumber themselves with, while the natives enjoyed a record feast of hippopotamus flesh; and on the fourth morning Dick and Grosvenor returned on horseback to the wagon, while Ramoo Samee, in charge of the spoils, was conveyed down the river to the same spot in a canoe manned by the grateful natives. They found the cattle all right, and visibly improved by their three days' rest, while Leo, the lion cub, welcomed Dick's return with almost embarrassing demonstrations of affection. Late that same evening Mafuta also returned, with the intelligence that although he had not actually seen either elephants or buffaloes, he had obtained, from natives whom he had encountered, intelligence of a large herd of the former at a distance of four days' trek from the river. He also reported the natives to be quite friendly disposed and willing to allow the white men to traverse their particular section of country. Everything thus appearing favourable, on the following morning the oxen were once more inspanned, and the journey resumed.

Then ensued a long trek extending over a period of more than two months, including a day's halt here and there to rest the oxen, or to indulge in a little hunting, during which they enjoyed excellent sport among elephants, buffaloes, lions, leopards, giraffe, veldebeeste, zebra, ostriches, and the various species of buck to be found in the southern portion of the great African Continent; so rapidly, indeed, did their spoils accumulate that at length they could no longer find room for them in the wagon, and were glad to avail themselves of the opportunity afforded by their arrival at a particularly friendly village to leave everything of the kind, including some eighteen hundred pounds of ivory, in charge of the villagers.

Of the last three weeks of this long trek, nine days were consumed in forced marches through sterile country, bordering a wide and—according to

Mafuta—utterly impassable desert, during which both water and grass were so exceedingly scarce that the entire party suffered terrible privation, no game of any kind being seen, where more than half the oxen died, while the remainder were reduced to such a miserable condition that they were scarcely able to drag the now more than half-empty wagon. Presently the character of the country gradually changed, a water-hole or two were found, with small patches of fairly nutritious grass growing round them, and as soon as a favourable spot was reached the wagon was outspanned and the oxen allowed a couple of days' holiday in which to rest and recuperate. Then Grosvenor and Dick, mounting their horses, which had been spared as much as possible during the preceding ten days, set off with their rifles in search of game, and eventually succeeded in finding and shooting a pair of bush buck wherewith to replenish their larder.

At the end of the second day's rest Mafuta—who had by this time completely won the confidence of the two leaders of the expedition, and had attained rather to the position of a humble comrade than a mere follower—gave it as his opinion that the oxen had now sufficiently recovered to justify the party in resuming their journey; and accordingly on the following morning the animals were once more inspanned. Dick and Grosvenor had already seen enough of the surrounding country during their two days' foraging expedition to have come to the conclusion that conditions would now improve with every mile of progress, and this conclusion was fully borne out by their first day's experiences, the country gradually becoming more hilly and broken, with small watercourses occurring at steadily decreasing intervals, with more and richer grass at every mile of their progress, until by the end of the day they once more found themselves in a district that might fairly be termed fertile, while a few head of game—bucks and a brace of paow (a kind of bustard)—had been seen. All this was exceedingly encouraging to the two explorers, for their experiences thus far—with one very important exception—had been in

strict accordance with Menzies' story, as repeated to them by their friend Mitchell, and confirmed them in the conviction that at length they had arrived within measurable distance of the spot where, according to the account given by the former, the ruins of ancient Ophir still existed in recognisable form. The exception referred to consisted in the fact that whereas, according to Menzies, the Makolo nation, upon whose territory they had now entered, were exceedingly jealous of all intrusion—Menzies himself having escaped a frightful death at their hands by the very skin of his teeth—they had thus far met with no molestation whatever; which, however, might possibly be accounted for by the fact that thus far they had seen no natives.

But this state of affairs was not to last much longer; for on the third day of their resumed trek, by which time they had reached a somewhat rugged, well-wooded stretch of country, watered by numerous streams, upon surmounting a ridge they sighted a native village, some three miles ahead, surrounded by well-cultivated fields which, upon their nearer approach, the travellers found to consist chiefly of maize and tobacco, with here and there a patch of sugar cane, or a small fruit orchard. Soon afterwards they encountered a large herd of cattle in charge of about a dozen native lads, one of whom, upon sighting the strangers, took to his heels and ran, as though for his life, to an eminence at no great distance, where, placing his hands funnelwise to his mouth, he began to shout, in a peculiar, high-pitched tone of voice, a brief communication of some sort to some unseen person or persons. At the same time one of the other lads, after intently scrutinising the newcomers for several minutes, advanced cautiously toward them and finally halted—evidently holding himself ready to bolt at the slightest suspicious sign—and, raising his sheaf of assagais in his right hand by way of salute, shouted the single word:

"*Bietu*!"

The word was evidently a variant of the Zulu *Biete*, the form of salutation addressed to a great chief, and, so construing it, Mafuta at once placed his shield and weapons in the wagon and, advancing rapidly, proceeded to address the lad in good Zulu. The stranger, however, although it was evident that he caught the meaning of a word here and there, seemed unable to grasp the sense of Mafuta's communication in its entirety, whereupon the latter made a second attempt, this time using a sort of dialect or corruption of the true Zulu tongue; and was now more successful, quite a long interchange of conversation ensuing, at the termination of which the stranger turned and ran to the before-mentioned eminence, from the summit of which he shouted, in the same high-pitched voice as his predecessor, a communication of very considerable length, while Mafuta returned to the wagon.

"Well, Mafuta, what is the news?" demanded Dick, as the Kaffir approached.

"The news, Chief, is good," answered Mafuta, saluting. "We have arrived within the borders of the Makolo country; and the word of the *'mfana* who spoke with me is that it will be wise of my fathers to outspan at the first suitable halting place until the will of the king regarding them be made known. The Makolo do not approve of strangers entering their country, it would appear; but their objection no longer applies to white men, to whom the Spirits of the Winds have commanded that all kindness be shown, should such ever visit the Makolo country. News of our arrival has already been sent forward to Lobelalatutu, the king; and his will concerning us will be made known as soon as it comes; but, meanwhile, Matemba, the *'mfana* who spoke with me, advises that we outspan until that will be made known."

“Um!” remarked Dick; “that does not sound altogether promising, eh, Phil? Seems to indicate that there may possibly be difficulties put in the way of our penetrating the country, doesn’t it? What did you say to the *’mfana* Mafuta?”

“I said,” answered Mafuta, “that the two white men, my chiefs, had come from afar across the Great Water to visit Lobelalatutu, the King of the great Makolo nation, to offer presents, and to request his permission to examine the ruins of the great city of which they had heard.”

“Yes, of course; I suppose that was the correct diplomatic way in which to put the matter,” remarked Dick. “And what said Matemba in reply?”

“He said,” answered Mafuta, “that doubtless the king, remembering the commands laid upon him by the Spirits of the Winds, upon the occasion of their last visit to the country in their great glittering ship which flies through the air, would gladly permit my chiefs to visit the ruins, even as the Spirits themselves had done.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Dick; “that sounds better. But,”—turning to Grosvenor —“I wonder what the fellow means by the ‘glittering ship which flies through the air’—and the ‘Spirits of the Winds’? Can it be possible that an airship has ever penetrated so far as this? Stop a minute—let me think. ‘Spirits of the Winds—glittering ship which flies’—by Jove! can it be possible? I thought, when I heard the expression ‘Spirits of the Winds’ that it sounded not altogether unfamiliar, that I had met with it before, in fact; and now that I come to overhaul my memory I very distinctly remember reading a yarn describing the adventures of some people who possessed a wonderful airship in which they made the most extraordinary voyages and met with some astounding experiences—”

“Yes,” interrupted Grosvenor; “I know the book you mean. I, too, read it. But I took it to be fiction, pure and simple; a somewhat daring flight of a novelist’s imagination. And now that you have reminded me of the yarn I distinctly remember that the four fellows in the story were described as having visited these same ruins of Ophir that we are hunting for—”

“Yes,” cut in Dick, “that is so. And, if I remember aright, they met with some rather exciting adventures among these Makolo, didn’t they?”

“Rather!” assented Grosvenor. “Were taken prisoners, or something of that sort, and only escaped by the skin of their teeth.”

“That’s it,” agreed Dick. “Yes; the man who was then king wanted to steal their airship, didn’t he?”

“He did—and got banished for his pains,” answered Grosvenor. “But that was not the end of the story. He—the king, I mean—returned from his banishment, killed the king who was reigning in his stead, and—yes, was found practising his old dodges of cruelty and murder when the ‘Spirits’ paid a second visit to his country.”

“Precisely,” agreed Dick. “But that part of the story was given in a second book recounting the further voyagings of the wonderful *Flying-Fish*—that was the name of the airship, you will remember. By Jove! How vividly those yarns recur to one’s memory when anything special—like this adventure of ours—occurs to recall them. Do you know, Phil, it now seems to me that, quite unconsciously to ourselves, those two books have had a distinct influence upon us in undertaking and carrying through this journey?”

“Possibly,” agreed Grosvenor; “though I am obliged to admit that I have been, and am still, quite unconscious of it. The point that is of real

importance to us is this. Had the narratives in those two books the slightest foundation of fact? Because, if so, our recollection of them might stand us in good stead should difficulties arise between us and these people. Take, for example, the matter of the four Spirits of the Winds. If we were to judiciously exhibit some knowledge of them and their doings, this king might be inclined to be a great deal more complaisant than he otherwise would be. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps," conceded Dick; "it is impossible to say. But what knowledge do we possess, or can we exhibit? Absolutely none, except what we can remember through the perusal of those two books. And, for my own part, I am inclined to believe that the alleged adventures of the four persons therein referred to were purely fictitious, or at least had no more than the slenderest connection with actual fact."

"Yet," contended Grosvenor, "it is remarkable, to say the least of it, that in our very first communication with these Makolo—which, now I come to think of it, was the actual name of the nation given in those books—the four Spirits of the Winds should be mentioned. Isn't it?"

"Yes, it certainly is," agreed Dick, somewhat reluctantly. "And of course," he continued, "if it should happen that those two yarns are a record of actual occurrences presented in the guise of fiction, it will not be by any means the first time that such a thing has occurred. Anyhow," he concluded, "I do not see that we can possibly do any harm by acting, as you suggest, upon the assumption that the yarns, however extravagant they may have appeared to us when we read them, are records of actual fact, and using our recollection of them in any manner that may seem advantageous to us. Is that agreed?"

"Yes, certainly," assented Grosvenor. "We can but try it, and see how it works. And now, to change the subject, what say you about outspanning? This seems to be a good spot, eh?"

During the foregoing conversation the two speakers had been walking on ahead of the wagon, with their rifles in the hollow of their arms, the dogs and Leo, the lion cub, trotting amicably at their heels. They had arrived at a spot about a mile from the village, and were now traversing an open “flat” with plenty of grass, close to the margin of a small stream. As Grosvenor had suggested, it was an excellent spot upon which to outspan, for there were grass and water for the cattle, and it was sufficiently far away from the village to prevent any of those annoyances that a nearer approach might have subjected them to; they therefore halted, and when the wagon came up the order to outspan was given. A few minutes later, while Jantje and ’Nkuku were superintending the watering of the oxen, some half-dozen women, carrying baskets poised upon their heads, were seen approaching from the village. When, somewhat later, these women arrived at the wagon, the leader of them announced that the contents of the baskets, consisting of green mealie cobs, sugar cane, eggs, sweet potatoes, half a dozen shockingly skinny chickens, milk, and *joala* (a kind of native beer) were a present from the headman of the village to the strangers. (Six months earlier the travellers would have laughed incredulously at the idea of liquids being conveyed in baskets; but now they took it quite as a matter of course, for they had by this time grown quite familiar with the native basket, so exquisitely woven out of grass as to be quite impervious to leakage). They accepted the gift with a few words—but not too many—of thanks, and then, desirous of creating a good impression upon the Makolo as early as might be, they directed the women to wait, and, going to the wagon, took from their store of “notions” a few yards of gaudily printed cotton stuff, two or three yards of brass wire, half a dozen empty two-ounce tobacco tins decorated with gilt and coloured lettering, in the style familiar to all devotees of the weed, a small wooden box containing about a pint of mixed beads, and to each of the smiling and expectant basket-bearers a special present for herself, consisting of a necklet of large particoloured beads, the

remaining gifts being of course for the headman in return for his present. The necklets Dick and Grosvenor personally clasped round the shapely, bronze-tinted throats of the recipients, to the intense delight of the latter, and then the damsels took their departure, smiling to such an extent as to display every tooth in their heads. Presently, when they were a few yards from the wagon, they burst into song, the burden of their lay being the magnificent generosity, enormous wealth, and splendid personality of the visitors.

About an hour before sunset that same day another party made its appearance, approaching from the village. On this occasion it consisted of men only, some twenty in number, which, upon their arrival at the wagon, proved to be the headman of the village and his retinue, all unarmed.

The party halted at a distance of some ten paces from the spot where Dick and Grosvenor sat before their open tent, and as they did so, with the precision of trained soldiers, every man's right hand was flung aloft, and in deep, sonorous tones the salute was given:

"*Bietu*!"

Then the headman stepped forward and said, Mafuta standing by to act as interpreter:

"I, Insimbi, headman of the village of M'gama, in the country of the Makolo, bear the greetings of the great King Lobelalatutu to the unknown white men who have crossed the Great Water to visit him, to offer him gifts, and to request his permission to visit the ruins of the great city that are situate near the king's village. He bids you welcome to the country of the Makolo, and his word is that you are to be conducted forthwith in all honour to his presence. You are his guests, to be treated by all men as such, and by them to be supplied with all things necessary to your comfort and

wellbeing. Your oxen are poor in condition and few in number, therefore shall they be cared for here until they are again fit for work; meanwhile a fresh team shall be supplied from the herd belonging to this village for the conveyance of your wagon to the ruins you desire to visit. And if there be any other thing that you desire, my orders are to furnish it to you. I have said. Is it well, O white men?"

"It is very well, O Insimbi," answered Grosvenor. "It is well for the Makolo and for your king that he keeps fresh in his memory the commands laid upon him by the four Spirits of the Winds, and we are satisfied. When can we be supplied with the fresh team of oxen?"

"At sunrise to-morrow shall the herd be driven hither, when my lords shall choose for themselves as many as they will," answered the headman.

"Let it be so," answered Grosvenor; "for to-morrow at sunrise will we resume our journey to the king's village and the ruins. By the way, ask him, Mafuta, how far the ruins are from here."

"With a full team of fourteen fresh oxen it may be done in seven days," Mafuta translated Insimbi's answer to the question.

"Seven days!" ejaculated Grosvenor, glancing in astonishment at Dick. "Then how the dickens has this fellow Insimbi contrived in the course of a single day to communicate with the king and get a reply from him?"

"Why, easily enough," answered Dick. "Don't you remember the wonderful system of voice-telegraphy mentioned in those two books that we were discussing to-day? That, of course, is how it has been accomplished. And, now that I come to think of it, we had an illustration of that system this morning when those two boys ran to the top of yonder hill and started

shouting in that queer, high-pitched tone of voice. They were telegraphing to the king the news of our arrival without a doubt."

"Yes," assented Grosvenor, a little doubtfully, "I suppose that was it. But seven days' trek with fresh oxen! That means a hundred and forty miles, or thereabout—it is wonderful!"

"You are right; it is," agreed Dick; "but not more wonderful, to my mind, than that we, destined, as one may say, to make this trip together, should have both been fortunate enough to stumble across and read those two books, which I am now beginning to understand were records of sober fact instead of extravagant fiction, as we both thought them to be. We must certainly polish up our recollection of what we read, for it is not at all difficult to imagine circumstances in which the knowledge may be of vital import to us. By the way, Mafuta, tell those fellows that they are dismissed, and that all we shall require of them to-morrow, in addition to the oxen, will be a guide."

Oxen and guide were both duly forthcoming on the morrow: the journey toward what may be called the capital was resumed, and continued day after day without adventure, the guide supplied on the first day continuing with the party for the whole of that day, and then turning them over to another, who in like manner piloted them a day's trek, in turn to pass them on to another, and so on, day after day; each guide returning to his starting-point on the following day.

Chapter Eight.

King Lobelalatutu.

The one thing that, after the spreading, well-tilled fields surrounding every village, the great herds of cattle, and the general aspect of prosperity everywhere met with, most impressed the two travellers during their progress through the Makolo country, was the extraordinary courtesy and deference uniformly extended to them by the natives. These people were savages, pure and unadulterated, a fierce and warlike race, who had been obliged to fight for their very existence throughout countless ages, ignorant and superstitious to a degree, with all the virtues and most of the vices of the primeval savage, unspeakably cruel and relentless as enemies, absolutely fearless in battle, and, above all, intensely suspicious of strangers; yet, although white men were practically unknown to them as a people, they never annoyed the travellers by any display of undue curiosity, every man deferentially saluted them, and all were willing, even eager, to do them service.

The character of the country, although it could not by any stretch of the imagination be described as mountainous, maintained its rugged character almost to the end of the journey, consisting of a constant succession of low hills, or ridges, mostly of granite formation, divided from each other by broad, fertile, well-watered valleys, dotted here and there with villages which, as the travellers advanced, gradually drew closer together and increased in importance.

It was as the travellers surmounted a certain ridge, about an hour and a half before the time of their midday halt, that they caught their first glimpse of the sea since losing sight of it on their departure from Lourenço Marques. It stretched away to right and left and in front of them, a narrow, faint, grey streak, softly shimmering under the beams of the noontide sun; and between it and the observers lay a wide-stretching, level, grassy plain, in the midst of which appeared numberless irregularities that, viewed through their powerful glasses, assumed the aspect of architectural ruins of enormous

massiveness and strength. But they were some ten miles distant, and through the highly rarefied atmosphere that intervened it was impossible to obtain any very clear conception of their character, except that they were undoubtedly of human origin and of quite unexpected extent. One thing, however, was certain, in the light of Menzies' story, as recounted to them by his and their friend Mitchell, those enormous ruins could be none other than the remains of the ancient Ophir mentioned in Holy Writ; and the two friends sent up a shout of irrepressible exultation at the thought that they had advanced thus far upon their difficult journey without mishap of any kind. They were now all eagerness and impatience to reach those wonderful ruins; but the oxen were tired and hungry, having already been trekking for more than two hours; moreover, they took no interest in archaeology, and preferred an acre of rich grass to the finest ruins in the world, therefore it became imperative to outspan as soon as the wagon had plunged down into the plain far enough to reach the first watercourse. But Grosvenor and Maitland were not long in arriving at the decision to saddle up and ride forward as soon as they had partaken of a hasty tiffin.

This resolution they duly carried into effect, observing the precaution to slip their loaded revolvers into their belts and to sling their loaded rifles and fully charged bandoliers over their shoulders, to guard against the possibility of accident, although they had thus far seen nothing to justify the slightest suspicion that either the king or his people meditated treachery. As they rode they had ample opportunity to observe—as indeed had been the case ever since they entered the Makolo country—the operation of the curious voice-telegraph system practised by the natives in their communications with each other, the high-pitched messages—doubtless reporting their progress-breaching their ears at frequent intervals.

They advanced at an easy canter, heading straight for the ruins, for there was no semblance of a road, or even of a footpath, and scarcely any people were to be seen, except in and about the villages which they occasionally passed. But when they had arrived within about three miles of the ruins they observed, approaching them round the spur of a low hill, a troop of about fifty horsemen, which their field glasses enabled them to perceive were splendidly mounted, and garbed in the full panoply of war, consisting of shield, war axe, sheaf of broad-bladed spears, plumed head-dress, and—in the case of the leader—leopard-skin mantle, and necklace of leopards' claws. It was a distinctly formidable cavalcade for two men only to meet, even although the latter were armed with weapons of such deadly precision as the rifle and revolver; and for a minute or two the travellers were just a little uncertain as to how to meet the situation. Finally they reined in and came to a halt, whereupon the leader of the troop threw up his right hand, as though giving an order, upon which his followers, who had been advancing at a gallop, reined their horses back upon their haunches, coming to an

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abrupt halt, while he, reducing his pace to a hand-gallop, continued his advance alone.

“All right, old chap, come along,” exclaimed Grosvenor; “those fellows mean us no harm, I am sure. I expect it is a detachment sent out by the king to bid us welcome on our approach to his village.”

“Very possibly,” assented Dick. “But, having halted, we must now remain where we are until that fellow approaches and delivers his message. To resume our journey at this moment would be tantamount to an admission of

distrust on our part, which would never do. No, no; let the man come to us, not we go to him. Among savages, you know, first impressions count for a good deal, and it would never do to let those fellow think that we halted because we were nervous."

"No, of course; you are quite right, it would not," agreed Grosvenor; and sitting straight up in their saddles, and assuming an air of absolute confidence which somewhat belied their inward feelings, they patiently awaited the arrival of the solitary horseman.

In less than a minute he had arrived—a fine, stalwart man, of about middle age, clean-limbed, broad chested, upright as a dart, of dauntless aspect; his limbs and body showing many scars of battle. As he reached a point some ten feet from where the two white travellers awaited him he abruptly reined his horse to a standstill, and threw up his right hand in salute.

"*'Nkosi,*" he cried, in a full, deep, resonant tone of voice, "Lobelalatutu, the King of the Makolo, salutes you by the mouth of me, 'Mpandula, and bids you welcome to his royal village. Behold a squadron of his royal guard, which he has dispatched, under my command, to conduct you in all honour to his presence. He awaits you now in his palace. Does it please my lords that the squadron, approach to give them the salute?"

Now, this speech was only very imperfectly understood by those to whom it was addressed; a word or two here and there they comprehended because of their similarity to those in the language spoken by Mafuta; the name of the king also they recognised; and 'Mpandula's gestures and the tones of his voice also told them a little. Thus in one way and another they contrived to gain a sort of hazy general notion of the gist of the chiefs speech. But how were they to reply to it, and what were they to say? So early a summons to the king's presence was rather unexpected, and, in the absence of Mafuta, who was behind, with the wagon, would be rather embarrassing; for how

were they to converse with the king without the assistance of an interpreter? There was but one thing to be done, and that was to reply to the best of their ability, which Dick undertook to do in the only native tongue with which he was familiar, explaining as well as he could the difficulty in which the pair found themselves.

It was evident at once, by the puzzled expression on the chiefs face, that he understood Dick as little as Dick understood him; and for a moment there seemed to be the possibility of a deadlock. But suddenly ’Mpandula’s brow cleared, he turned on his horse and shouted a name, in response to which one of the guards drove his heels into his horse’s flanks, and dashed forward to his chiefs assistance. The latter appeared to explain the position in a few terse words, and when he had finished, the newcomer, at ’Mpandula’s dictation, repeated the message of the king, word for wood, in the language with which Dick was familiar.

“What do you say, Phil,” questioned Dick, when the message was concluded; “shall we go? Or shall we excuse ourselves for the present, upon the plea that we would prefer to wait until the wagon comes up, in order that we may take with us the gifts that we have brought for His Majesty? I am not quite sure that I altogether like this escort business. It may be all right, of course. The king’s message sounds all right; but if the chap means treachery it will be exceedingly awkward for us, will it not?”

“It certainly will,” agreed Grosvenor. “But,” he continued, “I fancy it is altogether too late to think of that now. When we determined to enter this country we tacitly decided to take all the risks of so doing; and in any case we cannot now escape, do what we will, therefore I think our best policy will be to take everything for granted, and go willingly with these fellows, since if we refused they have the power to compel us. What has so suddenly put the idea of treachery into your head?”

“Upon my word I don’t know,” answered Dick. “Unless it is the sight of these armed men. But, as you say, it is too late to hesitate now, and, after all, their presence may merely signify the desire of the king to do us honour. Yes, I suppose we had better go.” And, turning to ’Mpandula, he said:

“We are ready to go with you into the presence of the king, therefore let the squadron approach. But our followers are behind, with the wagon, and it is desirable that they should know what has become of us; therefore I pray you let a message be transmitted to them, informing them of our whereabouts, and also directing them where to outspan at their final halt.”

“The will of my lords shall be done,” answered the chief, through the interpreter. And, raising his right hand, he shouted an order, whereupon the squadron of native cavalry, which had remained motionless as so many statues, at once awakened into life, and, starting forward at a gallop, advanced in as close formation and as perfect line as the finest civilised troops, halting a horse’s length in rear of their commander. Then, at a signal from the chief, every man tossed his right hand aloft in salute and thundered out the word *’Nkosi*! This salute Dick and Grosvenor acknowledged by placing their hands to their hat-brims, in military fashion, to the evident satisfaction of ’Mpandula and his followers; and then, as the two whites touched their horse’s flanks with the spur and moved forward at a canter, the escort formed up, completely encircling them; one man at the same moment detaching himself and galloping away in the direction of the wagon, in response to an order from his commander.

Some twenty minutes later the party reached the outskirts of the ruined city, and found themselves confronted by enormous masses of masonry, consisting of walls, some of which still remained erect, although for the most part they had sunk into shapeless, overgrown masses of ruin, arches, columns, erect and prostrate, fragmentary pediments, shattered entablatures,

dislodged capitals, crumbling pedestals, and mutilated statues of men and animals, all of colossal proportions; the buildings and portions of buildings all being of an immensely massive yet ornate and imposing style of architecture quite unknown to the travellers. Even the cursory glimpses which were all that Dick and Grosvenor were for the moment able to obtain, convinced them both that they were face to face with the remains of a city that must, thousands of years ago, have been of enormous extent and of almost unimaginable opulence and splendour.

But they had little time, just then, in which to indulge their curiosity, for they almost immediately struck into a sort of bridle path that presently turned away from the ruins and led toward an extensive village, which now swept into view as they rounded the spur of a hill. The village consisted of some five hundred huts surrounding a central stockade, which enclosed a small group of buildings of considerably more pretentious character than the ordinary huts, and which Dick and Grosvenor at once conjectured must be the royal palace and its dependencies. This conjecture was confirmed upon their arrival at the village, for at the gateway of the stockade the cavalcade halted, and ’Mpandula, dismounting, requested his charges to do the same, intimating that he was about to conduct them forthwith into the presence of the king.

Of course there was nothing to be done but to obey with a good grace, and the travellers, therefore, swung out of their saddles, and, handing over their horses to a couple of natives who stepped forward to take charge of them, followed their guide, or custodian, whichever he might happen to be, through the gateway, not without certain qualms of apprehension as to the wisdom of placing themselves thus unreservedly in the power of a savage king, who, if he should so choose, could send them to a death of unspeakable torment and horror, without the slightest fear of ever being brought to book. But now, more than ever, was it too late to hesitate;

therefore resolutely stifling their apprehensions, and assuming a bearing of the most perfect confidence, they advanced toward a group of several persons whom they now saw arranged in front of the principal building within the enclosure.

Unquestionably the most important personage in this group was a splendid figure of a savage, attired in a sort of petticoat of leopard-skin reaching to just above the knee, a mantle of lion-skin thrown over his shoulders, gold bangles on his arms and ankles, a beautifully worked coronet of gold adorned with crimson feathers of the flamingo, two necklaces—one composed of lions' teeth and claws, and the other, and larger, of unpolished stones that seemed to emit a faint glint of ruddy fire—round his neck. He was armed with a sheaf of short, broad-bladed stabbing spears, and was seated on a sort of throne entirely covered with an immense kaross of lions' skin. Behind him stood eight savages, as finely built men as himself, whose dress and adornments at once proclaimed them to be chiefs, and persons of very great importance in the Makolo nation. The individual upon the throne was of course none other than the king himself.

Boldly advancing to within about ten paces of the seated monarch, Grosvenor and Dick halted, and, according to pre-arrangement, gave His Majesty a military salute. Then Dick, addressing the king in his best Kafir, remarked:

"Hail! Lobelalatutu, King of the Makolo, we salute you." Which the interpreter, who had followed them, promptly interpreted.

"I see you, white men," answered the king, slightly raising his right hand in acknowledgement of the salute. "You are welcome to the country of the Makolo. When I was informed of your approach I gave certain orders to my people concerning your comfort and welfare. I trust that those orders have been obeyed to your satisfaction."

“Your words, O King! have been most implicitly obeyed, and we thank you for them, as also for the welcome that you have extended to us,” returned Dick. “The four Spirits of the Winds will be pleased to learn, when we return, that you have not forgotten the injunctions that they laid upon you.”

“The four Spirits of the Winds!” ejaculated the king, in great surprise, not wholly untinged with trepidation—which emotions were even more strongly displayed by the chiefs who stood about him. “Know ye then those terrible beings?” (Note 1.)

“Even so,” answered Dick composedly. “We know that they twice visited the Makolo country; and we also know,”—he added with emphasis—“what happened upon each of those occasions. We know what happened to M’Bongwele, the former king of the Makolo; and we know why Lobelalatutu was chosen king in his place.”

“*Wau*!” murmured the assembled chiefs behind their hands, in awestricken tones; “it is wonderful!” while Lobelalatutu shifted uneasily in his seat as he gazed apprehensively in the faces of his two visitors. For nearly a minute he remained silent, apparently debating within himself some very puzzling question. Then he said:

“I would that I knew, O white men, all the reasons that have led you to visit the Makolo country. They must be many and great to have induced you to cross the Great Water, and to take so long, so wearisome, and so dangerous a journey afterwards.”

“Listen then, O King Lobelalatutu, and you shall be told,” answered Dick. “My friend here is a great hunter; he loves the excitement of the chase, even as do your own young men. But in our own country the people are so many that there is little room for game, which is consequently very scarce. Therefore my friend said: ‘Lo, I will go to Africa, where the people are few

and game is abundant, and there will I hunt the lion, the leopard, the elephant, the rhinoceros, the buffalo, and all those other animals that afford good sport, and are not to be found in England; also I am desirous of seeing the wonderful ruins of that great and ancient city whereof the four Spirits of the Winds have spoken; therefore will I go to the Makolo country, wherein those ruins are to be found, and become the friend, if I may, of the king, and his people.' And, as for me, I am a healer of all kinds of sickness; I am also a seeker of gold, and the stones that glitter. Therefore said my friend to me: 'Come, let us go together, for the journey shall be to our mutual advantage; we will hunt together, and if sickness overtake me you shall be my healer, while such gold, or stones, or ivory as we may obtain shall be yours.' Those, O Lobelalatutu! are our sole reasons for coming hither. Are they not good and sufficient?"

"They may be sufficient in your own eyes; but as for me, I know not," answered the king. "The thing that I would know is this: Come ye as friends, or as secret enemies, of me and my people?"

"Have I not said?" returned Dick. "My friend would be the friend of you and your people; and his friends will also be my friends; his enemies my enemies. If ye should need such help as it is in our power to give, it shall be yours, freely; and all we ask in return is that we may be allowed to examine the ruins at our leisure, and to take away with us such gold or stones as we may find."

"It is well," answered the king. "If that be all ye ask, it is granted. Ye may examine the ruins at your pleasure; ye may remain in my country as long as ye will, and no man shall molest you; and whatsoever ye may find that is valuable in your eyes, that shall ye take with you when ye leave my country. That is my word, the word of the king. Say now, is it good?"

“It is very good, and the Spirits will be well pleased when they learn that you have granted our request,” answered Dick.

The king gave vent to a sigh of evident relief; it was clear that he wished to stand well with these two friends of the great and terrible Spirits of the Winds, who by the potency of their magic had been able to punish his predecessor M’Bongwele for his evil-doing, and to place himself upon the vacant throne. Yet it was apparent that there was still something at the back of the king’s mind, something that he keenly desired yet hesitated to speak of. For two or three minutes he sat plunged in deep and painful meditation; then he looked up and said:

“It is well; I am glad that ye have come hither, O white men! for when ye return to your own country ye will be able to tell the Spirits that I have faithfully obeyed all the injunctions that they laid upon me. Ha! There is one thing more that I would ask. Ye speak not the tongue of the Makolo, yet ye were able to communicate with my people as soon as ye entered my borders. By what means did ye so?”

“Oh, quite easily!” answered Dick—who, being the better linguist of the two, naturally assumed the part of spokesman. “We have with us a man who speaks the Makolo tongue, and whose language we speak; therefore we communicate with your people through him.”

“Good!” exclaimed the king, in accents of extraordinary satisfaction; “it is very good. Go now in peace, O white men! Ye are my friends, and no harm shall befall ye while ye stay in the country of the Makolo; I the king say it. And it may be, O healer of sicknesses! that I can help you in the matter of the shining stones that ye crave to possess. See ye these?” And he pointed to the necklace of ruddy, unpolished stones that he wore.

Dick stepped forward to look closer at the stones, and finally took the loop of the necklace into his hands. At first sight the stones appeared to be no more than ordinary red pebbles, about the size of a plover's egg, or perhaps a little larger, the only peculiarity being that they were exactly alike in colour, and that they all emitted a rich, ruddy light. For a minute or two Dick stood carefully examining the stones; and as he did so a faint, elusive memory came to him in connection with them. Then suddenly the memory became clear and, carefully suppressing his excitement, he turned to Grosvenor and said, in quite an ordinary tone of voice:

"Just come and have a look at these stones, Phil, but be careful not to betray anything in the nature of astonishment or admiration. Do you remember reading that those four chaps in the *Flying-Fish* accidentally stumbled upon, first, the king's ruby necklace, and then, through it, a ruby mine? Well, this is undoubtedly the necklace; and our friend here seems to hint that he is willing to show us the spot where similar stones may be found."

"Looks like it, certainly," answered Grosvenor in carefully modulated, matter-of-fact tones. "Jolly fine stones, aren't they? If you can contrive to take home a sackful of those stones, old man, you need no longer fear money troubles, eh? What?"

"A sackful!" ejaculated Dick, with a laugh. "A peck of them will completely satisfy me, my boy." Then, turning to Lobelalatutu, who was keenly watching them both, he said:

"These stones, O King! are very good and of some value in my country, though worthless here. Know you where they are to be found?"

"I know," answered the king; "and it may be that I will show you the place; I cannot yet say, but I will consider the matter. I have given instructions as to the place where your wagon shall outspan; it is near at hand, between the

village and the ruins; and if ye need anything, send word by your servant to me, and I will see to it."

"We thank you, O Lobelalatutu!" answered Dick. "We go now; but to-morrow we will come again, bearing with us the gifts that we have brought for thee from England. Until then, farewell!"

Shortly after nine o'clock that night, while the two friends, having dined, were sitting under the raised front flap of their tent, enjoying the wonderful view of the ruins, rising gaunt and black in the midst of the landscape, flooded by the rays of the newly risen moon, and chatting in desultory fashion over the events of the day, as Grosvenor pulled contemplatively at his well-charred brier pipe, Mafuta appeared before them and, giving the usual salute, said:

"There is one from the village yonder who would speak with my lords, if they be willing."

"Who is it, Mafuta—a man, or a woman?" demanded Dick.

"It is a man, *'mlungu*" answered Mafuta. Then, drawing still nearer, and lowering his voice almost to a whisper, he added: "He says he is named Lobelalatutu!"

"The king!" exclaimed Dick, starting to his feet in amazement. "What the dickens is up now, I wonder? Is he armed, Mafuta?"

"Nay, lord, he is weaponless," answered Mafuta.

"Bring him hither," commanded Dick; "we will speak with him."

Saluting again, Mafuta disappeared, and presently returned escorting a tall savage, unarmed save for a light switch, such as every native habitually carries, in order to defend himself against the attacks of snakes. He wore the *keshla*, or head ring, and was naked save for the usual *moucha* or apron of deerskin. As he stepped within range of the rays of the lamp, which Dick had hastily lighted, his eyes rolled and gleamed with something of apprehension in their expression; but despite his change of garb the white men had no difficulty in recognising the king.

“We see you, O Lobelalatutu!” said Dick, adopting the ordinary form of salutation among the natives, for there was an air of secrecy about this visit that seemed to suggest a desire on the part of the king that he should be regarded as to some extent incognito. “Enter, I pray you, and be seated,”—pointing to the chair which he had just vacated, and drawing forward his medicine chest as a seat for himself, thus placing the king between himself and Grosvenor.

With a sigh, whether of weariness or of relief was not quite clear, the king sank into the chair indicated, and when Mafuta would have discreetly withdrawn, stopped him.

“Is this the man through whom you have hitherto communicated with my people?” the king demanded, and Mafuta duly translated the question.

Dick answered in the affirmative, adding: “Tell him, Mafuta, that we know you to be faithful, and are ready to trust you even with our lives.”

This speech also Mafuta translated, with an air of mingled hauteur and humility which was amusing enough to Dick and Grosvenor.

For answer the king stood up and, laying his hand upon Mafuta’s shoulder, looked piercingly into the man’s eyes for the space of a full minute or more.

On his part, Mafuta returned the gaze as steadfastly as it was given; and it was an interesting sight to the onlookers to see those two savages, both of them splendid specimens of their respective races, endeavouring to read each other's character. At length Lobelalatutu removed his hand from the other's shoulder and said:

"It is well! Tell your chiefs that I say you are a true man, and that I, too, am willing to put my life into your hands. Stay you here and interpret for me, for I have a matter of moment to discuss with the white men."

"Tell the king to say on," commanded Dick, when this speech had been translated to them; and Lobelalatutu, turning to Dick, said:

"I am in a great strait, O *'mlungus*, and know not what to do. I would that the four Spirits of the Winds, who made me king over the Makolo, were here, for I have faithfully obeyed their injunctions, and they would help me. But you are friends of the Spirits, and it may be that your wisdom will find a way for me. May I speak?"

Note. The author is here referring to events which occurred in two of his previous books: *The Log of the "Flying-Fish"*, and *With Airship and Submarine* (both published by Messrs Blackie and Son, Limited).

Chapter Nine.

The Chief Witch Doctor's Plot.

"Speak freely and without fear, O Lobelalatutu!" answered Dick. "Tell us your trouble; and it may be that we shall, as you say, be able to point the way to deliverance."

“Then—but first let the light be extinguished,” said the king, pointing to the hurricane lamp suspended from the pole of the tent. “It may be that some of my people, standing yonder in the shadow, hoping to behold some wonder, may see me with you, and, though they might not recognise me, disguised as I am, I would rather that no man should know that you have been secretly visited this night.”

“Right!” answered Dick in English. “I see your point, old chap, and out goes the ‘glim’.” And so saying he took down the lamp, opened, and extinguished it.

“It is well,” approved the king, with a sigh of relief. “Now can I talk without fear of discovery.” He paused for a moment, considering how he should begin, then said: “As we talked to-day, O Healer of Sicknesses!”—the native word for this expression (soon abbreviated to “Healer”) forthwith became Dick’s name among the Makolo from that moment—“you said that you knew what happened to M’Bongwele, the king who ruled before me, and also how I came to be made king in his stead. Know you also the story of Seketulo, whom the Four Spirits made king in M’Bongwele’s stead when they first came among the Makolo?”

“Yes, we know,” answered Dick. “We know that M’Bongwele was dethroned and banished by the four Spirits because of his barbarous and iniquitous rule, and that Seketulo was made king in his stead. We know also that, after a time, M’Bongwele secretly returned from exile, and, aided by certain powerful chiefs, slew Seketulo and reinstated himself as King of the Makolo. And, finally, we know that when the four Spirits revisited this country in their great glittering ship that flies through the air, they again deposed M’Bongwele and hanged him and his chief witch doctor from the bough of a tree, because, despite their previous warning, they persisted in

their evil-doing. And in M'Bongwele's place they made you, Lobelalatutu, King of the Makolo."

"It is even so, O Healer!" assented the king. "The tale, as you tell it, is the truth; and now I know of a verity that, possessing this knowledge, you are like unto the Spirits themselves, to be trusted, even as they were; therefore will I, without fear, unfold to you the tale of my present trouble. It was the dissatisfaction of certain chiefs with Seketulo's system of government, as prescribed to him by the four Spirits, that made M'Bongwele's secret return and his resumption of the throne possible. Seketulo was instructed to govern the Makolo justly and humanely, to put a stop to the oppression of the people by the chiefs, and, above all, not to make war upon the neighbouring nations save in self-defence. It was this last restriction that occasioned the greatest discontent among certain of the chiefs; because, the Makolo being a powerful and warlike nation, we were generally victorious when we went to war, and the greater part of the spoils went to the chiefs, who thus increased their riches as often as we made raids upon our neighbours. But under Seketulo's rule all this was altered, and we were obliged to be content with such wealth as we already possessed; hence the discontent and all that followed upon it. Now, since I became king, I have endeavoured to govern my people even as Seketulo did; and for a long time things have gone very well with us; the number of the Makolo, no longer kept down by war, has greatly increased, as also has our prosperity; for now that war is no longer part of its policy the nation has devoted itself to agriculture and the breeding of cattle, our herds have greatly multiplied, new villages have sprung up, fresh land has every year been brought under cultivation, and all have enough, and more than enough, to satisfy their wants. But of late I have suspected that, despite our steadily increasing prosperity, all is not well with us. I have detected signs of discontent not only among the chiefs, but among the people themselves; there have been murmurs that the long peace which we have enjoyed is converting the

Makolo into a nation of women who will soon lose the capacity for fighting; our neighbours are growing insolent and aggressive; and—worst sign of all—those chiefs who most boldly support me in my determination to continue to rule in accordance with the tenets laid down by the four Spirits, are rapidly dying off, one after the other, by some mysterious disease."

"Phew! I say, that looks very fishy, doesn't it, Dick?" exclaimed Grosvenor, when the king had concluded his story. "Smacks of conspiracy and secret murder—eh, what?"

"Yes," agreed Dick; "I must confess that it undoubtedly has a look of that kind of thing about it." Then, turning to Lobelalatutu, he asked:

"How long is it since the chiefs who support you began to sicken and die; and how many have already passed along the Dark Path?"

"It is now nearly three moons since 'Mtatu, my most trustworthy chief, died; and since then five others have travelled along the same Dark Road," answered the king. "And now a seventh, 'Nkuni, lies sick in his hut with the same symptoms as the others. Three nights and two days has he thus lain."

"And how long does the sickness usually last?" asked Dick, his professional instincts being at once aroused.

"They usually die on the seventh day after the sickness declares itself," answered the king.

"Good!" responded Dick. "Then your friend is in no immediate danger; and to-morrow, when we present ourselves before you with our gifts, I will see him, and it may be that I shall be able to save his life. Have you aught further to tell us?"

“No,” answered the king. “I have now told all. But I fear that all these things portend evil to me, and, perchance, the end of my reign and life. It is for this reason that I have visited you to-night in secret; for I hoped that if a conspiracy is growing up against me you might be able to name the conpirators to me. That is all the help I ask,” he finished grimly.

“Yes,” answered Dick; “I have no doubt that if we could ascertain the identity of the conspirators—if any—you could be safely trusted to do the rest. Well, we will see what can be done to help you. Must you really go? Well, good night! Take care of yourself; or, in other words, *hamba gahli*.”

As the tall, dark figure of Lobelalatutu strode away down the slight slope, upon the summit of which the tent was pitched, and melted into the shadows, Grosvenor turned to his companion, who had now re-seated himself, and said:

“It seems to me, friend Dick, that we have arrived upon the scene at the psychological moment—eh, what? If our friend Lobelalatutu’s suspicions have any better foundation than his own imagination, it strikes me that we are on the eve of exciting times. What say you?”

“I say yes to that, most emphatically,” responded Dick. “For, don’t make any mistake, Phil, the king’s imagination is not running away with him; the death of six chiefs in quick succession, followed by the serious illness of a seventh, is something more than mere coincidence; it means conspiracy, followed by ghastly, blood-curdling tragedy—unless we can contrive by some means to discover the identity of the conspirators in time. As for those unfortunate chiefs, I have not the slightest doubt that they have been removed by poison—some secret and comparatively slow but deadly poison, and I intend to make it my first business to discover what that poison is, and its antidote—if I can. The chances are, however, that I shall fail, for almost all the savage peoples possess a great deal more knowledge

of drugs, and especially of poisons, than we civilised folk are aware of, or are inclined to credit them with; and if poison is really being employed, it will almost certainly be something of which I have no knowledge. Still, we shall see. And you may be sure that I shall use my very best efforts to succeed, and also to discover the details of the conspiracy which Lobelalatutu suspects; for, should it succeed, we shall find ourselves in an exceedingly awkward predicament."

"Why—how do you mean?" demanded Grosvenor.

"How do I mean?" repeated Dick. "Why, in a few words, I mean this, that so long as Lobelalatutu lives and continues to govern this people we are reasonably safe. But if he should happen to be deposed, and murdered, the new king will most probably sacrifice us both to his fetish as a sort of thank-offering for his success. Twig?"

"Of course I do," answered Grosvenor. "I had never thought of that; but it seems likely enough, now that you come to mention it. It appears to me that our first business must be to straighten out matters, for our own sakes as well as for that of Lobelalatutu. Poor chap! Here is he, a despot, with absolute power over the life of every one of his subjects; you would naturally suppose that such a man would have nothing to fear, wouldn't you? Yet, like other monarchs, he seems liable at any moment to become the victim of secret intrigue, and lose his crown and his life together. I thought the poor chap looked worried when we called upon him to-day. The Bard was right—'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown', be the head that of a civilised monarch or a savage."

"True for you, my boy," answered Dick. "But are you not beginning to feel tired? Because, if you are, pray don't stand on ceremony, but turn in as soon as you like. As for me, I think I will sit up a bit longer and see if I cannot think this matter out and find a streak of daylight somewhere."

“Which, I suppose, is a hint that you don’t need my company any longer,” retorted Grosvenor. “All right, old chap, pray don’t apologise. I know I’m a bit of a duffer in such matters as this, so I’ll leave you to thresh it out alone, and turn in for a good night’s sleep—eh, what?”

Left to himself, Dick Maitland sat far into the night, considering the situation unfolded to him by the king; and at length an inspiration came to him, by following which he thought it possible that he might be able to clear up the mystery connected with the deaths of Lobelalatutu’s most trusted chiefs, and perhaps discover whether or not there really existed a conspiracy to overthrow that monarch and restore the barbarous practices that had made the rule of the last king literally a reign of terror. Then he turned into his hammock and slept soundly until Mafuta aroused him at sunrise with the early cup of chocolate which was the invariable prelude to the business of the day.

The first thing after breakfast the two friends walked to the wagon, which was outspanned close at hand, and opened the boxes and bales which contained the various articles which they had brought with them to serve as presents and media of barter, and from the contents of these they selected a liberal assortment of gifts for the king, his wives, and the most important chiefs in His Majesty’s immediate entourage. These they handed over to the care of Mafuta, Jantje, and ’Nkuku the voorlouper; then, directing the trio to follow them, Dick and Grosvenor mounted their horses and rode at a foot-pace to the king’s village.

The distribution of the gifts proved to be a somewhat lengthy function, for the articles presented included a considerable number of mechanical toys, the working of each of which had to be carefully explained to the recipient; but at length it came to an end, to the apparent satisfaction of everybody concerned, and then Dick said to the king:

“Your Majesty is aware that I am a healer of sickness; is there any member of your family, or anyone in whom you are interested, lying sick at the present moment? Because, if so, I shall be very glad to do what I can to restore the patient to health.”

The king looked doubtfully at Dick for a moment or two, as though not quite comprehending the drift of the question; then something in the expression of Maitland’s face led to his understanding, and he replied:

“There is no one of my household at present sick, O Healer! but one of my chiefs—a man named ’Nkuni, who is my friend, lies nigh unto death; and if you can heal him I shall be grateful to you, for he is very dear to me. His sickness is the same as that which has already sent six other chiefs along the Dark Path; and it is of so strange and deadly a nature that Sekosini, the head witch doctor, can find no cure for it.”

As the king thus spoke Dick was keenly watching the faces of the various persons present, and he noted with something of a thrill that four or five of the chiefs seemed to exchange stealthy glances of meaning with each other, and also, despite their assumption of indifference, to exhibit signs of inward perturbation. But it was no part of his policy to show that he had observed these things; he therefore responded to the king:

“Ah, it may be that the sickness from which ’Nkuni is suffering is a sickness new to this country; and if it should prove to be so it is not surprising that Sekosini is unable to conquer it. It may be, however, that it is akin to some of the diseases with which I am acquainted, and in that case I can save the chief’s life. We will go to his hut and see him even now, if the king will direct someone to conduct us thither.”

Lobelalatutu at once turned to one of the chiefs present, and said:

“Ingona, you are ’Nkuni’s friend; take these white men to his hut, that the Healer may see him, and perchance restore to him his health and strength.”

Two minutes later Dick stood in the hut of ’Nkuni, and saw, lying stretched upon the pallet before him, a man somewhat past the prime of life who, when in health, must have been a very fine specimen of manhood. Now, however, he was thin and wasted, his skin was cold yet dry, his pulse was exceedingly feeble and erratic, and he was in a terribly exhausted condition, having suffered a severe paroxysm of abdominal pain shortly after swallowing a draught of milk which had been administered to him by Sekosini’s order. This last fact, together with several other details respecting the progress of the disease, were communicated by the man’s chief wife, who appeared to be greatly concerned about him, as was naturally to be expected.

“Where is the vessel from which the milk was drunk?” demanded Dick, when the woman had told all that she had to tell.

A calabash bowl capable of containing about a quart was produced for his inspection, and he saw with satisfaction that it had not yet been washed. The film of milk still clinging to its interior showed that it had been about half full when offered to the patient, and about a teaspoonful of milk still remained in the bowl. Of this vessel Dick instantly took possession, handing it over to Grosvenor, with instructions not to spill a single drop of its contents on any account. Then he asked if any medicine had been administered in the milk, and was answered in the affirmative, a very small calabash bottle being shown which had contained the drug. Of this also Dick took possession. Next, having brought his medicine chest with him, in accordance with the plans which he had made overnight, the young doctor administered a powerful emetic, then he locked the chest, slipped the key into his pocket, and, leaving the chest in the hut to obviate the

inconvenience of carrying it to and fro, he gave certain instructions to the chief's wife, and then requested Ingona to conduct him to the hut of Sekosini, the chief witch doctor.

This request appeared to fill Ingona with alarm, which he made no attempt to conceal. He informed Dick that Sekosini was a very great man indeed, second in power and influence only to Lobelalatutu himself; that it was not his custom to receive visitors unless permission had first been asked, the request being invariably accompanied by a present; that evil invariably befell those who were foolhardy enough to offend him; and that if he—Ingona—might presume to advise, he would strongly recommend the white man not to go near him, as Sekosini had always manifested a peculiarly strong aversion to strangers, and especially to white men since the two visits of the Spirits of the Winds to the Makolo country.

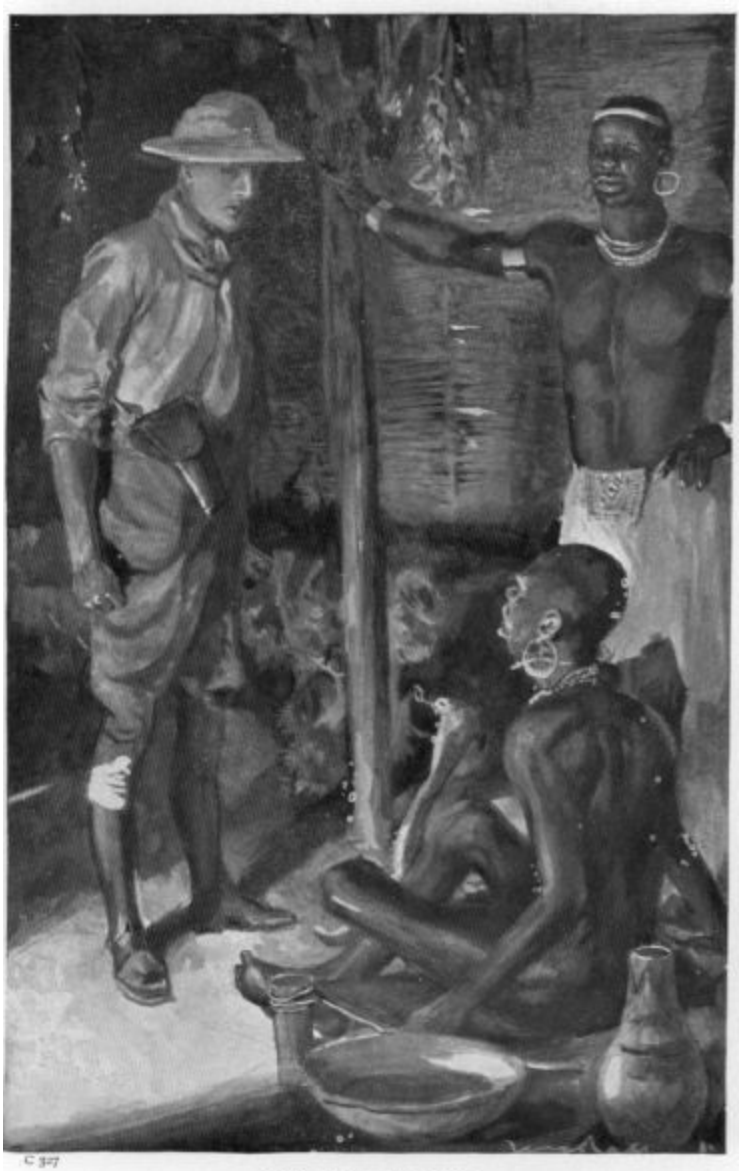
All this, however, only tended to strengthen certain suspicions which Dick had already formed; but he did not express them to Ingona; he blandly explained to that chief that, having been requested by the king to use his best endeavours to cure 'Nkuni, he wished to see Sekosini and consult with him, in order that he might learn as many particulars as possible respecting the ailment from which 'Nkuni was suffering. This explanation appeared at least partially to satisfy Ingona, who made no further attempt to dissuade Dick from his purpose, but, on the contrary, offered to go forward and prepare Sekosini for the proposed visit. To this proposal, since it could scarcely interfere with his plans, Dick cheerfully assented, whereupon Ingona, pointing out the witch doctor's hut, which stood a good quarter of a mile apart from all others, hastened toward it at the long, swinging trot which enables the South African savage to get over the ground so quickly and which he can maintain for such an incredible length of time.

Dick, meanwhile, accompanied only by Mafuta to act as interpreter, sauntered slowly on his way, for the double purpose of arranging mentally the plan of his impending interview with Sekosini, and giving Ingona time to say whatever he might wish to say to the witch doctor.

It was about a quarter of an hour later that, as Dick and his henchman approached the witch doctor's hut, Ingona emerged from it with the gratifying intimation that he had succeeded in inducing Sekosini graciously to accord the white man an audience. Whereupon the white man, having suitably expressed the satisfaction which was his at so great an honour, stooped and passed into the hut, preceded by Ingona and followed by Mafuta, whose original wholesome fear of wizards had by this time become completely swamped by his belief in the power of his master to circumvent the most powerful wizard that ever lived.

The hut of Sekosini afforded no indication of the importance of its owner, for it was of the same size as, and in all other respects similar to, the other huts of the ordinary natives, that is, as regarded its external appearance. Inside, however, there was a very marked difference; for whereas the ordinary native is content to sleep on the bare floor, Sekosini was satisfied with nothing less than a bed, consisting of a quadrangular framework of hardwood supported, at the height of a foot above the floor, by four stout posts driven firmly into the ground, the skeleton framework being strapped across and lengthways by a great number of tightly strained raw-hide thongs upon which were piled several very valuable karosses, or skin rugs. Also the interior of the hut was thickly hung with bunches of dried herbs and other objects, the precise nature of which Dick was at first unable to determine in the comparative obscurity of the interior, passing at once, as he did, from the blazing sunshine of the open direct into an interior which was unilluminated save by such light as penetrated through the low, narrow entrance.

For a full minute he stood, mute and motionless, waiting for his eyes to accustom themselves to the change; then the various objects of the interior



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DICK AND SEKOSINI

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gradually began to reveal themselves to him with increasing distinctness, and he found himself face to face with a thin, wizened, shrunken creature of apparently incredible age, without a particle of hair on head or face, but with a pair of eyes that glowed like carbuncles within their cavernous sockets. He was seated cross-legged upon the floor, was absolutely naked, save for a necklace of snake skin, and was toying with an enormous green *mamba*—one of the most

deadly of South African snakes—that lay coiled between his legs with its cruel, vindictive eyes fixed immovably upon the visitor. Beside Sekosini stood Ingona, apparently impassive, but his quick, irregular breathing betrayed the fact that he was labouring under a considerable amount of excitement. As for the witch doctor, his face wore a smile of concentrated malice, as though he anticipated something in the nature of a conflict with this audacious white *mfana* and was already exulting in the prospect of a quick and overwhelming victory.

Suddenly he fixed his eyes intently upon Dick's, and said, in soft, sibilant tones:

"Well, *'mlungu*, what want ye with Sekosini?"

It was the moment and the opportunity for which Dick had been waiting. Gazing intently into the eyes of the savage, in the peculiar manner that he had learned from Humphreys, the young doctor suddenly concentrated his will upon the effort to bring his foe—for as such he intuitively recognised Sekosini—under subjugation. For a moment the strangely contrasted pair gazed at each other, and then some strange sensation experienced by the witch doctor seemed to warn him of what was happening. But it was too late; Dick had caught him unawares, and so absolutely instantaneous was the hypnotic method which Humphreys had taught his pupil that before Sekosini could offer any effective resistance his will had completely succumbed to Dick's, and he was in the latter's power. In response to Dick's unspoken thought he said:

"Ask what you will, and I will answer."

"You hear?" demanded Dick, turning his gaze for a moment upon Ingona.

“I hear,” answered Ingona, unsuspectingly meeting Dick’s gaze as he replied, and in that moment he, too, was brought under the young doctor’s influence. For a few seconds longer Dick kept his unwinking gaze steadfastly fixed upon the chief, mentally commanding him to forget everything that he might see and hear during the interview; and then he again turned his attention to the witch doctor. He recalled to mind a declaration of Humphreys’ upon which the latter had laid great stress: “The spoken word, where you can use it, is always more potent than the unspoken, but whether it is understood or not is really a minor matter; it is the emphasis, the insistence which is conveyed by speech, added to the will power employed, that renders the operator absolutely irresistible.” As it was of the utmost importance that Sekosini should remain completely under his influence until the whole affair was brought to an end, he now once more sent his compelling gaze into the unblinking eyes of the ancient savage, and finally said to him, in English:

“Henceforth, until I release you, your will is mine; you will think and act only as I direct. You understand?”

“I understand, and will obey,” answered Sekosini.

“Good!” returned Dick. “Now I command you to tell me the absolute truth. Know you anything relative to the sickness from which the chief ’Nkuni is suffering, or the sickness from which ’Mtatu and the other five chiefs died?”

“Yes,” answered Sekosini—and the answer in nowise surprised Dick; “I know all. ’Nkuni is slowly dying of poison administered by me, the same poison that sent ’Mtatu and the other five chiefs along the Dark Path. The destruction of these men is preliminary to the destruction of the king, of whose method of government I and others disapprove. I might have destroyed Lobelalatutu alone; but if the chiefs whom I have destroyed had

been allowed to live it would assuredly have led to trouble, therefore have I destroyed them first. When ’Nkuni dies the chiefs who think as I do will be strong enough to act without fear of opposition, and we shall be able to destroy Lobelalatutu and restore the system which prevailed when M’Bongwele reigned, the system by which the chiefs and the witch doctors were able to acquire much wealth instead of living, as we do now, in comparative poverty.”

“Then,” demanded Dick, “do I understand that under Lobelalatutu’s rule you have not a sufficiency to meet all your wants?”

“I have a sufficiency, yes,” answered Sekosini; “but I would have much more than that. I would have wealth, great wealth, and, above all, power, the power that the witch doctors wielded in M’Bongwele’s time. True, I have much power even now; but it is as nothing to the power that was wielded by Mtusa, the chief witch doctor whom the accursed Spirits of the Winds sent along the Dark Path with M’Bongwele, the king.”

“I see,” said Dick meditatively. “And are there any others concerned with you in this precious scheme of yours to remove Lobelalatutu?”

“Yes,” answered Sekosini, “there are Ingona, Lambati, Mapela, Moroosi, Amakosa, N’Ampata, and Sekukuni, all chiefs.”

“Quite a formidable little crowd,” mused Dick, as he drew forth his pocket book to make a few notes. “Just repeat those names again—slowly, if you please,” he commanded.

Sekosini did so, and Dick noted down the names very carefully, so that there should be no mistake, for some of the native names are quite embarrassingly similar in sound.

“Now,” resumed Dick, when he had done this, “to return to ’Nkuni. What is the poison that you have been administering to him?”

“It is a decoction of the leaves of the plant that hangs immediately over your head,” answered Sekosini.

Dick reached up and touched a thick branch depending from the roof of the hut. “This?” he asked.

Sekosini assented, and Dick took down the branch and examined it. It seemed quite an ordinary shrub to all appearance. He handed it over to Mafuta for safekeeping.

“Next question,” said Dick. “Is there an antidote to this particular poison?”

“Oh yes!” answered the witch doctor cheerfully; “I never use a poison that has no antidote, because it is sometimes desirable to alter one’s plans at the last moment.”

“Quite so,” assented Dick; “and I am going to alter your plans with regard to ’Nkuni straight away. Where is your antidote, and how is it prepared?”

“It is contained in those roots,” answered Sekosini, pointing to a bundle of bulb-like objects also suspended from the roof. “The method of preparation is simple. A root is taken, cleaned from the adhering soil, and boiled in water until it is soft enough to crush between the fingers. Then the liquid is allowed to cool and strained through cloth. This liquid is of a dark colour, almost black. To administer it, add enough water to stain it very pale yellow, and let the patient drink as he will; the more he drinks the quicker will be his cure.”

“Excellent! I shall easily remember that,” murmured Dick. Then, addressing the witch doctor, he said:

“That is all I want to know at present. Now, remain here until I summon you to the presence of the king. Mafuta, take these roots, and we will be going.”

Two hours later he had prepared a sufficient quantity of the antidote to fill an eight-ounce medicine bottle; and as the stuff was exceedingly strong, he believed that this ought to be nearly, or quite, sufficient to effect a complete cure. Armed with this, he made his way to ’Nkuni’s hut, and was gratified to find that the emetic had been productive of very satisfactory results, the pain being greatly eased, while the temperature of the body had become almost normal. He now administered a good stiff dose of the antidote, and left the bottle containing it in charge of the patient’s wife, giving her the most minute instructions respecting its administration. This done, he proceeded to the enclosed part of the village containing the king’s house and its dependencies, and informed the sentries at the gate of the palisade that he desired to report personally to the king the state of the chief ’Nkuni, from whose hut he had just come. The sentries had already received orders to admit the white men whenever they should present themselves, and in a few minutes Dick found himself standing in the presence of Lobelalatutu.

Chapter Ten.

Dick’s “Magic”.

The king was reclining upon a sort of sofa, with two or three of his wives fanning him to drive away the flies, when The Healer was announced; but a word caused the women to scuttle off to their own quarters like frightened rabbits, while Lobelalatutu rose to a sitting position as Dick entered, followed by Mafuta.

“I see you, O Healer!” exclaimed the king with cordiality, before Dick could say a word. “Draw near and sit beside me. It is said that you have news of ’Nkuni for me. Have you seen him?”

“Twice this day have I seen him,” answered Dick; “once when I went forth from your presence this morning, and again but a short time since. I came hither directly from his hut.”

“And has your skill enabled you to find out what is wrong with him?” demanded the king.

“It has,” answered Dick. “Your friend ’Nkuni was slowly dying from the effects of the same poison that slew the others. But I can save him, and he shall live, it may be to serve you better than some of those chiefs who, professing to be loyal to you, are secretly planning your overthrow and death.”

“*Au*!” ejaculated Lobelalatutu; “is it so? Then my suspicions were not ill-founded. But, tell me, how came you to learn this?”

“When I first visited the hut of ’Nkuni this morning, conducted thither by the chief Ingona, whom you thought to be ’Nkuni’s friend,” answered Dick, “I found that Sekosini, the chief witch doctor, had been administering to the sick man certain medicines with the alleged purpose of healing him of his sickness. When I entered his hut ’Nkuni seemed to be nigh unto death, having endured much pain after swallowing a draught of milk containing medicine supplied by Sekosini. The symptoms were those of poisoning; I, therefore, took possession of the unwashed vessel which had contained the milk, and also the remainder of the medicine supplied by Sekosini, with the object of examining both. I have not yet done that, for the examination would take time, and ’Nkuni’s case seemed urgent; therefore I went to Sekosini’s hut to talk with him about it. And when at length I stood face to

face with the witch doctor I laid my magic upon him, so that he was perforce obliged to tell me all the truth of the matter; and he confessed that ’Nkuni’s illness was part of a conspiracy to remove your friends from you, that you might be deposed and slain, and the iniquitous system of government practised by M’Bongwele restored.”

“*Au*, it is well!” exclaimed the king in a low stern voice; “it is very well. The vile, treacherous witch doctor shall be brought hither and placed before a slow fire until he gives up the names of those who are conspiring with him, and then—”

“Nay,” interrupted Dick, “there is no need; Sekosini has already voluntarily given me the names of those chiefs who are his partners in the conspiracy against you. They are,”—Dick drew out his pocket book and read —“Ingona, Lambati, Mapela, Moroosi, Amakosa, N’Ampata, and Sekukuni —nay, do nothing rashly, I pray you, but sit still and hear what I have to say.” For at the mention of those seven names the king had sprung to his feet in an access of fury, and seemed about to summon his guard. But at Dick’s persuasion he seated himself again, though he was much too excited for the moment to listen to his white visitor, muttering over to himself the names of the conspirators.

“Ingona—Ingona,” he hissed through his clenched teeth, “the man whom I believed to be the most loyal of all my chiefs, the man who evidently feigned friendship with ’Nkuni only to betray him to his death! But I will make a terrible example of these rebels; they shall die such deaths that—”

“Stop!” commanded Dick. “Is this how the Four Spirits who placed you on the throne of the Makolo taught you to administer justice?”

“Nay,” answered the king. “But this is no ordinary crime; it is as vile, in intention at least, as that of those who conspired against Seketulo and

restored M’Bongwele. Those chiefs were not only responsible for the death of Seketulo, but also for the horrors that followed; they were—”

“Just so,” interrupted Dick; “they were all that and more. But even that does not justify you in torturing these men to death. Destroy them, by all means, if you will, so that they may never again have the opportunity to do perhaps irreparable mischief; and let their death be so ignominious that it shall be a warning to all others; but let it be humane. In a word, hang them, even as M’Bongwele and M’Pusa, his chief witch doctor, were hanged. That surely ought to suffice for all practical purposes, should it not?”

“Possibly,” assented the king unwillingly. “The death by hanging and the disgrace of it are greatly feared, and it may be that—”

“Yes,” interrupted Dick soothingly, “of course it will. Then that is settled, eh? Because I want you to understand that unless you definitely promise me that there shall be no torture I shall be obliged to withdraw from this business altogether; moreover, I will take my magic off Sekosini, and then nothing that you can do will make him confess or incriminate the others. You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes, it is true,” admitted the king reluctantly; “Sekosini is very obstinate; and if he were so minded he would refuse to confess, even were he staked out on an ant’s nest.”

“Of course he would,” agreed Dick. “Therefore you see for yourself how futile anything of that kind would be. It would only make of him a martyr, and of you a cruel, revengeful, suspicious brute in the eyes of your people. But if he and his fellow conspirators can be brought to admit their guilt publicly, you at once become the righteous judge, and score accordingly. And I can make them confess if they are really guilty, as Sekosini asserts.”

“Then tell me, O Healer! what do you advise?” asked the king.

“This,” answered Dick. “I advise that you summon the whole of your chiefs to present themselves before you, and when they are assembled, Sekosini shall be called into your presence and commanded to tell his version of the story of the conspiracy in the hearing of all the chiefs. Then, if the chiefs implicated have any excuse to offer, let them offer it; if they have not, let them be hanged as plotters against the authority and person of the king.”

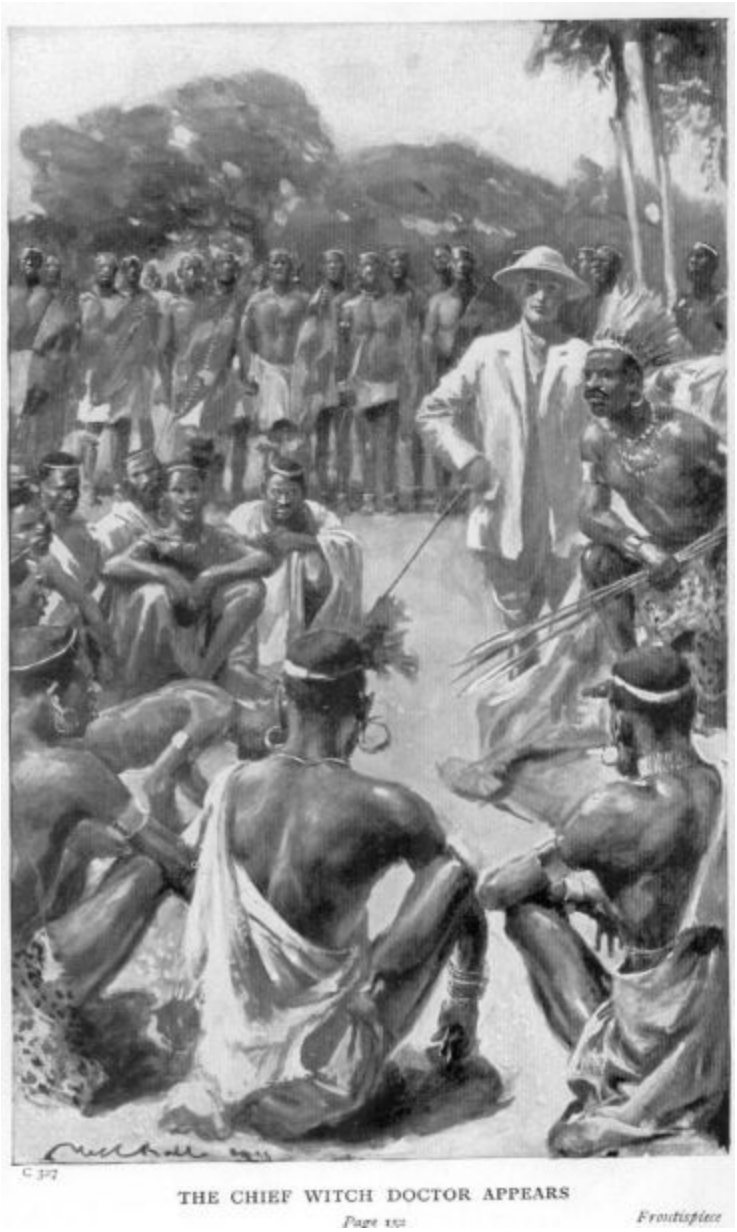
“It is well said; the advice is good, and shall be followed,” exclaimed the king. “It shall be done forthwith. I will send forth a messenger commanding all chiefs to present themselves before me in the Great Place, in connection with a matter of import; and when they have assembled, Sekosini also shall be brought hither.”

“There is no need for you to trouble about Sekosini,” answered Dick. “When you require his presence I will bring him to you by the power of my magic.”

About an hour later Lobelalatutu, having summoned his chiefs, sat upon his throne in the centre of the Great Place before his palace, with Dick beside him, and his bodyguard of some five hundred warriors, fully armed, arranged in a wide circle round him. Then the chiefs began to arrive, singly, or in twos or threes, until all were present; and as each arrived he was admitted to the interior of the circle of guards, where he squatted on his haunches before the king, the entire assemblage of chiefs, some thirty in number, forming themselves into an arc of a circle at a distance of about twenty feet from the throne. When at length it had been ascertained that every chief except the sick ’Nkuni was present, the king turned to Dick and said:

“Now, O Healer! by the power of your magic, cause Sekosini, the chief witch doctor, to come hither, I pray you.”

At the king’s words there occurred an uneasy movement among the assembled chiefs, some of whom exchanged quick, furtive glances of apprehension, which were duly noted by Dick and the king. The latter smiled somewhat sardonically and, beckoning the chief of his bodyguard toward him, murmured certain instructions in his ear. Meanwhile Dick, concentrating his thoughts upon Sekosini, mentally commanded him at once to present himself before the king in the Great Place. A quarter of an hour of somewhat painful tension followed, during which no word was spoken by any one of those who were hemmed in by the circle of armed guards, and then the chief witch doctor was seen approaching. He entered the circle of the guards, through a gap which was opened to give him passage—and which instantly closed again behind him—did *bonga*



THE CHIEF WITCH DOCTOR APPEARS

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(homage) to the king, and then stood, silent and serene, about midway between the king and the line of sitting chiefs. His aspect of perfect serenity, due to the fact that he was still completely under Dick's hypnotic influence, seemed to reassure certain of the assembled chiefs, whose faces had shown signs of anxiety; but the fact that The Healer, sitting there silent and impassive beside the king, had been able to summon Sekosini from a distance, and compel his presence, had been duly noted, and hands were placed over mouths, and low murmurs

of “*Au! ’mtagati; ’mkulu ’mtagati*” (a wizard; a great wizard) ran round the assembly.

The king himself was by no means unimpressed by this evidence of Dick’s wonderful power. He decided that it was a thing to be remembered; but it in nowise troubled him, for it was being exercised in his behalf. He, however, allowed time for the effect to sink into and take good hold of the minds of the spectators, for he was shrewd enough to recognise that the possession of such an ally must materially strengthen his own position; and at length, when he believed that the incident had produced its full effect, he sprang a new surprise upon his audience by saying, in a loud voice:

“Stand forth, O Sekosini! and tell us what you know concerning the sickness of the chief, ’Nkuni, and the deaths of those other six who have recently travelled along the Dark Path!”

Then, to the unutterable confusion and dismay of his fellow conspirators, the chief witch doctor, speaking in a loud, clear voice, proceeded clearly and succinctly to unfold detail after detail of the plot for the overthrow of the king, and the means whereby it had been hoped to accomplish it, including the murder of the six chiefs who, it was believed, were powerful enough to render the scheme abortive. As the full, cold-blooded atrocity of the conspiracy became revealed, murmurs of anger and detestation, low at first, but louder as the story proceeded, began to run round the line of chiefs, while those who sat next the parties implicated edged away from them on either side as far as possible, until they crouched, isolated, crestfallen, and self-condemned by their guilty countenances, a target for all eyes. At length Sekosini’s story came to an end, and for a few tense moments a profound silence ensued. There was not an individual present who did not realise the vital importance to the entire nation of the issues that had been raised by the witch doctor’s confession, and the manner in

which those issues would be dealt with by the king. Disaffection, secretly fomented and carefully nurtured, had grown so strong that it now threatened to disintegrate the whole nation, and unless it were firmly dealt with would probably split up the Makolo into a number of petty tribes, at enmity with each other, and an easy prey to those other nations who surrounded them. Would the king have the courage boldly to seize the hydra-headed menace and choke the life out of it, or would he resort to a policy of temporising and concession? Everybody present awaited the king's action in breathless suspense, while some were already grimly counting the number of spears upon which they might reckon to back them. But the anxious broodings of the assemblage were suddenly broken in upon by the voice of the king, who, lifting his head, cried in a loud voice:

"Ingona, trusted friend and counsellor of the king, induna of the Makolosi regiment, the very flower and backbone of my army, you have heard the tale told by Sekosini. Say now, is that tale false, or is it true?"

Ingona, a war-scarred veteran of perhaps fifty years of age, tall, straight as a spear shaft, and of commanding presence, rose to his feet and answered in a clear, deep voice:

"It is true, O Mighty One! true in every detail."

"It is true," repeated the king, in a tone of deep sorrow; "yes, unhappily there is no room to doubt it; every word carried conviction of its truthfulness to my mind. It is true; and the meaning of that is that the chiefs of the Makolo are divided into two factions, one of which would leave the government of the nation in my hands, while the other would entrust it to—whom?"

"Nay, O Great One! who can say? We had not agreed as to that," answered Ingona.

“Then—after my death—how was the matter to have been decided?” demanded the king.

“Who can say?” again answered Ingona. “We should probably have fought it out, and the victor would have seized the throne.”

“And ye would have set the Makolo at each other’s throats for—what?” demanded Lobelalatutu.

“Truly, I know not,” answered Ingona, “unless it were to satisfy the ambition of Sekosini. He has already confessed that he was the originator of the conspiracy, and therein he spoke no more than the truth. He is guileful as a snake; he has the gift of persuasive speech, and knowing that some of us were chafing under prolonged inaction, he used his cunning and the power of his tongue to stir our discontent into indignation, and finally into hatred and a fierce determination to effect a change. By the power of his magic he turned our hearts from thee, O Great One! and made us long, even as he did, for a return of such days as those when M’Bongwele reigned, when we were ever at war, when our young men became warriors instead of husbandmen, and when we enriched ourselves with the spoils of the vanquished. It was a dazzling dream that he brought before our eyes, and for a time it blinded me to the evils that lay behind it, and it is only now, when it is too late, that I perceive that evil, and understand that Sekosini befooled and bewitched me to the end that he might be raised to such power as M’Pusa enjoyed during the reign of M’Bongwele, when he and not M’Bongwele actually ruled the Makolo people. It is enough; I have said!”

“Take him away to his hut; set a guard over him; and see that he escape not,” ordered the king. “If he be not forthcoming when wanted, the officer and guard who have him in charge shall be crucified. Lambati, you too are implicated in this conspiracy. Have you aught to say in your defence?”

“Nay, O Great One!” answered Lambati; “I could but repeat the words of Ingona; and what would that avail me? Nothing! I, too, have said!”

“Let him also be taken away, and watched as carefully as Ingona,” ordered the king. “Mapela, have you aught to say in justification of your conspiracy against me?”

“Ay, that have I,” answered Mapela, springing to his feet and speaking in a defiant tone of voice. “My justification, O Lobelalatutu! is that under your governance the Makolo, formerly the most powerful and warlike nation in the world, is fast becoming a nation of women, and the contempt and laughing-stock of our neighbours. Soon shall we forget the art of war, our young men will sicken at the sight and smell of blood, and we shall become the prey of the first nation that dares attack us. Are not these sufficient reasons for our desire to see thee removed, and a man placed upon the throne in thy stead?”

A low murmur, whether of approval or the reverse it was difficult to say, ran round the line of assembled chiefs at this defiant speech from the mouth of one of the most powerful chiefs of the nation, but it subsided again instantly.

“Have you aught further to say, O Mapela?” demanded the king.

“Nay,” answered Mapela, still in the same defiant tone of voice. “What I have already said should surely be sufficient.”

“It is,” answered the king dryly, as he signed the guards to remove the rebel. “Is there anyone present who thinks and feels as does Mapela?”

“Yea!” answered two of the implicated chiefs, named respectively Amakosa and N’Ampata, as they simultaneously sprang to their feet.

“And have you, Amakosa, anything to add to, or take from, what Mapela has said?” demanded the king.

“Nothing!” briefly answered Amakosa.

“Or you, N’Ampata?” pressed the king.

“Only this, O Great One! that I think it would have been better had we approached thee and opened our minds to thee before conspiring against thee. But the plan was Sekosini’s, and he would listen to no such proposal; while I, who had been sworn to secrecy, dared not break my oath,” answered N’Ampata.

“Why not?” demanded Lobelalatutu. “When I was placed upon the throne, did not you, N’Ampata, with all the other chiefs, swear allegiance and loyalty to me? Yet you have dared to break that oath. Why, then, should you not dare to break your oath to Sekosini? Was he greater than I, or his power more than mine?”

“He persuaded me that it was; and also that, since in the opinion of many you were misgoverning the nation, I should be justified in breaking my oath of allegiance,” was the answer.

“Take them away!” commanded the king. And when they had gone he called upon the two remaining chiefs, Moroosi and Sekukuni, to justify themselves, if they could.

“I have naught to say, O Great One!” answered Moroosi, “save that, as it was with Ingona so was it with me.”

“And you, Sekukuni?” demanded the king.

“I also am the victim of Sekosini’s wiles and his serpent tongue,” answered the chief. “I should never have joined the conspiracy had he not led me secretly to believe that when thou wert gone I should be made king in thy stead. And the prospect dazzled me, for I believed that I could govern better than thou.”

Again the king waved his hand, and the last two of the conspirators were led away, amid an intense, breathless, almost ominous silence. For a few minutes Lobelalatutu sat, with his chin resting upon his chest, apparently reviewing the situation; then, lifting his head, he spoke.

“Chiefs of the Makolo,” he said, “ye have to-day heard how Sekosini, the chief witch doctor, and seven of the most powerful and influential among you secretly plotted together to destroy me, and, by so doing, to set you at each other’s throats like wolves fighting over a carcass, and ye have also heard what means were adopted to render the plot successful; how six of your number were sent along the Dark Path by the witchcraft of Sekosini, and how another would have taken the same journey but for the superior witchcraft of him who sits here at my side. It was his power that compelled Sekosini to come hither to-day and tell the truth; and it is to his power that ’Nkuni will owe his life, for the Healer has promised to save him and make him whole again. Think ye that it was mere chance that brought the Healer and his friend the Mighty Hunter into the land of the Makolo at the moment when, but for them, Sekosini’s plot must have been crowned with success? I tell you, nay; it is because it has been ordained that I, whom the Four Spirits of the Winds set upon the throne, should continue to rule over you! It is useless to plot against me, who am under the protection of the Spirits; for, as ye have seen, it can but lead to the detection and overthrow of the plotters. Yet the eight who have to-day confessed their guilt before you are not all equally guilty, and therefore their punishment shall not be equally severe. Had such a thing as this happened in the days of M’Bongwele they

had all died lingering and painful deaths; but I have been taught to temper justice with mercy; therefore, while all must be punished for conspiring against me, their lawful king, their punishment shall be in strict proportion to their guilt. And this is a matter that requires careful consideration; for while, on the one hand, I am determined that the punishment shall not be too severe, I am equally determined that it shall not be weakly lenient. Go, therefore, now; and to-morrow I will summon you again to hear sentence pronounced upon the guilty ones. You are dismissed."

Five minutes later the Great Place was empty, Dick having followed the king, by the invitation of the latter, into his house. For several minutes Lobelalatutu remained sunk in a profound reverie, evidently pondering upon some question of exceeding difficulty; at length, however, he raised his head and said:

"I give you hearty thanks, O Healer, for the help which you have afforded me in the discovery of those who are concerned in the conspiracy that has this day been revealed. I have for some time suspected that something of the kind existed, but I dreamed not that it was so serious, or that so many of my chiefs were involved in it; nor could I devise a means by which to discover the truth. It is your wisdom, O Healer, that found a way; and now I again desire the help of that wisdom to enable me to apportion to each offender a punishment proportionate to his crime. You heard what each culprit had to say in his defence, and I doubt not that you saw, as I did, that all were not equally guilty. I am not troubled about Sekosini, Mapela, and Amakosa; their guilt is indisputable, and they die the death; if they were permitted to live they would but plot against me again. N'Ampata also is a dangerous man; he, too, is opposed to my system of government, and is not to be trusted; it were better that he should die, than that he should live and perchance stir up another conspiracy against me, to be suppressed only at the cost of many more lives. A chief is not like ordinary men; he wields

power, influence, authority; as he thinks, so do his followers; and if he were to call his people to arms against even me, they would obey him, and the country would thus be involved in a civil war, resulting in much slaughter. For the sake of my people I must prevent this; and the only way to do this is to remove the disaffected. Is not this the truth, O Healer?"

"Undoubtedly," answered Dick. "It is better that a few should die than many; and those who foment rebellion, stir up strife, and incite to acts of violence and murder are even more guilty than the misguided individuals who listen to them and act upon their suggestions."

The king nodded his agreement with this expression of opinion.

"Therefore," said he, "in order to prevent the stirring up of strife and the incitement to bloodshed, Sekosini, Mapela, Amakosa, and N'Ampata must die. But as to the others I am not so sure. They have conspired against me, it is true; they consented to the slaying of seven of my most trusted chiefs and counsellors; and they would have brought anarchy upon the people; therefore must they also be punished. Yet Ingona, Lambati, Moroosi, and Sekukuni have all been my friends; they have aided me with valuable counsel when I have been confronted with problems of great difficulty and danger; and never until now have they shown the least sign of disloyalty. They are valuable servants whom it would be most difficult if not altogether impossible to replace; and, above all, I feel almost certain that in their hearts they are not disloyal, but that, as Ingona said, they have been bewitched and led astray by the craft of Sekosini. I think that, the head Witch Doctor and his evil influence removed, they would henceforward be, as they were aforetime, true, loyal subjects; and I would not destroy them if they may otherwise be safely dealt with. What does your wisdom advise in their case, O Healer?"

It was a very difficult and delicate question upon which to advise, and Dick never, perhaps, felt more heavily handicapped by his youth and inexperience than he did at that moment; yet it was evident that this savage king, himself at a loss how to deal with the problem, was practically leaving the decision as to the fate of those four men in his hands, and that, whatever his advice might be, it would be followed. For several minutes he anxiously pondered upon the situation, and then light and inspiration suddenly came to him. Why should he not again employ his marvellous hypnotic powers to solve the problem? He had already done so with perfect success in the case of Sekosini; why not in that of these others? He could place them under his influence and then compel them to disclose the innermost secrets of their hearts, thus determining beyond a doubt exactly how deep their feeling of disloyalty went and whether it went too deep to be capable of being uprooted and replaced by one of absolute fidelity in the future. This point determined, he would be able to advise with absolute confidence, or, better still, enable the king to decide for himself. Yes, that was undoubtedly the best thing to be done, and he turned to Lobelalatutu with a sigh of relief.

“Listen, O Great One!” he said. “You ask for my advice, and now I am ready to give it. Let the four chiefs, Ingona, Lambati, Moroosi, and Sekukuni, be brought hither in charge of the guards which you have placed over them; then will I lay my magic upon them so that they shall speak only the plain, simple truth, even as Sekosini spoke it just now to his own condemnation; and thus shall ye be able to judge exactly how far each man may be trusted in the future. Is my advice good and acceptable?”

“It is very good, and we will act upon it forthwith,” answered Lobelalatutu; and, clapping his hands to summon a messenger, he gave instructions that the four chiefs should be at once brought into his presence. A few minutes later they stood before him, each in charge of two fully armed guards; and Dick, after allowing them to stand for a full minute in the oppressive silence

that prevailed, in order that their minds might be suitably attuned to the ordeal which they were to undergo, suddenly rose to his feet, and, walking up to each man, gazed steadfastly at him in the peculiar manner which he had already found so marvellously effective, and at once brought him under hypnotic control. Then, retiring to the seat which he had just quitted, he powerfully willed that each man should reply with absolute truth and candour to all questions asked him, concealing nothing, and laying bare the inmost secrets of his heart. As he thus concentrated his will upon theirs he watched each man narrowly, and presently, seeing that they were all absolutely under his control, he raised his hand, and said, in a low, impressive voice:

“Listen, O Ingona, Lambati, Moroosi, and Sekukuni! Lobelatatutu, the king, the Great One, is about to question you further concerning the conspiracy in which ye have been engaged with Sekosini, and it is my will that ye shall answer his every question truthfully and without reservation or concealment of any kind. Ye hear?”

“We hear, O Healer, and we will obey,” answered the four, as with one voice.

“It is well,” said Dick. “Now, O Great One! proceed with your questions, and be assured that ye shall learn the whole truth.”

“Listen, O Ingona,” said the king. “A while ago ye attempted to explain to me why ye had joined this conspiracy fomented by Sekosini. Is there aught more that ye would say in extenuation of your crime?”

“Nothing, O Great One,” answered Ingona sadly. “Our crime is too rank to admit of extenuation. It is true that there are those among us who think that even peace may be bought at too high a price, if that price includes the forgetting by our warriors of the art of war, and the impossibility of training

our young men to fight. Never since the death of M'Bongwele have we been allowed to wash our spears in the blood of our enemies; and, in the opinion of many, those enemies are consequently growing overbold and insolent. But who are we that we should presume to judge the king's actions, or to say to him: 'Ye shall do this,' or 'Ye shall not do that'? To do so is a crime; and the king who tamely suffers it is too weak to govern so powerful a nation as the Makolo. Yet I committed that crime; and now, when it is too late, when that has been done which may never be undone, my greatest shame and grief are that I was ever weak enough to open my ears to the beguilings of that serpent Sekosini, that I ever permitted him to turn my eyes from the straight path and hide from them, until too late, the dreadful consequences that must have ensued had Sekosini's plot succeeded."

"Tis pity that ye saw not all this in time, Ingona," said the king reproachfully. "Tell me, now—If this conspiracy had ripened to fruition, would you, O Ingona, have taken the field and led your warriors against me?"

"Nay," answered Ingona, "that would I not. The time was when, blinded and misled by Sekosini's plausible arguments and misrepresentations, I might have done so. But that time is past; even before the arrival of the Healer I had begun dimly to foresee the evil that must come to the nation through the plot; and it was in my mind to take steps for its frustration, but he forestalled me."

"And you, Lambati?" demanded the king.

"Nay, O Great One," answered the chief. "That I conspired against you, and joined your enemies, is true; but I know now that my madness was but momentary, and that, had the time come, I should have arrayed myself on your side, and against your enemies."

“And you, Moroosi?” questioned the king.

“As I answered you a while ago, O Great One, as it was with Ingona, so was it and is it with me. I have no gift of fluent speech, but I pray you to recall what he said, and to believe that I agree with every word, and would fain say them all again.”

“And you, Sekukuni?” reiterated Lobelalatutu.

“I spoke falsely, O King, when I said that I was the victim of Sekosini’s wiles,” answered Sekukuni. “I think as he thinks, and answered as I did only in the hope that my punishment might be mitigated. But I tell you, Lobelalatutu, that if yonder white man had not interfered and saved you by his magic, I would have fought against you, even to the last man; for I was to have been king in your stead; and I know that under my rule the Makolo nation would have recovered all its lost greatness.”

The king for a moment looked astounded at this bold and defiant speech, for he had hitherto regarded Sekukuni as one of his most trustworthy chiefs; but he quickly recovered from his astonishment, and signed the guards to lead away their prisoners.

Chapter Eleven.

The Place of Red Stones.

The day was well advanced when at length Dick Maitland, weary and hungry, returned to his tent, where he found Grosvenor indulging in a bath and a change of clothing after a preliminary exploration of the ruins. “You seemed to be engaged busily upon affairs of state, and not likely to need me, so I trotted off to take a general look round,” he explained.

“Well,” demanded Dick, “and what do you think of them?”

“Awfully interesting!” answered Grosvenor. “Wonderful people they must have been who were responsible for the building of the city. People of refinement, don’t you know; fond of luxury, intensely artistic, and all that sort of thing. Some of the carvings—floreated capitals and, and what-d’ye-call-ems of that sort—are really splendid. And everything’s on such a grand scale, too; must have been immensely wealthy—those old johnnies. I’m only sorry now that I’m not an archaeologist; for if I were I might write a book about the place and become famous. But no, that wouldn’t do either, for Professor von Schalckenberg has already done that, so my book would only be a drug on the market. But I’ve taken some rattlin’ good photographs of the place, and I ought to be able to do something with them later on—eh, what?”

“Yes,” said Dick, “I dare say you will—if they come out right. Have you developed them yet?”

“No, not yet,” answered Grosvenor. “Waiting until it gets dark before I attempt anything of that sort. But I know that they’ll come out all right. Good light, correct exposure, isochromatic screen and films; bound to come out right, y’know. Found the place where the Professor and his pals had been digging. Must have done a lot of work, those johnnies; no end of soil turned over where they dug for pavements and—and—things. And, pray, what have you been about all day, old chap?”

Dick told him, pretty well *in extenso*, how he had passed the day, even going so far as to describe his hypnotic experiments—of which he had said nothing to Grosvenor thus far—with the result that the Mighty Hunter was rendered almost speechless with astonishment.

“Hypnotised ’em, eh?” he ejaculated. “Well, I’ll be shot! Thought hypnotism was all humbug and tommy rot, y’know. Collusion, and that sort of thing.”

“Yes,” agreed Dick, “there is no doubt that much of it is. But, nevertheless, hypnotism is a perfectly genuine science, and a tremendously powerful agent for good, if properly used. There is the well-known institution at Nancy, for instance, where several almost miraculous cures have been effected solely by the employment of hypnotism. Oh yes, hypnotism is genuine enough, make no mistake about that; and the hypnotic practitioner can do many wonderful things by its employment. For instance, do you suppose that old villain, Sekosini, would have revealed all the details of his precious plot to-day had I not hypnotised him?”

“No, I don’t suppose he would,” acknowledged Grosvenor. “But—er—I say, old chap, I’m just wondering whether it was quite playing the game—doin’ the square thing by the wizard and the other johnnies to make them give themselves away under the influence of hypnotism—eh, what?”

“Ah, now,” said Dick, “you raise a question of an exceedingly controversial character. I admit, of course, that at the first blush, and regarding the matter superficially—if I may say so—it certainly would seem that I had taken an unfair advantage of those fellows by compelling them to speak the truth, and so ‘give themselves away’, as you expressively put it. Yet why, I ask you, should they not be made to do so? Are evildoers to be permitted to shelter themselves from the consequences of their misdeeds behind a protective screen of lies? Is right to be handicapped in its battle with wrong by what, after all, seems to me an overstrained if not altogether false sense of justice? There can be little doubt that skilful criminals have escaped the just punishment of their crimes simply because they have refused to incriminate themselves. This, of course, is all right from the criminars point

of view; but is it right from the point of view of the community, who look to the law to protect them from him? My own view—which I give for whatever it may be worth—is that the criminal has no right to be protected from himself. It is the interests of the community and not of the criminal that have to be considered. If by speaking the truth he furthers the ends of justice he ought to be allowed to do so, ay, or even compelled, where compulsion is possible, as in the case of these conspirators. Here we have certain men who, for their own selfish ends, deliberately planned to plunge this Makolo nation into all the horrors of civil war, and deluge it with the blood of its own people; also, in pursuance of their plans they foully and treacherously took the lives of six of the most important chiefs and endangered that of a seventh. Were they ‘playing the game’, or, in other words, were they acting openly and above-board? On the contrary, their acts were wrapped in secrecy, and were characterised by the vilest treachery; and they would have been successful but for my intervention. For it is certain that the facts could never have been brought to light, had I not compelled Sekosini to speak the truth. That being the case, how could their nefarious scheme have been defeated by our side playing the game, if by ‘playing the game’ you mean that we were not to compel, or even permit them to incriminate themselves? To me it seems to resolve itself into this—that if one side insists on playing the game while the other side refuses to do so, the first must always suffer defeat while the other triumphs; and where the side which insists on playing the game represents right and justice, law and order, and the other side represents evil and criminality, the result must be the triumph of the lawless over the lawabiding, which, as Euclid observes, is absurd. Q.E.D.”

“Yes,” agreed Grosvenor, “I suppose you are right, Dick. Put as you put it, it certainly does seem an absurd and fantastic distortion of our sense of fairness that in the ceaseless struggle between good and evil the latter should be helped and the former handicapped as much as possible; and at

all events in the present case I think you have successfully demonstrated your right to act as you did. Now, having settled that point, I propose that we have dinner, which seems to be ready, if one may judge by the looks and actions of Ramoo Samee."

The sun had barely risen on the following morning when Dick and Grosvenor received an invitation from the king to present themselves forthwith in the Great Place, where the conspirators were to be brought up for judgment to be pronounced upon them; and as such an invitation was tantamount to a command they hastily finished the breakfast upon which they were engaged when the message reached them, ordered their horses, and rode away toward the appointed spot.

Upon their arrival they found the chiefs who had been summoned, like themselves, to hear sentence pronounced, already assembling, while the king's bodyguard, motionless as statues, were ranged in a semicircle round the throne that had been placed in position for the accommodation of the king. A stool stood on either side of the throne, and upon their arrival Dick and Grosvenor were at once conducted to these. Almost immediately afterward the king made his appearance, and approaching the throne seated himself thereon, while those present accorded him the royal salute, Dick and Grosvenor standing and saluting in military fashion. Then, at a sign from His Majesty, all who were entitled to sit did so, and the order was given to lead forward the prisoners.

Conducted by their guards, the eight prisoners, their faces set and expressionless as masks, ranged themselves in line before the king; then, for a full minute, there ensued a profound and impressive silence, which was at length broken by Lobelalatutu, who commanded, in a calm, stern voice:

“Sekosini, chief Witch Doctor, and you Mapela, Amakosa, N’Ampata, and Sekukuni, chiefs of the Makolo, stand forward and listen to your doom. Out of your own mouths have ye been convicted of conspiracy against me and the peace of the nation. You, Sekosini, Mapela, N’Ampata, and Amakosa, yesterday boldly and defiantly acknowledged your guilt, and had nothing to plead in extenuation of it; but you, Sekukuni, in addition to being a conspirator, have proved yourself liar (and) coward; for at your public trial, in the presence of those now assembled, you declared yourself to be, like Ingona, Lambati, and Moroosi, the victim of Sekosini’s wiles and serpent tongue; whereas afterward, when you were brought before me privately, and compelled by the Healer’s magic to speak the truth, you acknowledged that your former statement was false, made only in the hope of mitigation of your punishment, and that in your foul, guilty heart you thought as Sekosini, and would have fought against me to your last man in the attempt to overthrow and destroy me. To satisfy your unlawful ambition and greed of gain, you five men, all holding positions of high authority and trust, would have set callously tribe against tribe, regiment against regiment, and man against man, until the people had fallen and strewed the ground like leaves of autumn and the land was drenched in their blood. It is enough; you are a menace and danger to the nation, and you must die. In the old days of the reign of M’Bongwele—those days which you were so anxious to restore—your dying would have been a lingering, long-drawn-out, excruciating torment; but under the teaching of those who put me on this throne I have learned to be merciful, and my sentence is that you be led forth and hanged by the neck from the bough of the tree that ended M’Bongwele’s cruel and iniquitous life, and there left as an example and a warning to all who think such evil thoughts as yours. Bind them and take them away.”

In an instant the guards who had charge of the doomed men seized them, and proceeded to bind their hands behind them with thongs of hide, prior to

leading them away to the place of execution. With one exception they submitted silently and without protest; Sekosini, however, the Witch Doctor, seemed determined not to go without firing a Parthian shot, for, fixing his eyes on Dick, he shouted in a high, piercing voice:

“Listen, O *’mlungu*! It is through you and your accursed magic that I go forth this day to die the death of shame and ignominy; for, but for you, we should have kept our secret, our plans would have succeeded, and ours would have been the triumph. But though your magic triumphs now, it shall not always be so. I too have a potent magic, by means of which mine eyes can pierce the veil of the future and see many things that are to be. I see you and the other *’mlungu* going hence through many dangers to a far country, where other dangers await you; and, mark you this, though both go, only one of you shall return! It is enough; I have said, and I am ready.”

So heavily charged with bitter hate and malignity were the tones of the witch doctors voice and the expression of his burning eyes that, despite his sober common sense, Dick could scarcely repress a shudder at the veiled threat conveyed by the man’s parting words; but his attention was quickly diverted by the voice of the king commanding Ingona, Lambati, and Moroosi to listen to him while he announced his decision concerning them.

“Attend to my words, O chiefs of the Makolo nation!” said Lobelalatutu, raising his voice so that all present might distinctly hear. “Ye were present yesterday when I summoned the eight conspirators before me to defend themselves; and ye heard Ingona, Lambati, Moroosi, and Sekukuni declare that there was no treason in their hearts, but that they had been bewitched and led astray by Sekosini. I was inclined to believe them, as doubtless ye all were, and it grieved me that I should be obliged to condemn to death those who had served me well in the past, and might perchance, if they spoke the truth, serve me well again in the future. Yet how was I to know

that their words were in very deed the truth? I was perplexed and troubled, and in my perplexity I sought counsel from my friend the Healer. And the counsel that he gave me was good. He said: ‘Behold now, O Great One, thou shalt summon those men again before thee, and by the power of my magic I will cause them to speak the very truth to thee; thou shalt read the inmost secrets of their hearts, and thus shalt thou gauge the exact measure of their guilt in this matter.’ And as the Healer spoke, so was it; the three who stand before us had indeed been beguiled and led astray for a time from their fidelity by the wiles of Sekosini, but there was no treachery in their hearts; and they confessed that, had the conspiracy ripened, they would have arrayed themselves on my side, while Sekukuni confessed that he was indeed guilty of all that he had been charged with. Therefore, although they have sinned in conspiring against me, and must consequently be punished, yet their punishment shall not be death. My sentence upon you, O Ingona, Lambati, and Moroosi! is that ye be banished hence to the farthest confines of my kingdom, and be stationed at those points where the neighbouring nations are most aggressive. There ye shall be placed in command of the troops who guard the land; there ye shall find ample outlet for your warlike propensities; and there, if ye will, ye may atone for your fault by rendering me as good service in the future as ye have rendered in the past. I have said!”

As the last words passed the king’s lips a shout of irrepressible triumph and rejoicing went up from those present; for the three chiefs most intimately concerned had many friends, and were regarded by all with esteem and respect almost amounting to veneration. There is little doubt, therefore, that the king’s clemency in punishing their crime by banishment to points where their duties would not only be arduous, but also honourable, did much to strengthen his position and increase his popularity.

For several days following the conspiracy trial nothing of moment happened; the excitement which had been aroused by the somewhat sensational discovery of the plot and its sequel gradually subsided, until at length everybody was once more going about his business as calmly and quietly as though nothing abnormal had ever happened. Meanwhile Dick and Grosvenor diligently applied themselves to a systematic exploration of the ruins and the taking of many photographs; they were both highly skilled amateur photographers, and were also endowed with a considerable amount of artistic taste. Moreover, Grosvenor had devoted a considerable amount of time to the perfecting of himself in the science of photography in natural colours, and had provided himself with all the requisite apparatus needed. Consequently, by the time that they had completed their labours, they found themselves possessors not only of a large number of negatives of the highest value from the archaeologist's point of view, but also of several exquisitely beautiful pictures in natural colours of the ruins as seen under various atmospheric effects, such as early morning, sunrise, and sunset, the latter being exceptionally fine because of the gorgeous hues of the sunsets which were characteristic of the place.

It was about a week after the trial of the conspirators, and the execution of the sentences passed upon them, that King Lobelalatutu sent for them both, and tendered his hearty thanks for the important service which Dick had rendered him in unravelling the details of the plot and bringing the plotters to trial, as well as for saving the life of the chief, 'Nkuni, who, under the Healer's sedulous ministrations, was already up and about again. The king took some pains to make it perfectly clear that his gratitude was both deep and absolutely sincere, even going to the length of proposing that they should take up their permanent residence in the country, and promising that if they would do so he would make them chiefs. The offer was made in perfect good faith, and had of course to be treated with the utmost—apparent—seriousness; but Dick explained that, highly as they both

appreciated His Majesty's generosity, it was impossible for them to avail themselves of it for the simple reason that they had long ago made other arrangements to which they must adhere.

"Then," said the king, "if ye will not remain with me and help me by your wisdom to govern this great people, say now in what way I may reward you for the great service that ye have done me."

"There is a way," answered Dick. "Ye may remember, O Great One, that on the day when we first came to you I said that I was a seeker of gold and the stones that glitter and shine, even such stones as those that shine red in the necklace which you wear; and you said that maybe you could help me in my search. If you will cause to be shown us the place where such stones are to be found, and will give us leave to take as many as we may desire, it will be reward enough."

"Surely if that will content ye it is easily done," answered the king. "I will give orders that men shall go to the place and dig up as many of the stones as ye desire, and ye shall take them away with you whither ye will. But that is a small thing, and it pleases me not that ye shall take so little; therefore, since your journey hence is to be a far one, I will give you out of mine own herd forty picked oxen, young and strong, to draw your wagon and to make good such loss as may happen through sickness or the attack of savage beasts; and I will also give orders that so long as your way lies within my borders ye shall be supplied with all that ye may require. Is it enough?"

"It is enough, O King, and we thank you," answered Dick. "And now, behold, our work here is done; give us therefore a guide to the place of red stones, and send the diggers after us that we may be gone, for, as you have said, our journey is long, and we must hasten."

“It shall be even as ye have said,” agreed the king. “When desire ye to leave me?”

“As soon as ye shall be able to provide us with a guide,” answered Dick.

“Then that is even now,” answered Lobelalatutu. “I grieve that ye are leaving me; but since I cannot persuade you to stay, I say: ‘Go in peace, and may the Spirits watch over you that your journey be prosperous. The Place of Red Stones is distant one day’s ox trek from here, therefore send forward your wagon at once with the guide whom I will give you, and ye shall follow on your horses. I know not whether we shall meet again, O Healer of Sickness and Mighty Hunter! but if ye return, the whole Makolo nation shall give you welcome. Farewell!’”

An hour later Dick and Grosvenor, having dispatched the wagon on ahead, and then gone round to bid farewell to the various chiefs, swung themselves into the saddle and, turning their backs regretfully upon the village and the ruins of Ophir, cantered off upon two magnificent horses which the king had, at the last moment, added to his gift of oxen. The animals were superb specimens of their kind, jet black without a white hair upon them, standing about fifteen-two in height, perfectly shaped, with fine, clean, sinewy legs not too long, splendid shoulders and haunches, skins like satin, perfect in temper, courageous as lions, speedy, easy-paced. They jumped like cats, and were tough as whipcord, as they found to their great satisfaction before many days were past; they were, in fact, perfect specimens of the exceptionally fine breed of horses peculiar to the Makolo country. Mounted on these magnificent animals, which seemed to carry them absolutely without effort, although neither of them was a light weight, the two riders soon overtook the slow-moving wagon, and then, carefully noting the instructions of the guide who was piloting the vehicle, passed on toward the sea that gleamed softly in the extreme distance.

A quiet, steady canter of some three hours' duration, which left their new mounts apparently as fresh as they had been at the start, brought the horsemen out upon a long stretch of sandy beach upon which the swell of the Indian Ocean broke in long lines of diamond spray, with a never-ceasing roar of deep-toned thunder; and, with a sigh of relief at the grateful coolness of the sea breeze after the stifling heat of the plain which they had just crossed, they gladly swung themselves out of the saddle and, passing their arms through their bridles, proceeded to look about them.

The beach upon which they found themselves was a very ordinary, unpicturesque-looking stretch of brown sand running practically straight, and also practically north and south, as far as the eye could see in both directions. It averaged about one hundred and twenty yards in width, was very flat, and on its landward side was bounded by a bank of red earth ranging from ten to about fifty feet in height, cut into here and there by "dongas", through one of which they had descended from the plain to the level of the sand. The ordinary high-water mark seemed nowhere to reach within less than thirty yards of the toe of the bank, but there were indications—in the shape of little patches of dry and crumbling seaweed and other ocean débris—that in stormy weather the breakers occasionally reached to the foot of the bank and in some places actually undermined it. At a distance of about half a mile to seaward a long line of white water betrayed the position of a reef.

"Um!" exclaimed Grosvenor, after he had allowed his gaze to travel over the prospect for several minutes; "this is a pretty desolate-looking spot, and no mistake; not at all the sort of place where you would expect to find precious stones, is it?"

"Why not?" retorted Dick, laughingly. "Gems are sometimes found in the most unlikely looking places. I did not expect the landscape to be

distinguished by any unusual characteristics; did you?"

"'Pon my word I don't know," replied Grosvenor; "but somehow I expected it to look very different from this. After all, however, what does the beauty or otherwise of the landscape matter, so long as the rubies are really here? And I suppose they are here, somewhere, eh? We haven't made a mistake and come out at the wrong spot, do you think?"

"Well," admitted Dick, "we may not have hit the precise spot perhaps, but I think we cannot be more than half a mile from it. Perhaps the quickest way of finding it will be to search for it. Now, just let me think for a moment. Those *Flying-Fish* people started by searching the beach. The Professor, possessing superior knowledge to the others, searched the face of the cliff; and finally, when the precise locality of the mine had been discovered, they went to work with pickaxe and shovel and dug their way down to the level of the 'pocket'. I think our best plan would be to search for that hole, which must still be conspicuous enough to admit of identification. Let us return, by way of the donga, to the top of the cliff, and, starting from there, ride along close to the cliff edge, you taking one direction and I the other. We ought to come across it within half a mile, or a mile at most."

"Right you are, old chappie, come along," answered Grosvenor, preparing to mount. As, however, he placed his left foot in the stirrup, and was about to spring into the saddle, Dick checked him.

"Hold on a moment, Phil," he exclaimed, his eyes intently searching a certain part of the cliff about a quarter of a mile distant. "Do you see that notch in the line of the cliff, over there? From here it looks something like a 'breakdown', but it may be the very spot we want to find. Anyhow it is quite worth examining; and if it should prove not to be the mine we can at all events reach the top of the cliff by means of it, and can start our search

from there. Come along." The next moment the pair were up and cantering toward the spot.

At the point toward which they were riding the cliff was quite low, its crest being not more than some fifteen feet above the level of the beach; therefore, although the notch or gap was of but insignificant width, it reached from top to bottom of the cliff face, and offered a way, of sorts, from the beach to the level of the plain above; but as the horsemen drew near they saw that although it was a 'breakdown' or collapse of the cliff face, it was undoubtedly caused by an artificial excavation which had had its origin a few yards inland from the line of the crest. They rode right into it, and found themselves in a sort of basin-shaped pit, one side of which having broken away had left the gap through which they had entered. A single glance around sufficed to assure them that they had reached the place of which they were in search, and dismounting they flung their bridles over their horses' heads to the ground, leaving them to stand, as they had been trained to do, while they proceeded at once to search the place for its precious contents.

They had not to look far. It was evident that time and weather had wrought some slight changes in the place since it had last been worked, the changes consisting chiefly of falls of earth from the sides, here and there; but pebbles, singly and in little groups of half a dozen or so, were plentifully strewed about the surface of the soil, and the very first one examined proved to be exactly similar in character to those of which the king's necklace was composed. Such, however, was not invariably the case, many of the stones which the searchers picked up turning out to be quite worthless; nevertheless ten minutes sufficed to satisfy the prospectors that the source of boundless wealth lay practically within reach of their hands, for during that short period each of them had secured a dozen rubies of varying size, from that of a pea up to pebbles as large as a pigeon's egg,

while Grosvenor had been lucky enough to find a specimen as large as a duck's egg. By the end of an hour they had more than doubled the amount of their find, and had filled their jacket pockets as full as it was prudent to load them; but it was evident that, profitable as this desultory, haphazard method of search had proved to be, much better results might be hoped for from systematic pick-and-shovel work; accordingly they agreed to suspend further operations until the arrival of the wagon, and the party of labourers which had been placed at their disposal by Lobelalatutu; they, therefore, scrambled out of the pit and set about searching for a suitable site for their camp, eventually pitching upon a spot about a quarter of a mile distant from the mine.

By the time that the wagon arrived and the tent had been pitched the day was too far advanced to make it worth while for work to be started. It was, therefore, decided to give the workers a good long night's rest after their wearisome tramp from the king's village, and an hour after sunset saw the entire party wrapped in profound sleep.

But with the appearance of the sun above the sea's rim, on the following morning, everybody was once more astir; and after an early breakfast a general adjournment was made to the mine, where, under Dick Maitland's superintendence, a dozen parties of the Makolo were soon actively engaged with their native mattocks and shovels in excavating the soil in search of the precious stones, one-half of each party being employed upon the work of digging, while the other half turned over the excavated soil and extracted from it all the stones which it happened to contain, Dick and Grosvenor employing themselves meanwhile in passing from party to party and sorting out the rubies from the worthless stones upturned. In this way considerable progress was made, and by midday a very handsome pile of rubies had been accumulated, consisting, however, for the most part of relatively small stones.

It was not, however, until late in the afternoon that their real good luck came to them, and then it came all in a moment. A party of the natives who had for some time been left to themselves had excavated quite a little cavern in the side of the pit, and, as might have been expected, this mode of working ultimately resulted in a "cave-in". Fortunately for them, the workers who were responsible for it detected the signs of the approaching fall in time to avoid being buried by it; and when the dust-cloud occasioned by it presently subsided, and the new face thus laid bare came to be examined, it was discovered that a veritable "pocket" of rubies had been exposed, the stones—every one of them of large size and especially fine fire and colour—being so numerous that almost every shovelful of earth turned over contained one or more! They were all, without exception, so very much finer than the finest that had hitherto been found that the latter were there and then incontinently discarded, and a fresh collection was at once begun, the whole body of natives being concentrated upon this one spot. So enormously rich did this "pocket" prove to be that when at length the declining sun gave warning that the moment to cease work had arrived, Dick and Grosvenor were fain to acknowledge to each other that, eager as the former was to make his fortune, they had now collected sufficient rubies to constitute not one but two exceedingly handsome fortunes, and that in any case the quantity acquired was as great as it would be at all prudent to cumber themselves with in view of the long and arduous journey that still lay before them.

Chapter Twelve.

Life in the Wild.

Dawn of the following morning, which in that latitude preceded the rising of the sun by but a bare quarter of an hour, witnessed the awakening of the

white men’s camp to a scene of brisk activity; for the after-dinner conversation of the previous evening between Dick and Grosvenor had resulted in their arrival at a decision to make an immediate start on the long trek which they hoped would end in their discovery of the mysterious white race, which rumour persistently asserted to exist somewhere in the far interior of the great Dark Continent, and the approximate situation of which they had gleaned from their friend Mitchell, the Natal sugar planter.

Breakfast was soon over; and while Jantje and ’Nkuku were away, rounding-up the cattle and driving them in, preparatory to inspanning, Dick and Grosvenor opened a case and proceeded to reward munificently the gang of Makolo labourers who had helped them in the acquisition of the rubies, with a generous distribution of beads, brass wire, empty tobacco tins, lengths of coloured print, and toys, finally dismissing them happy in the possession of what, to these simple savages, was wealth beyond anything that they had ever ventured to dream of. Then, the cattle being inspanned, the little party headed away inland, in a north-westerly direction, striking a small stream by which they outspanned, three hours later. On that day week they struck a river of some importance flowing through an exceedingly fertile country abounding in game, and the upward course of this river they followed for the next eight days, although it led them somewhat out of their way; for they found, upon scouting in the direction which they wished to pursue, that their direct course would soon carry them into an arid, waterless district, infested, moreover, by tsetse fly, to enter which would infallibly result in a serious loss of cattle. And the preservation of their cattle was now, or very soon would be, a matter of vital importance to them.

At length the two leaders of the expedition, industriously scouting daily toward the direction in which they wished to travel, found that they had reached a point where it would be safe for them to leave the river and strike

away toward the west and north-west, and they immediately did so, the country in that direction being free from fly, and consisting of wide-rolling plateaux, rising one beyond another, somewhat like broad, shallow steps, with a solitary, lofty hill rising in the extreme distance. This district was well watered by a number of tiny rivulets, and was clothed with rich young grass thickly dotted with clumps of mimosa, palmetto, and other tropical growth, amid which game of various kinds could be seen moving, including a small herd of giraffes.

This was much too good an opportunity to be missed. The friends therefore, after taking careful note of the spot where the immense animals were feeding, returned to the wagon and, having provided themselves with an abundant supply of ammunition, changed their saddles from the horses that they had hitherto been riding to the two which had been presented to them by King Lobelalatutu, and cantered off, after giving Mafuta - whom they left in charge of the wagon and stock—strict injunctions to make for a certain indicated spot, and there outspan and await them.

The light breeze which was blowing happened to be favourable to their approach, and they had arrived within a hundred yards of the large clump of mimosa in which they had last seen the giraffes feeding, when a heavy swishing and crashing of branches caused them to draw rein; and the next moment an enormous elephant emerged from the thicket, and stood looking about him as he flourished a great branch of foliage in his trunk, with which he seemed to be keeping the flies at bay. For a few seconds he seemed to be unaware of the presence of the hunters, and stood angrily switching the branch about his head and back, grunting and grumbling to himself, as though he was not in precisely the best of tempers. He was an immense tusker, by far the biggest that the travellers had thus far encountered, and that he was the hero of many battles seemed evident, for both his tusks were broken off short, leaving only about a foot of jagged ivory protruding from

each jaw. The first impulse of the two hunters was to swing themselves gently out of their saddles and take a shot at him, for the huge beast was standing in a very favourable position, nearly broadside on; but Grosvenor, happening to notice the broken tusks, settled back into his seat again, murmuring, as he did so:

“Let’s leave the poor beggar alone, Dick; he’s not worth shooting. See his tusks?”

It was practically impossible for the animal to have heard Grosvenor’s voice, for he purposely spoke in low tones, in order to avoid attracting the elephant’s attention; yet as the words were spoken the huge brute faced sharply round toward the two horsemen, and stood attentively regarding them for a moment. Then, tossing aside the branch with which he had been whisking himself, he threw up his trunk, and, trumpeting savagely, charged straight toward them.

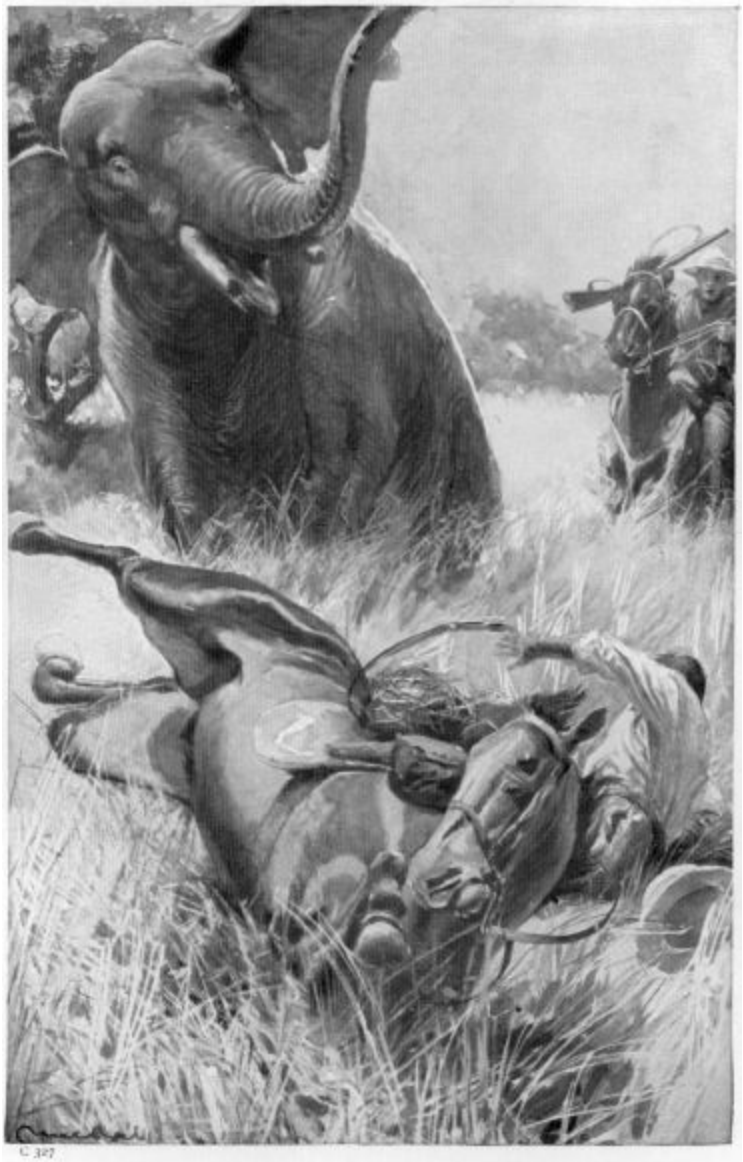
“No use waiting; let’s scatter!” shouted Grosvenor, and, obedient to a touch of the heel and bridle, the two magnificent horses which the friends bestrode swerved round as though upon pivots, and dashed off in a direction at right angles to each other. For an instant the great beast seemed disconcerted at this manoeuvre, and appeared unable to make up his mind which enemy he would pursue, first following one of them for a yard or two, and then turning in pursuit of the other; but presently it seemed to dawn upon him that he could not possibly hope to overtake both, and his final choice was Grosvenor, whom he settled down to chase in grim earnest, his long trunk outstretched to its utmost limit, his immense ears flapping furiously, and his small eyes sombre with concentrated hatred. As soon as Dick saw that the brute had definitely marked down Grosvenor as his prey he turned his bridle and rode in a direction parallel with that which was being followed by pursued and pursuer, and began to shout loudly, in the

hope of again causing the elephant to hesitate, even if he could not altogether divert him from his pursuit of Grosvenor; but the ruse was vain, the monster glanced viciously once in Dick's direction, but refused to be diverted from his fell purpose.

At the beginning of this singular race there had not been the slightest doubt in Dick's mind as to its ultimate result; he felt absolutely confident that, suberbly mounted as they were, they would be able to gallop away from their pursuer and elude him with the utmost ease; but now, to his consternation, he began to realise that, so far at least as Grosvenor was concerned, escape was distinctly doubtful, unless something could be done toward altering the existing conditions. For, strong and speedy as were the horses, they were frightfully handicapped in the race by the grass, which at this particular spot happened to be unusually long—reaching as high as the horses' shoulders—tough, and tangled, rendering it exceedingly difficult for them to force a passage through it, while to the huge bulk and momentum of the elephant it seemed to offer no obstacle at all. The great beast was rapidly gaining upon Grosvenor, and as rapidly forging ahead of Dick, upon whom it began to dawn that, unless something were speedily done to prevent it, a tragedy must inevitably ensue.

He looked anxiously about him, and saw that, at a distance of about a mile, the patch of long rank grass came to an end and was succeeded by short smooth turf, over which the going would be everything that could be desired; but it was much too distant to be of any service in the present emergency. For the elephant was gaining at every stride and must inevitably overtake the fugitive long before he could reach it, while the horses were already beginning to show signs of distress as they plunged panting through the obstructing tangle, in the midst of which they were constantly stumbling as their outflung feet encountered, and were caught in, some especially tough patch of the knotted vegetation.

What was to be done? Something; and that right quickly if— As the thought was flashing through Dick's brain he saw his friend's horse stumble heavily, make a desperate effort to recover himself, and finally roll over and disappear completely with his rider in the dense ocean of greenish-grey vegetation, while the elephant, a bare fifty yards in the rear, threw up his outstretched trunk and trumpeted a loud blast of savage exultation. There was now but one thing to be done, and the only question in Dick's mind was whether there was time enough left and, excited as he was, whether he had the necessary steadiness



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of hand to do it. But it must be attempted, at any rate, so, unslinging his rifle, he set it at full cock as he galloped, held it pistol-wise in his hand, pointed it full at the huge bulk of the elephant, and pulled the trigger. The jar of the recoil nearly dislocated his elbow, and for a fraction of a second he feared that all was lost. But even as the fear gripped his heart, turning him sick and faint, the enormous beast suddenly halted, swayed unsteadily for a moment on his great pillar-like legs, and then collapsed in a heap. As he did so Dick, to his intense relief, saw the prostrate horse and rider scramble to their feet almost within arm's length of the fallen monster.

"Mount and ride, you duffer!" shrieked Dick, as he saw Grosvenor stand, apparently stupefied, staring at the prostrate beast; "he may be only stunned; and if he gets up again nothing can save you. Or, better still, empty your magazine into his skull as he lies."

"There is no need, my dear chap," answered Grosvenor calmly; "it would only be a sinful waste of valuable cartridges. The brute is as dead as mutton; your bullet caught him behind the ear all right, and is no doubt deeply embedded in his brain. It was a splendid shot, especially considering that it was fired from the saddle, and at full gallop too. I congratulate you on it, old man. And, before I forget it, let me thank you for saving my life. If you had not fired as promptly as you did he would have had me, sure as fate, and I should have been a goner—eh, what?"

Although Grosvenor spoke in a tone of light raillery it but thinly disguised the depth of feeling that stirred him, as Dick fully realised when he pulled up alongside his friend and they exchanged hand-grips. Lightly as he spoke of the incident, Phil knew right well that he was on the very edge of disaster at the moment that Dick pulled trigger, and though he would fain have treated the whole adventure as a joke he was none the less grateful to Dick

for his timely intervention, and the pressure of his hand was quite as eloquent as much outpouring of words.

“By Jove,” exclaimed Dick, as he swung out of his saddle and loosened the girths, to enable his horse the more readily to recover his wind, “what a monster! He is far and away the biggest elephant that I have ever seen; and if his tusks had been unbroken they would have been a prize worth having, if only as curiosities. As it is, I don’t think it will be worth while to waste time in cutting out the stumps; do you? Poor beggar, he must have been suffering pretty badly from toothache; see how tremendously that left gum is swollen. That means an abscess at the root of the tusk that must have been dreadfully painful. No wonder that he was in such a dickens of a bad temper! Well, he is of no value to us, except as a contribution to our larder, so we may as well be going. We will mark the spot where he lies, and send Mafuta and Jantje for one of his feet, which will furnish us with an epicurean dinner to-night. And now I suppose we may as well go and look for the wagon, for of course the giraffes cleared out directly the rumpus began.”

They camped that night in the midst of a wide plateau dotted here and there with low *kopjes* of outcropping granite, and clothed for the most part with *melkboom* interspersed with patches of low thornbush and sun-dried grass; and, from the fact that they had met with no water since noon, they greeted with much satisfaction the discovery of a shallow water-hole of some two acres in extent, within about half a mile of which they outspanned for the night, an hour before sunset. They did not care to approach nearer to the water than this, for upon inspecting the place they became aware, from the spoor in the mud all round the margin, that it was the favourite if not the only drinking place for all the animals in the neighbourhood, and past experienced had taught them that the nocturnal sounds emanating from such a spot were the reverse of favourable to sleep. Moreover, they had detected

among the most recent spoor that of lions; and for the sake of their cattle they preferred to keep at a respectful distance from a place frequented by such formidable animals.

At one spot this miniature lake was bordered by a patch of reeds of considerable extent, which looked as though it might harbour a few wild duck; therefore, as soon as the wagon was outspanned, the two friends took their shot guns and a couple of dogs which had manifested some talent at retrieving, and made their way toward the reeds, warning Jantje to be careful to water the cattle as far as possible from the spot toward which they were making. Leo, the lion cub, by this time very nearly half-grown, would fain have accompanied the sportsmen, for he had developed an extraordinary attachment to both of his white masters. He loved nothing better than to accompany them on their rambles, and was as obedient as any of the dogs, with whom he was on the best of terms; but it was deemed best on this occasion that he should be taken to water on a leash, with the cattle, and return with them to the wagon. He was therefore left behind, much to his disgust.

Choosing what seemed to be advantageous positions, the two sportsmen, each accompanied by a dog, carefully ambushed themselves among the reeds at a distance of about a hundred yards from each other and, crouching low, patiently awaited the course of events. They had not long to wait for proof of the soundness of their judgment, for they had not been in position more than half an hour—by which time the sun, magnified to twice his size by the evening vapours through which he glowed, palpitating like a ball of white-hot steel, hung upon the very edge of the horizon—when a whirring of wings warned them to be on the alert, and a moment later a flock of some fifty teal, which must have been feeding on some far-off marsh during the day, settled down upon the surface of the water, with much splashing and loud quacks of satisfaction at having once more reached what they

doubtless believed to be a haven of safety. But if they really entertained any such belief they were most deplorably mistaken, for that fate which rules the destiny of wild duck ordained that they should settle on the precise patch of water that was fully commanded by both sportsmen, and some three seconds later both guns spoke practically at the same instant, and up went the teal again with a great whir of wings and loud cries of consternation, leaving behind them a round dozen or more of dead and wounded floating upon the rippled surface of the water.

By the time that the whole of the “bag” had been retrieved the dusk was deepening into darkness, and star after star was twinkling into view from the vast, cloudless, purple dome above. The two friends, therefore, scrambled forth from their hiding places and, perfectly satisfied with themselves and all things else, prepared to make their way back to the wagon.

They had not progressed above two dozen paces beyond the margin of the reeds, however, when Grosvenor, who was leading the way along a narrow track through the coarse grass, uttered a sharp ejaculation, and halted suddenly in his tracks, the next moment stamping violently on something just before him.

“What is the matter, old chap?” demanded Dick, stepping quickly to his friend’s side.

“Snake!” replied Grosvenor briefly, and in a rather tremulous tone of voice; “trod on him—unintentionally of course—and the beggar turned sand bit me. Take that—and that—and that, you brute—”

“Where is the thing?” demanded Dick anxiously.

“There,” responded Grosvenor, pointing to a writhing, twisting something that squirmed on the grass as he ground the heel of his heavy boot on it.

“Take your foot away, man, and let me have a look at it,” commanded Dick; and as the other did as he was ordered Maitland bent down and directed a quick, keen glance at the reptile, about six inches of whose body was crushed almost to a jelly. Then, quickly pinning the flat, heart-shaped head to the ground with the muzzle of his gun, he pulled the trigger, and thus effectually put an end to the creature’s existence. With the barrel of his weapon he deftly whisked the still writhing body half a dozen yards away into the long grass, and then turned sharply to his friend.

“Sit down, old chap, quick,” he said, “and show me where you were bitten.”

Somewhat startled by his companion’s abrupt manner, Grosvenor seated himself on the ground and drew up his left trouser leg, pulled down his sock, and revealed two small punctures close together in the lower part of the calf of the leg, barely visible in the fast-decreasing light.

“I see,” ejaculated Dick, fumbling in his waistcoat pocket as he spoke. “Take your pocket handkerchief, quick; tie it round your leg below the knee, and with the barrel of your revolver twist it as tight as you possibly can, tourniquet fashion, so as to stop the passage of the blood into your body. Now,” as he drew forth and opened a penknife, the blade of which he made a point of always keeping razor-keen, “I am going to hurt you a little bit, so set your teeth and bear it, old man.”

“All right; go ahead,” responded Grosvenor. “Was the brute venomous, then?”

“Can’t say,” responded Dick evasively, as he quickly slashed the flesh across and across over the two punctures; “but we are not taking any more

chances to-day, my boy."

The blood, instead of spurting from the knife wounds, oozed forth thick and sluggishly; whereupon Dick, without a second's hesitation, applied his lips to the gashes, which were close together, and sucked strongly for about a quarter of an hour, spitting out the blood which gradually began to flow a little more freely. Finally, when the flow had ceased, he groped in his pocket and produced a small case containing a stick of lunar caustic; then from another pocket he drew forth a box of matches, which he handed to Grosvenor.

"I'll relieve you of this," he said, laying his hand upon the revolver, the barrel of which Phil had twisted in the handkerchief and had been holding in place all this while, "and you can start striking matches, so that I may see what I am doing." Then, giving the revolver an extra twist or two, he pulled out his own handkerchief and deftly secured the weapon in place, after which he proceeded, by the light of the matches which Grosvenor struck, one after the other, carefully and thoroughly to cauterize the wounds.

"There," he remarked cheerfully, with a sigh of relief as he finished his task, "that is as much as we can do here. The next thing is to get you back to the camp as soon as possible."

"All right," assented Grosvenor. "But," he added, as he attempted to rise, "I'm afraid I shall have to get you to help me, old chap; I couldn't possibly —"

"Of course you couldn't," responded Dick, "and I don't mean that you shall try. Just sit where you are for a little while longer, and leave me to arrange things." Therewith he drew a whistle from the pocket of his hunting shirt, and upon it blew three piercing blasts in quick succession that, in the breathless stillness of the night, might have been heard at least a mile away.

He repeated the signal at brief intervals for about ten minutes, when answering shouts were heard, whereupon he drew three or four matches from the box, bunched them together, ignited them, and held the tiny torch aloft to guide Mafuta and Jantje, whose voices he recognised. A minute later they both arrived upon the scene, anxious to know what was amiss, and received Dick's hurried explanation with many *Au's*! of surprise and apprehension. Then, in obedience to his brief but concise instruction, they hurried away again at a run, to return with very commendable celerity, bearing Grosvenor's hammock and a long pole, hacked from the nearest tree they could find. The hammock having been spread upon the ground, the patient was, under Dick's anxious supervision, laid very carefully upon it, so that there might be as little movement of his body as possible; and finally, the hammock having been securely lashed to the pole, the whole was raised upon the shoulders of the two blacks and by them borne to the camp. Arrived there, the hammock was, still with the utmost gentleness and care, slung inside the tent, the lamp was lighted, and Dick proceeded to examine his patient afresh.

By this time the wounded limb had become terribly swollen, and Grosvenor complained of severe pain about the injured region. This, of course, was not to be wondered at, considering the rather heroic treatment to which the leg had been subjected, and Dick was not very greatly concerned about it. But what caused him to look very grave was the fact that his patient also complained of feeling cold, and manifested symptoms of approaching delirium, while his whole body was now beginning to be convulsed, at rapidly shortening intervals, by spasms of violent and uncontrollable twitching. Without wasting a moment Dick now had recourse to alcohol, freely dosing his patient with neat brandy, in the hope of inducing a condition of intoxication—for he knew that if he could succeed in this the excess of alcohol in the system would neutralise the venom, and his patient would be saved. But it was not until he had administered nearly a quart of

the spirit that the desired symptoms began to appear; and it was long past midnight before the twitching convulsions entirely ceased and the patient sank into a deathlike sleep; by this time also the swelling of the limb was perceptibly subsiding; and when at length Dick turned down the lamp and disposed himself to take such rest as he might be able to snatch in a folding chair by the side of his friend's hammock, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the crisis was past and Phil would live.

Up to this moment the young doctor had been far too busy and altogether too deeply preoccupied in attending upon his patient to give any attention to, or indeed be more than vaguely aware of, what was happening outside the tent, although there certainly had been moments when sounds of a more than usually alarming character had reached his ears so distinctly and obtrusively as partially to distract his attention for the fraction of a second or so; but now that Grosvenor was asleep and safe, and Dick began to feel that he also would be the better for a little rest, outside sounds began to obtrude themselves upon him with a force and persistency that would not be denied, and he awoke to a consciousness of the fact that something quite out of his ordinary experience was happening.

At first he was disposed to attribute the babel of sound that reached his ears to the fact that the party were outspanned in close—almost too close—proximity to the only water that, so far as he knew, existed for many miles round, and which was consequently the regular drinking place for every living creature in the neighbourhood, as he and his chum had already ascertained. Indeed the incessant bellowing, snorting, trumpeting, roaring, splashing, and squealing that, slightly mellowed by distance, penetrated to the interior of the tent, was quite enough to justify such an idea. But he had scarcely settled himself in his chair beside Grosvenor's hammock, and closed his eyes in the hope of wooing sleep to them, than he became aware of other and nearer sounds, dominating the first, the sound of crackling

flames, frequent low, muttered ejaculations, the occasional soft thud and swish of feet running through long grass, followed by a shout or two which was almost invariably responded to by a low, angry snarl, while the clashing of horns, the rattling of the trek chain, the almost continuous lowing and moaning of the oxen, the stamping of the horses tethered to the wagon, and the whining of the dogs, indicated the extreme restlessness and uneasiness of the animals. The disturbance was so much greater than usual that Dick finally felt called upon to investigate. So, rising from his chair, he cast a quick glance at his patient which assured him that all was well there, and then, raising the flap of the tent, stepped forth into the open air.

The first sight that greeted him was that of about a dozen fires arranged in a circle round about the tiny camp, in the ruddy-yellow, flickering glare of which he saw Mafuta, Jantje, and ’Nkuku flitting hither and thither, tending the fires and feeding them from an enormous stack of thorns and branches piled up near the wagon, while Ramoo Samee, the Indian groom, stood with the horses, talking to them, caressing them, and soothing their excitement by every means in his power. Most of the oxen, instead of lying down, were on their feet, their tails swishing agitatedly from side to side, their heads turning quickly this way and that, their ears twitching, their nostrils distended, sniffing the air, their hoofs stamping the earth impatiently, while their eyes glowed and shone in the light of the fires, and ever and anon one or another of them would throw up his head and give vent to a low, moaning bellow, which told, as eloquently as words, their state of terror. As for the dogs, they were all huddled together beneath the wagon, shivering with fear, their tails between their legs, and their lips drawn back, revealing their fangs, in a sort of snarling grin. Leo was the only animal who did not seem very greatly perturbed, but even he was awake, and lay crouching at the extreme end of his tether, his eyes lambently aglow, and his tail softly beating the earth now and then.

“Ho there, Mafuta!” called Dick, as he stood taking in the scene and admiring the generally romantic effect of it all—the glowing fires, the wavering columns of smoke, the uneasy animals, the flitting figures, the great bulk of the wagon with its white canvas tent aglow with the firelight, and the mellow stars raining down their soft radiance; “what is all the disturbance about?”

“Lions, baas,” answered the Kafir as he paused for a moment, his arms filled with a great bundle of branches which he was carrying to the fires, and his great bronze body shining with perspiration; “we are beset by them; and if the fires were allowed to die down they would rush in upon us, and kill or stampede the whole of the oxen and horses. See there—and there—and there,” he added, pointing into the darkness beyond the glow of the fires.

Dick looked, but could at first see nothing, his eyes as yet being dazzled by the light of the flames, but presently, looking in the direction toward which Mafuta pointed, he caught sight of first one pair of greenishyellow orbs, and then another, and another, gleaming out of the darkness, until finally he counted no less than seven pairs of eyes, all intently staring inward. By the flitting to and fro of some of these pairs of eyes Dick perceived that certain of the lions were regularly making the circuit of the camp, some in one direction, some in the other, apparently searching for an unguarded spot at which they might venture to make a dash; but there were three pairs of eyes that remained stationary, as though their owners were patiently awaiting a signal of some sort. These, Dick decided, were the most dangerous of their foes, and at the same time the most easy to deal with, because of their immovability; so, returning to the tent he first cast a quick glance at the still soundly sleeping form of Grosvenor. Then he took up his bandolier, threw it over his shoulder and adjusted it in position, seized his rifle and satisfied himself that it was fully loaded, and again made his way outside.

It took a minute or two for his eyes again to adjust themselves to the peculiar conditions of the light, but presently he again caught sight of one of the motionless pairs of eyes, and, sinking upon one knee, he raised his rifle to his shoulder, carefully brought its two sights accurately in line with a point midway between the two glowing orbs, and pressed the trigger. The sharp, whip-like crack of the weapon was answered by several low, snarling growls, and a swishing of the grass suggestive of several heavy bodies bounding away through it, while the stationary and moving pairs of eyes vanished, as if by magic; and a minute or two later some four or five of the oxen lay down where they were tethered to the trek chain, with a sigh of obvious relief.

“They are gone, baas,” remarked Mafuta, as he again passed with more fuel; “but we must keep up the fires; for they are almost certain to come back again. They are young lions who have been driven away from the pool, and not allowed to hunt there by the old ones, and they are hungry. Yes, they will come back again; and you will perhaps have to kill two or three more before they will go away and leave us alone.”

“Do you think, then, that I got the fellow I fired at?” demanded Dick.

“Yes, baas,” answered Mafuta with confidence. “I heard the bullet strike. You will find the beast, dead, out there, when the day breaks. But see, yonder, baas, they are slinking back; there is one pair of eyes over there, and I saw another in that direction—yes, there they are again. Ah! now they are gone—but, look there, baas, see you those two pairs? No, no, do not shoot yet; wait until they come quite close; then—shoot and kill. Where is that *schelm*, Jantje, and why is he not feeding the fires? If they are not kept up we shall yet lose half our oxen!”

Chapter Thirteen.

The Mysterious White Race.

Two more lions fell to Dick's rifle that night, before the brutes were finally scared out of their projected attack upon the camp; but it was not until the first signs of dawn were paling the eastern sky, and all the multitudinous sounds in the neighbourhood of the water-hole had long subsided into complete silence, that the watchers felt at liberty to cease their vigil and snatch an hour or two of much-needed rest. Meanwhile, Grosvenor remained completely sunk in the lethargic sleep which had resulted from the saturation of his system with alcohol.

Although the blacks had been up and working hard all night, they were astir again very soon after sunrise; and the first thing they did was to go out and bring into camp the carcasses of the three dead lions, in order that Dick's eyes might be gladdened by the sight of them upon his emergence from the tent. Then, while Jantje and 'Nkuku loosed the oxen and drove them to the water-hole, Ramoo Samee prepared a couple of cups of strong black coffee, which Mafuta carried into the tent; and as the Kafir looped back the flaps of the entrance, giving admission to a flood of brilliant sunlight and a brisk gush of cool, invigorating air, Dick stirred uneasily in his hammock, sat up, rubbed his eyes, and exclaimed, sleepily:

"Hillo, Mafuta, surely it is not yet time to turn out, is it? I don't seem to have been asleep more than half a minute." Then his glance fell upon Grosvenor's hammock, and memory instantly returned to him; he sprang to his feet and laid his finger upon his patient's pulse, and as he did so Grosvenor uttered a low groan and, opening his eyes, looked dazedly up into the eyes of the friend who bent over him.

“Hullo, Dick,” he murmured, “that you? I say, old chap,” endeavouring to rise, “what the dickens is the matter with me? I feel like a—a—boiled owl; my head is aching as though it would split, and my mouth is as dry as a limekiln. And—look here, old man, why are you holding me down in my hammock like this? Am I not to get up to-day, eh, or—”

“Certainly not, at least not just yet,” answered Dick firmly. “And never mind about your head, or your mouth; what does your leg feel like? Here, just let me have a look at it.” And, gently lifting the limb and pushing up the leg of the trousers, in which Grosvenor had lain all night, he laid bare the injury. The swelling, although it had not quite disappeared, had subsided so greatly that the limb had once more come to bear some semblance to a human leg, and the livid purple tint had almost faded out, while the cauterised wounds were perfectly dry and healthy in appearance. But when Dick began to gently pinch and prod the injured member, and to ask: “Does that hurt at all?” it became evident that there was a distinct numbness in the limb, as far up as the knee. But this did not very greatly distress Dick; all the signs were indicative of the fact that the venom in the blood had been effectually neutralised; and as for the numbness, that would probably pass off in the course of the day.

“Well, Doctor,” said Grosvenor whimsically, “what is your verdict—favourable, or otherwise? I remember now that I was bitten by a beastly snake, last night, and that you did several things to me that made me feel horribly queer, but I don’t quite remember how I got to the tent. Was the brute venomous?”

“About as venomous as it could well be,” answered Dick. “But you need have no fear,” he added, seeing a look of anxiety spring into his patient’s eyes; “the danger is quite over; now all that we have to think about is how to cure that headache of yours. And here, just in the nick of time, Mafuta

has brought us our coffee. Take your cup and drink it at once; and if in the course of the next half-hour you feel no better, I will mix you a draught. Stop a moment; just look me straight in the eye; yes, that is right; now drink your coffee; it will completely cure your headache, and you will immediately fall asleep, waking again in time for breakfast."

Grosvenor obediently took the cup, drained it, and lay back on his pillow.

"Thanks, old chap," he murmured; "that's good; I—I—feel—" and was asleep.

"That's all right," murmured Dick meditatively, as his eyes rested upon the other's placid countenance. "Why did not I remember to try that kind of thing last night! It might have helped matters a good deal. Ah well! I'll not forget next time. Now, Mafuta," he continued, turning to the Kafir; "what about the lions? How many did I kill last night?"

"Three, baas," answered Mafuta; "that is to say, two lions and one lioness, all full-grown, but quite young, and in grand condition, their teeth and claws quite perfect."

"Is that so?" queried Dick. "Then I suppose you have been out to have a look at them?"

"Yes, baas," answered the black; "we went out and brought them in. They are now just outside the tent."

"Very well," said Dick, draining his coffee. "I will have a look at them. And —what about my bath? I suppose there is no chance of one this morning, eh?"

"Ramoo Samee and I have each brought two buckets of water from the hole, and the *Inkose's* bath is ready for him when he will," answered

Mafuta.

Grosvenor’s sleep appeared to have been extraordinarily beneficial, for when he awoke to the rattle of crockery as Mafuta busied himself in the arrangement of the breakfast table, not only was he absolutely free from headache, and all the other unpleasant symptoms of which he had complained two hours earlier, but his general condition was also greatly improved, the swelling of the injured limb had subsided, the flesh had recovered its natural colour, the numb feeling had almost disappeared, and now all that remained to remind him of his disagreeable and perilous adventure of the previous night was the smarting and burning sensation of the cauterised wound itself, which he endured with stoical composure, and indeed laughed at as a trifle not worth wasting words about. But he was fully alive to the frightful nature of the peril from which he had so narrowly escaped, and was so earnest and profuse in his thanks to Dick for having twice saved his life in the course of a few hours that at length the young medico laughingly threatened to gag him if he did not instantly change the topic of conversation. One of the best signs of his progress towards complete recovery, perhaps, was the voracious appetite which he developed when breakfast was placed upon the table. But it was not until late in the afternoon that Dick allowed him to rise from his hammock; then it was only permitted in order that the camp might be moved somewhat farther from the water-hole, with the object of avoiding a recurrence of the annoyances of the preceding night.

By the following morning Grosvenor was practically well again, and, with his injured leg well protected by a bandage, was once more able to mount a horse; the march was therefore resumed, and came to an unadventurous end in a small valley, watered by a tiny brook, as the sun was sinking beneath the western horizon. Thenceforward their progress was steady, averaging about twenty miles a day, for six days a week, Sunday being always

observed as a rest day, whenever possible, primarily for the sake of the cattle, it must be confessed, which it was found required at least one day's rest in every seven upon such a prolonged journey as that upon which they were now engaged. The journey was not altogether devoid of adventure, by any means; for upon one occasion they killed no less than five of their oxen through overwork during a hurried flight from the neighbourhood of a devastating grass fire; they lost three more at one fell swoop while crossing a flooded river; six succumbed to snake bites; four fell a prey to lions; and seven died of sickness believed to have been induced by the eating of some poisonous plant. But, after all, these were merely the ordinary accidents incidental to travel in the African wilderness, and would need too much space to be recorded in detail. The natives whom they encountered from time to time during their progress were by no means uniformly friendly, but tact and firmness, coupled with an occasional demonstration of the terribly destructive qualities of their firearms, and a judicious distribution of presents among the chiefs, secured them from actual molestation, though there were times when it seemed to be, figuratively speaking, a toss-up, whether they would or would not have to choose between being turned back or "wiped out."

Indeed now, when they had been continuously journeying for nearly three months since they had turned their backs upon the friendly Makolo nation, and were daily receiving fresh evidence that they were drawing very near to the goal of their long pilgrimage, it was by the merest chance, the most extraordinary caprice of the king into whose country they had penetrated, that they were permitted to live and accorded freedom to pursue their journey unmolested. For the savages among whom they now found themselves seemed to be possessed of an extraordinarily virulent animus, or prejudice—call it which you will—against whiteskins, due, as the travellers eventually discovered, to the fact that a nation of whites inhabited the adjacent territory, between whom and the blacks, who surrounded them on

all sides, an implacable enmity had existed as far back as history or even legend extended. From whence those white people had come, or how long they had inhabited the land of which they held such stubborn possession, there was no record to tell; but the grievance of the blacks seemed to consist in the fact that the interlopers—as they chose to regard them—occupied the whole of a peculiarly rich and fertile tract of country from which, though they were relatively few in number, they resolutely refused to be dislodged; while the surrounding territory, occupied by the blacks, was comparatively poor, sterile, and ill-watered, affording an ever more scanty subsistence to the steadily growing population. Also there was a widespread belief, amounting to conviction among the blacks, that their white neighbours were wont to punish such attempts as were made from time to time to drive them out, by putting all prisoners to death in a variety of peculiarly hideous forms —although it was by no means clear how this belief arose, since no prisoners ever returned to throw any light upon the subject.

It is not, perhaps, greatly to be wondered at if, under such circumstances, the blacks had gradually come to regard the possessor of a white skin as the incarnation of everything that was superlatively detestable, and a person to be destroyed promptly with as little hesitation or compunction as one would destroy a particularly venomous snake; and such was the feeling which Grosvenor and Dick inspired in the breasts of those natives in whose hands they found themselves upon a certain memorable day. It was at first proposed to put them to the torture *sans cérémonie*; but a certain petty chief, anxious to curry favour with the king, intervened in the nick of time, and, having made prisoners of the entire party, sent the whole of them, including the wagon, oxen, horses, and animals generally, to the king’s village, in order that His Majesty might have his full share of such sport as the torture of the white men might furnish. This journey, however, occupied five days, during the progress of which the two white men proved to be so different in every respect from the only other white men whom the blacks

had ever encountered, to be possessed of such strange powers, and to be, generally, such “kittle cattle” to deal with, that the king, learning that these strangers were bent upon entering the territory of his white neighbours, ultimately came to the somewhat cynical conclusion that he could kill two birds with one stone, so to speak, by allowing the formidable strangers to go their way and inflict the maximum amount of annoyance and damage upon his especial enemies before those enemies in their turn destroyed the unwelcome visitors.

Thus it came to pass that, after spending close upon a fortnight in momentary expectation of a hideously protracted death by torture, Dick Maitland and Philip Grosvenor one day found themselves most unexpectedly released, their belongings returned to them, and permission accorded them to proceed upon their journey as soon as they would. They instantly availed themselves of this permission, lest peradventure it should be retracted; the result being that for five days they travelled under the protection of an armed escort until they arrived at the frontier, where the escort hurriedly left them, after jeeringly warning them of the many evil things that awaited them in the immediate future.

Scarcely ten minutes had elapsed after the departure of the guard before the travellers perceived a man intently watching them from the summit of a low kopje about a quarter of a mile ahead of them. For perhaps a minute he stood, motionless as a statue, gazing steadfastly at them under the shade of his hand, then he turned suddenly and disappeared. But during that minute Dick and Grosvenor had brought their powerful field glasses to bear upon him, and had distinctly seen that his skin was white, excepting in so far as it had become browned by the sun, that his hair was thick, black, and arranged in long, straight curls that reached to his shoulders, that he was naked save for a breech clout about his loins and a pair of sandals upon his feet, and that he was armed with a long, slender spear and a circular shield

or target about two and a half feet in diameter. Three minutes later they saw him running with incredible speed toward another low elevation, distant about a mile from his starting-point, and which, as the travellers discovered, when they brought their glasses to bear upon it, was crowned by a low structure, so roughly constructed that it might easily have passed for a mere heap of stones and turf, but which, later on, proved to be a sort of blockhouse accommodating an outpost consisting of an officer and ten men. Two minutes later the man whom they had first seen, or another so exceedingly like him that it was impossible to distinguish any difference at a distance of two or three hundred yards, left the blockhouse—which they now perceived was only one of many in sight arranged in a somewhat irregularly curved line which probably conformed to the line of the frontier—and set off, at the same astonishing speed that the first had displayed, heading inward from the frontier line. They watched him for about five minutes, and then lost sight of him over the brow of a slight undulation. Beyond the roughly constructed blockhouses there was not a sign of inhabitants in any direction; the land was rough and uncultivated, there were neither cattle nor sheep to be seen; and if, as they strongly suspected, the blockhouses in sight accommodated a few men, none of their occupants revealed their presence nor made the slightest attempt to interfere with the uninvited visitors. It was a moot point between Dick and Grosvenor whether they should not take the bull by the horns, as it were, by riding up to the nearest blockhouse and attempting to get into communication with its occupants at once; but Grosvenor was very strongly opposed to any such step, upon the ground that, if they did so, they might be summarily turned back and ordered to quit the country forthwith, which, as Phil pointed out with some emphasis, would be an exceedingly tame and ignominious ending of their long and arduous journey. His policy was to let well enough alone, to get as far into the country as possible before attempting to open up communication with its inhabitants, and, meanwhile, to show in every

possible manner by their sober behaviour that their mission was a peaceable one.

But if the borderland of this mysterious country presented a somewhat wild and uninviting appearance, it was not long before the travellers perceived that this state of things prevailed only over a very narrow belt of territory. For as they pressed on toward the interior they first sighted another line of blockhouses, considerably larger and more substantially constructed than the first, each perched upon a commanding knoll and completely surrounded by a stout, lofty, and practically unclimbable stockade; then they saw a few cattle dotted about, grazing, under the protection of quite a strong force of armed men, similar in all respects to the individual whom they had first sighted. These people took no notice of the strangers beyond removing themselves and their charges well out of the route which was being pursued by the wagon; it was evident that they had no desire to come into touch in any way whatever with their uninvited visitors. Then, a mile or so farther on, the herds became larger and their attendants more numerous; and, next, the intruders reached what seemed to be a belt of farms, each containing its own fortified farmhouse, a lofty and, apparently, immensely strong and solid structure of hewn stone, surrounded in many cases by a moat, either wet or dry, with a single narrow entrance high up in the wall and only accessible by means of a ladder; the unglazed window openings few in number and too narrow to permit the passage of a human being through them; the roof flat, and protected by a breast-high parapet; the structure, as a whole, constituting a very efficient miniature stronghold. The crops appeared to be of the most varied character, starting with sugar cane on the outside margin of what may be called the agricultural belt, and then gradually changing to various kinds of grain, which in its turn was succeeded by fruit orchards and vineyards. These last, however, were not met with until the detached farms had been left far behind, and had been succeeded in turn, first by tiny hamlets of half a dozen houses huddled

together as if for mutual protection, and then by villages of ever-increasing importance, each dominated by a castle-like structure that looked as though it might serve the purpose of a keep or refuge for the inhabitants to retire to in times of stress or danger. These, however, were not reached by the travellers until quite late in the following day, and are only referred to now, in order that some idea may be conveyed of the manner in which the mysterious white race who inhabited the country met the problem of carrying on their agricultural pursuits, and at the same time affording protection to the farmers against sudden raids by their savage neighbours.

The region or belt of small hamlets still lay some two miles ahead of the travellers when, about half an hour before sunset, the word was given to outspan in the midst of a patch of rich pasture watered by a small, shallow stream of crystal-clear water. By the time that the sun was sinking behind a range of hills that rose gradually from the plain, and the summits of which were apparently about twenty miles distant, the oxen and other animals had been watered, the tent pitched, and the two leaders of the little expedition, having found a passable bathing place a short distance up the stream and taken their evening dip, were impatiently awaiting the last meal of the day, which by courtesy they named dinner, although it very inadequately represented the usual conception of what that meal ought to be.

Presently the viands made their appearance—a haunch of venison, cut from a buck that Grosvenor had shot early that morning, served sparingly with red currant jelly, the last pot of which had been opened for the occasion, sweet potatoes, purchased from the savages a few days earlier, “flap-jacks”—so called because they could find no other name for them—made by Ramoo Samee of flour, mealie meal, and water, and baked over the embers of the cooking fire, a few wild guavas, and as much water from the stream as they cared to drink, followed by a very small cup of coffee each,

for both coffee and sugar were now becoming exceedingly scarce commodities with them.

As they ate they talked, the burden of Dick's conversation being the remarkable behaviour of the inhabitants of this mysterious country in leaving them so severely alone, a course of action which was in direct opposition to all their past experiences of the African peoples, and which Dick regarded as sinister in the extreme. His settled policy in dealing with the savages had always been to approach them promptly, as soon as met with, and lose no time in making friendly overtures, his leading idea being that if one can but succeed in convincing a savage that no harm of any kind is intended him, he is just as likely to be amiable as the reverse. Up to now Grosvenor had held a similar opinion, and had always most ably seconded Dick's endeavours to create a friendly impression upon the natives encountered; but in the present case he was utterly opposed to their usual methods, the fact being that the idea of penetrating to the heart of the country inhabited by the mysterious white race had gradually come to be an obsession with him, and he would hear of nothing being done that might by any chance interfere with this project; his conviction being that if they adopted their usual methods they would inevitably be stopped and sent to the rightabout. Had he but known what was impending, his anxiety would probably have taken quite a different direction.

The two friends were seated in their tent, partaking of breakfast, on the following morning, when Mafuta hurriedly appeared, in a state of considerable perturbation, with the information that a strong body of armed men were approaching the camp; and upon turning out to investigate, they saw that this was indeed the case, the new arrivals being in number about a hundred, and apparently a party of soldiery, all being attired alike in a sort of uniform consisting of a sleeveless white tunic girt about the waist with a belt, and buskins reaching halfway to the knee; their heads were bare, save

for a thick mop of black hair, arranged in curls which reached to the shoulders; and each man was armed with a long lance, or spear, and a shield, or target, similar to those seen on the previous day. They advanced in single file and close order, and appeared to be under the command of a man who wore a feather head-dress, whose tunic was adorned with a pattern round the hem and armholes, worked in what looked like crimson braid, upon which were sewn close together a large number of small circular disks of polished yellow metal which had the appearance of being made of brass, or, maybe, gold.

“Ah,” ejaculated Grosvenor, as he stood watching their approach, “my fears have materialised, you see, Dick! Those fellows have undoubtedly been dispatched to conduct us back to the frontier and see us safely out of the country; and here ends my longcherished hope of making the acquaintance of this mysterious white race. It is horribly exasperating, especially after we have actually reached their country, and seen for ourselves that such a people really exists.”

“Um!” retorted Dick. “Yes, it is undoubtedly provoking, as you say. But I hope nothing worse is going to happen than what you anticipate. I must confess that I do not altogether like the appearance of things in general, and the expression upon the countenances of those fellows in particular. I seem to detect indications of a cold-blooded, relentless ferocity that would cause them to convert our bodies into pincushions for those spears of theirs with as little compunction as you would impale a rare moth upon a cork with a pin. But whatever may be their intentions with regard to us, we must rigidly adhere to our usual principle of showing no fear and offering no resistance. Probably if we follow this plan they will not kill us on the spot; and while there is life there is hope and the possibility that chance may turn in our favour. Anyway, whatever may happen to us, I hope that they will spare the blacks. Possibly they may make slaves of us all. Well, we shall soon know

the worst, for here they come—confound those dogs!—call them off, Phil; if they fly at any of those chaps and hurt them, there will be trouble at once! Here, Pincher, Juno, Pat, Kafoula, ’Mfan, come in, you silly duffers! Come in, I say! D’you hear me? Come in and lie down! And you too, Leo; how dare you, sir!”

Dick and Grosvenor rushed out, and with the aid of sjamboks soon quelled the disturbance and brought their motley pack into subjection, the animals having made a general dash at the intruders, when the latter arrived within some fifty yards of the wagon, while Leo, the lion cub, excited by the disturbance, had broken the rein which usually confined him to the wagon at nighttime, and had participated in the general onslaught.

At the charge of the snapping, snarling dogs the approaching body of soldiery had promptly levelled their spears, and the interference of Dick and Grosvenor had only just been in the nick of time to save the animals’ lives. The little episode left the troops and their commander absolutely expressionless, save that the latter seemed just a trifle astonished when he saw Dick coolly seize the snarling lion cub by his incipient mane and rate him roundly for his insubordinate behaviour, before he ordered the brute to retire with the dogs to the wagon. The next moment, in obedience to a sign from the officer, six couples detached themselves from the main body of the soldiery; and in a trice the two young Englishmen and their four dark-skinned followers, Mafuta, Ramoo Samee, Jantje, and ’Nkuku—the latter absolutely shivering with fear—found themselves prisoners, with their arms tightly bound behind them with stout raw-hide thongs.

“Ah,” ejaculated Dick, “this is just what I feared might happen! Still, it is perhaps better than being killed outright, and—”

“Hush!” interrupted Grosvenor, sharply. “Listen to that fellow giving orders to his men: I’ll be shot if he isn’t speaking Hebrew—or something that

sounds uncommonly like it!”

“Hebrew?” echoed Dick. “Nonsense! Surely you don’t mean it?”

“Indeed I do, then,” retorted Grosvenor; “never was more serious in my life. Listen! Yes, I feel sure I was not mistaken; it is a sort of Hebrew patois that he is speaking, Hebrew, mixed up, it is true, with a number of words that I can make nothing of. Still, I can understand enough of what he is saying to make out that he is giving his fellows orders to drive in our oxen and yoke them to the wagon. You know I went in rather strongly for Hebrew when I was at Oxford, and did pretty well at it. And I don’t know what you think about it, Dick, but when I come to look at those men’s faces it seems to me that they are all of quite a distinct Jewish type—eh, what?”

“Well—yes—they certainly are,” admitted Dick. “But—Hebrews! Where the dickens can they have come from?”

“Goodness knows!” returned Grosvenor; “unless—and by Jove there may be something in the idea—who is to say that they are not one or more of the lost tribes—eh, what?”

“Well, of course they may be,” agreed Dick. “That is rather a brilliant idea of yours, old chap, and may be worth following up—if they give us the chance. But not just now; there are more pressing matters claiming our attention at this moment—these bonds of ours, for instance. I don’t know how yours are, but mine have been drawn quite unnecessarily tight; my fingers already feel as though they are about to burst. Do you think you could make that fellow understand that there is no need at all to bind us, and that if he will release us we ask nothing better than to accompany him whithersoever he may be pleased to take us?”

“Yes, I think I can,” replied Grosvenor. “At all events I’ll try; my lashings are quite as uncomfortable as yours can be, I fancy.”

And forthwith he shouted to the officer a lengthy if somewhat halting communication in the best Hebrew at his command, the result being that, after a long colloquy, the amazed officer, after considerable hesitation, somewhat reluctantly gave the order for the prisoners’ bonds to be loosed, after cautioning them that the slightest sign of any attempt at escape would result in the instant death of the entire party. Then, having scored one success, Grosvenor attempted another by suggesting that Jantje and ’Nkuku should be entrusted with the inspanning and driving of the wagon, which could be accomplished with much greater facility if the oxen were handled by those to whom they were accustomed. This also the officer eventually conceded, after carefully considering the matter for about a quarter of an hour, meanwhile the oxen were driven very nearly mad by the vain efforts of the soldiers to round them up and drive them towards the wagon.

Chapter Fourteen.

Prisoners.

At length, after a tremendous amount of unnecessary confusion and trouble, the oxen were inspanned, and with the usual unearthly yells and loud cracking of the long whip by Jantje, mounted upon the wagon box, the creaking, lumbering vehicle was got under way, Ramoo Samee following close behind and leading the horses, while the dogs and Leo came to heel and trotted along close behind Grosvenor and Dick, as was their wont when their masters chose to walk, which was not very often. As for the soldiers, they arranged themselves as a cordon round the entire cortege, the officer in command leading the way.

This order was maintained until the noon outspan, when the officer, after some pressing, laid aside his aloofness sufficiently to accept Grosvenor's invitation to join him and Dick at luncheon. This proved to be the thin end of the wedge, so to speak; for the man could scarcely sit at the same table with his two prisoners, partake of their fare, and still preserve his original attitude of silence toward them; indeed it soon became evident that he was consumed with curiosity concerning the two people who had travelled such a distance with such few retainers; who seemed to have absolutely no knowledge of what fear was; and who apparently numbered lions as well as dogs among their domestic animals. He began by making a few tentative remarks, to which Grosvenor responded at some length, and then suddenly demanded, with an air of astonishment that he made scarcely any effort to conceal, how it came about that he, Grosvenor, a total stranger, was able to communicate with a native of the country in what was practically his own language. Then Grosvenor entered into a long explanation, involving a brief history of the principal seats of learning in England, with the methods and subjects of study pursued therein, and including the interesting fact that Hebrew, being commonly regarded as one of the most ancient tongues in the world, was there regarded as especially worthy of attention.

This last statement seemed to be particularly gratifying to the young officer's vanity, and had a distinctly mollifying effect upon his original hauteur and coldness. He thawed visibly, and even condescended to laugh at some mild joke upon which Grosvenor ventured, and then sought to further satisfy his curiosity by making a number of personal enquiries as to where Phil and his friend came from, why they came, how long they had been upon the journey, and so on. To all these enquiries Grosvenor replied pretty fully, but when in his turn he attempted to elicit some information respecting their destination, and the treatment that they might expect to receive upon their arrival, the man at once shut up like a trap, and

thenceforward for the remainder of the journey refused to hold any communication whatever with his prisoners.

Their route lay in the direction of a range of distant hills, which they judged it was the intention of their captor to cross; and as they went they found the country gradually changing its character by subtle gradations, growing ever more fertile and more highly cultivated with every mile of progress, while the houses increased in number and clustered more thickly together. At length, after passing through one of these hamlets, they emerged upon a narrow field path, which widened somewhat when the next hamlet was passed, and so gradually became a more prominent feature until ultimately it developed into a full-blown road, which, rough and uneven at first, steadily improved in appearance and quality until it became a very excellent and much-used thoroughfare, shaded by trees on either hand. In short the country, which on its extreme frontier was a perfect wilderness, steadily improved with every mile of progress toward its interior, as regarded the evidences of a high state of civilisation. One of the strangest things, however, which came under the notice of the Englishmen was that, from the moment of their arrest, the inhabitants—whom they encountered in ever-increasing numbers as the day wore on—manifested the most absolute indifference with regard to them, not even deigning to cast a second glance upon what was clearly a most novel and unusual sight in that country.

At sunset the party encamped at the foot of the hills toward which they had been journeying all day, and which proved to be much more lofty, and at a much greater distance, than they had imagined them to be when they were first sighted; and the whole of the next day was consumed in climbing, by means of an excellent road, to the summit of a pass where, having safely negotiated a short length of exceedingly narrow and difficult roadway between two enormous vertical cliffs, they emerged upon a small plateau of rich grassland that afforded good camping ground for the night.

The spot where the travellers outspanned was the bottom of a miniature basin of some five or six acres in extent, and was surrounded on all sides by steep slopes terminating in a series of jagged peaks, some four or five hundred feet high, that bounded the view in every direction and limited it to a distance of about half a mile. But when, after inspanning on the following morning, they crossed the little plateau upon which they had spent the night, and passed round a bluff at its farther side, a wonderful prospect at once burst upon their astonished gaze. For they now found that the chain of hills, up the outer slope of which they had been laboriously climbing during the whole of the preceding day, formed an unbroken if somewhat irregular circle of something like forty miles in diameter, measuring across from ridge to ridge, the inner slopes of the encircling hills being from three to five miles wide, with a plain of from five to ten miles in width at their feet, this plain in turn encircling a lovely lake, measuring about twenty miles across, the very centre of which was occupied by an island of perhaps three or four miles in diameter, the whole rugged surface of which appeared to be covered with buildings embowered in leafy gardens.

Now at last the travellers began to really understand the wealth and importance of the people into whose country they had entered, uninvited; for, as far as the eye could reach, even with the aid of their exceedingly powerful field glasses, the mountain slopes and the plain that lay circling at their feet consisted of nothing but a practically unbroken sweep of highly cultivated land, dotted with snug farmhouses, and bearing ripening crops of various kinds, interspersed here and there with trim vineyards, or orchards of fruitbearing trees; while, at distances of from three to eight or ten miles apart, there nestled among groves of noble shade trees, villages which must have sheltered from a hundred-and-fifty to, perhaps, four or five hundred inhabitants. And through all there ran a perfect network of roads, carrying, as could be seen with the aid of their glasses, a considerable amount of

traffic, among which could be distinguished a number of wheeled vehicles, the first they had seen since entering the country.

The officer, who was their custodian, was evidently intensely gratified at the surprise and admiration freely expressed by his two principal prisoners at the scene that lay spread out at their feet, and even halted the cortege for a few minutes to enable Dick and Grosvenor to take in its multudinous details conveniently, and examine them through their field glasses. It was noticed by the two Englishmen that he regarded these instruments with the most acute curiosity, but either pride or reserve deterred him from asking any question concerning them. When, however, Dick offered him a peep through them, he was wholly unable to resist the temptation, or to restrain his expressions of amazement as, glancing through the tubes at the island, some twenty miles distant, he was enabled to distinguish such details as the roofs, windows, and doors of houses built thereon, while of course the details of houses in the plain below, the character of the several vehicles on the roads, the numbers of oxen in the teams which drew them, were quite unmistakable. But when Grosvenor, seeking to avail himself of this temporary relaxation of manner, attempted once more to engage the man in conversation, he instantly relapsed into his former attitude of unresponsiveness; and his manner soon made it clear that he was determined to risk no complications of any kind by allowing anything in the nature of familiarity or friendliness between himself and his prisoners.

The descent from the crest of the encircling hills to the circular belt of plain below was of course quite an easy matter, compared with the ascent of the outer slope on the previous day, the gradient of the road being practically uniform all the way, and just steep enough to necessitate a slight application of the brakebar to the rear wheels of the wagon from the crest to the plain; and Dick noted with some surprise that their taciturn friend, the officer in command, appeared to be greatly interested in the working of this

exceedingly simple piece of apparatus, as though it was something with which he was quite unfamiliar. The party effected the descent and reached the level plain in about an hour and a half from the moment of starting, and soon found themselves travelling along a broad, level, well-kept road among a large number of other people, most of whom looked at them with more or less curiosity, but steadfastly refrained from addressing a word of remark to any of the guard who had them in charge.

About half an hour after reaching the plain they debouched into another and much broader road than that by which they had been previously travelling, and it then became tolerably evident that their ultimate destination must be the island in the centre of the lake; for the road which they were now traversing was absolutely straight all the way to the margin of the lake, and pointed accurately toward the island.

They had been travelling along this road for nearly an hour, and were approaching a village of more importance than any which they had hitherto passed, when there suddenly arose a considerable commotion among the people on the road ahead of them, who were seen running confusedly hither and thither amid a great cloud of dust, while shouts, shrieks, and a sound of low, angry bellowing rose upon the stagnant air. Mechanically the whole party came to a halt to see what was the matter, while Jantje and ’Nkuku began shouting to each other in greatly excited tones, and the oxen which were drawing the wagon began to low, snort, sniff the air, stamp excitedly on the ground, and lunge at each other with their long horns. For perhaps a minute it was impossible to guess what was happening; then the shouts suddenly grew much louder and more excited, the crowd ahead parted right and left as though panic-stricken, there arose a shriek of terror, or pain, or perhaps both, a man’s body was seen to go whirling some eight or ten feet into the air, and then a bulky something, which presently resolved itself into a huge buffalo bull, emerged from the dust-cloud and came charging along

the road, striking out with its immense, curved, sharp-pointed horns at everybody in its way. The brute was then only about two hundred yards off, and was galloping straight toward the party, with tail high in the air, head low, eyes aflame with fury, and great gouts of froth dripping from its heavy muzzle. For a moment the soldiers seemed paralysed with terror, the next they all turned as with one accord, and, leaping an irrigation ditch that ran alongside the road, sought safety in flight across a field of young wheat. The buffalo paused a moment in mid-career, as though hesitating whether he should pursue them or charge the wagon and its team of oxen; but the next moment the brute had made up its mind, and, perhaps attracted by the crimson trimming and glittering ornaments of the officer's tunic, leaped the ditch and deliberately selected that unfortunate individual as the especial object of his pursuit. The position of the man at once became one of deadly peril, for, fast though he ran, the buffalo had the advantage in the matter of speed, and was rapidly gaining upon him when Dick and Grosvenor sprang to the wagon and, hastily seizing their rifles, prepared to act. Dick was the first on the ground again with his weapon, and, sinking on one knee to secure steadiness of aim, he brought the sights to bear exactly behind the animal's left shoulder, and fired. The spirt of flame and the little jet of filmy blue smoke extorted a sharp ejaculation of astonishment from those who were near enough to notice it, but it was as nothing compared with the shout of mingled amazement, terror, and relief that went up when the huge beast stumbled, fell forward on his head, turned a complete somersault, and lay still, slain at the very instant when, having overtaken the fugitive, he had lowered his head to impale the shrieking man upon his horns.

With such startling abruptness did the huge beast collapse that the pursued officer did not realise the fact until he had run a farther distance of some thirty yards or so, and even then, when at length he halted and looked back at the prostrate and motionless animal, he seemed quite unable to understand that it was dead and harmless; for he shouted an order to his

men to close in round the buffalo and secure it with cords before it recovered itself and resumed the aggressive. It was not until a few of the bolder spirits, having cautiously approached the carcass, nearly enough to perceive the bullet hole and the blood flowing from it, had satisfied themselves that the brute was in very truth dead, and had borne emphatic testimony to the extraordinary fact, that he was able to screw up his own courage to the point of personal investigation. Then he calmly made his way back to the road and, approaching Grosvenor, demanded an explanation of the seeming miracle; but even after he had been told, and the rifle exhibited to him and its powers laboriously explained, he seemed quite unable to understand, and was at last fain to dismiss the mystery with an impatient shrug of the shoulders, and an order for the march to be resumed.

But Dick had seen a man tossed by the buffalo, and had judged, by the victim's shriek of agony, that he was badly hurt; he therefore kept his eyes open as they passed along the road, and sharply directed Grosvenor to call upon the officer to halt when presently they came upon a group of about a dozen persons standing by the side of the road surrounding a little group consisting of two persons, a man and a woman; the man bleeding profusely from a ghastly wound in the thigh, and already grey and sharp of feature under the shadow of death, while the woman crouched helplessly in the dust, supporting the wounded man's head upon her knees.

Without ceremony Dick forced his way through the little crowd of onlookers, gave one keen glance at the prostrate man, and then, turning, shouted to Grosvenor:

"This chap is bleeding to death, Phil—artery severed apparently. Just explain to our man, will you, and tell him that, with his permission, I propose to save the poor fellow's life. Mafuta, bring my medicine chest here, quick!"

The little crowd, that was fast being augmented by new arrivals, scowled ferociously at the, to them, uncouthly clad but stalwart figure of the young doctor who had so unceremoniously forced his way in among them, but remained passive, possibly gathering, from the tone of his speech, that he proposed to succour the wounded man; nor did the officer in charge of the party offer any objection, but obediently called a halt when requested by Grosvenor to do so. A few seconds later, therefore, Dick, with Grosvenor as his assistant, was kneeling beside the wounded man, deftly bathing his terrible injury with an antiseptic lotion, prior to the more difficult and delicate task of searching for and securing the ends of the severed artery, which had been spouting blood like a fountain until Dick had applied the tourniquet. The entire operation of dressing, stitching, and binding up the wound occupied the best part of half an hour, by which time the roadway was packed with people anxiously enquiring what was amiss, and eager to get a glimpse of the benevolent young barbarians who had so strangely come among them and at so opportune a moment. Those who were favourably enough placed actually to see what was going on were filled with amazement and—despite their unreasoning hatred of strangers—admiration at the deftness with which Dick first stanched the flow of blood and then proceeded to dress the injury; for, strangely enough, this people, highly civilised though they were in some respects, possessed but the most rudimentary knowledge of medicine and surgery, pinning their faith chiefly to the virtue of charms and incantations, their knowledge being not nearly sufficient to enable them successfully to grapple with so serious an injury as that with which the young Englishman was so calmly and competently dealing. As the operation proceeded, these people, usually so cold and self-contained, reported progress to those who were less favourably situated for observation than themselves, and in this way the entire crowd were kept posted up in every step, until finally a great sigh of relief arose from them as Dick concluded his task and rose to his feet.

But the young doctor had not yet finished with his patient, by any means; he intended to see him safely into his own home before he left him, and this he did, a half-dozen of the soldiers fetching the man's bed from his house, carefully lifting him thereon, and carrying him in, under Dick's watchful care, aided by Grosvenor as interpreter. This done, he administered a soothing and fever-allaying draught; after which, upon being informed by the young officer that he would probably have no opportunity of seeing his patient again, he hypnotised the man and subjected him to a powerful mental suggestion that all danger was now past, that no complications of any kind would arise, and that he would rapidly get well without further attention. This done, he and Grosvenor rejoined the wagon and resumed their march.

The delay occasioned by this incident of the buffalo so retarded their progress that it was close upon noon before they arrived at the margin of the lake; and here they were curtly informed that they were about to be conveyed to the island, and that as it was not proposed to take the wagon or any of the animals with them, they must indicate what few articles they thought they might require during the next few days, and those articles would be conveyed across with them. There was a certain indefinable, sinister suggestiveness in the character of this communication that seemed to imply a doubt in the mind of the official who made it whether the individuals to whom it was made would require anything at all after "the next few days"; but Dick and Grosvenor, acting as usual upon the general principle of taking an optimistic view of everything, gave no sign that they detected anything of a covert character in the intimation, and calmly indicated the trunks containing their clothing, the medicine chest, their rifles and revolvers, and a case of ammunition for the same, all of which were duly placed in a large craft, in shape something between a canoe and a lighter, which they afterward discovered was propelled by sixty paddles. At the last moment it transpired that their black attendants, Mafuta, Jantje, and

’Nkuku were to be left behind on the mainland—which arrangement also appeared to bear a certain sinister significance—whereupon Grosvenor suggested the extreme importance of placing them in charge of the wagon and its remaining contents, part of which—two cases of ammunition, to wit—he explained, consisted of terribly powerful magic, any tampering with which by unauthorised persons must inevitably have the most appallingly disastrous results. This suggestion, Grosvenor was informed, would receive the most careful consideration of the authorities; and he had the satisfaction of believing that not only would this probably result in saving the lives of the blacks, at least for a time, but he also perceived that his hint respecting the “magic” had made a very distinct impression.

The preparations for the transport of the prisoners across the lake were soon made, and in about half an hour from the moment of their arrival upon the beach they were under way. A circumstance which at once struck Dick as peculiar was the fact that the craft in which they were making the passage was unprovided with sails, in consequence of which they had to depend entirely upon the exertions of the paddlers, although, as it happened, there was a gentle breeze blowing that was dead fair for them. Thus the boat, being large and of somewhat clumsy model, occupied fully two hours in her passage, of about eight miles from the mainland to the island, notwithstanding the fact that sixty stalwart men were toiling at the paddles.

But this matter was soon banished from the minds of the two young Englishmen by their growing interest in the mysterious island which they were gradually approaching. For mysterious it certainly was in several respects. In the first place its solitary situation, right in the centre of that unknown lake, invested it with a certain aspect of secrecy, and secrecy always suggests mystery. Also there seemed to be little or no traffic between the island and the mainland, for during the two hours occupied by their crossing no other boat or craft of any kind appeared upon any part of

the lake. Then, as they gradually drew nearer to the island, and its various details revealed themselves, the two young Englishmen became aware that the entire island, excepting perhaps the actual soil of it, was artificial; that is to say, every square inch of its surface had apparently been arranged or modified by the hand of man, for either it bore a building, was traversed by a road, or formed part of a garden every tree and plant in which owed its existence and its precise position to human design and arrangement. All the natural features of the island seemed to have been ruthlessly swept away to make room for something forming part of a complete, comprehensive plan. And that plan bore eloquent evidence in its every feature that it owed its inception to intellects characterised by a very high degree of culture and refinement, and its execution to hands exceptionally skilled in many of those arts and sciences that are the heritage of ages of civilisation. The architecture was massive, almost heroic in its proportions, and its ornamentation was severe yet graceful, with a very strong and marked suggestion of Egyptian influence. The gardens were elaborately terraced, and consisted for the most part of wide, smooth, grassy lawns thickly dotted with flower beds cut into graceful and fanciful shapes, with trees growing only where they would afford a grateful shade either to the wayfarer or to the gardens arranged upon the flat-topped roofs of the houses. The roads were so cunningly planned that, by means of their serpentine windings, an easy gradient was everywhere maintained; and, lastly, the entire island was encompassed by a lofty and immensely solid wall, or quay, built of enormous blocks of granite the face of which had been worked to so smooth a surface as to render it absolutely unclimbable, the only means of obtaining a landing seeming to be by way of a double flight of wide stone steps leading up from the water to a wide platform which was shut off from the interior of the island by an immensely strong gateway flanked by two lofty towers.

By the time that Dick and Grosvenor had become imbued with a fairly accurate general impression of the extraordinary characteristics of the mysterious unknown island city to which they were bound, the craft that bore them was close in under the frowning protective wall which engirdled it, and a few minutes later the boat ranged up alongside one of the two flights of landing steps, the paddles were laid in, and the crew, springing to their feet, checked the vessel's way by grappling a number of large bronze mooring rings the shanks of which were deeply sunk into the face of the massive masonry. Then the officer who had arrested the prisoners, and still had them in charge, gave the word to land, and the young Englishmen stepped ashore, closely followed by half a dozen men bearing their several belongings, except their firearms, which they insisted on carrying themselves.

Ascending the long, easy flight of steps, the little procession, led by the officer, presently reached the broad platform on the top, and found themselves confronting a pair of enormous bronze doors which completely filled the gateway, and which swung slowly open, apparently by some mechanical means, to admit them. Passing through the gateway, and noting, as they went, the extraordinary strength and solidity of the doors, they found themselves in a kind of tunnel, or passage, some twenty feet long, in the structure of the gateway, with a sunlit vista of a paved street, bordered on either hand by lofty shade trees, with houses behind them, and thronged with people. Another minute and they had emerged from the archway and were in the street itself, which they now perceived to be one of the business streets of the island, for the houses on either side of it were arranged as shops, the whole of the lower part of each being open, affording a view of the various wares for sale, displayed upon a gently sloping platform, at the rear end of which sat the owner, cross-legged, Eastern fashion, arrayed in long flowing robes of brilliant hues. The fronts of the shops were unglazed, and unprotected by screen or barrier of any kind, nor did the shopkeeper

make the slightest attempt to solicit custom; his property was simply protected from the ardent rays of the sun by a gaily coloured blind, or awning, and he sat silently and gravely awaiting the arrival of such customers as might chance to require the particular kind of wares that he had for disposal. These wares, it soon appeared, consisted chiefly of fruit; bread, in the form of small, fancifully shaped loaves; cakes; sweetmeats; drinks of various kinds, mostly compounded of powders while the customer waited—there seemed to be a brisk demand for these—fish, presumably from the lake, alive and swimming about in a large tank from which they were withdrawn as required by means of a hand net; light flimsy muslins, white or dyed in a number of brilliant colours; lengths of exquisite embroidery in gold, silver, or silk thread, and in some cases studded with what looked very much like uncut gems; saddlery and harness, some of it richly mounted or embroidered with gold; queershaped household utensils made of copper or some other metal that had the colour and sheen of gold; jewellery, necklaces, bracelets, armlets, anklets, earrings, and finger rings of gold, and vari-coloured stones that might or might not be gems; and articles of clothing, including sandals of all kinds, from the perfectly plain piece of board, secured by a single strap, to articles of the most elegant design and costly workmanship.

The little party traversed this street for about a quarter of a mile, attracting little or no notice from the passers-by as they went, and then turned abruptly out of it into a wide road leading gradually uphill. The houses which bordered this road were all private residences, detached from each other, and each embosomed in its own spacious garden, aflame with flowers of the most brilliant hues and exquisite perfume, several of the species being quite unknown to the Englishmen. The people who were encountered in this road, or were seen passing in or out of the houses, or moving about in the gardens, appeared to be of decidedly higher caste than any that the travellers had thus far seen. Their skins were not so swarthy, their features

were more refined, many of the women being exceedingly beautiful, although the good looks of the men were to a considerable extent marred by an expression which may best be described as latent, cold-blooded ferocity. All these people wore garments of exceedingly fine material, mostly white, richly trimmed with elaborate embroidery in colours or gold, the women's dress being a long, sleeveless garment reaching from the throat to the feet and confined at the waist by an ornamental belt, handsome sandals, much jewellery, and the head bare, the heavy masses of dark hair being wound upon the head very becomingly, and intertwined with ribbon or strings of coloured beads. The costumes of the men were of two kinds: the elders wore for the most part a long, flowing *burnous* kind of garment with enormous loose sleeves reaching to the wrists, while the younger men wore a kind of tunic confined at the waist by a belt and reaching just below the knee. All wore either sandals or buskins, and all were bareheaded, the hair of the men being exceedingly thick, allowed to grow long enough to reach the shoulder, and mostly dressed in thick clusters of tight, straight curls. The general type of countenance, as Grosvenor again took occasion to remark to Dick, was distinctly Hebraic.

The road which the party now followed twisted and turned hither and thither, apparently with the object of securing a uniform gradient, but it led continuously upward, until at length it conducted them to an enormous, massively constructed building of brown granite that towered, tier after tier, for five tiers in height; the top tier consisting of a comparatively small edifice with a metal roof which shone in the afternoon sun like burnished gold. This building somehow suggested the idea of a temple, partly, perhaps, because of the fact that it was the topmost portion of the building which occupied the extreme apex of the island; but the newcomers had scant opportunity to take in its details, for they were marched straight to a low doorway cut in the tremendously thick wall of the lower story of the building, which gave them admission to a long labyrinth of twisting

passages, lighted only by the smoky flare of half a dozen torches. This network of passages they traversed for a distance which both of them estimated at fully five hundred yards, finally arriving at a small door which was flung open by a man who had accompanied the party from the outer door. The officer motioned his prisoners to enter, and, there being no alternative, they did so, the bearers following with their belongings. These last being deposited on the ground, the bearers retired, the door was slammed-to and barred on the outside, and the two adventurous young Englishmen found themselves alone in a cell or dungeon about eight feet square, devoid of every suggestion of furniture, and lighted only by a small aperture, some six inches square, pierced in an outer wall of the building which must have been at least twelve feet thick.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Trial and Verdict.

“Well, Dick,” exclaimed Grosvenor, as the door was closed upon them and they looked round them in the dim light percolating through the long, narrow aperture in the wall which afforded their only supply of air and illumination, “what is your present opinion of things in general?”

“Well,” returned Dick reflectively, “the outstanding fact which dominates all others is that we have actually penetrated to the very heart of the mysterious country which our friend Mitchell predicted we should never reach, and have therefore triumphantly accomplished the chief object of our journey, despite all the difficulties that we have encountered. For the rest, this cell, although it is somewhat lacking in comfort and convenience as a dwelling, is at least clean, dry, and pleasantly cool compared with the

temperature outside. And—that is about all I have to say on the matter at present, I think."

"Um!" retorted Grosvenor with a suspicion of peevishness in his voice; "that is not very much. What do you think they mean to do with us? That is what I am trying to get at. Of course I remember that the gist of Mitchell's homily to us was: 'Don't go, if you value your lives, because those people don't like strangers.' But if a fellow seriously considered a little matter like that, exploration would soon be a thing of the past, for I've noticed that many of the johnnies whose countries we have passed through haven't liked strangers. Yet we've contrived to pull through all right thus far; and of course I have been hoping that our luck would still hold good, and that when we arrived in this country something would happen to enable us to create a favourable impression upon the chappies, causing them to decide that we are the exceptions to the general rule, and are worthy to be treated as honoured guests and all that sort of thing—eh, what? But when I look round me and take in the details of this apartment it seems to me that things have somehow gone wrong; I can't help thinking that they must have a more comfortable guest chamber than this somewhere in this old caravanserai—eh? What do you think?"

"I have no doubt they have," returned Dick. "Yet they may consider this quite good enough for us. But I am not going to worry very greatly just yet, and I would recommend you not to do so either. It is true that so far these folk have displayed a most lamentable and disconcerting lack of appreciation of our many excellent qualities, but you must remember that we have not had much opportunity for a display of those qualities as yet. The opportunity will come no doubt, and when it does we will just make our friends outside sit up—I don't quite know how, but we will do it somehow. So cheer up, old chap; the fact that they have put us in here instead of killing us at sight, so to speak, seems to suggest to my mind the

belief that, if they are displeased at our presence in their country, they at least intend to give us some sort of a trial before passing us on to the executioner."

"Oh, dash it all, old man, don't talk about executioners—!" began Grosvenor, when he was interrupted by the opening of the cell door and a man entered, bearing in one hand a pitcher of water, and in the other a loaf of bread of liberal proportions on a wooden platter. These he placed on the floor beside the prisoners, and was gone again before Grosvenor could sufficiently pull his wits together to address him.

The food and drink were most acceptable, for the prisoners had taken no refreshment since breakfast that morning, and the day was now drawing to its close, as they could tell by the rapidly diminishing light that percolated through their narrow window. They fell to upon the viands forthwith, availing themselves of the last departing daylight to find the food; and finally, after a little further desultory chat, in which each did his best to make light of the situation, they disposed themselves as comfortably as they could upon the floor, and sought such rest as might be possible under the circumstances.

The night that followed was certainly not a pleasant one, for the floor was hard, and sleep was shy of coming to them. With the first glimmerings of daylight, therefore, the two prisoners arose, weary, sore of body, and in a distinctly pessimistic frame of mind which found no amelioration in the fact that hour after hour dragged its weary length along, bringing neither visitors nor food, although the breakfast hour had long passed. Noon arrived, and still no footstep approached the door of their cell; and when at length their watches marked the hour of three in the afternoon without the arrival of food, without even so much as a visit from their jailer to ascertain whether

or not all was well with them, they began to ask themselves seriously whether by any chance they had been forgotten.

The answer came about half an hour later when the door of their cell was suddenly thrown open by the man who had locked them in on the previous night, and who now gruffly summoned them to follow him.

They emerged from their place of confinement gladly enough—for they had reached that stage of discomfort when one welcomes any change, even though there should be a possibility that it may prove to be for the worse—and were at once taken into custody by a handsomely attired officer in command of ten soldiers who, armed with short, broad-bladed spears, and each carrying a flaring torch, at once closed round them. The word to march was given, and the party moved away along the labyrinth of passages, turning hither and thither in the most bewildering fashion, until at length they reached a narrow flight of stone steps that wound upward, corkscrew fashion, until they emerged into another passage which, after a journey of some fifty yards, conducted them into a spacious and lofty hall lighted at either end by a large window glazed with what, from the cursory glance which they obtained of it, they judged to be talc, or some similar substance. A number of passages led out of this hall, and down one of them the party plunged, finally passing through a doorway into a spacious chamber, lighted, like the hall, by large windows glazed with the talc-like material already mentioned. There was a peculiarity about this chamber that at once attracted the attention of the two young Englishmen, and it was this: the wall opposite the door by which they had entered was divided horizontally into two unequal parts, the lower and smaller of the two being occupied by a grille of exquisitely fine carved work executed in a kind of Greek pattern, while the upper compartment was filled in with a window reaching right across from side to side of the chamber, that threw a strong light right down upon the precise spot where they were halted. As the two prisoners came to

a standstill at the word of command of the officer in charge of the party, the soldiers formed themselves into a semicircle between their charges and the door, and grounded their spears with a clank upon the black marble pavement, while, although the room was apparently empty, save for themselves, the officer advanced and, raising his spear in salute, exclaimed in a loud voice, in the quasihebrew tongue which appeared to be the common language of the people:

“Lords! the prisoners from afar are present.”

“It is well,” replied a deep, solemn voice from behind the grille, and the two friends suddenly realised that they were about to be put upon their trial for the offence of intruding where they were not wanted. They both directed their gaze upon the grille with greatly enhanced interest, striving to obtain a glimpse of the person or persons behind it; but a space of at least twenty feet divided them from it, and at that distance the interstices were too small to afford the faintest glimpse of anyone on the other side. There was a pause of perhaps half a minute, then the voice that had last spoken said:

“Let Benoni, the officer who arrested the strangers upon their arrival in Izreel, be summoned to give his evidence.”

The officer in charge of the prisoners stepped to the door, opened it, spoke a few words to someone on the other side, apparently giving an order, then closed the door again and returned to his former position in the hall.

“Did you hear that, Dick—Benoni—Izreel? Don’t those two names suggest anything to you?” murmured Grosvenor behind his hand.

“N–o, I can’t say that they do, except that they seem to be not altogether unfamiliar to me,” answered Dick in a like low murmur.

“Familiar!” ejaculated Grosvenor, incautiously raising his voice; “I should think they are. Why—”

“Silence!” interposed the officer sternly, at this moment. Although Grosvenor’s eyes blazed at the insult, and he looked more than half-inclined to forcibly resent it, he closed his lips with a fierce snap, and obeyed the injunction, at the restraining touch of Dick’s hand. A moment later the officer who had brought them to the island entered, and, closing the door behind him, advanced, saluting as he faced the grille.

“Benoni,” said the deep voice from behind the screen, “say what you know concerning the strangers from afar whom ye yesterday brought across the water to Bethalia!”

Again Benoni saluted. Then, facing toward the centre of the grille, he proceeded to relate how, in consequence of intelligence brought to him by runners from the frontier, he proceeded in search of the strangers, and, having taken them, brought them to Bethalia, in accordance with the general order providing for such a circumstance. Then he proceeded to describe in some detail the journey, making mention of the wonderful tubes that brought distant objects near, so long as one continued to gaze through them; and, from that, passed on to describe in full the incident of the infuriated buffalo, the consternation it had created among the wayfarers upon the road along which it had charged, its persistent pursuit of himself, the wonderful magic whereby the strangers had slain the animal, from a distance, at the precise moment when it had been about to toss him into the air; and how, finally, the younger stranger of the two had insisted upon interrupting the journey to succour the man who had been grievously hurt by the animal; adding that, in obedience to orders received, he had early that morning proceeded to the mainland to enquire into the condition of the injured man, whom, to his amazement, he found to be making favourable

progress toward recovery. He spoke throughout in a clear, level voice, and seemed to be concerned only to convey an absolutely truthful impression of everything to his unseen audience behind the grille.

At the conclusion of Benoni's narrative a silence ensued, lasting for nearly twenty minutes, broken only by a low sound suggestive of subdued whispering behind the grille. At length, however, even this ceased, and the silence became almost oppressive for the space of about another half-minute. Then it was broken by the voice that had before spoken, saying:

"White strangers, say now by what names are ye known?"

To which Grosvenor replied: "My name is Philip Eustace Meredith Grosvenor; and that of my friend is Richard Maitland."

This statement was followed by another brief silence, when the unseen speaker said:

"Philip Eustace Meredith Grosvenor and Richard Maitland," he boggled the names a little, especially those of Grosvenor, "ye have entered the country of the Izreelites uninvited, and without even asking permission to do so. Had ye sought permission before crossing our border, it would have been refused you, and ye would have been turned back and permitted to depart in peace. But to enter this land uninvited, and without obtaining permission, is against our law, and the punishment for the offence is the Slow Death!"

Here the speaker made an impressive pause, as though to allow the statement to be thoroughly absorbed by the understanding of those most intimately concerned. Then he resumed:

"But we learn from the officer Benoni, who brought you hither, that since entering our country ye have saved the lives of two men; and since men's

lives are more valuable to the Izreelites than aught else, we have decided to mitigate your punishment to this extent: ye shall live, if ye will, upon condition that ye swear never to attempt to leave the country without the royal assent, and to devote yourselves henceforth to the service of Izreel in such manner as ye may be directed. Say now, therefore, will ye accept life, with the condition attached to the gift; or will ye go forth from hence to die the Slow Death?"

This speech Grosvenor carefully translated to Dick, finishing up by asking:

"What answer shall I give the Johnnie, Dick? On the one hand, I have no fancy for being marched out from here to die the Slow Death, whatever that may be—something pretty horrible, I have no doubt, by the sound of it—but, on the other hand, I have just as little inclination to bind myself to end my days here, among these chappies—eh, what?"

"I fully agree with you, my dear fellow, on both points," answered Dick; "but there is one broad principle upon which I invariably act, and that is, where one is confronted by a choice between two evils, always to choose the lesser of the two. In this case I think there can be no question as to which is the lesser of the two evils between which we have to choose; because if we were foolish enough to choose death it would mean the end of all things sublunary for us; whereas if we choose life, even with the condition attached, there is always a sporting chance of something happening to make matters better for us. For myself, I would rather live, even here, than die the death, whether slow or quick. My advice, therefore, is to take the life which is offered us, and make the best of it."

"Very well, then; that's agreed," returned Grosvenor, who proceeded forthwith to explain laboriously to the unseen judges that they accepted the alternative of life offered them.

The decision was received with low murmurs of what sounded like satisfaction on the part of those behind the grille. A short silence next ensued, which was followed by further mutterings among the unseen judges, who seemed to be debating some important point. Finally an intimation came from those mysterious individuals that the strangers were to be marched to the Great Hall, there to take the oath which formed the condition upon which they accepted their lives; whereupon the officer, Benoni, gave an order, and the prisoners were marched out of the Judgment Hall through the door by which they had entered.

Making their way back along the passage which they had previously traversed, the party presently found themselves in the central hall out of which all the passages in the building seemed to radiate. Traversing this, they now entered another and much wider passage, which conducted them into what was presumably the Great Hall; for it was a square apartment measuring fully a hundred feet each way, lighted on two adjacent sides by lofty windows glazed with the talc-like substance which the two friends had before observed, only in the present case the glazing glowed with rich colour, having been painted or dyed with marvellous skill into representations of various apparently symbolical subjects, as were also the lights in a great central dome which, supported by massive columns, occupied about three-fourths of the roof space of the apartment. These columns as well as the walls and flat portion of the roof of the hall, were also very elaborately decorated in colour, while the floor was composed of white marble. A long, thin rod, which might be gold, judging from its sheen and colour, depended from the great boss, or keystone, of the dome, supporting a group of seven beautifully ornate, lighted lamps, at a height of about twenty feet above the floor; and immediately beneath these there was a table covered with a cloth, woven in a most intricate and elegant pattern, apparently of very fine gold thread. Upon this table there lay a large roll of parchment manuscript, wound upon two golden rods, decorated with what

looked like pine cones wrought in gold at the ends; and behind the table stood seven venerable men with long white moustaches, and beards reaching to their waists, clad in a hooded garment of finest wool, dyed black, reaching to their feet. Their hoods were drawn so far over their heads and faces that little of their features could be seen, save their eyes, which glowed out of the sombre shadow cast by their hoods.

The young Englishmen, still in the custody of the guard, were marched up to within about ten feet of the table, where they were halted; whereupon the central and apparently oldest figure of the seven said, in a deep, grave voice —which both at once recognised as that which had spoken from behind the grille:

“Draw near, strangers, and take the oath which shall free you from the ban of the law, and make you citizens of Izreel for the remainder of your lives. Lay your right hands upon this roll and, with your left hands raised toward heaven, repeat after me:—

“I swear, by the Sun, Moon, and Stars, by Light and Darkness, by the Powers of the Air, and by the Flame of the seven lamps which burn forever, that I will never seek to leave Izreel without first obtaining the royal assent, and that henceforth I will devote myself to its service in such manner as I shall be directed!”

The oath sounded formidable enough, but after all it really meant little to those who were called upon to take it, and they took it unhesitatingly, with the full intention of keeping it both in letter and in spirit—since an oath was an oath, whatever form its wording might assume—and, this done, Benoni and his guard were dismissed, and the two newly enrolled citizens of Izreel were left alone with the seven whom they subsequently came to know as the Elders.

The stern attitude of these toward the two aliens was now considerably relaxed; they invited Phil and Dick to accompany them into another and a much smaller room, where, to the great satisfaction of the Englishmen, they found a substantial meal awaiting them, and to this the entire party forthwith sat down. The appetite of the ex-prisoners was by this time brought to a fine edge by their somewhat protracted fast, and they did full justice to the fare placed before them, to the wonder and admiration of their hosts, who, it appeared, were themselves but indifferent trenchermen. The meal over, and the attendants dismissed, Malachi, the chief of the Elders, and the man who had delivered judgment in the Judgment Hall, turned to Grosvenor and said:

“And now, O Philip! the moment has arrived when we, the Elders, must decide in what manner you and he whom you call Dick may best serve Izreel. Tell me, therefore, I pray you, what ye can both best do, in order that we may assign to each of you a useful vocation.”

“That is all very well,” remarked Grosvenor rather ruefully, when he had translated this speech to Dick. “So far as you are concerned the matter is simple enough; you are a doctor, and when once these chappies have had an example of your skill in that line I expect they’ll find you plenty to do. But what can I do? Absolutely nothing useful! I can ride, shoot, sail a yacht passably—”

“Stop!” cried Dick impulsively. “Ask these ancients whether they know what sails are. If they don’t—and I’ll bet they do not, or they would have used them yesterday—your vocation is cut out for you. You can teach them how to use sails, and also how to model their craft upon better lines; and by the time that you have finished that job I have no doubt another will turn up. Just talk to the old gentlemen along those lines, and see what comes of it.”

And Grosvenor did, with the happiest results. He ascertained that the Izreelites knew nothing whatever about sails, or indeed how to use the wind in any way as a labour-saver; and when he told his little audience that boats could be propelled, corn ground, water pumped, and a number of other useful things done by the power of wind alone, they were at first very strongly inclined to suspect him of romancing. But when he further offered to demonstrate to them the truth of his assertion they at once agreed to afford him every facility for so doing, and cheerfully promised to place at his disposal such men and material as he might require.

And when he came to speak of Dick's qualifications as a healer of all manner of diseases and injury to the human anatomy, they were even more greatly surprised and delighted, for, astonishing as it may appear in the case of a people so highly civilised in many respects as were the Izreelites, they knew practically nothing of either medicine or surgery, and pinned their faith entirely to the efficacy of charms and incantations. Moreover, it soon transpired that they had a particular as well as a general reason for rejoicing at the fact that a physician of real and proved ability had come among them; for, after a considerable amount of discussion among themselves, Grosvenor was informed that the whole nation was racked with anxiety concerning the health of the young Queen Myra, who seemed gradually becoming deranged; the especial significance of their anxiety being explained by the fact—stated with the utmost gravity—that an ancient prophecy, in which they placed the most implicit faith, foretold that should ever a monarch die without issue, the fall of the nation and its absorption by its savage neighbours would immediately follow. The point of it all lay in the fact that the Queen was unwedded, and insisted on remaining so, while the savages who surrounded Izreel on every side were daily becoming more aggressive!

“Now, here is your chance, Dick,” explained Grosvenor delightedly, when he had translated the above particulars to his friend. “You sail in with your pills and potions, cure the Queen, marry her, make me your Prime Minister, and we all live happily ever afterwards, like the people in the fairy tales—eh, what? Shall I tell these chappies that they need not worry any further about their Queen, for that you are prepared to cure her, whatever her malady may happen to be?”

“Of course not,” answered Dick seriously. “But you may say, if you like, that I shall be very pleased to see Her Majesty and do what I can for her. And pray try to be serious, Phil, for once in a way; frivolity is well enough at a proper time, and in its proper place, but it will not improve these people’s opinion of us if they see us laughing and obviously joking over a matter that seems to be a serious enough one for them, and may be sufficiently serious for us, too, in the long run.”

“Yes—yes—of course,” assented Grosvenor, completely sobered by his friend’s grave words; “I quite see what you mean, old chap, and I promise you there shall be no further ill-timed attempts at jocularity on my part. The poor old chappies look a bit put out as it is; but I’ll soon make it all right with them.”

Therewith he proceeded to explain to the Elders that, while his friend could not promise anything definite without first seeing the Queen, he was willing to have an interview with her at once, or at Her Majesty’s earliest convenience, and would do everything in his power to restore her to perfect health.

This announcement at once banished the glum looks which Grosvenor’s ill-timed levity of demeanour had called up, and restored matters to the favourable condition that had been momentarily endangered. A brief consultation was held, and at its conclusion Malachi, the chief Elder,

hurried away to seek an audience of the Queen with the object of endeavouring to secure her consent to an interview with the wonderful doctor from afar. Meanwhile the two Englishmen were conducted up a magnificently wide marble staircase to the building that formed the second story, as it were, of the immense edifice in which they had been brought to trial, and which they now learned was the Government building in which the business of the nation generally was transacted, and the chief officials of the Government had lodging, the topmost story of all being a temple to which the Elders were wont to resort in times of especial national stress and danger, and where they were supposed to seek—and obtain—inspiration and guidance enabling them to successfully grapple with the crisis.

The second story of this curious building, which was part legislative palace and part temple, was the portion especially devoted to the lodgment of the Government officials, and it was a gratifying indication to the two friends of their future status in their new country that they were now assigned apartments in this portion of the building. These apartments consisted of two large and exceedingly lofty rooms, one to serve as a sleeping chamber, and the other as a sitting- and working-room combined. Each room was lighted by an exceptionally large window that opened like a door and gave access to the projecting roof of the story below, which was some sixty feet wider, each way, than the story immediately above it. This roof was flat, and was beautifully laid out as a flower garden, with winding walks through a level lawn thickly studded with beds of beautiful, sweet-scented flowers. The garden was protected all round by a breast-high parapet, and commanded a magnificent view, not only of the entire island, but also of the lake and the encircling hills. The Elder who installed the newcomers in this sumptuous suite of apartments having enquired whether their lodging was to their liking, and received a reply in the affirmative, informed them that, that being the case, the belongings which they had brought with them to the island would at once be placed in their new lodging. Then, having asked

whether he could do anything more for their immediate comfort, and being answered in the negative, he indicated an immense copper gong on the landing outside their door, informed them that a single stroke upon it would at once bring the attendant who had been appointed to wait upon them, and so bowed himself out.

Meanwhile, Malachi, the chief Elder, was having a rather difficult time with the self-willed young Queen. First of all she positively refused to grant him an audience at all; and when at length he succeeded in obtaining admission to her apartments by his persistent representations that the matter upon which he desired to see her was of the most vital importance, she at once angrily ordered him out again as soon as she understood that he had found a new physician whom he desired her to see. But if the Queen was self-willed, Malachi was the very incarnation of pertinacity; he protested, wheedled, entreated, and was indignant by turns, but all to no purpose until he happened to mention that the physician in question was a stranger from a far country beyond the Great Water; when, first commanding him to repeat his statement all over again, she suddenly developed a sweet reasonableness, that caused the astonished Malachi to doubt the evidence of his senses, by announcing that she would see the stranger, who was to be brought into her presence forthwith.

Chapter Sixteen.

Dick and Phil prosper.

Determined to afford Her Majesty neither time nor opportunity to repent of her sudden decision, Malachi hastened out of the palace as speedily as his poor old limbs would carry him, and, making the best of his way back to the enormous building in which the strangers were lodged, presented himself in

their apartment, which he found them in the act of returning to by way of the window after a stroll round the roof garden outside. Almost incoherent from want of breath and his eagerness to impress upon the pair the necessity to seize the present favourable opportunity, the Elder hastily explained that his mission to the Queen had been successful, and entreated Dick and Grosvenor to accompany him to the palace forthwith; with which request they were of course perfectly ready to comply. The palace was but a bare hundred yards from the larger building, both in fact being built on the same plot of ground, and a few minutes sufficed the trio to pass from the one building to the other, to traverse the noble entrance hall of the palace, and to make their way to the Queen's private suite of apartments, outside the door of which two soldiers armed with spear and target stood on guard. The next moment they were in the presence of the Queen, who, surrounded by some half a dozen ladies, reclined listlessly upon a couch of solid gold gorgeously upholstered in richly embroidered silk.

As the trio entered and bowed low before her, the young Queen glanced listlessly at her visitors for a moment, and then a look of interest crept into her eyes, such as Malachi had not seen there for months, causing his heart to leap within him as he wondered whether this young doctor had indeed the power to perform a miracle and effect the cure of the lovely young creature upon whom the hopes of the whole nation depended.

For lovely the Queen most certainly was, indeed it is the only word which adequately expresses the perfection of her charms. The Izreelite women were, as the young Englishmen had already had opportunity to observe, mostly of more than prepossessing appearance, tall, stately, statuesque creatures of Juno-like proportions, with melting dark eyes, and luxuriant tresses of dark, curly hair. But Queen Myra's beauty was of a totally different type, for she was *petite* yet exquisitely formed, fair as the dawn of a summer's day, with golden-brown locks, and eyes as blue as the sapphire

sky overhead. So lovely indeed was she that Grosvenor, surprised out of his manners, whistled softly, and remarked to Dick, in quite audible tones:

“Phew! Dick, my boy, did you ever see such a beauty in all your born days? No wonder that these old jossers the Elders are anxious to keep the darling alive—eh, what?”

As he spoke the faintest suspicion of a smile seemed to flicker for a moment in the eyes of the Queen, but Dick, who noticed it, thought it must have been provoked by Malachi’s genuflexions as he performed the ceremony of introduction, pointing to Dick first as the physician, and then to Grosvenor as the friend who had journeyed with him across the Great Water, and who, happening in some mysterious way—which he, Malachi, did not pretend to understand—to possess some slight knowledge of the Izreelite tongue, would act as interpreter between Her Majesty and the physician.

By the time that Malachi had finished his speech the terrible listlessness and indifference of the Queen’s manner, which had for so many months been a source of anxiety to the nation in general and the Elders and nobles in particular, had completely vanished, and she electrified the chief Elder by raising herself upon her couch and bidding him imperiously to be gone and to leave her alone with her ladies and the two strangers. The poor old gentleman, his head dizzy with many conflicting emotions, hastily bowed himself out, and was halfway back to his own quarters in the Legislature before he well knew whether he was on his head or his heels.

The door had no sooner closed upon Malachi than an extraordinary change took place in the appearance and demeanour of the Queen; the languor of her attitude and the absolute listlessness and indifference with which she had regarded her chief Elder vanished as if by magic. Her eyes lit up eagerly, a wave of colour suffused her hitherto marble-white cheeks and

brow, and, turning to her two visitors, she astounded them by exclaiming in excellent English, with only a trace of accent, as she stretched out her hands toward them:

“Gentlemen—gentlemen, are you indeed English, or has my poor brain at last given way under the strain of my terrible trouble?”

For a moment the friends were literally smitten speechless by astonishment; then Grosvenor, who was the first to recover full possession of his faculties, sprang forward and, sinking upon one knee, raised one of the little outstretched hands respectfully to his lips.

“Madam,” he said, absent-mindedly retaining the Queen’s hand in his own as he still knelt before her, “we are indeed Englishmen, and entirely at your service. There are but two of us, as you see; but you have only to command us, and whatever two Englishmen in the midst of thousands of enemies can do, that will we do for you. Isn’t that so, Dick?”

“It is, indeed,” answered Dick, smiling at the passionate fervour of his friend’s speech. “Your Majesty has but to explain to us the nature of your trouble, and it shall go hard indeed with us if we do not devise some means to help you, especially as, unless I am entirely mistaken, you are a countrywoman of our own. Get up, Phil, and let Her Majesty tell us her story. And mind your ‘P’s’ and ‘Q’s’, old man,” he added in a low tone; “don’t let your sympathy and enthusiasm run away with you, or you will be apt to excite possibly awkward comment on the part of Her Majesty’s ladies. You have made some of them open their eyes pretty wide already, I can assure you.”

With a muttered ejaculation Grosvenor hastily scrambled to his feet, while the Queen, beckoning to two of her ladies, directed them to place a couple of settees for her visitors close to her couch. Upon these the two

Englishmen seated themselves, in obedience to a sign from Her Majesty, who thereupon addressed them:

“I fear,” said she, “that I shall find it quite impossible to make you understand how astonished and how glad I am to see you both. I am astonished, because it is a law of this land that no aliens are ever permitted to enter it—and live; and I am glad because you, like myself, are English, and my dear mother taught me to believe that Englishmen are always ready to help their countrywomen in distress under all circumstances. And I am in distress, the greatest distress that I suppose it is possible for a woman to be in. But let me tell you my story—it will not take long—and then perhaps you will understand.

“I am twenty-three years of age, and of English parentage. My father was an officer in the Indian army, and for nearly four years my mother resided with him at a little frontier post called Bipur. Then trouble arose; the hill tribes in the neighbourhood of Bipur committed certain excesses, and an expedition was dispatched under my father’s command. Fighting ensued, and my father was killed in one of the earliest engagements that took place. There was now nothing to keep my mother in India, therefore, as the climate did not suit her, she made immediate arrangements to return to England, taking passage in a sailing ship that was proceeding home by way of the Cape, a long sea voyage having been prescribed for the benefit of her health.

“I do not know how it happened, nor did my mother, but the ship was wrecked on the African coast, and many lives were lost. My mother, however, happened to be one of the saved; and she, with the rest of the survivors, fell into the hands of certain natives who surprised their camp on the beach in the dead of night. The men of the party were all slain; and what became of the few women who survived I do not know, for my mother

never told me; but she was brought by her captors to this country and presented to King Geshuri, who made her his queen. Two months later I was born; and my mother never had any other children.

“Five years ago King Geshuri died; and my mother became the reigning monarch of the country, in accordance with the Izreelite law. But she was never strong; and three years ago she, too, died, leaving me absolutely alone to govern this fierce, headstrong people as best I could.”

Here the Queen’s emotion overcame her for a moment, and she hid her face in her hands, while the tears welled over and trickled through her fingers. Her distress moved the young Englishmen powerfully, and they began to murmur expressions of sympathy and assurances of help. But, quickly recovering her composure, the Queen resumed her narrative.

“That, however, is not what is troubling me, for my mother, realising that I must one day become a queen, devoted herself entirely to educating me in such a manner as to prepare me, as well as she could, for the discharge of my difficult duties. Unfortunately, we had no books, so my mother was compelled to rely entirely upon her own knowledge and experience in the matter of my education and training; but she not only taught me the English language, but also how to read and write it, spending many hours in printing with her own hand long passages containing maxims for my guidance, simply that I might have the means of learning to read English books, should ever any such fall into my hands.

“And now I come to the matter that is troubling me. The Elders tell me that the time has arrived when I must take to myself a husband; and they have suggested—oh, I cannot tell you how many men!—Izreelite nobles, of course—from whom I may make my choice. But I do not like any of them; there is not one among them all whom I do not thoroughly detest, for they are all fierce, arrogant, overbearing men who do not even pretend that they

have any desire to make me happy. All they want is to be king, so that they may enjoy the absolute power and authority of a monarch; for, if I marry, my husband will at once become the ruler of the country, according to the Izreelite law, and I shall merely be his wife. Fortunately, I cannot be compelled to marry, and I won't—I won't," with a passionate little stamp of the foot, "until I meet with a man whom I can—can—love. But I know I shall have no peace until I consent to marry somebody; the Elders are wild with anxiety that I should choose a husband; they worry me every day, ay, and almost every hour of the day, about it, until I am driven very nearly out of my senses by the thought that, sooner or later, I shall be constrained to become the wife of some man whom I detest. That is my trouble, gentlemen; I wonder if you are clever enough to devise a means of helping me."

"Yes, Your Majesty, we are," answered Dick confidently. "I don't say that we already have a plan; for that would be asserting far too much. But you have told us the nature of your trouble, which of course is the first thing that it is necessary for us to know; and now we will lose no time in thinking out a remedy. Trust to us, madam; we will not fail you. We have practically pledged ourselves to spend the remainder of our lives in your country—your Elders compelled us to do that—and the removal of your trouble and the securing of your happiness shall have precedence of every other consideration with us."

The Queen's gratitude was so great that she seemed scarcely able to find words in which to express herself adequately; it was almost painful to witness, so eloquently did it testify to the desperation with which she had been compelled to combat the suggestions of unwelcome alliances with which she had been perpetually harassed; but she contrived to make it quite clear that the arrival of the two Englishmen filled her with renewed hope and a revived zest in life. "I know," she said, "that it must sound unkind of

me to say so, but I cannot help being glad that you are here; for now at last I feel that I have two friends who will stand by me and help me to the utmost of their ability. Besides," she added delightedly, as the thought came to her, "you will be companions for me. I have been utterly lonely and friendless since my mother died; but you will come to see me often—every day—won't you? And we can walk and talk together, and I can again be happy."

"Of course," answered Grosvenor eagerly. "You may absolutely depend upon us both to do anything and everything that you may ask of us. I believe we are each to be assigned certain duties, which I suppose we shall be expected to perform; but our first duty is to you, our first care must be for your happiness, and, so far as we can prevent it, you shall never again be worried by those old jossers the Elders, or anybody else. We have a few books among our baggage, and as soon as it is delivered to us I will turn them out and bring them over to you; and as to coming to see you, why of course we shall be delighted to do so; we will come over every evening after our day's work is over. Eh, Dick?"

"Certainly," answered Dick; "or at least as often as it may be prudent to do so. And now, madam," he continued, addressing the Queen, "I think it will be well that we should retire, for above all things else we must carefully avoid anything and everything that may excite suspicion or jealousy, and I imagine that both might easily be aroused by a too-sudden appearance of friendship between ourselves and Your Majesty. Besides, Malachi the Elder will be anxiously awaiting our report. But, as my friend has said, you may absolutely rely upon our loyal friendship and our best help at all times and seasons. Possibly we may be able to arrange another call before the day is over; meanwhile I crave Your Majesty's permission for us to retire."

As Dick anticipated, they found the chief Elder anxiously awaiting their return, eager to learn the young doctor's opinion relative to the mental and

physical condition of the Queen; and Dick, with Phil for his interpreter, was not slow to give it. Of course, to his practised eye it had at once been evident that Queen Myra was simply being worried and badgered and terrified out of her senses by these old men who, with that idiotic prophecy dominating their minds, desired one thing and one only, namely to see the Queen married as speedily as possible to somebody; but to whom it seemed that they cared very little. Dick intended to put a stop to that at once; he therefore directed Grosvenor to inform the Elder, Malachi, that the Queen was in a most critical condition, but that he could cure her, provided that his instructions were all implicitly obeyed, but not otherwise. This last statement set the poor old Elder absolutely quivering with apprehension; but Dick was not worrying overmuch about him or anybody else save the Queen, and he contrived to frighten the unhappy Elder so thoroughly that at length he unreservedly promised, both for himself and everybody else, that the word “marriage” should never again be spoken in Her Majesty’s presence until Dick gave permission; and he also agreed that Dick should have an absolutely free hand with regard to the Queen’s treatment, the visitors she should receive, the exercise she should take, and so on; thus providing for Dick’s and Grosvenor’s free admission to the palace and the Queen’s presence as often as they chose.

This important matter settled, the friends retired to their own quarters to talk matters over. They found that all their various belongings had been brought from the cell in which they had passed the previous night, and were now carefully arranged in their own private apartment. Grosvenor at once went to his trunk, opened it, bundled its contents upon the floor, and feverishly proceeded to sort out the half-dozen books—novels, and two volumes of poems—which it contained, exhorting Dick to do the same, in order that “that poor girl” might be provided with a new form of amusement with the least possible delay. It was easy for Dick to perceive, from his companion’s talk, that the latter had been profoundly impressed by the charms and the

lonely state of the young Queen; and Maitland quietly chuckled, as he reflected that Grosvenor would never have seen her had he not fled to South Africa for distraction from the smart of a heart severely lacerated by some fickle fair one, who, by the way, seemed now to be completely forgotten. But he shook his head with sudden gravity, as his thoughts travelled on into the future and he foresaw the possibility of a mutual attachment springing up between Phil and the Queen. That would be a complication with a vengeance, and he determined quietly to do everything in his power to prevent it.

The ensuing six months passed with the rapidity of a dream; for no sooner had the two Englishmen arranged matters relating to the Queen upon a satisfactory basis than they discovered that there was another cause for anxiety of the gravest character in the behaviour of the savage nations that hemmed in Izreel on every side. Hitherto these had been too busily engaged in fighting each other to do more than make desultory war upon the Izreelites; but now news of an apparently reliable character came to Bethalia, the island city, to the effect that a certain king, named Mokatto—a very shrewd fellow by all accounts—had entered into friendly communication with the rulers of the other nations whose countries bordered on Izreel, and had pointed out the folly of fighting each other for no particular reason, when, by uniting their forces, they could attack the Izreelites, overwhelm them, and divide their country equally among the victors. This counsel, there was every reason to believe, had been accepted; for reports were almost daily coming to hand of preparations which pointed to nothing less than an impending attack upon Izreel by the confederated kingdoms.

This was precisely what the Izreelites had always feared more than any other earthly thing; and when authentic intelligence began to arrive,

pointing to the conclusion that the long-feared attack was about to be made, the Izreelites grew almost crazy with panic, some of them contending that their gods were angry at the admission of two aliens into the country, and that the only way by which their anger could be appeased was by offering the strangers as a sacrifice upon the great altar of the temple which formed the top story of the Legislative building. This theory took a very strong hold upon certain of the most influential of the nobles, who quickly developed extreme jealousy of the two strangers, whom they vaguely suspected of being in some unexplained way inimical to them and their interests; and for a time Dick and Grosvenor undoubtedly went in danger of their lives.

At length, however, this peril became so imminent that the pair agreed to take the bull by the horns and deal with it forthwith. They accordingly convened a meeting of the Seven Elders and all the nobility, at which Dick delivered an address, graphically describing the danger in which the nation stood, and boldly asserting that only he and Grosvenor could possibly avert it.

This, of course, was rather a staggering statement, and one which the Izreelites were not at all disposed to accept unquestioningly, or without proof. But Dick was equal to the occasion. He and Grosvenor had discussed the matter together, had decided upon their plan of campaign, and the Opposition were silenced by his first question.

“What do you suppose would happen to your Queen,” he demanded, “if you were unwise enough to put us to death? I will tell you. She is now on the highroad to recovery; but, deprived of our ministrations, she would suffer an immediate relapse, and die! Do you need to be reminded of what would follow upon that? If there is any truth in your ancient prophecy the very thing that you most dread would immediately happen. In other words, our destruction would immediately be followed by that of the entire nation.

“But, apart from that, our destruction would be the gravest mistake that you could possibly make; for we, who are natives of the greatest fighting nation that the world has ever known, can teach you much in the art of war, your knowledge of which is of the slightest. Your weapons are poor and inefficient, and you know nothing of strategy and generalship; but we can instruct you in those important matters, and also teach you how to make new and powerful weapons, by means of which you will be able effectually to subjugate the nations which now threaten you. Say, then, will you destroy us, and so involve yourselves in irretrievable ruin? Or shall we teach you how to emerge victoriously from the coming struggle with your enemies?”

There could be but one answer to such a question; the jealousy of the nobles gave way to fear. They no longer clamoured for the death of the Englishmen, but, on the contrary, were as willing as the rest that the strangers should be afforded every opportunity to make good their boast, and from that moment Dick and Grosvenor became virtually the Dictators of the nation.

Their victory was perhaps the easier from the fact that during the six months of their sojourn they had already accomplished much. The Queen, for example, enlivened and encouraged by the intimate companionship of her two fellow countrymen, had gradually thrown off the incubus of her terror, and was now almost her former self again; while Grosvenor had found congenial occupation in fitting the few craft upon the lake with sails, and designing and building other craft of greatly improved model, including half a dozen cutters of the racing-yacht type, which he conceived would be exceedingly useful should the savages ever again attempt, as they had done on several previous occasions, to attack the island city. As for Dick, the densely populated city alone provided him with more patients than he could conveniently deal with; and he had effected many remarkable cures.

One of the first things that particularly attracted the attention of the two friends immediately upon their arrival in Izreel was the inadequacy of the weapons—a spear, or sheaf of spears, and a small round shield or target—with which the people were armed; and this they now proceeded to rectify by the general introduction of bows and arrows as an auxiliary to the spear and shield. There was an abundance of suitable wood for bows to be found in a forest on the inner slope of the mountains on the mainland, while reeds suitable for the shafts of arrows grew in inexhaustible quantities along the margin of the lake; and when once a pattern bow and arrow had been made, and a sufficiency of wood and reeds provided, the furnishing of every man with a good bow and quiverful of arrows was speedily accomplished. There had at first been a difficulty in the matter of arrowheads, but this had been overcome by the discovery of an enormous deposit of flints—in searching for which a rich mine of diamonds had come to light.

The construction of his fleet and the training of their crews having been accomplished, Grosvenor next took the army in hand and proceeded to train it in the use of the bow, succeeding at length, by dint of indefatigable perseverance, in converting the soldiers into an army of really brilliant marksmen.

This achievement brought the time on to nearly nine months from the date of the adventurers' arrival in Izreel, during the first eight months of which information had come in from time to time which left no room to doubt that the savages of the adjoining nations had combined together and were making the most elaborate preparations for a simultaneous attack upon Izreel from all sides. Then the sources of information seemed to suddenly dry up, and no news of any description relative to the movements of the savages could be obtained.

The Izreelites were disposed to regard this as a favourable omen, many even asserting their conviction that the savages had quarrelled among themselves, and that attack from them was no longer to be feared; but Dick and Grosvenor took quite another view of the matter. They regarded the cessation of news as ominous in the extreme, and dispatched imperative orders to the frontier for the maintenance of the utmost vigilance, night and day. They also organised strong relays of swift runners, radiating from various points along the shore of the lake to those points where attack might first be expected, in order that intelligence of an invasion might be brought to the capital with the utmost promptitude. The strength of the garrisons in the outlying blockhouses was also doubled, which were put under the command of the most resolute and intelligent captains that could be found, with instructions that each post was to be stubbornly defended until the enemy should threaten to surround it, when it was to be abandoned, and the garrison—or what might remain of it—was to retire inward to the next post, and so on; the various garrisons contesting every inch of ground, cutting up the enemy as severely as possible, and gradually retiring inward toward the lake and Bethalia if they could not maintain their ground. These preparations did not take long to make, since it was merely a matter of marching supplementary troops to the frontier, and the provisioning of the various blockhouses, fortified farms, castles, and strongholds generally; and as the preparations had all been made beforehand, a week sufficed to place the entire nation on the defensive.

Still the task was accomplished none too soon, for on the very day succeeding that upon which the preparations for defence were completed, news arrived in Bethalia that large bodies of savages had been seen massing upon various parts of the border, while the next day brought intelligence of attacks upon almost every one of the outlying blockhouses, and of the retirement of their respective garrisons after severe fighting in which heavy

loss had been sustained by both sides. The invasion of Izreel had begun, and was being prosecuted with relentless determination and energy.

Chapter Seventeen.

Victory, Triumph, and—the End.

This grave news created the utmost consternation and dismay among the Elders and nobles of Bethalia; for they had, almost with one accord, persisted in believing that at the last moment the savages had shrunk from the contest. There was, however, one solitary crumb of comfort in the news that now came almost hourly from the front, which was that, severely as the Izreelites had suffered, the enemy had suffered ten times more severely, having been kept completely at arm's length, so long as the defenders' stock of arrows had lasted, and that it was only when these had become exhausted that the savages had succeeded in storming the blockhouses and driving out the defenders. This contained a lesson that Grosvenor and Dick were quick to profit by, and no sooner did the news come to hand than every available person was set to work manufacturing arrows, thousands of which were daily dispatched to the front.

Thus far the two Englishmen had remained at Bethalia, receiving news and directing operations from there, at the urgent request of the Elders; but as intelligence continued to arrive from the front reporting the presence of the enemy in overwhelming numbers, and the retirement of garrison after garrison, with details of terrific fighting in every direction, it was not to be supposed that Dick and Grosvenor would consent to remain tamely pent up in the city, while the chance of their lives was beckoning them from a distance that could now be covered on horseback in a couple of days' smart riding. They consequently induced the armourers of the town to knock them

out a couple of makeshift sabres, which they intended to take with them in addition to their revolvers and magazine rifles, and announced their intention of proceeding forthwith to the front.

But had a bombshell exploded and blown to pieces the temple that formed the top story of the House of Legislature, or unroofed the palace, it could scarcely have produced a more tremendous effect, or created greater consternation, than did this simple announcement. The Elders were convinced that if the guiding spirits of the campaign were ever permitted to take the field they would inevitably be slain and the end of all things would come. The nobles were animated by pretty much the same uncomfortable conviction; and as for the Queen, when, despite the remonstrances and entreaties of the Elders and nobles, Dick and Grosvenor presented themselves at the palace to bid Her Majesty farewell, she promptly ordered the arrest of the pair, and gave them their choice of being confined close prisoners, or pledging their word of honour to abandon their intention! It was in vain that the culprits pleaded, argued, and drew the most harrowing pictures of what must inevitably happen if they were not allowed to proceed to the front and personally supervise operations. The Queen turned a deaf ear to all that they said; positively refused to give her consent; entreated and upbraided in her turn; and, finally, bursting into a passion of tears, declared that if anything were to happen to Phil she would die! At which statement Grosvenor incontinently took the young lady in his arms, kissed her, soothed her back into self-possession again, and vowed with ardour that if that was how she felt about it he was more than content to remain behind and look after her, provided that she would allow Dick to go. To which compromise she at once smilingly assented. For such is the selfishness of lovers!

The murder was out at last, and the precise thing had happened which Dick had foreseen, and had vowed to prevent, if possible, because of the terrible

complications which, as he believed, must inevitably ensue. These two had fallen in love with each other, and the chances were that, as soon as the news reached the ears of the already jealous nobles, Grosvenor and Dick would be “removed”, either openly or privately, while the Queen would at once be ruthlessly forced into the kind of marriage that she had all along regarded with such utter dread and detestation.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! and occurring, too, at such a terribly inopportune moment. Yet, as Dick moodily reflected, while being ferried across to the mainland in one of Grosvenor’s new, fast-sailing cutters, perhaps the moment might not be so very inopportune after all. It was a fact that, under the able leadership of Mokatto, the savages were pressing Izreel as it had never before been pressed within its recorded history. Izreel was now literally fighting for its life, its very existence; and if, through the help of the two Englishmen, the country should by any chance win out and achieve a decisive victory over her combined enemies, it was just possible that gratitude, that rarest of human sentiments, might take the form of forgiveness, if nothing more; in which case there was perhaps a bare possibility that Grosvenor and Dick might be released from their oath and permitted to return to their own country. But it was doubtful, Dick decided, very doubtful; and his meditations assumed a distinctly gloomy tone as, having arrived on the mainland, he hunted up Mafuta and explained to that jubilant savage that they were about to proceed to the front and take part in the fighting.

To attempt anything even remotely resembling a detailed account of Dick Maitland’s adventures during the ensuing three weeks would be impossible, for they were numerous and exciting enough to demand an entire volume to do justice to them. It must suffice to say that during that eventful period the youngster saw enough fighting to satisfy him for the remainder of his life—desperate, ferocious, hand-to-hand fighting, in which neither side ever

dreamed of asking or giving quarter, in which a disabling wound was immediately followed by death upon the spear-points of the enemy, and the salient characteristics of which were continuous ear-splitting yells, the shrill whistling of the savages, the rumbling thunder of thousands of fiercely rushing feet, blinding clouds of dust through which there appeared a phantasmagoria of ferocious countenances, gnashing teeth, glaring eyeballs, the ruddy flash of ensanguined spear-points, hurtling knobkerries and whirling war-clubs, upthrown arms, clenched fists, reeling bodies, the shout of triumph and the short, quick gasp that followed the home-thrust of the stabbing spear. This was the kind of thing that marked the end of each day's fight when, the stock of the Izreelites, arrows being exhausted, it became necessary at last to evacuate a stubbornly held position and to retire before the overwhelming hordes of savages that, despite the frightful losses sustained by them in the course of each day's fighting, seemed daily to increase in numbers as the encircling cloud of them contracted with the daily retirement of the defenders towards the lake.

As for Dick, he seemed to bear a charmed life; for although he fearlessly exposed himself, day after day, wherever the fighting happened to be fiercest and most stubborn, he had thus far received no hurt more serious than a mere scratch or two, and a rather severe contusion from the blow of a knobkerrie that had all but unhorsed him; but this immunity may have been due, at least in part, to the fact that Mafuta was always unobtrusively close at hand, ready to guard his beloved young master, ay, and even to lay down his life for him, if necessary.

Those were strenuous days indeed for all concerned, and especially for the defenders; for the fighting usually began with the dawn, and continued all through the day as long as there was light enough to distinguish friend from foe; while, so far as the Izreelites were concerned, they were obliged to maintain a watch all through the hours of darkness, in order to be prepared

for the surprise night attacks which the savages sprang upon them from time to time, with the obvious purpose of exhausting the defenders' strength.

But while Mokatto and the other savage kings who had thrown in their lot with him for the purpose of "eating up" the Izreelites, and partitioning their country, were solacing themselves with the assurance that, despite their frightful daily losses in men, they were winning all along the line, Dick was artfully drawing them after him into the heart of the chain of mountains that encircled the lake and the island city of Bethalia. These mountains, or hills rather—for they were scarcely lofty enough to be worthy of the more imposing appellation—were of an exceptionally rugged and precipitous character, to such an extent, indeed, that they were absolutely impassable except at four points, where the natural features had been so far improved upon that passes of a sort—narrow ledges for the most part, bounded on one side by a vertical, unclimbable face of rock and upon the other by an appalling chasm—had been painfully hewn out of the stubborn granite; and it was in the direction of these four passes that young Maitland was now retiring in excellent order, and enticing the enemy to follow him. For it was in these passes that he expected to win the victory which he intended to convert finally into a complete, disastrous, panic-stricken rout of the enemy. To this end he had already made certain preparations, for news of the completion of which he was anxiously waiting. And at length the news came; whereupon, having dispatched to the commanders at the other three points identical sets of instructions, of a sufficiently elastic character to leave plenty of scope for initiative on the part of the leaders, he summoned the commanders of his own division to his tent as soon as the day's fighting was over, and, having carefully and fully explained his plans to them, gave them explicit instructions regarding their conduct upon the following day, and dismissed them. Then, mounting his tired horse, Dick rode off up the pass at a foot-pace, closely followed by the faithful Mafuta, who, dog-tired

though he was after many long days of strenuous fighting, chuckled grimly as his young master unfolded his plan of campaign.

The fighting which began with dawn upon the following morning was of a somewhat different character from that of the preceding days; for hitherto the Izreelites had always begun the day behind the shelter of stone walls of some sort, from which it had taken the best part of the day to dislodge them, and from which, when dislodged, they had been wont to retreat in more or less good order to the next stronghold in their rear. But now the last of these fortified positions had been abandoned and the Izreelite armies had retired —or been driven back, as the enemy firmly believed—into the mouths of the four passes which led across the hills to the lake and Bethalia. They had not only entered the mouths of the passes, but had retired into them, until they had reached certain spots where the natural configuration of the surrounding hills was of such a character as to constitute the position a natural fortress capable of being held and defended by a comparatively small body of men; and here they halted and lighted their watch fires. The enemy also halted, about half a mile lower down the pass, and, as soon as it was dark, sent out a number of scouts with instructions to search for a way by which the savages might slip past during the night, and get round to the rear of the Izreelites. Some of those scouts never returned to their camp; those who did reported that the task assigned to them had proved an impossible one, for that, after climbing laboriously and at the risk of their necks for varying distances, they had all, without exception, arrived at a point where farther progress was impossible and retreat scarcely less so. Meanwhile, the Izreelite watch fires, the foremost line of which happened to be at a turn of the pass, just where they were well within sight of the enemy, were kept brilliantly burning all through the night, evidencing an untiring vigilance on the part of the Izreelite outposts, who could be seen, by the light of the fires, moving about from time to time.

But when at length the first rays of the morning sun smote the topmost ridges of the hills and came stealing down their sides, arousing the combatants to another day of sanguinary strife, behold! there were no Izreelites to be seen in the neighbourhood of the still briskly blazing fires, nor could the fresh scouts which were promptly sent out find any trace of them. Then Mokatto, suspecting an ambush, sent forward other scouts, in relays, with orders to advance up the pass—each relay keeping the one next before it in sight—until the leading band should regain touch with the enemy, when a single scout was to return with the intelligence. But, strange to say, the single scout did not return; and when at length the fiery chief, losing patience at the absence of all news, gave orders for a general advance up the pass, the impi who led the way soon discovered the reason, for they came upon the bodies of those scouts, one after the other, lying in the narrowing roadway, each with an arrow through his heart, evidently shot from some spot near at hand, but quite inaccessible from the roadway itself.

Yet still no enemy was to be seen, no sign of his presence to be discovered, until Mokatto, leading his contingent and advancing with the utmost caution, reached the summit of the pass, when he found that the narrow roadway, at a point where it turned sharply round an elbow, had been broken down for a distance of some fifty feet, until only space enough was left for men to pass in single file. And as the first man essayed the passage of this perilous path and attempted to work his precarious way round the perpendicular buttress of rock that formed the elbow, a spear, wielded by an unseen hand, was observed to dart forward and bury itself deep in his naked breast, and the next moment he went hurtling downward off the narrow ledge into the ghastly abyss that yawned beside him. And as it was with the first man so was it with those who followed him in the desperate attempt to round that fatal elbow, until even Mokatto himself, fearless and resolute warrior as he was, was fain reluctantly to admit that farther progress, by that way at least, was impossible.

There was nothing for it but to call a halt, and consider what was the next thing to be done. To advance was impossible; to retreat was equivalent to an acknowledgment of defeat, which, after the frightful losses already sustained by the savages, would probably result in them rising upon their leaders and slaying them in revenge for having fomented so disastrous a war; while a very brief inspection of their surroundings sufficed to convince them that nothing without wings could possibly surmount that vertical rock on the one hand, or descend that awful precipice on the other. Yet, as they looked, the savage warriors became aware that somewhere there must be a path to the top of the rock, for they caught sight first of one, then of another, and then of many Izreelites peering down upon them from above. Then, suddenly, there came hurtling down from the summit of the rock, some five hundred feet above the heads of the savages, a shower of stones, not very big, yet big enough, falling from that height, to dash a man's brains out, smash an arm or a leg like a dried twig, or send him reeling off the narrow pathway to the depths below.

The word was given to retire. There was no other course open to the invaders, for obviously it was worse than useless to stand huddled helplessly together upon that narrow pathway and suffer themselves to be destroyed without the ability to strike a blow in self-defence—and the retreat down the pass began. Then, with the first rearward movement, the air, pent in between the rocky walls of that savage gorge, began to vibrate with a most dreadful outcry of shrieks, shouts, and yells of dismay and panic; for, as though at some preconcerted signal, a devastating shower of great boulders came pouring over the crest of the cliff above the pass, crushing men into unrecognisable fragments or hurling them by hundreds over the edge of the narrow pathway. Moreover this state of affairs prevailed not at one isolated spot only, but all along the road, as far as it was occupied by the battalions of the savages. There was a moment of helpless confusion, during which those who were fortunate enough to have

escaped the first effects of that terrible shower stood, stricken motionless and dumb, gazing as in a dream at the frightful, overwhelming destruction that had come upon them in that awful gorge. Then blind, raging panic seized upon the survivors, who turned and fled shrieking down the pass, intent only upon escaping from the ceaseless pounding of that merciless hail of boulders, madly fighting for precedence with their equally panic-stricken comrades, savagely grappling with those who happened to be in front of them impeding their passage, and either hurling them, or being themselves hurled, into the ravine that gaped to receive them.

The scene was appalling beyond all possibility of description; it was not a defeat only, it was not even merely a disastrous rout, it was practically annihilation; for of the thousands of savages who entered that pass—that awful death-trap—on that fatal day, only hundreds emerged from it again; and they were so utterly demoralised and unnerved with terror that no thought of rallying or making a stand ever entered their minds; they simply ran blindly ahead until they fell exhausted, and there lay, absolutely heedless of what might befall them. And as it was with Mokatto and his legions in the one pass, so was it with the chiefs and those who followed them in the other three passes; many of the leaders—Mokatto himself among others—were numbered among the slain; and there seemed to be nobody to take the lead or to assume command. The invading armies had been practically wiped out, and the few survivors had degenerated into a flying, panic-stricken mob dominated only by the one idea of escape into the comparative safety of their own land.

As for the Izreelites, infuriated at the wanton invasion of their country, and fully realising what would have been their own fate had the savages chanced to have been the victors, they relentlessly pursued the flying enemy during the whole of their retreat down the passes, and would doubtless have destroyed them to the very last man had not Dick personally, and by means

of imperative messages persistently reiterated, stayed the slaughter, by pointing out that the victory was too decisive and complete for further aggression to ever again become a possibility; and that a too relentless pursuit of already desperate men could but result in a further loss of life among the Izreelites themselves. Even this representation, forcibly as it appealed to a people who regarded the lives of their men-kind as the most precious possession of the nation, scarcely sufficed to curb their lust for further slaughter, for they had become, for the moment, human tigers who, having tasted blood, abandoned their prey only with the utmost reluctance and with much savage snarling of discontent and disappointment. But at length the obvious soundness of Dick's reasoning gained recognition and acceptance by the Izreelite chiefs, who finally persuaded their followers to content themselves with the mere ejectment of the insignificant remnants of the enemy beyond the frontier.

Meanwhile Dick, having paid a flying visit to Bethalia, to satisfy himself that all was well in that quarter, made arrangements for the immediate reconstruction of those portions of the roads through the passes that had been broken down, in order to check the advance of the invaders. This was temporarily accomplished by the building of rough bridges across the gaps; but, fully recognising how important a part had been played by those gaps, he sketched out a scheme whereby they should be made permanent, spanned by substantial drawbridges, and defended at the inner extremity by strongly fortified gateways. This scheme he laid before the Elders, who immediately approved of it, and ultimately the work was carried out.

But long before that many things had happened. In the first place the victorious Izreelites, having shepherded the last of the fugitives over the border, had returned in triumph, each to his own home, and had set to work to repair the devastation wrought by the fighting on the lands that lay outside the circle of the protecting hills. This was considerably less than had

been anticipated; for, so certain had Mokatto and his colleagues been of victory that they had issued the most stringent orders against any wanton destruction of property, the result being that such damage as had accrued had only amounted to what was inevitable in the course of a stubbornly contested fight; and that did not amount to very much where neither of the combatants possessed guns or other battering paraphernalia of any description.

The return of the triumphant army to Bethalia was a pageant exceeding in gorgeousness of display and general enthusiasm anything that had ever before occurred within the memory of any living inhabitant of the city. The regular troops were comparatively few in number, every male Izreelite being armed and liable to be called upon for active service, should occasion for such service arise; but the paucity of numbers was an altogether insignificant detail; the one thing that was of importance, and counted, was that they had fought and signally defeated a force of overwhelming numerical superiority, and inflicted upon their immemorial enemy a blow of such crushing severity that a lasting peace was now assured. Little wonder that the people so recently hag-ridden with a perpetual fear, that often approached perilously close to panic, scarcely knew how to give adequate expression to the feeling of joy and relief that now possessed them, and were just a little inclined to become extravagantly demonstrative.

The troops, conveyed across from the mainland in boats, and landed at the one grand flight of steps which afforded the solitary means of access to the island, were marched through the city to the palace and the House of Legislature, where they received the thanks of the Queen and the Elders for their gallantry; and at the last moment it was made known to Dick—to his secret but profound annoyance and discomfiture—that nothing would satisfy the populace but that he, as the one hero, *par excellence*, of the brief but sanguinary war, must head the troops, mounted on the horse that had

carried him so gallantly and well in the press of battle! He would willingly have avoided the distinction if it had been possible, and had indeed fully intended to absent himself from all active participation in the pageant; but a note from Grosvenor, informing him that the idea had really originated with Queen Myra, and that Her Majesty would be intensely disappointed if he refused, caused him good-naturedly to set his own feelings on one side for the nonce and consent to become a puppet for once in a way. Accordingly he was the first warrior to pass through the gateway which gave access to the interior of the town, and as he emerged from the shadow of the arch into the dazzling sunshine that flooded the streets he was met by a choir of some sixty young women arrayed in gala attire, crowned with roses, and wearing garlands of flowers round their necks, who, forming up at the head of the procession, led the way, some singing a hymn of triumph, rejoicing, and glorification of the victors, while others accompanied them on flutes, flageolets, and cymbals. But this was not all. As Dick, blushing furiously and feeling more uncomfortable than he ever before remembered, emerged from the gateway, two maidens stepped forward, one from each side of the way, and while one deftly twined a garland of roses round the horse’s neck, the other, catching the lad’s hand, gently drew him down and caused him to bend in the saddle sufficiently to permit her to cast a similar garland round his neck!

It was a distinctly embarrassing situation for a modest young Englishman to find himself in, but as he heard the shouts of greeting and acclamation that rang out from the throats of the jubilant crowd who thronged the streets, and realised that all this was but the outward expression of a very real and deep feeling of gratitude for important services rendered, he put his embarrassment on one side, and bowed and smiled his acknowledgments, to the frantic delight of the spectators.

In this fashion, then, the troops paraded the principal streets of the city, while young girls and tiny children strewed flowers before them in the roadway, and the populace cheered and applauded, until the spacious park in which stood the palace and the House of Legislature was reached, when a halt was called before the principal entrance of the palace, where the Queen, once more in radiant health, came forth and, in a few well-chosen words, expressed her fervent gratitude to all the brave men who had borne themselves so nobly and gallantly in the defence of their country, winding up with an expression of admiration and sorrow for the fallen, and of sympathy for those whom the relentless cruelty of war had bereaved of their nearest and dearest.

Then Malachi and his fellow Elders appeared and pronounced a long oration of a very similar character, but going somewhat more into detail. He dwelt particularly upon the fierce, undying animosity with which the savages of the surrounding nations had regarded the presence of the Izreelites in the country from time immemorial, reminded his hearers of the state of almost perpetual warfare in which the nation had lived through the ages, and described the recent attack as the most virulent and determined that they had ever experienced, being nothing less than a carefully elaborated and well-ordered plan for their complete extermination. Then he touched upon the arrival of the two young Englishmen in the country, spoke of the law prohibiting the admission of strangers, and fully explained the reasons which had led to an exception being made in their case, and congratulated himself and everybody else upon the happy issue of that exception, going on to say that but for the warlike knowledge and skill of the visitors, and the superlative importance of the parts which they had played in planning and carrying out the scheme of defence, that day of triumph and glory for Izreel would never have dawned. And he wound up by saying that, in acknowledgment and recognition of the enormously important and valuable services which these young men had rendered to the

nation, he and his fellow Elders had felt it to be their duty to recommend the Queen to confer upon both the honour and distinction accompanying the title of Princes.

A roar of delighted approval greeted this peroration; and if perchance there happened to be here and there a noble or two who regarded with disapprobation the bestowal of this unique honour upon aliens, they were too prudent to permit that disapprobation to be suspected, in view of the apparently universal popularity of the act.

The Queen, acutely conscious of the fact that she contemplated a step, the effect of the announcement of which it was utterly impossible to foresee, and quick to recognise that the popularity of Grosvenor and Dick would probably never be greater than it was at that moment, determined to make the utmost of the opportunity; and, upon the occasion of the public investiture of the newly created princes, electrified everybody present by calmly announcing—in a manner which seemed to suggest that she was doing something which she was certain would meet with the full and unanimous approval of her people—that it was her intention to espouse Prince Philip as soon as the necessary preparations for the ceremony could be made!

The announcement was followed by silence so tense that, to make use of a much hackneyed expression, one might have heard a pin drop, and it lasted so long that the Queen grew white to the lips, and her eyes began to glitter ominously. Was it possible that the nobles—who but for the military genius of Phil and Dick would now in all probability have been, with herself, captives in the hands of the savages—were going to show themselves so selfishly ungrateful as to disapprove of her choice? An impatient stamp of her little foot on the daïs, and a defiant upward toss of her head seemed to threaten an outburst that would probably have caused the ears of those

present to tingle, when somebody—whose identity was never established—began to applaud vociferously. The applause was almost instantly taken up by another, and another, and others, until within a moment or two the vast chamber was ringing and vibrant with the expressions of approval and rejoicing. The verdict, though delayed, perhaps, a second or two too long for Her Majesty's entire liking, was decisive, unmistakable, and not to be gainsaid; and if there were any present who recognised that it meant the final collapse of certain cherished ambitions of their own, they were wise enough to say nothing about it.

But although the Queen's choice of a husband was thus ratified by the only section of her subjects who might possibly have raised objections to it, a great deal of exceedingly delicate negotiation and arrangement was found to be necessary, and a number of quite unexpected difficulties and hitches arose, before the path to the hymeneal altar was made perfectly smooth for the royal lovers; while, on the other hand, as the negotiations and arrangements progressed, it grew increasingly clear that a man possessed of Grosvenor's outside knowledge and experience was infinitely preferable, from the point of view of the national advantage, as a ruler, to even the most powerful and influential of the Izreelite nobles. By the time, therefore, that everything was settled, approval had become intensified into delight, and there was every prospect that Phil's reign would be a highly popular one. Then, in due time, came the marriage, which may be dismissed with the mere mention of the fact, since this makes no pretence to being a love story.

But although even a royal wedding may possess little or no interest for those for whose entertainment this story is written, it had a most important effect upon the fortunes of those whose adventures are here set forth. For, by the Izreelite law, it not only made Philip Grosvenor the Consort of the Queen, but it also put into his hands the actual government of the nation; it made him, in fact, the King, an absolute monarch, with power to shape and

control the destinies of the nation as seemed to him good; with nobody to say him nay, whatever the nature of the decrees he might promulgate, and to whom even the Queen herself became subject. Then, with regard to Dick Maitland, it will be remembered that he, as well as Grosvenor, had been compelled to take an oath that he would never seek to leave the country without the royal assent. But, now that Phil was King, that assent was, of course, to be obtained easily enough; and obtained it was, as soon as the wedding was over and Grosvenor was securely installed in his new position. For, whatever inducements there might be for Phil to pass the remainder of his life in the strange, scarcely-heard-of land of the Izreelites, no such inducements existed in the case of Dick Maitland, who was now all impatience to return to England and provide for the welfare of his mother—if, haply, she still survived.

Accordingly, having in due form sought and obtained the royal assent to his departure from Izreel, Dick lost no time in completing his preparations for the long and perilous journey that lay before him. And, first of all, he presented Leo—now nearly full-grown and, thanks to careful and judicious training, a most amiable, docile, and affectionate beast—to Queen Myra, as the most cherished possession it was in his power to offer her. Of the horses which they had brought with them into the country he kept only the one which King Lobelalatutu had given him, leaving the rest with Phil—there being no horses in Izreel. Ramoo Samee, being given his choice, elected to remain in Izreel, in the capacity of stud groom; but Mafuta, Jantje, and ’Nkuku returned with Dick, as a matter of course. And, as a measure of precaution, Grosvenor arranged for an escort of five hundred Izreelite warriors to accompany the wagon through the country immediately on the other side of the border; for although the savage inhabitants had received such terrible chastisement that they were scarcely likely to interfere with anyone coming from Izreel, it was deemed wisest to run no risk of a possible hostile demonstration.

At length the day and hour of parting came, and Dick, fully equipped for his journey, presented himself at the palace to say farewell. The moment was not without its emotions, for although it had already been planned that at no very distant date Maitland should revisit Izreel, bringing with him certain matters which Grosvenor felt it would be highly desirable for him to possess as monarch of a people of such great potential possibilities as the Izreelites, both remembered that the journey from Bethalia to the nearest confines of civilisation was a long and arduous one, bristling with perils of every imaginable kind, and who could say that it would be accomplished in safety, or, if accomplished, could be repeated? For life is too full of chances for a man to make plans for the future, with any certainty that he will be able to carry them out. Therefore, when these two adventurous sons of the most adventurous nation on earth finally clasped hands and said their last words of farewell, though those words were entirely cheery and optimistic, the voices which spoke them were a little husky with feeling, and the firm, strong hand-grip was lingering, and relaxed with much reluctance.

Dick’s ride from the palace through the town to the point of embarkation for the mainland was one long, unbroken ovation; for there had now been time for the people to recognise, and also to appreciate, the many fine qualities of the young Englishman’s character; realisation of the enormous debt which they owed to him and to his friend, their new king, had come to them, and they were as unfeignedly sorry to witness his departure from among them as a naturally unemotional people could well be.

As he stepped into the swift-sailing cutter which was to convey him across to the mainland, where the wagon, already inspanned, was awaiting him, a letter was handed to him by one of two men who had just carefully deposited in the boat a well-filled leather portmanteau bearing Grosvenor’s initials. The letter ran thus:

“Dear old Chap,—

“The portmanteau which accompanies this note contains Myra’s and my own parting gift to you, in the shape of the finest diamonds which a gang of twenty men have been able to extract from the newly discovered mine during the last month. They are quite valueless to us, it is true, but in the dear old country to which you are bound they ought, even apart from the rubies which you are taking back, to make you one of the most wealthy men in the world. May God grant you health and long life to enjoy that wealth, and to employ it—as we know you will—in ameliorating the lot of those who are worse off than yourself! We confidently look forward to your return to Izreel in the course of the next year or two; but should unkind fortune forbid that return, think of us occasionally, and remember that in the far interior of Africa there are two hearts in which your memory will be cherished so long as life shall last.

“Yours, in undying friendship,—

“Phil.”

My story is told. It only remains to add that, some six months later, Dick Maitland arrived safely in England, with all his treasure intact, just in time to rescue his mother from the grip of destitution that was on the point of closing relentlessly upon her, and to place her in a position of such absolute safety and luxury that it was months before the dear old lady could persuade herself it was not all a tantalising dream, from which she would sooner or later awake to again find herself face to face with the ever-recurring, harassing, heart-breaking problem of ways and means, and the even more painful state of anxiety and uncertainty concerning the whereabouts of her son that had so worried and distressed her during the past year.

As for Doctor Julian Humphreys, Dick nearly drove the good man crazy with delight by placing to his credit at the bank a sum so stupendous that he might have spent the rest of his days in riotous luxury, had he so chosen. But that was not Humphreys' way at all; his heart was set upon the relief of those who suffered the keen pangs of poverty through no fault of their own; and he thenceforth enjoyed the pleasure of doing good to the top of his bent, retaining his modest establishment at 19 Paradise Street, but greatly enlarging his surgery, stocking it abundantly with every drug, instrument, and appliance that could possibly ameliorate pain or heal disease, and continuing enthusiastically to practise medicine and surgery among the poor, without fee or reward of any sort, save an occasional expression of gratitude from some more than usually appreciative patient.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE ADVENTURES OF DICK MAITLAND: A TALE OF UNKNOWN AFRICA ***

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