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STORIES OF
AFRICA

Chosen by
E. C. PARNWELL



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PREFACE

THIS anthology is planned to give, within the limits of its format, a general impression of the stories of Africa written during the past fifty years. Although consisting mainly of stories whose African environment is a vital and integral part of them, it includes for contrast a few examples of those to which an African setting is only incidental. Some episodes from the experiences of African adventurers have also been chosen.

Translations from African literature in other European languages are excluded, but by way of recognition of African folklore (which for adequate representation would need a volume to itself) the book opens with a typical native story.

A short glossary of obscure local words, supplementing the writers' own footnotes, is given on page 360.

The editor acknowledges his debt to friends for their criticisms and suggestions, and thanks the following for permission to reprint copyright stories:

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THE WASHERMAN'S DONKEY ¹

THERE was once a monkey which made friends with a shark. Every day the monkey used to eat the fruit of a great mkuyu tree, which spread partly over the village and partly over the sea; and every day the shark used to swim underneath, saying to the monkey, 'Throw me some figs, my friend.'

And he threw him figs day after day for many months, until one morning the shark said, 'You have done me numerous kindnesses. I should like to take you to my home, that I may repay you.'

'But how can I go?' the monkey answered. 'We don't go into the water, we beasts of the land.'

'I will carry you,' replied the shark. 'Not a drop of water shall get to you.'

So the monkey agreed to go.

When they were half-way the shark exclaimed suddenly, 'You are my friend, I must tell you the truth about this journey.'

'What do you mean?' replied the monkey, in surprise.

'At home, where we are going, our Sultan is

¹ A tale told by the natives of Zanzibar. This version is based on Bishop Steere's literal translation in *Swahili Tales* (1870) by permission of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

very ill, and we have been told that the medicine for him is a monkey's heart.'

The monkey hastily considered for a moment, thinking, 'My life is in danger; I must try to deceive him.'

'What are you thinking about?' asked the shark. 'Why don't you speak?'

'Well,' said the monkey, 'I hardly know what to say; you should have told me about that before we started.'

'Why?' he asked.

'If I had known,' the monkey answered, 'I might have brought my heart with me.'

'But where is your heart, then?'

'Oh, don't you know about us? When we go out we leave our hearts in the trees, and go about with only our bodies. I fear you don't believe me. If so, let us go on to your home, and you can kill me if you find my heart!'

But the shark believed him. 'No!' he said. 'We will go back now and get your heart.'

'Oh! I can't agree to that,' answered the monkey. 'Let us go to your place.'

But the shark persisted.

The monkey then took counsel with himself again. 'I had better let him have his own way until we get to the tree,' he thought. 'I know what to do when I get there.'

So they returned to the tree, and the monkey jumped ashore, crying, 'Wait for me here, Shark; I am going to get my heart, that we may be off.'

He climbed into the tree and sat there perfectly still. The shark called him, but he held his tongue. A second time the shark called him, saying, 'Let us be going.'

To this the monkey replied, 'Let us go where?'

'Let us go home.'

'Are you mad?'

'How so?'

'Do you take me for the washerman's donkey?'

'Why the washerman's donkey?'

'It had neither heart nor ears,' the monkey explained.

'My friend,' said the shark, still doubtful, 'You must tell me about this washerman's donkey, for I feel I ought to know his story.'

So the monkey began:

'A washerman had a donkey, and was very fond of it. After a time it ran away and went into the forest for many days, until the washerman forgot it. And it got very fat there in the forest.

'One day a hare going by saw the donkey with foam coming from its mouth, and thought how fat the beast was. So fat that he went and told the lion about it.

'Now the lion was recovering from an illness. He was very weak. So when the hare said to him, "I will bring you some meat tomorrow, that we may eat together," he heartily agreed.

'The hare arose and went into the forest, and

found the donkey again. Now that donkey was a she. And he said to her, "I am sent to come and ask you in marriage."

' "By whom?" she asked.

' And he said, "By the lion."

' The donkey consented very gladly, and replied, "We will go."

' They went along until they arrived at the lion's. The lion invited them in, and they sat down. After a while the hare gave the lion a sign with his eyebrow, as much as to say, "This is the meat, now's your chance!" And he said to the donkey, "I am going out for a little while, talk here with your husband."

' As soon as he had gone the lion sprang upon her, and they fought. The lion struck deep with his claws, but to his surprise got kicked very hard in return. At last the donkey flung the lion off and ran back into the forest.

' Then the hare came in again, saying, "Hullo! lion, have you managed it?"

' "I have not," he replied. "I gave her a good tearing, but because I am not strong yet she kicked me and got away."

' "Oh! Never mind!" said the hare, soothingly. "Don't put yourself out over it!"

' Nothing more happened until the donkey was well of her wounds, and the lion had got very strong. Then the hare went again to the lion, and said, "What do you think now, shall I bring you your meat?"

“Just you bring it me,” he answered, “and see how I will tear it in two!”

So the hare went back into the forest, where the donkey welcomed him and asked the news. The hare told her she had been invited to visit her lover. On hearing that she looked nervously at him, saying, “The day you took me there he scratched me very much. I am rather afraid.”

“Why, that is nothing,” the hare answered. “It is only the lion’s bluff manner of conversation.”

“Very well, then,” she said, “let us go.”

No sooner had the lion seen her than he sprang upon her and tore her into two pieces, as he had promised.

Then he bade the hare to take the meat and roast it; for himself he wanted nothing but the donkey’s heart and ears. The hare thanked him, and roasted the meat in a place apart, where the lion did not see him. And the hare took the heart and ears and went on eating them himself until he had had enough. The rest of the meat he hid away.

In due course the lion came and asked him for the heart and ears. “Oh!” said the hare, “There are none!”

“Why?” asked the lion.

“Did you not know this was the washerman’s donkey?” the hare replied.

“Well,” said the lion, “what has that to do with there being no heart and ears?”

‘“Heavens! You, a lion, a grown-up person, and it is not clear to you? The first time the animal visited you it came near to being killed, and yet it came to you the second time. Now, if it had had heart and ears, would it have come again?”

‘“Well,” said the lion, “I must admit there is truth in what you say.”’

So, having finished his tale, the monkey screamed angrily, ‘And now you want to make a washerman’s donkey of me, but you will not deceive me again! Our friendship is at an end. Be off!’

OLIVE SCHREINER
AN UNFINISHED LETTER

1883

[After the appearance of Gregory Rose, the 'new man' on Tant' Sannie's farm, Waldo, the son of the late overseer, decided to seek his fortune elsewhere. He and Gregory both adored Lyndall, the Boer-woman's niece, who, following Waldo's departure, yielded to the entreaties of a strange lover and also went away. Later Gregory, tormented by a disquieting rumour of Lyndall, tells Em, the Boer-woman's step-daughter (who is in love with him), that he must go and seek his love. In course of time he finds her in a Transvaal inn, alone and desperately ill, mourning her dead baby.]

GREGORY ROSE had been gone seven months. Em sat alone on a white sheepskin before the fire.

The August night-wind, weird and shrill, howled round the chimneys, and through the crannies, and in walls and doors, and uttered a long low cry as it forced its way among the clefts or the stones on the 'kopje'. It was a wild night. The prickly-pear tree, stiff and upright as it held its arms, felt the wind's might, and knocked its flat leaves heavily together, till great branches broke off. The Kaffirs, as they slept in their straw huts, whispered one to another that before morning there would not be an armful of thatch left on the roofs; and the beams of the wagon-house creaked and groaned as if it were heavy work to resist the importunity of the wind.

Em had not gone to bed. Who could sleep on a night like this? So in the dining-room she had lighted a fire, and sat on the ground before it, turning the roaster-cakes that lay on the coals to bake. It would save work in the morning; and she blew out the light because the wind through the window-chinks made it flicker and run; and she sat singing to herself as she watched the cakes. They lay at one end of the wide hearth on a bed of coals, and at the other end a fire burnt up steadily, casting its amber glow over Em's light hair and black dress with the ruffle of crape about the neck, and over the white curls of the sheepskin on which she sat.

Louder and more fiercely yet howled the storm; but Em sang on, and heard nothing but the words of her song, and heard them only faintly, as something restful. It was an old childish song she had often heard her mother sing long ago:

'Where the reeds dance by the river,
Where the willow's song is said,
On the face of the morning water,
Is reflected a white flower's head.'

She folded her hands and sang the next verse dreamily:

'Where the reeds shake by the river,
Where the moonlight's sheen is shed,
On the face of the sleeping water,
Two leaves of a white flower float dead.
Dead, Dead, Dead!'

She echoed the refrain softly till it died away, and then repeated it. It was as if, unknown to herself, it harmonized with the pictures and thoughts that sat with her there alone in the fire-light. She turned the cakes over, while the wind hurled down a row of bricks from the gable, and made the walls tremble.

Presently she paused and listened; there was a sound as of something knocking at the back-doorway. But the wind had raised its level higher, and she went on with her work. At last the sound was repeated. Then she rose, lit the candle at the fire, and went to see. Only to satisfy herself, she said, that nothing could be out on such a night.

She opened the door a little way, and held the light behind her to defend it from the wind. The figure of a tall man stood there, and before she could speak he had pushed his way in, and was forcing the door to close behind him.

‘Waldo!’ she cried in astonishment.

He had been gone more than a year and a half.

‘You did not expect to see me,’ he answered, as he turned towards her; ‘I should have slept in the outhouse, and not troubled you to-night; but through the shutter I saw glimmerings of a light.’

‘Come in to the fire,’ she said; ‘it is a terrific night for any creature to be out. Shall we not go and fetch your things in first?’ she added.

'I have nothing but this,' he said, motioning to the little bundle in his hand.

'Your horse?'

'Is dead.'

He sat down on the bench before the fire.

'The cakes are almost ready,' she said; 'I will get you something to eat. Where have you been wandering all this while?'

'Up and down, up and down,' he answered wearily; 'and now the whim has seized me to come back here. Em,' he said, putting his hand on her arm as she passed him, 'have you heard from Lyndall lately?'

'Yes,' said Em, turning quickly from him.

'Where is she? I had one letter from her, but that is almost a year ago now—just when she left. Where is she?'

'In the Transvaal. I will go and get you some supper; we can talk afterwards.'

'Can you give me her exact address? I want to write to her.'

But Em had gone into the next room.

When food was on the table she knelt down before the fire, turning the cakes, babbling restlessly, eagerly, now of this, now of that. She was glad to see him—Tant' Sannie was coming soon to show her her new baby—he must stay on the farm now, and help her. And Waldo himself was well content to eat his meal in silence, asking no more questions.

'Gregory is coming back next week,' she said;

'he will have been gone just a hundred and three days to-morrow. I had a letter from him yesterday.'

'Where has he been?'

But his companion stooped to lift a cake from the fire.

'How the wind blows! One can hardly hear one's own voice,' she said. 'Take this warm cake; no one's cakes are like mine. Why, you have eaten nothing!'

'I am a little weary,' he said; 'the wind was mad to-night.'

He folded his arms, and rested his head against the fire-place, whilst she removed the dishes from the table. On the mantelpiece stood an ink-pot and some sheets of paper. Presently he took them down and turned up the corner of the table-cloth.

'I will write a few lines,' he said, 'till you are ready to sit down and talk.'

Em, as she shook out the table-cloth, watched him bending intently over his paper. He had changed much. His face had grown thinner; his cheeks were almost hollow, though they were covered by a dark growth of beard.

She sat down on the skin beside him, and felt the little bundle on the bench; it was painfully small and soft. Perhaps it held a shirt and a book, but nothing more. The old black hat had a piece of unhemmed muslin twisted round it, and on his elbow was a large patch so fixed on

with yellow thread that her heart ached. Only his hair was not changed, and hung in silky beautiful waves almost to his shoulders. Tomorrow she would take the ragged edge off his collar, and put a new band round his hat. She did not interrupt him, but she wondered how it was that he sat to write so intently after his long weary walk. He was not tired now; his pen hurried quickly and restlessly over the paper, and his eye was bright. Presently Em raised her hand to her breast, where lay the letter yesterday had brought her. Soon she had forgotten him, as entirely as he had forgotten her; each was in his own world with his own. He was writing to Lyndall. He would tell her all he had seen, all he had done, though it were nothing worth relating. He seemed to have come back to her, and to be talking to her now he sat there in the old house.

‘—and then I got to the next town, and my horse was tired, so I could go no further, and looked for work. A shopkeeper agreed to hire me as salesman. He made me sign a promise to remain six months, and he gave me a little empty room at the store to sleep in. I had still three pounds of my own, and when you have just come from the country three pounds seems a great deal.

‘When I had been in the shop three days I wanted to go away again. A clerk in a shop has the lowest work to do of all people. It is

much better to break stones: you have the blue sky above you, and only the stones to bend to. I asked my master to let me go, and I offered to give him my two pounds, and the bag of mealies I had bought with the other pound; but he would not.

‘I found out afterwards he was only giving me half as much as he gave to the others—that was why. I had fear when I looked at the clerks that I would at last become like them. All day they were bowing and smirking to the women who came in; smiling, when all they wanted was to get their money from them. They used to run and fetch the dresses and ribbons to show them, and they seemed to me like worms with oil on. There was one respectable thing in that store—it was the Kaffir storeman. His work was to load and unload, and he never needed to smile except when he liked, and he never told lies.

‘The other clerks gave me the name of Old Salvation; but there was one person I liked very much. He was clerk in another store. He often went past the door. He seemed to me not like others—his face was bright and fresh like a little child’s. When he came to the shop I felt I liked him. One day I saw a book in his pocket, and that made me feel near him. I asked him if he was fond of reading, and he said yes, when there was nothing else to do. The next day he came to me, and asked me if I did not feel lonely; he never saw me going out with the other fellows;

he would come and see me that evening, he said.

'I was glad, and bought some meat and flour, because the grey mare and I always ate mealies; it is the cheapest thing; when you boil it hard you can't eat much of it. I made some cakes, and I folded my greatcoat on the box to make it soft for him; and at last he came.

' "You've got a rummy place here," he said.

'You see there was nothing in it but packing-cases for furniture, and it was rather empty. While I was putting the food on the box he looked at my books; he read their names out aloud. "Elementary Physiology", "First Principles."

' "Golly!" he said; "I've got a lot of dry stuff like that at home I got for Sunday-school prizes; but I only keep them to light my pipe with now; they come in handy for that." Then he asked me if I had ever read a book called the "Black-eyed Creole". "That is the style for me," he said; "there where the fellow takes the nigger-girl by the arm, and the other fellow cuts off! That's what I like."

'But what he said after that I don't remember, only it made me feel as if I were having a bad dream, and I wanted to be far away.

'When he had finished eating he did not stay long; he had to go and see some girls home from a prayer-meeting; and he asked how it was he never saw me walking out with any on Sunday

afternoons. He said he had lots of sweethearts, and he was going to see one the next Wednesday on a farm, and he asked me to lend my mare. I told him she was very old. But he said it didn't matter; he would come the next day to fetch her.

'After he was gone my little room got back to its old look. I loved it so; I was so glad to get into it at night, and it seemed to be reproaching me for bringing him there. The next day he took the grey mare. On Thursday he did not bring her back, and on Friday I found the saddle and bridle standing at my door.

'In the afternoon he looked into the shop, and called out, "Hope you got your saddle, Farber? Your bag-of-bones kicked out six miles from this. I'll send you a couple of shillings to-morrow, though the old hide wasn't worth it. Good-morning."

'But I sprang over the counter, and got him by his throat. My father was so gentle with her; he never would ride her up hill, and now this fellow had murdered her! I asked him where he had killed her, and I shook him till he slipped out of my hand. He stood in the door grinning.

' "It didn't take much to kill *that* bag-of-bones, whose master sleeps in a packing-case, and waits till his company's finished to eat on the plate. Shouldn't wonder if you fed her on sugar-bags," he said; "and, if you think I've jumped her,

you'd better go and look yourself. You'll find her along the road by the 'aas-vogels' that are eating her."

'I caught him by his collar, and I lifted him from the ground, and I threw him out into the street, half-way across it. I heard the bookkeeper say to the clerk that there was always the devil in those mum fellows; but they never called me Salvation after that.

'I am writing to you of very small things, but there is nothing else to tell; it has been all small and you will like it. Whenever anything has happened I have always thought I would tell it to you. The back thought in my mind is always you. After that only one old man came to visit me. I had seen him in the streets often; he always wore very dirty black clothes, and a hat with crape round it, and he had one eye, so I noticed him. One day he came to my room with a subscription-list for a minister's salary. When I said I had nothing to give he looked at me with his one eye.

"Young man," he said, "how is it I never see you in the house of the Lord?" I thought he was trying to do good, so I felt sorry for him, and I told him I never went to chapel. "Young man," he said, "it grieves me to hear such godless words from the lips of one so young—so far gone in the paths of destruction. Young man, if you forget God, God will forget you. There is a seat on the right-hand side as you go at the bottom door

that you may get. If you are given over to the enjoyment and frivolities of this world, what will become of your never-dying soul?"

'He would not go till I gave him half a crown for the minister's salary. Afterwards I heard he was the man who collected the pew-rents, and got a percentage. I didn't get to know any one else.

'When my time in that shop was done I hired myself to drive one of a transport-rider's wagons.

'That first morning, when I sat in the front and called to my oxen, and saw nothing about me but the hills with the blue coming down to them, and the karroo-bushes, I was drunk; I laughed; my heart was beating till it hurt me. I shut my eyes tight, that when I opened them I might see there were no shelves about me. There must be a beauty in buying and selling if there is beauty in everything; but it is very ugly to me. My life as transport-rider would have been the best life in the world if I had had only one wagon to drive. My master told me he would drive one, I the other, and he would hire another person to drive the third. But the first day I drove two to help him, and after that he let me drive all three. Whenever we came to an hotel he stopped behind to get a drink, and when he rode up to the wagons he could never stand; the Hottentot and I used to lift him up. We always travelled all night, and used to "out-span" for five or six hours in the heat of the day to rest.

I planned that I would lie under the wagon and read for an hour or two every day before I went to sleep, and I did for the first two or three; but after that I only wanted to sleep like the rest, and I packed my books away. When you have three wagons to look after all night, you are sometimes so tired you can hardly stand. At first, when I walked along driving my wagons in the night, it was glorious; the stars had never looked so beautiful to me; and on the dark nights when we rode through the bush there were will-o'-the-wisps dancing on each side of the road. I found out that even the damp and dark are beautiful. But I soon changed, and saw nothing but the road, and my oxen. I only wished for a smooth piece of road, so that I might sit at the front and doze. At the places where we "out-spanned" there were sometimes rare plants and flowers, the festoons hanging from the bush-trees, and nuts and insects, such as we never see here; but after a little while I never looked at them—I was too tired. I ate as much as I could, and then lay down on my face under the wagon till the boy came to wake me to "in-span", and then we drove on again all night; so it went, so it went. I think sometimes when we walked by my oxen I called to them in my sleep, for I know I thought of nothing; I was like an animal. My body was strong and well to work, but my brain was dead. If you have not felt it, Lyndall, you cannot understand it. You may

work, and work, and work, till you are only a body, not a soul. Now when I see one of those evil-looking men that come from Europe—navvies, with the beast-like, sunken face, different from any Kaffir's—I know what brought that look into their eyes; and if I have only one inch of tobacco I give them half. It is work, grinding, mechanical work, that they or their ancestors have done, that has made them into beasts. You may work a man's body so that his soul dies. Work is good. I have worked at the old farm from the sun's rising till its setting, but I have had time to think, and time to feel. You may work a man so that all but the animal in him is gone; and that grows stronger with physical labour. You may work a man till he is a devil. I know it, because I have felt it. You will never understand the change that came over me. No one but I will ever know how great it was. But I was never miserable; when I could keep my oxen from sticking fast, and when I could find a place to lie down in, I had all I wanted. After I had driven eight months a rainy season came. For eighteen hours out of the twenty-four we worked in the wet. The mud went up to the axles sometimes, and we had to dig the wheels out, and we never went far in a day. My master swore at me more than ever, but when he had done he always offered me his brandy-flask. When I first came he had offered it me, and I had always refused; but now I drank as my oxen

did when I gave them water—without drinking. At last I bought brandy for myself whenever we passed an hotel.

‘One Sunday we “out-spanned” on the banks of a swollen river to wait for its going down. It was drizzling still, so I lay under the wagon in the mud. There was no dry place anywhere; and all the dung was wet, so there was no fire to cook food. My little flask was filled with brandy, and I drank some and went to sleep. When I woke it was drizzling still, so I drank some more. I was stiff and cold; and my master, who lay by me, offered me his flask, because mine was empty. I drank some, and then I thought I would go and see if the river was going down. I remember that I walked to the road, and it seemed to be going away from me. When I woke up I was lying by a little bush on the bank of the river. It was afternoon; all the clouds had gone, and the sky was deep blue. The Bushman boy was grilling ribs at the fire. He looked at me, and grinned from ear to ear. “Master was a little nice,” he said, “and lay down in the road. Something might ride over master, so I carried him there.” He grinned at me again. It was as though he said, “You and I are comrades. I have lain in a road too. I know all about it.” When I turned my head from him I saw the earth, so pure after the rain, so green, so fresh, so blue;—and I was a drunken carrier, whom his leader had picked up in the mud, and laid at

the roadside to sleep out his drink. I remembered my old life, and I remembered you. I saw how, one day, you would read in the papers—"A German carrier, named Waldo Farber, was killed through falling from his wagon, being instantly crushed under the wheel. Deceased was supposed to have been drunk at the time of the accident." There are those notices in the paper every month. I sat up, and I took the brandy-flask out of my pocket, and I flung it as far as I could into the dark water. The Hottentot boy ran down to see if he could catch it; it had sunk to the bottom. I never drank again. But, Lyndall, sin looks much more terrible to those who look at it than to those who do it. A convict, or a man who drinks, seems something so far off and horrible when we see him, but to himself he seems quite near to us, and like us. We wonder what kind of a creature he is; but he is just we, ourselves. We are only the wood, the knife that carves on us is the circumstance.

'I do not know why I kept on working so hard for that master. I think it was as the oxen come every day and stand by the yokes; they do not know why. Perhaps I would have been with him still; but one day we started with loads for the Diamond Fields. The oxen were very thin now, and they had been standing about in the yoke all day without food while the wagons were being loaded. Not far from the town was a hill. When we came to the foot the first wagon stuck

fast. I tried for a little while to urge the oxen, but I soon saw the one "span" could never pull it up. I went to the other wagon to loosen that "span" to join them on in front, but the transport-rider, who was lying at the back of the wagon, jumped out.

' "They shall bring it up the hill; and if half of them die for it they shall do it alone," he said.

'He was not drunk, but in a bad temper, for he had been drunk the night before. He swore at me, and told me to take the whip and help him. We tried for a little time, then I told him it was no use, they could never do it. He swore louder, and called to the leaders to come on with their whips, and together they lashed. There was one ox, a black ox, so thin that the ridge of his backbone almost cut through his flesh.

' "It is you, Devil, is it, that will not pull?" the transport-rider said. "I will show you something." He looked like a Devil.

'He told the boys to leave off flogging, and he held the ox by the horn, and took up a round stone and knocked its nose with it till the blood came. When he had done they called to the oxen and took up their whips again, and the oxen strained with their backs bent, but the wagon did not move an inch.

' "So you won't, won't you?" he said. "I'll help you."

'He took out his clasp-knife, and ran it into the leg of the trembling ox three times, up to the

hilt. Then he put the knife in his pocket, and they took their whips. The oxen's flanks quivered, and they foamed at the mouth. Straining, they moved the wagon a few feet forward, then stood with bent backs to keep it from sliding back. From the black ox's nostril foam and blood were streaming on to the ground. It turned its head in its anguish and looked at me with its great starting eyes. It was praying for help in its agony and weakness, and they took their whips again. The creature bellowed out aloud. If there is a God, it was calling to its Maker for help. Then a stream of clear blood burst from both nostrils; it fell on to the ground, and the wagon slipped back. The man walked up to it.

“You are going to lie down, Devil, are you? We'll see that you don't take it too easy.”

“The thing was just dying. He opened his clasp-knife and stooped down over it. I do not know what I did then. But afterwards I know I had him on the stones, and I was kneeling on him. The boys dragged me off. I wish they had not. I left him standing in the sand in the road, shaking himself, and I walked back to the town. I took nothing from that accursed wagon, so I had only two shillings. But it did not matter. The next day I got work at a wholesale store. My work was to pack and unpack goods, and to carry boxes, and I had only to work from six in the morning till six in the evening; so I had plenty

of time. I hired a little room, and subscribed to a library, so I had everything I needed; and in the week of Christmas holidays I went to see the sea. I walked all night, Lyndall, to escape the heat, and a little after sunrise I got to the top of a high hill. Before me was a long, low, blue, monotonous mountain. I walked looking at it, but I was thinking of the sea I wanted to see. At last I wondered what that curious blue thing might be; then it struck me it was the sea! I would have turned back again, only I was too tired. I wonder if all the things we long to see—the churches, the pictures, the men in Europe—will disappoint us so! You see I had dreamed of it so long. When I was a little boy, minding sheep behind the “kopje”, I used to see the waves stretching out as far as the eye could reach in the sunlight. My sea! Is the ideal always more beautiful than the real?

‘I got to the beach that afternoon, and I saw the water run up and down on the sand, and I saw the white foam breakers; they were pretty, but I thought I would go back the next day. It was not my sea.

‘But I began to like it when I sat by it that night in the moonlight; and the next day I liked it better; and before I left I loved it. It was not like the sky and the stars, that talk of what has no beginning and no end; but it is so human. Of all the things I have ever seen, only the sea is like a human being; the sky is not, nor the earth.

But the sea is always moving, always something deep in itself is stirring it. It never rests; it is always wanting, wanting, wanting. It hurries on; and then it creeps back slowly without having reached, moaning. It is always asking a question, and it never gets an answer. I can hear it in the day and in the night; the white foam breakers are saying that which I think. I walk alone with them when there is no one to see me, and I sing with them. I lie down on the sand and watch them with my eyes half shut. The sky is better, but it is so high above our heads. I love the sea. Sometimes we must look down too. After five days I went back to Grahamstown.

‘I had glorious books, and in the night I could sit in my little room and read them; but I was lonely. Books are not the same things when you are living among people. I cannot tell why, but they are dead. On the farm they would have been living beings to me; but here, where there were so many people about me, I wanted some one to belong to me. I was lonely. I wanted something that was flesh and blood. Once on this farm there came a stranger; I did not ask his name, but he sat among the karroo and talked with me. Now, wherever I have travelled I have looked for him—in hotels, in streets, in passenger wagons as they rushed in, through the open windows of houses I have looked for him, but I have not found him—never heard a voice like his. One day I went to the Botanic Gardens.

It was a half-holiday, and the band was to play. I stood in the long raised avenue and looked down. There were many flowers, and ladies and children were walking about beautifully dressed. At last the music began. I had not heard such music before. At first it was slow and even, like the everyday life, when we walk through it without thought or feeling; then it grew faster, then it paused, hesitated, then it was quite still for an instant, and then it burst out. Lyndall, they made heaven right when they made it all music. It takes you up and carries you away, away till you have the things you longed for; you are up close to them. You have got out into a large, free, open place. I could not see anything while it was playing; I stood with my head against my tree; but when it was done, I saw that there were ladies sitting close to me on a wooden bench, and the stranger who had talked to me that day in the karroo was sitting between them. The ladies were very pretty, and their dresses beautiful. I do not think they had been listening to the music, for they were talking and laughing very softly. I heard all they said, and could even smell the rose on the breast of one. I was afraid he would see me; so I went to the other side of the tree, and soon they got up and began to pace up and down in the avenue. All the time the music played they chatted, and he carried on his arm the scarf of the prettiest lady. I did not hear the music; I tried to catch

the sound of his voice each time he went by. When I was listening to the music I did not know I was badly dressed; now I felt so ashamed of myself. I never knew before what a low, horrible thing I was, dressed in tancord. That day on the farm, when we sat on the ground under the thorn-trees, I thought he quite belonged to me; now, I saw he was not mine. But he was still beautiful. His brown eyes are more beautiful than any one's eyes, except yours.

'At last they turned to go, and I walked after them. When they got out of the gate he helped the ladies into a phaeton, and stood for a moment with his foot on the step talking to them. He had a little cane in his hand, and an Italian greyhound ran after him. Just when they drove away one of the ladies dropped her whip.

"Pick it up, fellow," she said; and when I brought it her she threw sixpence on the ground. I might have gone back to the garden then; but I did not want music; I wanted clothes, and to be fashionable and fine. I felt that my hands were coarse, and that I was vulgar. I never tried to see him again.

'I stayed in my situation four months after that, but I was not happy. I had no rest. The people about me pressed on me and made me dissatisfied. I could not forget them. Even when I did not see them they pressed on me, and made me miserable. I did not love books; I wanted people. When I walked home under the shady

trees in the street I could not be happy, for when I passed the houses I heard music and saw faces between the curtains. I did not want any of them, but I wanted some one for mine, for me. I could not help it. I wanted a finer life.

'Only one day something made me happy. A nurse came to the store with a little girl belonging to one of our clerks. While the maid went into the office to give a message to its father, the little child stood looking at me. Presently she came close to me and peeped up into my face.

"Nice curls, pretty curls," she said; "I like curls."

'She felt my hair all over with her little hands. When I put out my arm she let me take her and sit her on my knee. She kissed me with her soft mouth. We were happy till the nurse-girl came and shook her, and asked her if she was not ashamed to sit on the knee of that strange man. But I do not think my little one minded. She laughed at me as she went out.

'If the world was all children I could like it; but men and women draw me so strangely, and then press me away, till I am in agony. I was not meant to live among people. Perhaps some day, when I am grown older, I will be able to go and live among them and look at them as I look at the rocks and bushes, without letting them disturb me, and take myself from me; but not now. So I grew miserable; a kind of fever seemed to eat me; I could not rest, or read, or think; so

I came back here. I knew you were not here, but it seemed as though I should be nearer you; and it is you I want—you that the other people suggest to me, but cannot give.'

He had filled all the sheets he had taken, and now lifted down the last from the mantelpiece. Em had dropped asleep, and lay slumbering peacefully on the skin before the fire. Out of doors the storm still raged; but in a fitful manner, as though growing half weary of itself. He bent over his papers again, with eager flushed cheek, and wrote on.

'It has been a delightful journey, this journey home. I have walked on foot. The evening before last, when it was just sunset, I was a little footsore and thirsty, and went out of the road to look for water. I went down into a deep little "kloof". Some trees ran along the bottom, and I thought I should find water there. The sun had quite set when I got to the bottom of it. It was very still—not a leaf was stirring anywhere. In the bed of the mountain torrent I thought I might find water. I came to the bank, and leaped down into the dry bed. The floor on which I stood was of fine white sand, and the banks rose on every side like the walls of a room. Above, there was a precipice of rocks, and a tiny stream of water oozed from them and fell slowly on to the flat stone below. Each drop you could hear fall like a little silver bell. There was one among the trees on the bank that stood

out against the white sky. All the other trees were silent; but this one shook and trembled against the sky. Everything else was still; but those leaves were quivering, quivering. I stood on the sand; I could not go away. When it was quite dark, and the stars had come, I crept out. Does it seem strange to you that it should have made me so happy? It is because I cannot tell you how near I felt to things that we cannot see but we always feel. To-night has been a wild, stormy night. I have been walking across the plain for hours in the dark. I have liked the wind, because I have seemed forcing my way through to you. I knew you were not here, but I would hear of you. When I used to sit on the transport wagon half-sleeping, I used to start awake because your hands were on me. In my lodgings, many nights I have blown the light out, and sat in the dark, that I might see your face start out more distinctly. Sometimes it was the little girl's face who used to come to me behind the "kopje" when I minded sheep, and sit by me in her blue pinafore; sometimes it was older. I love both. I am very helpless, I shall never do anything; but you will work, and I will take your work for mine. Sometimes such a sudden gladness seizes me when I remember that somewhere in the world you are living and working. You are my very own; nothing else is my own so. When I have finished I am going to look at your room door——'

He wrote; and the wind, which had spent its fury, moaned round and round the house, most like a tired child weary with crying.

Em woke up, and sat before the fire, rubbing her eyes, and listening, as it sobbed about the gables, and wandered away over the long stone walls.

'How quiet it has grown now,' she said, and sighed herself, partly from weariness and partly from sympathy with the tired wind. He did not answer her; he was lost in his letter.

She rose slowly after a time, and rested her hand on his shoulder.

'You have many letters to write,' she said.

'No,' he answered; 'it is only one to Lyndall.'

She turned away, and stood long before the fire looking into it. If you have a deadly fruit to give, it will not grow sweeter by keeping.

'Waldo, dear,' she said, putting her hands on his, 'leave off writing.'

He threw back the dark hair from his forehead and looked at her.

'It is no use writing any more,' she said.

'Why not?' he asked.

She put her hand over the papers he had written.

'Waldo,' she said, 'Lyndall is dead.'

SIR HARRY JOHNSTON
EPFUMO AND THE HEAD-WIFE

1889

THE name they called my mother-country was Mbudikum. It was a land of forests and mountains—a land where water never failed, because in all directions there were brooks and rivers, and my country-people never thought of digging wells. When I can first remember, I was a small, small boy, and I lived in a large village of this country called Bahom. My mother was a young woman who had a pleasant face, although, after the fashion of these pagans, it was scarred and tattooed on the forehead, and cheeks, and chin. My mother was one of the five wives of a man called Asho-eso, who was the chief of the village, and also ruled over three other neighbouring towns. We lived in a kind of compound, the four sides of which were houses built of clay, with palm-thatch roofs; in the middle of the compound or yard was a small tree growing, and on this tree were hung the skulls of people whom my father, the old chief, had killed, and there were also a lot of charms and gri-gri, such as these pagans believe in, tied round the trunk of this tree; and every now and then, when the men of the village killed a slave or a prisoner whom they had captured when they fought with

the Bakuba—the Bakuba were a tribe who lived on a high mountain two days' journey from our village, and who used sometimes to fight with us—when, I say, the men of our town killed some one and roasted his flesh for a feast—for my people were man-eaters like the Ghuls of the desert—the bones of the men they had eaten were laid round about the base of this tree.

The first thing I remember clearly was playing with the skull of one of these people whom the young men of the town had eaten. I used to roll it about on the ground of the compound, and amuse myself by filling it with sand, and then holding it up to let the sand run out from the eyes and nose. There were a number of other boys—perhaps eight or ten—living with me in the compound, who were said to be my father's children. My mother was the youngest of his wives. Her name was Tutu, and the name of the head-wife was Ndeba. I hated Ndeba, and she did not like me, because she was jealous of my mother, and her own children had died. The old chief, my father, they said had been a strong man when he was young, and they had made him chief because he had fought very bravely against the Bakuba, and had captured many prisoners and women and goats and sheep, and, as he was very generous, they made him chief in the place of another man who had been killed; but, when I remember him, he was old and his eyes were dim; he had a short grey beard, and

the hair of his head was grey and he had lost many of his teeth. His knees were swollen and large, and he could only walk slowly and with a stick. For hours together he would sit on his haunches over the fire in his own hut, and do nothing but take snuff occasionally out of a small antelope-horn which hung round his neck. Only when the women wrangled too loud would he raise himself and find his voice, and when he was angry and shouted, the brightness came back to his eyes, and his voice was strong, and it made us tremble, because it was told that once in his younger days, when a wife had refused to stop yelling because the head-wife had taken her portion of peppers, he struck her on the head with his ebony stick, and she died.

Sometimes I used to creep into my father's hut and watch him as he sat over the fire; he never spoke much to me, and much of what he said seemed to be nonsense. A few sentences of his talk I still remember; he said them over and over again, like a kind of song: 'The elephants came down from the mountains—two, three elephants came. They wasted my farm, they dragged down my plantains, and they trampled my maize, and I, Eso, I, the chief, did a cunning thing against them, for I dug a big, big pit, and I overlaid its mouth with thin sticks, and on these sticks I reared the maize stalks upright, as though they were growing, and I scattered grass about in between them, so that

none might know that the sticks hid the mouth of the pit, and when the elephants came at night to eat my plantains, they pressed on the sticks, and one, the biggest, fell into the pit, and there I, Eso, found him, and I cut the tendons of his feet so that he could not walk, and I and my men stuck him in many places with spears, so that he bled to death, and for many days we feasted on his flesh, till our bellies ached with food. And his tusks, one I sold to a Tibari¹ trader, and the other I made into bracelets for my wives, and that is why they call me "Asho-eso", the "elephant-killer". And this tale he would tell many times, until I wearied of it, and little else he would say, except when the women quarrelled, and he could not sleep.

My eldest brother was a big young man. He was the son of the second wife. I liked him because he was kind to me, and because he, too, hated the eldest wife. When she quarrelled with my mother he took my mother's part. His own mother we all laughed at, because she had once broken her leg, and when it mended the bone stuck out in a lump, and one leg was shorter than the other, so that, when she walked, she walked with a hop. We called her the 'Hyena', because her gait was limping—and in our language we call the hyena the 'limping leopard'—but my eldest brother was good to me, and would play with me, and when he took part

¹ Fula.

in these pagan feasts, he would bring back a little of the man's heart they had eaten, so that I might taste it, and grow brave for Wallah! I was a pagan and a man-eater, too. I knew no better, and was as a brute, and none had told me of Allah and his Habi.¹

My eldest brother taught me to make bows and arrows—the bow out of the springy wood of the climbing palm, and the string, too, of palm fibre or the twisted gut of a goat—and our arrows were made out of stout grass-stems and notched, or sometimes the blacksmith of the village would beat me out a small barb of iron, which I would fasten on to the end of my arrow. With these bows and arrows I soon learned to kill small birds, which I took home to eat. I always shared them with my brothers, as was our custom, for we shared everything—we boys—but if the women tried to take something of what we had killed to put in their own pots, we made a great noise and stoned them, and my mother would scream and shout at the other women if they tried to take away the things I had killed, for my mother set much store by me, and would let no one do me hurt if she could prevent them.

And I learned to fish in the brooks, where we made weirs of reeds and bush-creepers, and once I remember, when I jumped into the deep water of one of these pools, which we had

¹ 'Prophet', viz. Mohammed.

dammed up, to catch in my arms a large fish that was entrapped there, a big lizard, such as the Arabs call 'Waran', attacked me, for he, too, was after the fish, and with his long, sharp-edged tail cut the skin all down my right thigh, and I thought I should have died, because so much blood ran out, and I could hardly drag myself home, where my mother wailed over me; and because the head-wife was learned in medicine, and knew the best way to stop the flowing of blood and heal the wound, my mother had to give her a large present—I think she gave her a goat—that she might apply her skill to close up the wound in my thigh; and this she did, as I remember, by washing it, and putting on it the red paste of a wood that was bitter to the taste, and then she strapped up the whole thigh in plantain leaves, and in a few days I was well.

About this time a great trouble came on us, for my elder brother went out to hunt the elephant with some young men of the town. They would follow the elephants till they came to a great marsh, which was a long day's journey from the town, and here, hiding among the reeds, where the elephants came to drink and bathe, they would let fly at them with spears and poisoned arrows, hoping, by much noise and by gradually closing on them, to drive the elephants out of the clear water into the thick mud, where they would stick, and where the men could get close to them and kill them with-

out the elephants having the power to escape or to run at the men. But one elephant, that was stronger and more cunning than the others, would not fly before the shouting, but turned round and made straight at my brother, whom he seized with his trunk and carried to the firm land among the bushes; and here, though he was like a porcupine for the lances and darts and arrows that stuck in his hide, thrown by the young men who were my brother's companions, he desisted not from his purpose, but, placing him on the ground with his trunk, he knelt down and drove one of his great tusks through my brother's body, and then broke away from the young men, so that none saw in what direction he escaped through the forest, he bearing all the time my brother's body spitted on his tusk. And when the news was brought home, it was said everywhere that it was witchcraft, that some enemy of my brother's had entered into this elephant as a devil, so that he might bring about my brother's death, and I heard the women whisper that the enemy who had done this was my father's head-wife; and the poor Hyena, as we called my brother's mother, was mad with rage, and threw herself on the head-wife, biting and striking her, until my father roared in his angry voice, and the other women pulled her off, and tied her with bush-rope, and then for two days there was quiet; but the young men had found part of my brother's body in the

forest, and had brought it back to the town, and then I heard it said that 'Epfumo' was out to find who had bewitched my brother, and entered the elephant to kill him.

When I heard the great 'Bong! bong!' of the 'Etum', which is a kind of drum made of a hollow-sounding wood, that gives out a noise almost like a bell, I was frightened and ran to my mother, she everywhere looking for me to hide me with herself in the house; for you must know the custom was, when this Epfumo was out, that he should slay all women and children, and all youths who were uninitiated, whom he met in his path. And the reason of this was, that these pagans believe that Epfumo is a 'Shaitan', a great devil, who is able to search out the truth.

He appears like a man dressed in a great mantle made of palm-fronds, a mantle which descends from his shoulders to his knees, and is very broad and constructed somewhat like a cage, but there are holes to let the arms pass out through, and on to his finger-nails are fastened leopards' claws. In one hand he holds a great cutlass, and in the other a pierced antelope-horn, with which he blows a strong blast at times, to warn people out of his way. On his head is a hideous mask of painted wood, from the top of which hangs down behind a black-and-white monkey-skin.

When I was a child I thought that the Epfumo was a real devil, but now I know it is only a man

dressed up, and generally the 'doctor', the pagan priest of the town, and this Epfumo that came out to find the person who bewitched my brother must have been an old man named 'Ashontshon', which means in our language 'Kill-thief'. And all this time that the Epfumo was searching through the town for the bewitcher of my brother, the drum in the fetish-house was going 'Bong! bong! bong!' and there was no other sound in the town but the noise of the drum, except when a dog howled or the fowls cackled; and I hid myself in the darkness of my mother's hut, fearing to let go her hand, and she, too, was frightened, and had put the screen of latticed palm-stems against the doorway of her hut; but presently we heard quite close to the entrance to our compound a blast from the Epfumo's horn.

My mother started up and trembled all over. 'He is coming in here,' she said, 'I knew it; it is the head-wife that has bewitched thy brother'; and although I was very frightened, I was very curious to see what the Epfumo would do, so I crept close to the doorway and peeped through the cracks of the palm-lattice, and for the first time I saw the terrible Epfumo. He came into the compound, walking at the head of a troop of other devils, dressed somewhat like himself, but with white staves in their hands and no cutlass, and the Epfumo cried, with a loud voice, 'I smell the witch who has bewitched Ejok' (that

was my brother's name), and at these words I saw my father come out of the house, walking very slowly and painfully, and helping himself with his stick, and he said, 'What seekest thou here, Epfumo?' and the devil said, 'I seek the bewitcher of Ejok, and I know I am near,' and the Epfumo walked towards our house, or rather he danced towards us with 'a curious mincing step, and again I shut my eyes with fright, for I saw he was coming to our door, and all this time my mother was crouching on the ground, putting her hands before her eyes; and when I looked out again the Epfumo had passed on, and he went very near the next house, and the next, but stopped at none till he came to the house of the head-wife, and there he danced in; and then I heard a frightful yell, and the Epfumo came out, dragging the head-wife by the wrist, and she in her scare set both her feet together and bent her body, so that he might fail to move her from the threshold of her hut; but it was of no use, for my father said, 'Bind her,' and the other dressed-up men that accompanied Epfumo took coils of bush-rope from underneath their mantles of palm-leaves, and bound the head-wife round and round, so that she was stiff, and could move nothing about her but her head; and all the while she screamed and screamed, until her screams became like the hoarse cry of an angry camel, and then when she was bound they lifted her up, and carried her out of the com-

pound. And then after some little time the 'Bong! bong! bong!' of the fetish drum stopped, for the witch was found. And the town came to life again.

My mother rose up and lifted away the door from the entrance to her hut, made up the embers of the fire, and then rushed out into the compound to meet the other women, who were already raising a mighty clamour with their tongues. They were all shouting: 'Did I not tell you so, did I not say the head-wife had bewitched Ejok? Were not her ways always the ways of a witch? Aha, now she will be punished as she deserves!' My mother screamed the loudest of all, for she was glad, and hated the head-wife, and I shouted too and the other boys, and the small girls beat with sticks on the wooden drums, and the goats baaed and the fowls cackled, and there was a great clamour. Only my father sat quiet on his haunches and seemed sad. He said once or twice, 'Witch or no witch, she was a wise woman, and who will tend me now she is gone?' Then some young men came rushing in and said the trial would take place as soon as the moon was up.

And all that day was hard to pass. I longed so to see what they would do with the woman who had bewitched my brother; and at last the evening meal was over and it was dark, and, lighting a bundle of palm shreds at the fire, which these pagans use as torches, my mother

took me by the hand and led me out of the compound, all the other women going too; but as we passed the open door of my father's hut his fire flickered up, and I saw him sitting there alone musing over the hearth, his chin resting on his hands, which held his ebony staff. And I said to my mother, 'Is he not going too?' and she said. 'He is too feeble to walk so far, and besides, he is too old to care for anything now but his soup and his snuff,' and she laughed. But the limping Hyena, the second wife, as she passed, said to my mother, 'It is not well to laugh, for Asho-eso was a strong man once, and it is you young women who have taken away his strength from him.'

So we passed out into the darkness, and my mother separated herself from the other wives, and here and there we saw the flare of the other torches, for many people were wending their way to the place of trial. But my mother walked not with the other wives, saying she liked not their company; and as we passed a new house that had been built in the town, a young man, a fine tall proper fellow—his name was 'Ngwi', or 'the leopard'—came out from under the eaves of the house and looked in my mother's face as she held up her torch, and my mother nodded to him and let go my hand, holding Ngwi's instead, whilst she still held up her torch to light the way. Then presently she saw the other wives of my father a little way in advance, and

she told me to run on ahead and go with my brothers, for there was something she must say to Ngwi first. So I ran on and joined myself to the limping Hyena, who was very sad, and sobbed and cried still, to think of the death of her son.

And when we arrived at the place of trial we found it was a large open space in the forest, where the ground was smooth, and had been beaten hard by men's feet, and all vegetation was removed except for one great tree, with spreading branches, which grew in the middle of the clearing, and all round the border of this maidan, or square, there were great fires burning, so that the place was full of light, and round these fires were squatting or standing all the young men of the town. Most of them were drunk with palm-wine, and kept shouting and singing without any sense, and close to the base of the big tree there lay my father's head-wife, still in her bonds; she could only move her head a very little from side to side, and her eyes rolled dreadfully; and there was another thing close beside her which made me feel very sad and sick—it was the remains they had found of my brother when he had been killed by the elephant, only the head and trunk and part of his thighs were there.

Then presently there was a blowing of horns, and into the square came Asho-ntshon, the old 'Nganga', or medicine-man of the town, who

used to dress up as the Epfumo, but this time he was not Epfumo at all, or the women and children would not have been there. The old Nganga had painted a curious pattern of white lines over his body, and he had a lot of charms hung about his neck, a tall plaited hat on his head, and ruffs of white goat's fur round his ankles. He blew a loud blast on his antelope-horn, and all the noise and talking ceased; then in the midst of silence he said, 'Epfumo has found the witch who brought about the death of Ejok; it is Ndeba, the wife of Asho-eso, the chief.' At these words the other wives of my father—except my mother, who had not come—all said, 'Aya, aya! it is true,' but the Nganga blew another blast on his horn to silence them, and went on, 'Ndeba denies that she bewitched Ejok, so it shall be put to the test, and we will see if Epfumo was wrong.' Then, after saying these words, he took his knife and cut off a small piece—just about a mouthful—of the flesh of my dead brother, and called to one of his attendants, who brought a small wooden box, in which was kept a red sauce. Into this sauce he dipped the morsel of my brother's flesh, and rolled it round two or three times; then he bade them hoist up Ndeba, the head-wife, and whilst they held her upright he said to her, 'Open thy mouth and swallow this piece of the flesh of the man whom Epfumo says thou didst bewitch. If it stays on thy stomach thou wilt be set free, and Epfumo

will have told a lie, for all men will see that thou couldst not have bewitched Ejok if his substance will unite with thine; but if thou vomit up this piece of his body, Epfumo will have shown truly that thou art the witch.' Then the head-wife opened her mouth and received the morsel of my brother's flesh; and I saw the muscles of her face and throat working as though trying to swallow it, but perhaps the sauce in which it was dipped made her retch, or perhaps after all she was a witch—how do we know? perhaps there is some truth in what these pagans tell! are they not the children of Iblis? How it was I know not, but Ndeba shook all over and vomited forth the piece of flesh that had been put into her mouth.

Then a great cry went up from among the people; they all shouted, 'Ndeba is the witch, Ndeba is the witch; Epfumo never tells a lie,' and the young men beat on their drums and blew their antelope-horns, and the limping Hyena, Ejok's mother, gave a sobbing scream, and rushed forward at Ndeba, who had fallen down on the ground, for the young men had left off holding her up. The Hyena tore Ndeba's face with her nails, and smashed in her nose with her fist, and would perhaps have killed her in her rage, only the Nganga kicked and cuffed the Hyena, and dragged her off, and said it was not thus Ndeba was to die. Then he called upon the young men, and they came up and took

hold of Ndeba, and whilst some unwound the bush-ropes that had bound her, others tied fresh ropes round her neck, ankles, and wrists, and with the ends of these ropes they lashed her round the trunk of the big tree. 'And is that all?' I asked of another of my father's wives, for I could not find my mother; 'are they not going to kill her?' 'No,' she replied, 'it is Epfumo who will kill her, but she will take some time to die, for she is strong even yet, although the Hyena has spoilt her face.' And all this time Ndeba said nothing, she was quite dumb, and did not seem to know what had happened. And, after she was tied to the tree, every one seemed to forget her, and the men and women had a big dance round the fire. Presently my mother came up to me and took me home, and I asked her where she had been all the time, and whether she had seen what had been done to Ndeba; and she said yes, she had seen all, but I did not believe that she was there. And the next morning there was a great clamour among the women in my father's yard, and the Hyena, who was now the head-wife, reproached my mother with her love for Ngwi, and threatened she would tell everything to my father, but my mother soothed her and hushed her and reminded her that the dead Ejok had been such a friend to me, and when my mother mentioned Ejok's name, the Hyena burst out crying, and promised not to say anything about Ngwi. And that day Ngwi

sent my mother a large fish which he had caught in the river, and she divided the fish among all the other women, and they seemed to be great friends.

The next day I went out with some of my brothers to snare birds in the forest, and when we were coming back in the evening we passed through the square where the people danced, and where the sacrifices used to take place, and there was Ndeba still tied to the tree; and when I went up to her, her eyes opened, and she looked at me, but she could not speak, because they had thrust a gag into her mouth. Just above her head they had driven into the tree a small peg, and on this was hung a bundle of red parrot-feathers; this meant that Ndeba was 'fetish'; that no one must touch her, or aid her, or give her food or water, or have anything to do with her, or Epfumo would kill them. So the other boys drew me away from staring at her, and we all went home with the birds we had caught.

And three days after that there was a big market held in the square, a market that took place in our town every ten days, and people came to this market from great distances when there was not war in the land; and here, for the first time, I saw a Ful merchant, a Mohammedan, who had come from the north to buy ivory and slaves. He had with him one or two people from a country near ours who had become the allies and servants of the Mohammedan Ful-be,

and who dressed in long blue robes and turbans, like Mohammedans, and although I was frightened at first, and held on to my mother's hand, still I looked at this man with wonder and curiosity; and I being then a pagan and one of the brutes of the field, wondered that this man should cover his body with cloth, for all the people of our town and country went naked except for their bracelets of ivory or their neck ornaments. And when I looked at the tree where Ndeba was bound I saw to my surprise that she was still alive—that is to say, her eyes opened and shut as she watched the coming and going of the people, but they all took no notice of her, and none offered to give her food or water, or to loose her bonds.

Once the Pul-o merchant asked some questions about her, but the young men of the town said to him, 'It is our business, meddle not with her,' and he laughed and turned away.

The next day I thought much about Ndeba, and wondered whether she still lived, and whether her eyes could still open and shut. So, without telling my mother, who, I knew, would scold me, I slipped away from the yard alone, and stole to the square in the forest. Around the base of the tree were walking two or three brown vultures of a kind that were tame in our town, like fowls, for we allowed them to eat the offal, and no man might disturb them.

When I stepped as close as I might to Ndeba,

I saw that her eyelids had dropped. But when I said in a soft voice, 'Ndeba!' her eyes opened and she looked hard at me.

Wallah! it is wonderful how these old women live! Here she had been tied to the tree for six days, and was not dead yet. But I thought to myself as I ran back home, 'She will surely die soon, or the vultures would not be walking about her.'

And still the next day I thought about Ndeba, and wondered whether she was dead yet. But I feared to leave our compound early the next morning, because my mother had asked me many questions about where I had been the day before, and had told me that if I went anywhere near Ndeba she would hand me over to Epfumo. However, soon there arose a clamour in the yard, because the Hyena rushed out of my father's house where she had been taking his morning food, and said he was not there, and that he must have disappeared for some hours, because the fire was out, and they sought for him everywhere in the compound, but could not find him.

My mother laughed and said, 'Puh! He has found his strength again, that is all. Perhaps it was Ndeba that bewitched him, and now he has grown strong, and gone off to hunt or trade.'

And then all the other women began shouting at my mother, saying she had hidden him or killed him lest he should find out about Ngwi, and

while they were making all this to-do, I slipped out of our compound, and ran off to the forest to see whether Ndeba was still living.

And when I got to the square, to my surprise I saw my father sitting down near Ndeba's feet, and leaning against the trunk of the tree, but a vulture was perched on Ndeba's shoulder, tearing the flesh off her cheeks; so it was clear she was dead.

And what do you think? my father was dead, too, and when I touched his body to awaken him, for I thought he was asleep, he rolled over on the ground. I was so frightened at this, fearing lest they should say I had killed him, that I ran right into the forest and hid there all the rest of the day, and at nightfall I returned home, hoping that they would not notice my absence, or would think that I had been to snare birds.

But long before I reached our compound I heard the wailing of the women, crying out for my father's death, for his body had been found in the market-place, and brought back to our home. And my mother told me that Epfumo had killed my father, because he had been to say good-bye to Ndeba.

The next morning, quite early, my mother caught her largest she-goat, one that had a little one running by her side, and a duck which she had bought from a Ful trader, and cut a big bunch of plantains out of her plantations. She set the bunch of plantains on my head, and made

me carry the duck under one arm, and lead the goat with the other hand. Then she told me to go to the house of Asho-ntshon, the Nganga, and say, 'This is a present from Tutu, the wife of Asho-eso.' Only that I was to say, and nothing more, and then to return as quickly as possible.

When I reached the Nganga's compound, there, too, was Ngwi, the young man that was my mother's friend, and he had with him two goats and a bag of kauri shells. He went in before me, and gave these things to the Nganga, with whom he had a long talk, which I could not hear. I was tired of waiting, so I began to rummage among the rubbish which lay in the Nganga's courtyard, and in one of the heaps of rubbish I remember I picked up part of a man's jaw, which had the teeth still in it, although they were loose, and I pulled all the teeth out to make myself a necklace, but whilst I was doing this the Nganga came up, and cuffed me on the head for meddling with his treasures.

Then he asked my business, and I gave him my mother's message and the present she had sent. He bade me wait whilst he went back into his house, and then he came out again with some red feathers of a parrot and some string made of human gut, which he told me to give to my mother, who was to hang the feathers round her neck with the piece of string. When I returned to our compound, my mother was

waiting for me, and took me aside and asked me in a whisper what the Nganga had said, and I gave her the string and the parrot-feathers, and told her what she was to do, at which she clapped her hands and seemed pleased. When I went back with her into the courtyard I saw the Hyena, who was the head-wife since Ndeba's death, sitting on one of our native stools, whilst other women were painting her all over with the camwood dye, and then drawing lines of white, in a kind of pattern, round her eyes, down the sides of her neck, and along the outer part of her arms. I ran to my mother to know what they were decking the Hyena for, and she said, with a laugh, that she was making herself smart for her journey to the Under-world.

'Where is the Under-world?' I asked. 'Is it beyond the mountain, on the great river?'

'No,' she said, 'it is under the ground, where dead people go when they are buried. Thy father has gone there, since Epfumo has called him, and now the Hyena must go too, to tend upon him.'

That same day some of the young men from the town came to prepare my father to be put into the earth. They opened his body and took out his bowels, which they buried in the ground in the middle of the compound; then they made a big fire in the hut where my father lived, and after they had sewn up the body they smoked it on a frame of sticks above the fire, and there it

lay all the rest of the day and the whole night, till it was quite black and dry; and it got so small, so shrunken, that it was not like my father at all. The next morning they took it down off the sticks, and rubbed the smoke-black off with the husks of bananas and with corn-cobs, so that the body was shiny like leather. After this they got the red dye and white earth, and painted the face of the corpse red and white, and put on the ivory bracelets and the charms that my father had worn round his neck when he was alive, and then they got the grass-cloth which our people used to weave and dye red and black, and they wound these cloths round and round his body so that it was like a bundle, and only the head was free; but before they wound this cloth round him they bent the legs up, so that my father was sitting with his knees close to his chest, just as he sat when he was alive, and when the cloth was wound round and round his body, it kept the knees and the arms in position. Then they dug a big, big hole in the floor of my father's hut.

And whilst this was going on, all that day the Hyena had been led round about the town, painted up in the way I have told you; she was led by the other wives of my father. She went to all the people in the town to say good-bye, and each gave her greeting, and many gave her presents to take with her. And when all was ready, the grave dug, and the corpse prepared,

they sent for the Nganga, and all the people began to come to our compound, carrying torches, for it was night. Then some of my other brothers brought three white goats from my father's flock and three white fowls, and baskets of ground-nuts and maize. And the Nganga, who was painted all over in different colours and had a monkey-skin cap upon his head, began to dance round the grave, and said a lot of silly words which I did not understand. After this he called in a loud voice on my father, 'Asho-eso, art thou ready to go?' And, though no one answered, he pretended to listen at the lips of the corpse whom they had seated at the edge of the grave, and then he turned to the other people and said, 'I hear him say "Yes".' So the young men got bush-rope and tied it round the corpse and lowered it into the grave.

Then some one led up the Hyena. I could see that she was trembling very much, but she did not speak, and the Nganga bade her lie on the ground by the side of the grave. She lay down on her back, and he kneeled on her chest, got her neck in his skinny hands, and squeezed it so that she was strangled and died. Then they laid her body in the grave at the feet of my father. And after this they brought the three white goats and three white fowls and cut their throats one after another over the grave, so that the blood fell on the two corpses, but the bodies of the goats and fowls were taken away to be

eaten at the funeral feast. The Nganga scattered a few of the ground-nuts and some maize into the grave, and they put in a horn of snuff and a wisp of salt in a banana leaf, and a gourd of water, some red peppers and some wooden dishes; and then the earth was all heaped back into the grave and trampled down by the young men. After this they had a big feast, and my mother gave me a large piece of meat. All the night they stayed singing and shouting and drinking palm-wine, until they were most of them drunk.

The next day all the big men met in the Epfumo house to say who should be the next chief, and some said one man and some said another, and whilst they were quarrelling the Nganga came dancing in, blowing his horn, and shouting out that he had a message from Epfumo, and the message was that Ngwi was to be the new chief.

Some grumbled at this, and said he was too young, but no one thought of disputing the Nganga's word. So the next day Nganga gave to Ngwi my father's ebony staff, and Ngwi came down and took possession of our compound and all that was in it, and the three remaining wives of my father became the wives of Ngwi, and Ngwi made my mother the head-wife, so that she had all the other wives as her servants.

And Ngwi killed ten of my father's goats and tapped many palm-trees, so that there were

great jars of palm-wine. And he dug up many yams and ground-nuts, and prepared a big feast, to which all the men of the village came. They were all pleased at this, and said Ngwi would make a good chief after all, because he was generous and fed the hungry. And I liked Ngwi, because he was kind to me and gave me a big ivory bracelet.

SIR H. RIDER HAGGARD

UMSLOPOGAAS WINS 'INKOSIKAAS'

1892

[Over-confident in his strength and fleetness, Umslopogaas, son of the great chief Chaka, is carried off by a lion. He is rescued by a young warrior Galazi, possessor of the great war-club 'Watcher of the Threshold', who holds in subjection the fierce wolves of the Ghost Mountain. Together Galazi and Umslopogaas live in a cave on the mountain-side, hunting and harrying in company with the wolves; and men in neighbouring kraals whisper in awe of two ghostly skin-clad figures leading an 'impi black and grey that runs on four legs with fangs for spears.']

Now many moons had gone by since Umslopogaas became a king of the wolves, and he was a man full grown, a man fierce and tall and keen; a slayer of men, fleet of foot and of valour unequalled, seeing by night as well as by day. But he was not yet named the Slaughterer, and not yet did he hold that iron chieftainess, the axe Groan-maker. Still, the desire to win the axe was foremost in his mind, for no woman had entered there, who when she enters drives out all other desire—ay, my father, even that of good weapons. At times, indeed, Umslopogaas would lurk in the reeds by the river looking at the kraal of Jikiza the Unconquered, and would watch the gates of his kraal, and once as he lurked he saw a man great, broad and hairy, who bore upon his shoulder a shining axe, hafted

with the horn of a rhinoceros. After that his greed for this axe entered into Umslopogaas more and more, till at length he scarcely could sleep for thinking of it, and to Galazi he spoke of little else, wearying him much with his talk, for Galazi loved silence. But for all his longing he could find no means to win it.

Now it befell that as Umslopogaas hid one evening in the reeds, watching the kraal of Jikiza, he saw a maiden straight and fair, whose skin shone like the copper anklets on her limbs. She walked slowly towards the reeds where he lay hidden. Nor did she stop at the brink of the reeds, she entered them and sat herself down within a spear's length of where Umslopogaas was seated, and at once began to weep, speaking to herself as she wept.

'Would that the ghost-wolves might fall on him and all that is his,' she sobbed, 'ay, and on Masilo also! I would hound them on, even if I myself must next know their fangs. Better to die by the teeth of the wolves than to be sold to this fat pig of a Masilo. Oh! if I must wed him, I will give him a knife for the bride's kiss. Oh! that I were lady of the ghost-wolves! There should be a picking of bones in the kraal of Jikiza before the moon grows young again.'

Umslopogaas heard, and of a sudden reared himself up before the maid, and he was great and wild to look on, and the she-wolf's fangs shone upon his brow.

'The ghost-wolves are at hand, damsel,' he said. 'They are ever at hand for those who need them.'

Now the maid saw him and screamed faintly, then grew silent, wondering at the greatness and the fierce eyes of the man who spoke to her.

'Who are you?' she asked. 'I fear you not, whoever you are.'

'There you are wrong, damsel, for all men fear me, and they have cause to fear. I am one of the Wolf-brethren, whose names have been told of; I am a wizard of the Ghost Mountain. Take heed, now, lest I kill you. It will be of little avail to call upon your people, for my feet are fleetier than theirs.'

'I have no wish to call upon my people, Wolf-man,' she answered. 'And for the rest, I am too young to kill.'

'That is so, maiden,' answered Umslopogaas, looking at her beauty. 'What were the words upon your lips as to Jikiza and a certain Masilo? Were they not fierce words, such as my heart likes well?'

'It seems that you heard them,' answered the girl. 'What need to waste breath in speaking them again?'

'No need, maiden. Now tell me your story; perhaps I may find a way to help you.'

'There is little to tell,' she answered. 'It is a small tale and a common. My name is Zinita, and Jikiza the Unconquered is my stepfather.'

He married my mother, who is dead, but none of his blood is in me. Now he would give me in marriage to a certain Masilo, a fat man and an old, whom I hate, because Masilo offers many cattle for me.'

'Is there, then, another whom you would wed, maiden?' asked Umslopogaas.

'There is none,' answered Zinita, looking him in the eyes.

'And is there no path by which you may escape from Masilo?'

'There is only one path, Wolf-man—by death. If I die, I shall escape; if Masilo dies, I shall escape; but to little end, for I shall be given to another; but if Jikiza dies, then it will be well. What of that wolf-people of yours, are they not hungry, Wolf-man?'

'I cannot bring them here,' answered Umslopogaas. 'Is there no other way?'

'There is another way,' said Zinita, 'if one can be found to try it.' And again she looked at him strangely, causing the blood to beat within him. 'Hearken! do you not know how our people are governed? They are governed by him who holds the axe Groan-maker. He that can win the axe in war from the hand of him that holds it, shall be our chief. But if he who holds the axe dies unconquered, then his son takes his place and with it the axe. It has been thus, indeed, for four generations, since he who held Groan-maker has always been unconquerable. But I have

heard that the great-grandfather of Jikiza won the axe from him who held it in his day; he won it by fraud. For when the axe had fallen on him but lightly, he fell over, feigning death. Then the owner of the axe laughed, and turned to walk away. But the forefather of Jikiza sprang up behind him and pierced him through with a spear, and thus he became Chief of the People of the Axe. Therefore, it is the custom of Jikiza to hew off the heads of those whom he kills with the axe.'

'Does he, then, slay many?' asked Umslopogaas.

'Of late years, few indeed,' she said, 'for none dare stand against him---no, not with all to win. For, holding the axe Groan-maker, he is unconquerable, and to fight with him is sure death. Fifty and one have tried in all, and before the hut of Jikiza there are piled fifty and one white skulls. And know this, the axe must be won in fight; if it is stolen or found, it has no virtue---nay, it brings shame and death to him who holds it.'

'How, then, may a man give battle to Jikiza?' he asked again.

'Thus: Once in every year, on the first day of the new moon of the summer season, Jikiza holds a meeting of the headmen. Then he must rise and challenge all or any to come forward and do battle with him to win the axe and become chief in his place. Now if one comes forward, they go into the cattle-kraal, and there

the matter is ended. Afterwards, when the head is hewn from his foe, Jikiza goes back to the meeting of the headmen, and they talk as before. All are free to come to the meeting, and Jikiza must fight with them if they wish it, whoever they be.'

'Perhaps I shall be there,' said Umslopogaas.

'After this meeting at the new moon, I am to be given in marriage to Masilo,' said the maid. 'But should one conquer Jikiza, then he will be chief, and can give me in marriage to whom he will.'

Now Umslopogaas understood her meaning, and knew that he had found favour in her sight; and the thought moved him a little, for women were strange to him as yet.

'If perchance I should be there,' he said, 'and if perchance I should win the iron chieftainess, the axe Groan-maker, and rule over the People of the Axe, you should not live far from the shadow of the axe thenceforward, Maid Zinita.'

'It is well, Wolf-man, though some might not wish to dwell in that shadow; but first you must win the axe. Many have tried, and all have failed.'

'Yet one must succeed at last,' he said, 'and so, farewell!' and he leaped into the torrent of the river, and swam it with great strokes.

Now the maid Zinita watched him till he was gone, and love of him entered into her heart—a love that was fierce and jealous and strong. But

as he wended to the Ghost Mountain Umslopogaas thought rather of Axe Groan-maker than of Maid Zinita; for ever, at the bottom, Umslopogaas loved war more than women, though this has been his fate, that women have brought sorrow on his head.

Fifteen days must pass before the day of the new moon, and during this time Umslopogaas thought much and said little. Still, he told Galazi something of the tale, and that he was determined to do battle with Jikiza the Unconquered for the axe Groan-maker. Galazi said that he would do well to let it be, and that it was better to stay with the wolves than to go out seeking for strange weapons. He said also that even if he won the axe, the matter might not stay there, for he must take the girl also, and his heart boded no good of women. It had been a girl who poisoned his father in the kraals of the Halakazi. To all of which Umslopogaas answered nothing, for his heart was set both on the axe and the girl, but more on the former than the latter.

So the time wore on, and at length came the day of the new moon. At the dawn of that day Umslopogaas arose and clad himself in a *moocha*, binding the she-wolf's skin round his middle beneath the *moocha*. In his hand he took a stout fighting-shield, which he had made of buffalo-hide, and that same light moon-shaped axe with which he had slain the captain of Chaka.

'A poor weapon with which to kill Jikiza the Unconquered,' said Galazi, eyeing it askance.

'It shall serve my turn,' answered Umslopogaas.

Now Umslopogaas ate, and then they moved together slowly down the mountain and crossed the river by a ford, for he wished to save his strength. On the farther side of the river Galazi hid himself in the reeds, because his face was known, and there Umslopogaas bade him farewell, not knowing if he should look upon him again. Afterwards he walked up to the Great Place of Jikiza. Now when he reached the gates of the kraal, he saw that many people were streaming through them, and mingled with the people. Presently they came to the open space in front of the huts of Jikiza, and there the headmen were gathered together. In the centre of them, and before a heap of the skulls of men which were piled up against his door-posts, sat Jikiza, a huge man, a hairy and a proud, who glared about him rolling his eyes. Fastened to his arm by a thong of leather was the great axe Groan-maker, and each man as he came up saluted the axe, calling it '*Inkosikaas*', or chieftainness, but he did not salute Jikiza. Umslopogaas sat down with the people in front of the councillors, and few took any notice of him, except Zinita, who moved sullenly to and fro bearing gourds of beer to the councillors. Near to Jikiza, on his right hand, sat a fat man with

small and twinkling eyes, who watched the maid Zinita greedily.

'Yon man,' thought Umslopogaas, 'is Masilo. The better for blood-letting will you be, Masilo.'

Presently Jikiza spoke, rolling his eyes: 'This is the matter before you, councillors. I have settled it in my mind to give my stepdaughter Zinita in marriage to Masilo, but the marriage gift is not yet agreed on. I demand a hundred head of cattle from Masilo, for the maid is fair and straight, a proper maid, and, moreover, my daughter, though not of my blood. But Masilo offers fifty head only, therefore I ask you to settle it.'

'We hear you, Lord of the Axe,' answered one of the councillors, 'but first, O Unconquered, you must on this day of the year, according to ancient custom, give public challenge to any man to fight you for the Groan-maker and for your place as Chief of the People of the Axe.'

'This is a wearisome thing,' grumbled Jikiza 'Can I never have done in it? Fifty and three have I slain in my youth without a wound, and now for many years I have challenged, like a cock on a dunghill, and none crow in answer.'

'Ho, now! Is there any man who will come forward and do battle with me, Jikiza, for the great axe Groan-maker? To him who can win it, it shall be, and with it the Chieftainship of the People of the Axe.'

Thus he spoke very fast, as a man gabbles :

prayer to a spirit in whom he has little faith, then turned once more to talk of the cattle of Masilo and of the maid Zinita. But suddenly Umslopogaas stood up, looking at him over the top of his war-shield, and crying, 'Here is one, O Jikiza, who will do battle with you for the axe Groan-maker and for the chieftainship that is to him who holds the axe.'

Now, all the people laughed, and Jikiza glared at him.

'Come forth from behind that big shield of yours,' he said. 'Come out and tell me your name and lineage—you who would do battle with the Unconquered for the ancient axe.'

Then Umslopogaas came forward, and he looked so fierce, though he was but young, that the people laughed no more.

'What is my name and lineage to you, Jikiza?' he said. 'Let it be, and hasten to do me battle, as you must by the custom, for I am eager to rattle the Groan-maker and to sit in your seat and settle this matter of the cattle of Masilo the pig. When I have killed you I will take a name who now have none.'

Now once more the people laughed, but Jikiza grew mad with wrath and sprang up asping.

'What!' he said, 'you dare to speak thus to me, you babe unweaned, to me the Unconquered, the holder of the axe! Never did I think to live hear such talk from a long-legged pup. On

to the cattle-kraal, People of the Axe, that I may hew this braggart's head from his shoulders. He would stand in my place, would he?—the place that I and my fathers have held for four generations by virtue of the axe. I tell you all that presently I will stand upon his head, and then we will settle the matter of Masilo.'

'Babble not so fast, man,' quoth Umslopogaas. 'or if you must babble, speak those words which you would say ere you bid the sun farewell.'

Now, Jikiza choked with rage, and foam came from his lips so that he could not speak, but the people found this sport—all except Masilo, who looked askance at the stranger, tall and fierce, and Zinita, who looked at Masilo, and with no love. So they moved down to the cattle-kraal, and Galazi, seeing it from afar, could keep away no longer, but drew near and mingled with the crowd.

Now, when Umslopogaas and Jikiza the Unconquered had come to the cattle-kraal, they were set in its centre and there were ten paces between them. Umslopogaas was armed with the great shield and the light moon-shaped axe. Jikiza carried the Groan-maker and a small dancing-shield, and, looking at the weapons of the two, people thought that this stranger would furnish no sport to the holder of the axe.

'He is ill-armed,' said an old man, 'it should be otherwise—large axe, small shield. Jikiza is

unconquerable, and the big shield will not help this long-legged stranger when Groan-maker rattles on the buffalo-hide.' The old man spoke thus in the hearing of Galazi the Wolf, and Galazi thought that he spoke wisely, and sorrowed for the fate of his brother.

Now, the word was given, and Jikiza rushed on Umslopogaas, roaring, for his rage was great. But Umslopogaas did not stir till his foe was about to strike, then suddenly he leaped aside, and as Jikiza passed he smote him hard upon the back with the flat of his axe, making a great sound, for it was not his plan to try to kill Jikiza with this axe. Now a shout of laughter went up from the hundreds of the people, and the heart of Jikiza nearly burst with rage because of the shame of that blow. Round he came like a bull that is mad, and once more rushed at Umslopogaas, who lifted his shield to meet him. Then, of a sudden, just when the great axe leapt on high, Umslopogaas uttered a cry as of fear, and, turning, fled before the face of Jikiza. Now once more the shout of laughter went up, while Umslopogaas fled swiftly, and after him rushed Jikiza, blind with fury. Round and about the kraal sped Umslopogaas, scarcely a spear's length ahead of Jikiza, and he ran keeping his back to the sun as much as might be, that he might watch the shadow of Jikiza. A second time he sped round, while the people cheered the chase as hunters cheer a dog which pursues a buck. So cunningly

did Umslopogaas run, that, though he seemed to reel with weakness in such fashion that men thought his breath was gone, yet he went ever faster and faster, drawing Jikiza after him.

Now, when Umslopogaas knew by the breathing of his foe and by the staggering of his shadow that his strength was spent, suddenly he made as though he were about to fall himself and stumbled out of the path far to the right, and as he stumbled he let drop his great shield full in the way of Jikiza's feet. Then it came about that Jikiza, rushing on blindly, caught his feet in the shield and fell headlong to earth. Umslopogaas saw, and swooped on him like an eagle on a dove. Before men could so much as think, he had seized the axe Groan-maker, and with a blow of the steel he held had severed the thong of leather which bound it to the wrist of Jikiza, and sprung back, holding the great axe aloft, and casting down his own weapon upon the ground. Now, the watchers saw all the cunning of his fight, and those of them who hate Jikiza shouted aloud. But others were silent.

Slowly Jikiza gathered himself from the ground wondering if he were still alive, and as he rose he grasped the little axe of Umslopogaas, and looking at it, he wept. But Umslopogaas held up the great Groan-maker, the iron chieftainess, and examined its curved points of blue steel, the gouge that stands behind it, and the beauty of its haft, bound about with wire (

brass, and ending in a knob like the knob of a stick, as a lover looks upon the beauty of his bride. Then before all men he kissed the broad blade and cried aloud:

'Greeting to thee, my chieftainess, greeting to thee, Wife of my youth, whom I have won in war. Never shall we part, thou and I, and together will we die, thou and I, for I am not minded that others should handle thee when I am gone.'

Thus he cried in the hearing of men, then turned to Jikiza, who stood weeping, because he had lost all.

'Where now is your pride, O Unconquered?' laughed Umslopogaas. 'Fight on. You are as well armed as I was a while ago, when I did not fear to stand before you.'

Jikiza looked at him for a moment, then with a curse he hurled the little axe at him, and, turning, fled swiftly towards the gates of the cattle-kraal.

Umslopogaas stooped, and the little axe sped over him. Then he stood for awhile watching, and the people thought that he meant to let Jikiza go. But that was not his desire; he waited, indeed, till Jikiza had covered nearly half the space between him and the gate, then with a roar he leaped forward, as light leaps from a cloud, and so fast did his feet fly that the watchers scarcely could see them move. Jikiza fled fast also, yet he seemed but as one who

stands still. Now he reached the gate of the kraal, now there was a rush, a light of downward falling steel, and something swept past him. Then, behold! Jikiza fell in the gateway of the cattle-kraal, and all saw that he was dead, smitten to death by that mighty axe Groan-maker, which he and his fathers had held for many years.

A great shout went up from the crowd of watchers when they knew that Jikiza the Unconquered was killed at last, and there were many who hailed Umslopogaas, naming him Chief and Lord of the People of the Axe. But the sons of Jikiza to the number of ten, great men and brave, rushed on Umslopogaas to kill him. Umslopogaas ran backwards, lifting up the Groan-maker, when certain councillors of the people flung themselves in between them crying, 'Hold!'

'Is not this your law, ye councillors,' said Umslopogaas, 'that having conquered the Chief of the People of the Axe, I myself am Chief?'

'That is our law indeed, stranger,' answered an aged councillor, 'but this also is our law that now you must do battle, one by one, with all who come against you. So it was in my father's time, when the grandfather of him who now lies dead won the axe, and so it must be again to-day.'

'I have nothing to say against the rule,' said Umslopogaas. 'Now who is there who will con-

up against me to do battle for the axe Groan-maker and the chieftainship of the People of the Axe?'

Then all the ten sons of Jikiza stepped forward as one man, for their hearts were mad with wrath because of the death of their father and because the chieftainship had gone from their race, so that in truth they cared little if they lived or died. But there were none besides these, for all men feared to stand before Umslopogaas and the Groan-maker.

Umslopogaas counted them. 'There are ten, by the head of Chaka!' he cried. 'Now if I must fight all these one by one, no time will be left to me this day to talk of the matter of Masilo and of the maid Zinita. Hearken! What say you, sons of Jikiza the Conquered? If I find one other to stand beside me in the fray, and all of you come on at once against us twain, ten against two, to slay us or be slain, will that be to your minds?'

The brethren consulted together, and held that so they should be in better case than if they went up one by one.

'So be it,' they said, and the councillors assented.

Now, as he fled round and round, Umslopogaas had seen the face of Galazi, his brother, in the throng, and knew that he hungered to share the fight. So he called aloud that he whom he should choose, and who would stand back to

back with him in the fray, if victory were their should be the first after him among the People of the Axe, and as he called, he walked slow down the line scanning the faces of all, till he came to where Galazi stood leaning on the Club Watcher.

'Here is a great fellow who bears a great club,' said Umslopogaas. 'How are you named, fellow?'

'I am named Wolf,' answered Galazi.

'Say, now, Wolf, are you willing to stand back to back with me in this fray of two against ten? If victory is ours, you shall be next to me among this people.'

'Better I love the wild woods and the mountain's breast than the kraals of men and the kiss of wives, Axebearer,' answered Galazi. 'Yet, because you have shown yourself a warrior of might, and to taste again the joy of battle, will stand back to back with you, Axebearer, and see this matter ended.'

'A bargain, Wolf!' cried Umslopogaas. As they walked side by side—a mighty pair!—they came to the centre of the cattle-kraal. There they looked on them wondering, and it came into the thoughts of some that these were no other than the Wolf-brethren who dwelt upon the Ghost Mountain.

'Now Axe Groan-maker and Club Watcher are come together, Galazi,' said Umslopogaas as they walked, 'and I think that few can stand before them.'

'Some shall find it so,' answered Galazi. 'At the least, the fray will be merry, and what matter how frays end?'

'Ah,' said Umslopogaas, 'victory is good, but death ends all and is best of all.'

Then they spoke of the fashion in which they should fight, and Umslopogaas looked curiously at the axe he carried, and at the point on its hammer, balancing it in his hand. When he had looked long, the pair took their stand back to back in the centre of the kraal, and people saw that Umslopogaas held the axe in a new fashion, its curved blade being inwards towards his breast, and the hollow point turned towards the foe. The ten brethren gathered themselves together, shaking their assegais; five of them stood before Umslopogaas and five before Galazi the Wolf. They were all great men, made fierce with rage and shame.

'Now nothing except witchcraft can save these two,' said a councillor to one who stood by him.

'Yet there is virtue in the axe,' answered the other, 'and for the club, it seems that I know it: I think it is named Watcher of the Fords, and woe to those who stand before the Watcher. I myself have seen him aloft when I was young; moreover, these are no cravens who hold the axe and club. They are but lads, indeed, yet they have drunk wolf's milk.'

Meanwhile, an aged man drew near to speak

the word of onset; it was that same man who had set out the law to Umslopogaas. He must give the signal by throwing up a spear, and when it struck the ground, then the fight should begin. The old man took the spear and threw it, but his hand was weak, and he cast so clumsily that it fell among the sons of Jikiza, who stood before Umslopogaas, causing them to open up to let it pass between them, and drawing the eyes of all ten of them to it. But Umslopogaas watched for the touching of the spear only, being careless where it touched. As the point of it kissed the earth, he said a word, and lo! Umslopogaas and Galazi, not waiting for the onslaught of the ten, as men had thought they must, sprang forward, each at the line of foes who were before him. While the ten still stood confused, for it had been their plan to attack, the Wolf-brethren were on them. Groan-maker was up, but as for no great stroke. He did but peck, as a bird pecks with his bill, and yet a man dropped dead. The Watcher also was up, but he fell like a falling tree, and was the death of one. Through the lines of the ten passed the Wolf-brethren in the gaps that each had made. Then they turned swiftly and charged towards each other again; again Groan-maker pecked, again the Watcher thundered, and lo! once more Umslopogaas and Galazi stood back to back unhurt, but before them lay four men dead.

The onslaught and the return were so swift

that men scarcely understood what had been done; even those of the sons of Jikiza who were left stared at each other wondering. Then they knew they were but six, for four of them were dead. With a shout of rage they rushed upon the pair from both sides, but in either case one was the most eager, and outstepped the other two, and thus it came about that time was given the Wolf-brethren to strike at him alone, before his fellows were at his side. He who came at Umslopogaas drove at him with his spear, but he was not to be caught thus, for he bent his middle sideways, so that the spear only cut his skin, and as he bent tapped with the point of the axe at the head of the smiter, dealing death on him.

'Yonder Woodpecker has a bill of steel, and he can use it well,' said the councillor to him who stood by him.

'This is a Slaughterer indeed,' the man answered, and the people heard the names. Thenceforth they knew Umslopogaas as the Woodpecker, and as *Bulatio*, or the Slaughterer, and by no other names. Now, he who came at Galazi the Wolf rushed on wildly, holding his spear short. But Galazi was cunning in war. He took one step forward to meet him, then, swinging the Watcher backward, he let him fall at the full length of arms and club. The child of Jikiza lifted his shield to catch the blow, but the shield was to the Watcher what a leaf is to the wind. Full on its hide the

huge club fell, making a loud sound; the war-shield doubled up like a raw skin, and he who bore it fell crushed to the earth.

Now for a moment, the four who were left of the sons of Jikiza hovered round the pair, feinting at them from afar, but never coming within reach of axe or club. One threw a spear indeed, and though Umslopogaas leaped aside, and as it sped towards him smote the haft in two with the blade of Groan-maker, yet its head flew on, wounding Galazi in the flank. Then he who had thrown the spear turned to fly, for his hands were empty, and the others followed swiftly, for the heart was out of them, and they dared to do battle with these two no more.

Thus the fight was ended, and from its beginning till the finish was not longer than the time in which men might count a hundred slowly.

'It seems that none are left for us to kill, Galazi,' said Umslopogaas, laughing aloud. 'Ah, that was a cunning fight! Ho! you sons of the Unconquered, who run so fast, stay your feet. I give you peace; you shall live to sweep my huts and to plough my fields with the other women of my kraal. Now, councillors, the fighting is done, so let us to the chief's hut, where Masilo waits us,' and he turned and went with Galazi, and after him followed all the people, wondering and in silence.

When he reached the hut Umslopogaas sat himself down in the place where Jikiza had sat

that morning, and the maid Zinita came to him with a wet cloth and washed the wound that the spear had made. He thanked her; then she would have washed Galazi's wound also, and this was deeper, but Galazi bade her to let him be roughly, as he would have no woman meddling with his wounds. For neither then nor at any other time did Galazi turn to women, but he hated Zinita most of them all.

Then Umslopogaas spoke to Masilo the Pig, who sat before him with a frightened face, saying, 'It seems, O Masilo, that you have sought this maid Zinita in marriage, and against her will, persecuting her. Now I had intended to kill you as an offering to her anger, but there has been enough blood-letting to-day. Yet you shall give a marriage gift to this girl, whom I myself will take in marriage: you shall give a hundred head of cattle. Then get you gone from among the People of the Axe, lest a worse thing befall you, Masilo the Pig.'

So Masilo rose up and went, and his face was green with fear, but he paid the hundred head of cattle and fled towards the kraal of Chaka. Zinita watched him go, and she was glad of it, and because the Slaughterer had named her for his wife.

'I am well rid of Masilo,' she said aloud, in the hearing of Galazi, 'but I had been better pleased to see him dead before me.'

'This woman has a fierce heart,' thought

Galazi, 'and she will bring no good to Umslopogaas, my brother.'

Now the councillors and the captains of the People of the Axe *konza*'ed to him whom they named the Slaughterer, doing homage to him as chief and holder of the axe, and also they did homage to the axe itself. So Umslopogaas became chief over this people, and their number was many, and he grew great and fat in cattle and wives, and none dared to gainsay him. From time to time, indeed, a man ventured to stand up before him in fight, but none could conquer him, and in a little while no one sought to face Groan-maker when he lifted himself to peck.

Galazi also was great among the people, but dwelt with them little, for best he loved the wild woods and the mountain's breast, and often, as of old, he swept at night across the forest and the plains, and the howling of the ghost-wolves went with him.

But henceforth Umslopogaas the Slaughterer hunted very rarely with the wolves at night; he slept at the side of Zinita, and she loved him much and bore him children.

W. C. SCULLY

UKUSHWAMA

1894

No ghosts, they say. What is a ghost?—

Nay, what are thoughts and stars and winds?

They cannot tell—they show at most

Those formal swathes the pedant binds

Across clear eyes, the while he plugs

The apertures of liberal lugs.

SHAGBAG on Dogmatism.

I

I HAD been for two days endeavouring to frame a workable quarantine scheme in respect of an outbreak of lung sickness amongst the natives' cattle in several of those deep valleys which cleave the Xomlenzi range from the northern bank of the Tina River, and it was late afternoon when I reached the kraal of my friend Numjala, headman over a section of the Baca tribe of Kafirs. The mounted policeman who had accompanied me let his tired horse fall in a particularly bad drift, thus laming the animal, and had had to remain behind in consequence. Thus I was alone, but this circumstance did not trouble me, because my horse was fresh, and I knew the country well.

Numjala is a man of parts; he must be well over sixty years of age, but his eye is bright and his wit is keen. He is well off, for a native, and very hospitable.

The moon being new, her pale crescent saw quickly after the sun, but the sky was perfect clear and the stars more than ordinarily bright. To reach home I had about twelve miles ride, that is, by taking a short cut along foot paths; along the main road the distance was nearer twenty.

Numjala was very anxious that I should spend the night at his kraal, and offered, would I agree to remain, to kill a juicy-looking kid and roast it for supper. I had, however, promised my wife to return by midnight, and I feared she might be uneasy were I not to do so. I therefore declined the invitation.

'Does your horse lead well?' asked Numjala.

'Not particularly,' I replied; 'why do you ask?'

'You say you are going by footpath past the Ghoda bush?'

'Yes.'

'Unless your horse leads well, you will never get him past the Ghoda to-night, this being the night of the new moon. You will certainly never ride him past.'

The Ghoda bush is a narrow strip of forest running down the side of a steep mountain which forms one side of a valley, the other side being formed of a perpendicular cliff, at the foot of which a stream brawls. The strip of forest does not quite reach the stream, a grassy glade, about twenty-five yards in width, lying

between. Over this glade the footpath leads. The Ghoda is about a mile from Numjala's kraal, and just beyond it is the drift over the stream.

'What has the moon to do with it?' I asked.

'That is a hard question. I only know that no horse can be ridden past the Ghoda after sundown when the moon is new.'

'Look here, Numjala,' I said reprovingly, 'a man of your intelligence ought to be ashamed of even pretending to believe such a thing. Why, this is worse than what you told me about the grass not growing at the spot where Ncapayi and his men were killed by the Pondos.'

'Is it?'

(Ncapayi, Great Chief of the Baca tribe, with many hundreds of his followers, was killed in 1845 in a battle fought with the Pondos on the northern bank of the Umzimvubo River, between what is now Mount Frere and the sea.)

'Yes, and nearly as bad as your account of the snow falling on Tshaka's impi and killing hundreds of his soldiers, whilst it fell nowhere else in the neighbourhood.'

'Why should not that be true?'

Fearing that it would be useless to attempt demonstrating to Numjala that, logically, no one is bound to prove a negative, I evaded his question, and said:

'You told me the other day that you believed in witchcraft. Surely you did not mean that?'

'Why not? Did not your great Prophet—every one of whose sayings all you white people believe so thoroughly and follow so carefully'—it will be seen that Numjala can be sarcastic—'believe in evil spirits, and even drive them forth? Is it not this that the witch-doctor claims to do? Did not the Prophet of the Wesleyans believe in witchcraft? Now, if you believe the words of your Prophets about some things, why not about others?'

I was surprised at these words, knowing Numjala to be a heathen, and I suppose I must have shown this, for he added:

'I have talked with the missionaries, or rather they have talked to me. Besides, my brother's son is an evangelist, and he has told me a lot about what is taught in the schools.'

'But, surely, Numjala, your experience must have taught you that witchcraft is all humbug, and that before the English rule, the witch-doctor was simply the instrument of the chief for suppressing people who became too rich or too powerful.'

'The witch-doctor may often be a humbug, and yet it is possible that there may be such a thing as witchcraft. A missionary, to whom I pointed out that some who preached the gospel had been since proved evil men, once said much the same thing to me about religion. I am an old man, and I have learnt many things, and one is this: He who always says of the thing he

does not understand, "This cannot be," is in danger of being put to shame.'

'Well, Numjala, tell me the story about the Ghoda bush, for I am sure there is a story.'

'I will tell it if you stay here to-night.'

'But I must go home.'

'Well then, I will make a bargain with you. You have already passed the Ghoda, and therefore you know the footpath leading to the drift.'

'Yes, I know it well. I travelled it only the day before yesterday.'

'Very well. You will take the pathway to-night, and if you can ride your horse past the Ghoda, well and good—you will go home to your wife. If not, you will return and sleep here. The kid will be roasted, and you shall hear the story. Do you agree?'

'Certainly I do.'

'Just one thing: remember that you are to *ride* past. It is possible, although I think it unlikely, that you might reach the drift if you blindfolded the horse and led him.'

'I quite understand. Good-bye.'

'I will not say "Good-bye." You will return and hear the story.'

As I rode away laughing, I heard Numjala calling out to his son Tantiso, telling him to catch a certain kid, kill it, and prepare it for immediate roasting. My course led down the hillside, and then along the level bottom of the

valley on the left-hand side of which is the Ghoda bush. The stream was on my right, and the pathway on which I was riding ran parallel with it, distant about twenty yards.

As I drew near the Ghoda I felt somewhat creepy. My horse was a steady old stager, not at all given to shying. He went along at a quick amble, and as I neared the fateful spot, I freshened up my courage with the thought that in a few moments I would have crossed the drift, and then the Ghoda and its ghost would be well behind me. My horse was stepping out briskly and without showing the least sign of suspicion, when all at once he gave a loud snort and wheeled sharply to the right, completely unseating me. However, I did not fall off, as I managed to clutch hold of his mane. As I swung back into the saddle, I saw that we had narrowly escaped falling down the steep bank into the stream.

To save my self-respect, I made another attempt to pass, but more or less the same thing happened, except that I kept my seat, and managed to avoid going so near the bank. I then left the horse to himself, and he ambled back to Numjala's kraal. When I dismounted he was wet with perspiration, and trembling violently. I will not say how I felt, but my sensations were not comfortable.

Numjala evinced no surprise, nor did he attempt to triumph over me in any way. Neither

did he (then, or ever) ask me what had happened. He took my return quite as a matter of course.

We sat down to supper. The kid was excellent, and the foaming kourmis from the big calabash equal to champagne. After supper I spread my rug at one side of the fireplace—Numjala unrolled his mat at the other. We lay down and smoked our pipes in silence for some time, and then Numjala told me the following story.

II

'It was many years since I first came to live on this spot. I was then a poor man, although the "great son" of my father, who was a chief of some importance. He died with Ncapayi in the battle on the Umzimvubo, and shortly afterwards all our cattle were swept off. I had then only two wives, and the eldest child by the first wife was a girl whom I called Nomalie. Many daughters have been borne to me since, and my kraal is full of their "lobola" cattle, but the only girl of the lot that I was ever really fond of was Nomalie—perhaps because she was my first child.

'She grew up—tall and straight, with well-formed limbs. I remember that from her birth she had a soft look in her face, and her eyes were very large. She was rather light in colour. It was said that her mother's grandfather was a white man. Her mother's family came from the Amavangwane country, which is on the

sea-coast, and I have been told that long ago a white man came out of the sea and took a woman of the tribe as his wife. One of this man's daughters was the mother of my wife, who was Nomalie's mother. It was strange that my wife showed no trace whatever of white descent, whilst Nomalie most certainly did, both in colour and feature.

'As soon as ever Nomalie reached a marriageable age, many men wanted to marry her, but when the suitors came to "metja" (woo) she would have nothing to do with them. I soon found out the reason of this; she had grown fond of a young man named Xolilizwe, a son of the right-hand house of one of Ncapayi's counsellors, who, like me, had lost all his wealth. Xolilizwe dwelt with his uncle Kwababana—a very old man—over the hill at the back of the cliff facing the Ghoda. He was a few years older than Nomalie, and he often used to stay for weeks at a time here at my kraal. Xolilizwe was all that a young man should be, except that he was poor, and his uncle, old Kwababana, could give him nothing.

'Xolilizwe was brave and strong, and I had gladly given him Nomalie, but you know what we Kafirs are: no man will give his daughter to one who cannot pay "ikazi" (dowry). Besides, no girl would want to marry such a man—no matter how much she liked him—for she would always be known as the woman for whom no

dowry had been paid, and this would be a reproach to her and all her relations.

'Nomalie was very young, and I was so fond of her that I did not want to force her to marry against her will. But seeing how matters stood, I told Xolilizwe that he had better keep away. Shortly after this he disappeared from the neighbourhood.

'In the days I speak of, Lukwazi was the most important man in these parts. Although inferior to me in rank, he was very rich, and Makaula, Ncapayi's successor, had made him chief over the people in this neighbourhood; consequently I was under him. Nearly all my father's people having been killed, the few who remained were placed under Lukwazi. His kraal was the one on the top of the second ridge beyond the Ghoda. No one liked Lukwazi, though many feared him on account of his cunning, and his wealth gave him power. He was a very big man, of a wrathful temper, and they said that though he loved the smell of other men's blood, he feared to smell his own. At the time I speak of he was an elderly man, and had (I think) twelve wives and many children.

'Well, one day Lukwazi called here in passing, and saw Nomalie. About a week afterwards two of his messengers came and said that he wanted her as his wife. I was both glad and sorry. Glad, because I was poor and wanted cattle, and when it is a question of lobola, a

chief gives more than an ordinary man; but sorry because I disliked Lukwazi, and felt uneasy at giving him my favourite daughter. Of course, I could not refuse, I being Lukwazi's man.

'Nomalie cried bitterly, and at first declared that she would never go to him, but I told her that she must, and that I would, if necessary, make her do so. I could not afford to fall out with Lukwazi, my chief, and a powerful, revengeful man. Besides, the girl had to marry some one, and I naturally wanted her to marry him who would pay the most cattle. After a while she ceased to object, but she went about looking so sad that I never liked to see her. She used to come near me, and look into my face, and this made me feel so sorrowful that I tried to avoid her as much as possible. Just before they took her away I was so distressed at the sight of her misery that I could have even then put a stop to the marriage only that I was afraid to make an enemy of Lukwazi.

'At length they came to fetch her away, and I shall never forget the look she gave me over her shoulder whilst being led away. Then I comforted myself with the thought that when she came back after the fifth day, driving the ox for the marriage feast, she would not look so miserable.

'In the middle of the second night after Nomalie had gone I was sleeping in my hut, and I heard some one trying to open the door.]

asked "Who is there?" and a voice (Nomalie's) replied, "It is I, your child." I removed the door-pole, and Nomalie entered. I said, "My child, what is this thing?" but she did not speak. I threw some twigs on the embers, and when they blazed up, what I saw made me burn with wrath. The girl was naked, and her body and limbs were covered with weals and scars where the women had beaten her because she would not allow Lukwazi to approach her.

'She sat down next to the fire and looked at me in silence until I could endure it no longer, so working up a semblance of anger to hide my pity, I said roughly, "Why have you brought disgrace on your house, by leaving your husband? I shall send you back tomorrow!" Instead of replying, she stood up, and taking my large spear from where it was sticking in the roof, she handed it to me. She then knelt down, and placing a hand upon each of her breasts, she drew them apart, and looked me in the face. I knew she meant this to indicate that she wished me to drive the spear into her, rather than send her back. To see if she were in earnest, I lifted the spear as if to strike, still keeping up the semblance of anger—but she just closed her eyes, smiled, and leant slightly towards me. I then saw she was in earnest, so I flung down the spear and said in a kinder voice that she should remain, and that Lukwazi might keep his cattle. When I had said this, she flung herself to the

ground on her face, and wept as though she would die.

'Next day, Lukwazi's messengers came for Nomalie, but I told them they could not have her. Afterwards Lukwazi himself came with ten men armed, and said he would take his wife by force. I stood in front of the door of the hut, leaving Nomalie alone inside, and told Lukwazi that the girl refused to return to him, and that after the way she had been ill-treated, I should not force her to do so. Lukwazi said that the girl was now his wife, that he had married her with my consent, that he had now come to fetch her, and that he meant to have her. Just then I felt something put into my hand from behind, and when I closed my fingers on it I found this thing to be the handle of my big, broad-bladed spear. Then I heard the wicker door of the hut being closed, and the cross-bar being slipped into its place.

'Now when I realized what Nomalie had done thus silently, and of her own accord, my heart filled with pride in my daughter, and I began to answer Lukwazi more boldly. I told him that I knew I had the law on my side—the girl had returned showing marks of ill-treatment, and I was therefore justified in keeping her—at all events until an inquiry had been held. Lukwazi said that, law or no law, he was going to take the girl away then and there, so I told him that I would slay with my spear the first man who

tried to enter the hut. At this, Lukwazi and his followers became very wrathful, and I think they would have attacked me had it not been for what my daughter then did.

'Over the loud voices of the men we heard hers calling Lukwazi by name, and then all ceased speaking for the moment. Lukwazi replied to her, saying, "What is it, my wife?"

' "The door of the hut is fast barred, and you cannot break it down so quickly but that I may set the hut in flames in several places before you enter. I will die in the fire rather than go with you."

'On hearing this, they all looked at one another, and shortly afterwards they moved off, Lukwazi still looking wrathful, and muttering fierce threats against me and my house.

'About a month afterwards Xolilizwe returned. He brought eight head of cattle which he had stolen from the Fingos. He came here and asked me to give him Nomalie as his wife, offering the cattle he had stolen as an instalment of the dowry, the balance of which he would pay later on, when able to do so. I consented, as I wanted to make up to the girl for any previous hardness, so she went as the wife of Xolilizwe to the kraal of his uncle, old Kwababana. There was not much of a marriage feast, for I still feared the anger of Lukwazi, and did not want to annoy him further. I warned Xolilizwe to be careful, as I felt sure

Lukwazi would try and be revenged on some of us—and most probably on him through the witch-doctor. In fact I strongly advised him to take Nomalie away quietly, and go and dwell with our people on the Umzimkulu.

‘It was early in summer when Nomalie went to dwell with Xolilizwe as his wife, and about three months before the feast of the first-fruits (Ukushwama). You know something about what then happens. Each chief sends away by night, and has a pumpkin, a mealie-cob, and a stick of “imfe” (sweet-reed), stolen from the territory of some chief belonging to another tribe. These are mixed with medicines by the witch-doctor, and partaken of by the chief and his family in the calf-kraal before dawn on the morning of the day of the new moon. You have no doubt also heard that when a chief confers the honours of chieftainship upon his “great son”, who is to succeed him, a special Shwama is held, and that on such an occasion the first-fruits have to be mixed by the witch-doctor in the skull of a man who has been killed for the purpose. Many Europeans refuse to believe that this kind of thing still happens; nevertheless it does, and it will happen in spite of all the Government may do so long as the Baca tribe is in existence. Even a Christian chief would require Ukushwama to be performed in respect of his son, or otherwise—as he well knows—the son would never be recognized as legitimately a chief.

'Now the skull used at Ukushwama must be that of a man of a certain rank, and is supposed to be that of an old man; but this is not absolutely indispensable. I have told you that Lukwazi, although a chief, was of low birth. Now, amongst the people in this neighbourhood were very few whose rank was even equal to his own, and therefore when it became known that at the next feast of first-fruits his son Bobozayo was to take the great Shwama, people began to wonder whose skull would be required.

'I thought over the matter myself, and I found that the only three men about here whose skulls would do were Kwababana—Xolilizwe's uncle, Xolilizwe, and myself. I at once made up my mind that Kwababana would be the man, because he was very old, and besides his rank was highest, his father having been the brother of Madikane.

'A short time before the feast, which begins with the new moon in the month which you call February, I went away to the "great place" (residence of the paramount chief of the tribe), intending to return in time for the opening ceremony. When I returned on the second-last day of the old moon, I was quite surprised to hear that Kwababana was quite well.

'As no one had heard of a killing, there was much speculation going on as to where a skull had been obtained; it being usual to kill for this purpose nearly a month before the feast

—although this, again, is not a necessary condition.

‘Well, we all assembled at Lukwazi’s kraal on the last night of the old moon. I had not seen Xolilizwe since my return, and I was surprised at not finding him at Lukwazi’s. Just before daylight the Shwama was administered to Bobozayo in the calf-kraal, and then to the members of his family. Upon two points I kept wondering: one was in connexion with the skull—whose was it, and where had the witch-doctor obtained it? The other was the absence of Xolilizwe—where was he, and what excuse would he give for not being present when the great son of the chief took the Shwama?’

‘We drank beer, and danced, and made merry all the forenoon. I saw a man near me who must have passed Kwababana’s kraal in coming to the feast, and I asked him if he had seen anything of Xolilizwe. He told me he had heard that Xolilizwe was away following the spoor of old Kwababana’s only milking cow, which had been stolen three days previously, and had not returned.

‘Just after the sun had begun to fall, I saw my daughter Nomalie approaching. She walked in amongst the people and straight up to me without saying a word. I shall never forget her face—it was like the face of one that had been dead for several days—all except the eyes, which were full of fire. I knew at once that Xolilizwe was dead.

'She took my hand and silently drew me after her, and thus we walked down the footpath to the drift on the other side of the Ghoda, which you meant to have passed to-night. We crossed the stream, and she led me to the edge of the bush and pointed to something lying just inside the outer fringe of brushwood. I looked, and saw the headless body of Xolilizwe.

'I recognized the body at once. No other man that I knew had such limbs as his. My unhappy daughter's husband had been slain by the thrust of a spear from behind through the left shoulder-blade. I tried to comfort Nomalie, and to get her to speak, but not a word passed her lips. After a while, she motioned me impatiently to leave her, so I went away, meaning to return later. I noticed a digging pick and a stone nearly as large as my head, with a string of twisted bark tied around it, lying close to the body. I knew now in whose skull the first-fruits had been mixed.

'It was still early in the afternoon, so I went home. The day was hot, and I had drunk much beer, so I lay down and slept. I woke just at sundown, and went quickly down to the Ghoda, expecting to find my daughter there. But she was not to be found, neither was the body where I had seen it lying. Just afterwards, however, I found a heap of stones that appeared to have been just before piled over a mound of fresh turned earth. The pick was stuck into the soft

ground next to it, so I inferred that Nomalie had buried the body of her husband and gone home.

'I went up to Kwababana's kraal, but Nomalie was not there. Old Kwababana was healthy in body for so old a man, but he was very childish, and just then the loss of his cow had quite upset him. He could tell me nothing about Nomalie, and when I told him that Xolilizwe was dead, he thought I meant the cow, and began to cry out. When I at last was able to make him understand that it was Xolilizwe I had said was dead, and not the cow, he appeared to be quite comforted. I then went back to my own kraal, but Nomalie was not there, nor had she been seen or heard of. So I ceased searching, thinking that she would be sure to return sooner or later.

'Three days after, a little boy told me that something strange was lying in the pool just above the Ghoda drift. I went down at once to see what it was. The pool is quite shallow, it would hardly drown a man if he were to sit down in it. There I found my daughter's body, with the stone which I had seen lying near Xolilizwe's headless trunk tied to the neck by the string of twisted bark. It was a pity. She would have been the mother of men.

'I dug a hole where she had left the pick stuck in the ground, for I now understood she had meant the placing of the pick thus as a sign that she wished me to bury her next to Xolilizwe.

To-morrow, when you are going home, get off your horse and walk into the Ghoda bush at its lower extremity. You will see a large "umgwenya" (kafir plum) tree just inside on your left, and underneath it two piles of stones. These are the graves. But my story is not yet finished.

'Lukwazi never saw another Shwama. The corn-yield that year was very plentiful, and in the early part of the winter beer flowed like water at every kraal. Lukwazi rode about with his followers from beer-drink to beer-drink, and he was drunk most of his days. On the evening of the fourth new moon after the feast of the first-fruits, Lukwazi and his men rode past here at full gallop. It was not yet dark. The sun had gone down and the moon was just disappearing. The party had been drinking beer for two days at the huts of Vudubele, the last kraal that you passed on your way here this afternoon, and all were mad drunk. They galloped down the valley, Lukwazi leading on a stout little grey stallion. He was beating his horse and yelling, and one blow made the horse swerve out of the path. There was an old ant-bear hole hidden in the grass, into which the horse trod, and falling, rolled over on its rider. Lukwazi lay quite still. His neck was broken.

'Since then, no horse will ever pass the Ghoda bush between sunset and sunrise when the moon is new.'

Next morning I dismounted at the Ghoda, and walked into the forest. I found the large umgwenya tree without any difficulty, and underneath it were the two piles of stones close together. They were much overgrown with ferns and creepers. A large bush-buck leaped up and crashed through the undergrowth. His doe followed immediately afterwards, passing so close that I could see the dew-drops glistening on her red, dappled flank.

H. G. WELLS

POLLOCK AND THE PORROH MAN

1897

It was in a swampy village on the lagoon river behind the Turner Peninsula that Pollock's first encounter with the Porroh man occurred. The women of that country are famous for their good looks—they are Gallinas with a dash of European blood that dates from the days of Vasco da Gama and the English slave-traders, and the Porroh man, too, was possibly inspired by a faint Caucasian taint in his composition. (It's a curious thing to think that some of us may have distant cousins eating men on Sherboro Island or raiding with the Sofas.) At any rate, the Porroh man stabbed the woman to the heart as though he had been a mere low-class Italian, and very narrowly missed Pollock. But Pollock, using his revolver to parry the lightning stab which was aimed at his deltoid muscle, sent the iron dagger flying, and, firing, hit the man in the hand.

He fired again and missed, knocking a sudden window out of the wall of the hut. The Porroh man stooped in the doorway, glancing under his arm at Pollock. Pollock caught a glimpse of his inverted face in the sunlight, and then the Englishman was alone, sick and trembling with

the excitement of the affair, in the twilight of the place. It had all happened in less time than it takes to read about it.

The woman was quite dead, and having ascertained this, Pollock went to the entrance of the hut and looked out. Things outside were dazzling bright. Half a dozen of the porters of the expedition were standing up in a group near the green huts they occupied, and staring towards him, wondering what the shots might signify. Behind the little group of men was the broad stretch of black fetid mud by the river, a green carpet of rafts of papyrus and water-grass, and then the leaden water. The mangroves beyond the stream loomed indistinctly through the blue haze. There were no signs of excitement in the squat village, whose fence was just visible above the cane-grass.

Pollock came out of the hut cautiously and walked towards the river, looking over his shoulder at intervals. But the Porroh man had vanished. Pollock clutched his revolver nervously in his hand.

One of his men came to meet him, and as he came, pointed to the bushes behind the hut in which the Porroh man had disappeared. Pollock had an irritating persuasion of having made an absolute fool of himself; he felt bitter, savage, at the turn things had taken. At the same time, he would have to tell Waterhouse—the moral, exemplary, cautious Waterhouse—who would

inevitably take the matter seriously. Pollock cursed bitterly at his luck, at Waterhouse, and especially at the West Coast of Africa. He felt consummately sick of the expedition. And in the back of his mind all the time was a speculative doubt where precisely within the visible horizon the Porroh man might be.

It is perhaps rather shocking, but he was not at all upset by the murder that had just happened. He had seen so much brutality during the last three months, so many dead women, burnt huts, drying skeletons, up the Kittam River in the wake of the Sofa cavalry, that his senses were blunted. What disturbed him was the persuasion that this business was only beginning.

He swore savagely at the black, who ventured to ask a question, and went on into the tent under the orange-trees where Waterhouse was lying, feeling exasperatingly like a boy going into the headmaster's study.

Waterhouse was still sleeping off the effects of his last dose of chlorodyne, and Pollock sat down on a packing-case beside him, and, lighting his pipe, waited for him to awake. About him were scattered the pots and weapons Waterhouse had collected from the Mendi people, and which he had been repacking for the canoe voyage to Julyma.

Presently Waterhouse woke up, and after udicial stretching, decided he was all right again. Pollock got him some tea. Over the tea

the incidents of the afternoon were described by Pollock, after some preliminary beating about the bush. Waterhouse took the matter even more seriously than Pollock had anticipated. He did not simply disapprove, he scolded, he insulted.

'You're one of those infernal fools who think a black man isn't a human being,' he said. 'I can't be ill a day without you must get into some dirty scrape or other. This is the third time in a month that you have come crossways-on with a native, and this time you're in for it with a vengeance. Porroh, too! They're down upon you enough as it is, about that idol you wrote your silly name on. And they're the most vindictive devils on earth! You make a man ashamed of civilization. To think you come of a decent family! If ever I cumber myself up with a vicious, stupid young lout like you again'—

'Steady on, now,' snarled Pollock, in the tone that always exasperated Waterhouse; 'stead on.'

At that Waterhouse became speechless. He jumped to his feet.

'Look here, Pollock,' he said, after a struggle to control his breath. 'You must go home. I won't have you any longer. I'm ill enough as it is through you'—

'Keep your hair on,' said Pollock, staring in front of him. 'I'm ready enough to go.'

Waterhouse became calmer again. He sa

down on the camp-stool. 'Very well,' he said. 'I don't want a row, Pollock, you know, but it's confoundedly annoying to have one's plans put out by this kind of thing. I'll come to Sulyma with you, and see you safe aboard'—

'You needn't,' said Pollock. 'I can go alone. From here.'

'Not far,' said Waterhouse. 'You don't understand this Porroh business.'

'How should I know she belonged to a Porroh man?' said Pollock bitterly.

'Well, she did,' said Waterhouse: 'and you can't undo the thing. Go alone, indeed! I wonder what they'd do to you. You don't seem to understand that this Porroh hokey-pokey rules this country, is its law, religion, constitution, medicine, magic. . . . They appoint the chiefs. The Inquisition, at its best, couldn't hold a candle to these chaps. He will probably set Awajale, the chief here, on to us. It's lucky our porters are Mendis. We shall have to shift this little settlement of ours. . . . Confound you, Pollock! And of course, you must go and miss him.'

He thought, and his thoughts seemed disagreeable. Presently he stood up and took his rifle. 'I'd keep close for a bit, if I were you,' he said, over his shoulder, as he went out. 'I'm going out to see what I can find out about it.'

Pollock remained sitting in the tent, meditating. 'I was meant for a civilized life,' he said to

himself, regretfully, as he filled his pipe. 'The sooner I get back to London or Paris the better for me.'

His eye fell on the sealed case in which Waterhouse had put the featherless poisoned arrows they had bought in the Mendi country. 'I wish I had hit the beggar somewhere vital,' said Pollock viciously.

Waterhouse came back after a long interval. He was not communicative, though Pollock asked him questions enough. The Porroh man, it seems, was a prominent member of that mystical society. The village was interested, but not threatening. No doubt the witch-doctor had gone into the bush. He was a great witch-doctor. 'Of course, he's up to something,' said Waterhouse, and became silent.

'But what can he do?' asked Pollock, unheeded.

'I must get you out of this. There's something brewing, or things would not be so quiet,' said Waterhouse, after a gap of silence. Pollock wanted to know what the brew might be. 'Dancing in a circle of skulls,' said Waterhouse; 'brewing a stink in a copper pot.' Pollock wanted particulars. Waterhouse was vague, Pollock pressing. At last Waterhouse lost his temper. 'How the devil should I know?' he said to Pollock's twentieth inquiry what the Porroh man would do. 'He tried to kill you off-hand in the hut. *Now*, I fancy he will try something more!

elaborate. But you'll see fast enough. I don't want to help unnerve you. It's probably all nonsense.'

That night, as they were sitting at their fire, Pollock again tried to draw Waterhouse out on the subject of Porroh methods. 'Better get to sleep,' said Waterhouse, when Pollock's bent became apparent; 'we start early to-morrow. You may want all your nerve about you.'

'But what line will he take?'

'Can't say. They're versatile people. They know a lot of rum dodges. You'd better get that copper devil, Shakespear, to talk.'

There was a flash and a heavy bang out of the darkness behind the huts, and a clay bullet came whistling close to Pollock's head. This, at least, was crude enough. The blacks and half-breeds sitting and yarning round their own fire jumped up, and some one fired into the dark.

'Better go into one of the huts,' said Waterhouse quietly, still sitting unmoved.

Pollock stood up by the fire and drew his revolver. Fighting, at least, he was not afraid of. But a man in the dark is in the best of armour. Realizing the wisdom of Waterhouse's advice, Pollock went into the tent and lay down there.

What little sleep he had was disturbed by dreams, variegated dreams, but chiefly of the Porroh man's face, upside down, as he went out of the hut, and looked up under his arm. It was odd that this transitory impression should have

stuck so firmly in Pollock's memory. Moreover, he was troubled by queer pains in his limbs.

In the white haze of the early morning, as they were loading the canoes, a barbed arrow suddenly appeared quivering in the ground close to Pollock's foot. The boys made a perfunctory effort to clear out the thicket, but it led to no capture.

After these two occurrences, there was a disposition on the part of the expedition to leave Pollock to himself, and Pollock became, for the first time in his life, anxious to mingle with blacks. Waterhouse took one canoe, and Pollock, in spite of a friendly desire to chat with Waterhouse, had to take the other. He was left all alone in the front part of the canoe, and he had the greatest trouble to make the men—who did not love him—keep to the middle of the river, a clear hundred yards or more from either shore. However, he made Shakespear, the Freetown half-breed, come up to his own end of the canoe and tell him about Porroh, which Shakespear, failing in his attempts to leave Pollock alone, presently did with considerable freedom and gusto.

The day passed. The canoe glided swiftly along the ribbon of lagoon water, between the drift of water-figs, fallen trees, papyrus, and palm-wine palms, and with the dark mangrove swamp to the left, through which one could hear now and then the roar of the Atlantic surf.

Shakespear told in his soft, blurred English of how the Porroh could cast spells; how men withered up under their malice; how they could send dreams and devils; how they tormented and killed the sons of Ijibu; how they kidnapped a white trader from Sulyma who had maltreated one of the sect, and how his body looked when it was found. And Pollock after each narrative cursed under his breath at the want of missionary enterprise that allowed such things to be, and at the inert British Government that ruled over this dark heathendom of Sierra Leone. In the evening they came to the Kasi Lake, and sent a score of crocodiles lumbering off the island on which the expedition camped for the night.

The next day they reached Sulyma, and smelt the sea breeze, but Pollock had to put up there for five days before he could get on to Freetown. Waterhouse, considering him to be comparatively safe here, and within the pale of Freetown influence, left him and went back with the expedition to Gbemma, and Pollock became very friendly with Perera, the only resident white trader at Sulyma—so friendly, indeed, that he went about with him everywhere. Perera was a little Portuguese Jew, who had lived in England, and he appreciated the Englishman's friendliness as a great compliment.

For two days nothing happened out of the ordinary; for the most part Pollock and Perera played Nap—the only game they had in common

—and Pollock got into debt. Then, on the second evening, Pollock had a disagreeable intimation of the arrival of the Porroh man in Sulyma by getting a flesh-wound in the shoulder from a lump of filed iron. It was a long shot, and the missile had nearly spent its force when it hit him. Still it conveyed its message plainly enough. Pollock sat up in his hammock, revolver in hand, all that night, and next morning confided, to some extent, in the Anglo-Portuguese.

Perera took the matter seriously. He knew the local customs pretty thoroughly. 'It is a personal question, you must know. It is revenge. And of course he is hurried by your leaving de country. None of de natives or half-breeds will interfere wid him very much—unless you make it wort deir while. If you come upon him suddenly, you might shoot him. But den he might shoot you.

'Den dere's dis—infernal magic,' said Perera. 'Of course, I don't believe in it—superstition—but still it's not nice to tink dat wherever you are, dere is a black man, who spends a moonlight night now and den a-dancing about a fire to send you bad dreams. . . . Had any bad dreams?'

'Rather,' said Pollock. 'I keep on seeing the beggar's head upside down grinning at me and showing all his teeth as he did in the hut, and coming close up to me, and then going ever so

far off, and coming back. It's nothing to be afraid of, but somehow it simply paralyses me with terror in my sleep. Queer things—dreams. I know it's a dream all the time, and I can't wake up from it.'

'It's probably only fancy,' said Perera. 'Den my niggers say Porroh men can send snakes. Seen any snakes lately?'

'Only one. I killed him this morning, on the floor near my hammock. Almost trod on him as I got up.'

'Ah!' said Perera, and then, reassuringly, 'Of course it is a—coincidence. Still I would keep my eyes open. Den dere's pains in de bones.'

'I thought they were due to miasma,' said Pollock.

'Probably dey are. When did dey begin?'

Then Pollock remembered that he first noticed them the night after the fight in the hut. 'It's my opinion he don't want to kill you,' said Perera—'at least not yet. I've heard deir idea is to scare and worry a man wid deir spells, and narrow misses, and rheumatic pains, and bad dreams, and all dat, until he's sick of life. Of course, it's all talk, you know. You mustn't worry about it. . . . But I wonder what he'll be up to next.'

'I shall have to be up to something first,' said Pollock, staring gloomily at the greasy cards that Perera was putting on the table. 'It don't suit my dignity to be followed about, and shot

at, and blighted in this way. I wonder if Porroh hokey-pokey upsets your luck at cards.'

He looked at Perera suspiciously.

'Very likely it does,' said Perera warmly, shuffling. 'Dey are wonderful people.'

That afternoon Pollock killed two snakes in his hammock, and there was also an extraordinary increase in the number of red ants that swarmed over the place; and these annoyances put him in a fit temper to talk over business with a certain Mendi rough he had interviewed before. The Mendi rough showed Pollock a little iron dagger, and demonstrated where one struck in the neck, in a way that made Pollock shiver, and in return for certain considerations Pollock promised him a double-barrelled gun with an ornamental lock.

In the evening, as Pollock and Perera were playing cards, the Mendi rough came in through the doorway, carrying something in a blood-soaked piece of native cloth.

'Not here!' said Pollock very hurriedly. 'Not here!'

But he was not quick enough to prevent the man, who was anxious to get to Pollock's side of the bargain, from opening the cloth and throwing the head of the Porroh man upon the table. It bounded from there on to the floor, leaving a red trail on the cards, and rolled into a corner, where it came to rest upside down, but glaring hard at Pollock.

Perera jumped up as the thing fell among the cards, and began in his excitement to gabble in Portuguese. The Mendi was bowing, with the red cloth in his hand. 'De gun!' he cried. Pollock stared back at the head in the corner. It bore exactly the expression it had in his dreams. Something seemed to snap in his own brain as he looked at it.

Then Perera found his English again.

'You got him killed?' he said. 'You did not kill him yourself?'

'Why should I?' said Pollock.

'But he will not be able to take it off now!'

'Take *what* off?' said Pollock.

'And all dese cards are spoiled!'

'*What* do you mean by taking off?' said Pollock.

'You must send me a new pack from Freetown. You can buy dem dere.'

'But—"take it off"?''

'It is only superstition. I forgot. De niggers say dat if de witches—he was a witch— But it is rubbish. . . . You must make de Porroh man take it off, or kill him yourself. . . . It is very silly.'

Pollock swore under his breath, still staring hard at the head in the corner.

'I can't stand that glare,' he said. Then suddenly he rushed at the thing and kicked it. It rolled some yards or so, and came to rest in the same position as before, upside down, and looking at him.

'He is ugly,' said the Anglo-Portuguese. 'Very ugly. Dey do it on deir faces with little knives.'

Pollock would have kicked the head again, but the Mendi man touched him on the arm. 'De gun?' he said, looking nervously at the head.

'Two—if you take that beastly thing away,' said Pollock.

The Mendi shook his head, and intimated that he only wanted one gun now due to him, and for which he would be obliged. Pollock found neither cajolery nor bullying any good with him. Perera had a gun to sell (at a profit of three hundred per cent.), and with that the man presently departed. Then Pollock's eyes, against his will, were recalled to the thing on the floor.

'It is funny dat his head keeps upside down,' said Perera, with an uneasy laugh. 'His brains must be heavy, like de weight in de little images one sees dat keep always upright wid lead in dem. You will take him wiv you when you go presently. You might take him now. De cards are all spoilt. Dere is a man sell dem in Free-town. De room is in a filthy mess as it is. You should have killed him yourself.'

Pollock pulled himself together, and went and picked up the head. He would hang it up by the lamp-hook in the middle of the ceiling of his room, and dig a grave for it at once. He was under the impression that he hung it up by the hair, but that must have been wrong, for when

he returned for it, it was hanging by the neck upside down.

He buried it before sunset on the north side of the shed he occupied, so that he should not have to pass the grave after dark when he was returning from Perera's. He killed two snakes before he went to sleep. In the darkest part of the night he awoke with a start, and heard a pattering sound and something scraping on the floor. He sat up noiselessly, and felt under his pillow for his revolver. A mumbling growl followed, and Pollock fired at the sound. There was a yelp, and something dark passed for a moment across the hazy blue of the doorway. 'A dog!' said Pollock, lying down again.

In the early dawn he awoke again with a peculiar sense of unrest. The vague pain in his bones had returned. For some time he lay watching the red ants that were swarming over the ceiling, and then, as the light grew brighter, he looked over the edge of his hammock and saw something dark on the floor. He gave such a violent start that the hammock overset and flung him out.

He found himself lying, perhaps, a yard away from the head of the Porroh man. It had been disinterred by the dog, and the nose was grievously battered. Ants and flies swarmed over it. By an odd coincidence, it was still upside down, and with the same diabolical expression in the inverted eyes.

Pollock sat paralysed, and stared at the horror for some time. Then he got up and walked round it—giving it a wide berth—and out of the shed. The clear light of the sunrise, the living stir of vegetation before the breath of the dying land-breeze, and the empty grave with the marks of the dog's paws, lightened the weight upon his mind a little.

He told Perera of the business as though it was a jest—a jest to be told with white lips. 'You should not have frighten de dog,' said Perera, with poorly simulated hilarity.

The next two days, until the steamer came, were spent by Pollock in making a more effectual disposition of his possession. Overcoming his aversion to handling the thing, he went down to the river mouth and threw it into the seawater, but by some miracle it escaped the crocodiles, and was cast up by the tide on the mud a little way up the river, to be found by an intelligent Arab half-breed, and offered for sale to Pollock and Perera as a curiosity, just on the edge of night. The native hung about in the brief twilight, making lower and lower offers, and at last, getting scared in some way by the evident dread these wise white men had for the thing, went off, and, passing Pollock's shed, threw his burden in there for Pollock to discover in the morning.

At this Pollock got into a kind of frenzy. He would burn the thing. He went out straightway

into the dawn, and had constructed a big pyre of brushwood before the heat of the day. He was interrupted by the hooter of the little paddle steamer from Monrovia to Bathurst, which was coming through the gap in the bar. 'Thank Heaven!' said Pollock, with infinite piety, when the meaning of the sound dawned upon him. With trembling hands he lit his pile of wood hastily, threw the head upon it, and went away to pack his portmanteau and make his adieux to Perera.

That afternoon, with a sense of infinite relief, Pollock watched the flat swampy foreshore of Sulyma grow small in the distance. The gap in the long line of white surge became narrower and narrower. It seemed to be closing in and cutting him off from his trouble. The feeling of dread and worry began to slip from him bit by bit. At Sulyma belief in Porroh malignity and Porroh magic had been in the air, his sense of Porroh had been vast, pervading, threatening, dreadful. Now manifestly the domain of Porroh was only a little place, a little black band between the sea and the blue cloudy Mendi uplands.

'Good-bye, Porroh!' said Pollock. 'Good-bye—certainly not *au revoir*.'

The captain of the steamer came and leant over the rail beside him, and wished him good-evening, and spat at the froth of the wake in token of friendly ease.

'I picked up a rummy curio on the beach this go,' said the captain. 'It's a thing I never saw done this side of Indy before.'

'What might that be?' said Pollock.

'Pickled 'ed,' said the captain.

'*What!*' said Pollock.

'Ed—smoked. 'Ed of one of these Porroh chaps, all ornamented with knife-cuts. Why! What's up? Nothing? I shouldn't have took you for a nervous chap. Green in the face. By gosh! you're a bad sailor. All right, eh? Lord, how funny you went! . . . Well, this 'ed I was telling you of is a bit rum in a way. I've got it, along with some snakes, in a jar of spirit in my cabin what I keeps for such curios, and I'm hanged if it don't float upsy down. Hullo!'

Pollock had given an incoherent cry, and had his hands in his hair. He ran towards the paddle-boxes with a half-formed idea of jumping into the sea, and then he realized his position and turned back towards the captain.

'Here!' said the captain. 'Jack Philips, just keep him off me! Stand off! No nearer, mister! What's the matter with you? Are you mad?'

Pollock put his hand to his head. It was no good explaining. 'I believe I am pretty nearly mad at times,' he said. 'It's a pain I have here. Comes suddenly. You'll excuse me, I hope.'

He was white and in a perspiration. He saw suddenly very clearly all the danger he ran of having his sanity doubted. He forced himself to

restore the captain's confidence, by answering his sympathetic inquiries, noting his suggestions, even trying a spoonful of neat brandy in his cheek, and, that matter settled, asking a number of questions about the captain's private trade in curiosities. The captain described the head in detail. All the while Pollock was struggling to keep under a preposterous persuasion that the ship was as transparent as glass, and that he could distinctly see the inverted face looking at him from the cabin beneath his feet.

Pollock had a worse time almost on the steamer than he had at Sulyma. All day he had to control himself in spite of his intense perception of the imminent presence of that horrible head that was overshadowing his mind. At night his old nightmare returned, until, with a violent effort, he would force himself awake, rigid with the horror of it, and with the ghost of a hoarse scream in his throat.

He left the actual head behind at Bathurst, where he changed ship for Teneriffe, but not his dreams nor the dull ache in his bones. At Teneriffe Pollock transferred to a Cape liner, but the head followed him. He gambled, he tried chess, he even read books, but he knew the danger of drink. Yet whenever a round black shadow, a round black object came into his range, there he looked for the head, and—saw it. He knew clearly enough that his imagination was growing traitor to him, and yet at times it

seemed the ship he sailed in, his fellow-passengers, the sailors, the wide sea, was all part of a filmy phantasmagoria that hung, scarcely veiling it, between him and a horrible real world. Then the Porroh man, thrusting his diabolical face through that curtain, was the one real and undeniable thing. At that he would get up and touch things, taste something, gnaw something, burn his hand with a match, or run a needle into himself.

So, struggling grimly and silently with his excited imagination, Pollock reached England. He landed at Southampton, and went on straight from Waterloo to his banker's in Cornhill in a cab. There he transacted some business with the manager in a private room, and all the while the head hung like an ornament under the black marble mantel and dripped upon the fender. He could hear the drops fall, and see the red on the fender.

'A pretty fern,' said the manager, following his eyes. 'But it makes the fender rusty.'

'Very,' said Pollock; 'a *very* pretty fern. And that reminds me. Can you recommend me a physician for mind troubles? I've got a little—what is it?—hallucination.'

The head laughed savagely, wildly. Pollock was surprised the manager did not notice it. But the manager only stared at his face.

With the address of a doctor, Pollock presently emerged in Cornhill. There was no cab in sight,

and so he went on down to the western end of the street, and essayed the crossing opposite the Mansion House. The crossing is hardly easy even for the expert Londoner; cabs, vans, carriages, mail-carts, omnibuses go by in one incessant stream; to any one fresh from the malarious solitudes of Sierra Leone it is a boiling, maddening confusion. But when an inverted head suddenly comes bouncing, like an india-rubber ball, between your legs, leaving distinct smears of blood every time it touches the ground, you can scarcely hope to avoid an accident. Pollock lifted his feet convulsively to avoid it, and then kicked at the thing furiously. Then something hit him violently in the back, and a hot pain ran up his arm.

He had been hit by the pole of an omnibus, and three of the fingers of his left hand smashed by the hoof of one of the horses—the very fingers, as it happened, that he shot from the Porroh man. They pulled him out from between the horses' legs, and found the address of the physican in his crushed hand.

For a couple of days Pollock's sensations were full of the sweet, pungent smell of chloroform, of painful operations that caused him no pain, of lying still and being given food and drink. Then he had a slight fever, and was very thirsty, and his old nightmare came back. It was only when it returned that he noticed it had left him for a day.

'If my skull had been smashed instead of my fingers, it might have gone altogether,' said Pollock, staring thoughtfully at the dark cushion that had taken on for the time the shape of the head.

Pollock at the first opportunity told the physician of his mind trouble. He knew clearly that he must go mad unless something should intervene to save him. He explained that he had witnessed a decapitation in Dahomey, and was haunted by one of the heads. Naturally, he did not care to state the actual facts. The physician looked grave.

Presently he spoke hesitatingly. 'As a child, did you get very much religious training?'

'Very little,' said Pollock.

A shade passed over the physician's face. 'I don't know if you have heard of the miraculous cures—it may be, of course, they are not miraculous—at Lourdes.'

'Faith-healing will hardly suit me, I am afraid,' said Pollock, with his eye on the dark cushion.

The head distorted its scarred features in an abominable grimace. The physician went upon a new track. 'It's all imagination,' he said, speaking with sudden briskness. 'A fair case for faith-healing, anyhow. Your nervous system has run down, you're in that twilight state of health when the bogies come easiest. The strong impression was too much for you. I must make you up a little mixture that will strengthen your

nervous system—especially your brain. And you must take exercise.’

‘I’m no good for faith-healing,’ said Pollock.

‘And therefore we must restore tone. Go in search of stimulating air—Scotland, Norway, the Alps’—

‘Jericho, if you like,’ said Pollock—‘where Naaman went.’

However, so soon as his fingers would let him, Pollock made a gallant attempt to follow out the doctor’s suggestion. It was now November. He tried football, but to Pollock the game consisted in kicking a furious inverted head about a field. He was no good at the game. He kicked blindly, with a kind of horror, and when they put him back into goal, and the ball came swooping down upon him, he suddenly yelled and got out of its way. The discreditable stories that had driven him from England to wander in the tropics shut him off from any but men’s society, and now his increasingly strange behaviour made even his men friends avoid him. The thing was no longer a thing of the eye merely; it gibbered at him, spoke to him. A horrible fear came upon him that presently, when he took hold of the apparition, it would no longer become some mere article of furniture, but would *feel* like a real dissevered head. Alone, he would curse at the thing, defy it, entreat it; once or twice, in spite of his grim self-control, he addressed it in the presence of others. He felt

the growing suspicion in the eyes of the people that watched him—his landlady, the servant, his man.

One day early in December his cousin Arnold—his next of kin—came to see him and draw him out, and watch his sunken yellow face with narrow eager eyes. And it seemed to Pollock that the hat his cousin carried in his hand was no hat at all, but a Gorgon head that glared at him upside down, and fought with its eyes against his reason. However, he was still resolute to see the matter out. He got a bicycle, and, riding over the frosty road from Wandsworth to Kingston, found the thing rolling along at his side, and leaving a dark trail behind it. He set his teeth and rode faster. Then suddenly, as he came down the hill towards Richmond Park, the apparition rolled in front of him and under his wheel, so quickly that he had no time for thought, and, turning quickly to avoid it, was flung violently against a heap of stones and broke his left wrist.

The end came on Christmas morning. All night he had been in a fever, the bandages encircling his wrist like a band of fire, his dreams more vivid and terrible than ever. In the cold, colourless, uncertain light that came before the sunrise, he sat up in his bed, and saw the head upon the bracket in the place of the bronze jar that had stood there overnight.

‘I know that is a bronze jar,’ he said, with a

chill doubt at his heart. Presently the doubt was irresistible. He got out of bed slowly, shivering, and advanced to the jar with his hand raised. Surely he would see now his imagination had deceived him, recognize the distinctive sheen of bronze. At last, after an age of hesitation, his fingers came down on the patterned cheek of the head. He withdrew them spasmodically. The last stage was reached. His sense of touch had betrayed him.

Trembling, stumbling against the bed, kicking against his shoes with his bare feet, a dark confusion eddying round him, he groped his way to the dressing-table, took his razor from the drawer, and sat on the bed with this in his hand. In the looking-glass he saw his own face, colourless, haggard, full of the ultimate bitterness of despair.

He beheld in swift succession the incidents in the brief tale of his experience. His wretched home, his still more wretched schooldays, the years of vicious life he had led since then, one act of selfish dishonour leading to another; it was all clear and pitiless now, all its squalid folly, in the cold light of the dawn. He came to the hut, to the fight with the Porroh man, to the retreat down the river to Sulyma, to the Mendi assassin and his red parcel, to his frantic endeavours to destroy the head, to the growth of his hallucination. It was a hallucination! He *knew* it was. A hallucination merely. For a

moment he snatched at hope. He looked away from the glass, and on the bracket, the inverted head grinned and grimaced at him. . . . With the stiff fingers of his bandaged hand he felt at his neck for the throb of his arteries. The morning was very cold, the steel blade felt like ice.

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

THE GOLD FISH

1900

OUTSIDE the little straw-thatched *café* in a small courtyard trellised with vines, before a miniature table painted in red and blue, and upon which stood a dome-shaped pewter teapot and a painted glass half filled with mint, sat Amarabat, resting and smoking hemp. He was of those whom Allah in his mercy (or because man in the Blad-Allah has made no railways) has ordained to run. Set upon the road, his shoes pulled up, his waistband tightened, in his hand a staff, a palm-leaf wallet at his back, and in it bread, some hemp, a match or two (known to him as *el spiritus*), and a letter to take anywhere, crossing the plains, fording the streams, struggling along the mountain-paths, sleeping but fitfully, a burning rope steeped in saltpetre fastened to his foot, he trotted day and night—untiring as a camel, faithful as a dog. In Rabat as he sat dozing, watching the greenish smoke curl upwards from his hemp pipe, word came to him from the Khalifa of the town. So Amarabat rose, paid for his tea with half a handful of defaced and greasy copper coins, and took his way towards the white palace with the crenelated walls, which on the cliff, hanging

above the roaring tide-rip, just inside the bar of the great river, looks at Salee. Around the horseshoe archway of the gate stood soldiers, wild, fierce-eyed, armed to the teeth, descendants, most of them, of the famed warriors whom Sultan Muley Ismail (may God have pardoned him!) bred for his service, after the fashion of the Carlylean hero Frederic; and Amarabat walked through them, not aggressively, but with the staring eyes of a confirmed hemp-smoker, with the long stride of one who knows that he is born to run, and the assurance of a man who waits upon his lord. Some time he waited whilst the Khalifa dispensed what he thought justice, chattered with Jewish pedlars for cheap European goods, gossiped with friends, looked at the antics of a dwarf, or priced a Georgian or Circassian girl brought with more care than glass by some rich merchant from the East. At last Amarabat stood in the presence, and the Khalifa, sitting upon a pile of cushions playing with a Waterbury watch, a pistol and a Koran by his side, addressed him thus:—

‘Amarabat, son of Bjorma, my purpose is to send thee to Taflet, where our liege lord the Sultan lies with his camp. Look upon this glass bowl made by the Kaffir, but clear as is the crystal of the rock; see how the light falls on the water, and the shifting colours that it makes, as when the Bride of the Rain stands in the heavens, after a shower in spring. Inside are seven gold

fish, each scale as bright as letters in an Indian book. The Christian from whom I bought them said originally they came from the Far East where the Djin-descended Jawi live, the little yellow people of the faith. That may be, but as they are, they are a gift for kings. Therefore, take thou the bowl. Take it with care, and bear it as it were thy life. Stay not, but in an hour start from the town. Delay not on the road, be careful of the fish, change not their water at the muddy pool where tortoises bask in the sunshine, but at running brooks; talk not to friends, look not upon the face of woman by the way, although she were as a gazelle, or as the maiden whom when she walked through the fields the sheep stopped feeding to admire. Stop not, but run through day and night, pass through the Atlas at the Glai; beware of frost, cover the bowl with thine own haik; upon the other side shield me the bowl from the Saharan sun, and drink not of the water if thou pass a day athirst when toiling through the sand. Break not the bowl, and see the fish arrive in Tafilet, and then present them, with this letter, to our lord. Allah be with you, and his Prophet; go, and above all things see thou breakest not the bowl.' And Amarabat, after the manner of his kind, taking the bowl of gold fish, placed one hand upon his heart and said: 'Inshallah, it shall be as thou hast said. God gives the feet and lungs. He also gives the luck upon the road.'

So he passed out under the horseshoe arch, holding the bowl almost at arm's length so as not to touch his legs, and with the palmetto string by which he carried it, bound round with rags. The soldiers looked at him, but spoke not, and their eyes seemed to see far away, and to pass over all in the middle distance, though no doubt they marked the smallest detail of his gait and dress. He passed between the horses of the guard all standing nodding under the fierce sun, the reins tied to the cantles of their high red saddles, a boy in charge of every two or three: he passed beside the camels resting by the well, the donkeys standing dejected by the firewood they had brought: passed women, veiled white figures going to the baths; and passing underneath the lofty gateway of the town, exchanged a greeting with the half-mad, half-religious beggar just outside the walls, and then emerged upon the sandy road, between the aloe hedges, which skirts along the sea. So as he walked, little by little he fell into his stride; then got his second wind, and smoking now and then a pipe of hemp, began, as Arabs say, to eat the miles, his eyes fixed on the horizon, his stick stuck down between his shirt and back, the knob protruding over the left shoulder like the hilt of a two-handed sword. And still he held the precious bowl from Franquestan in which the golden fish swam to and fro, diving and circling in the sunlight, or flapped their tails to steady them-

selves as the water danced with the motion of his steps. Never before in his experience had he been charged with such a mission, never before been sent to stand before Allah's vicegerent upon earth. But still the strangeness of his business was what preoccupied him most. The fish like molten gold, the water to be changed only at running streams, the fish to be preserved from frost and sun; and then the bowl: had not the Khalifa said at the last, 'Beware, break not the bowl'? So it appeared to him that most undoubtedly a charm was in the fish and in the bowl, for who sends common fish on such a journey through the land? Then he resolved at any hazard to bring them safe and keep the bowl intact, and trotting onward, smoked his hemp, and wondered why he of all men should have had the luck to bear the precious gift. He knew he kept his law, at least as far as a poor man can keep it, prayed when he thought of prayer, or was assailed by terror in the night alone upon the plains; fasted in Ramadan, although most of his life was one continual fast; drank of the shameful but seldom, and on the sly, so as to give offence to no believer; and seldom looked upon the face of the strange women, Daughters of the Illegitimate, whom Sidna Mohammed himself has said, avoid. But all these things he knew were done by many of the faithful, and so he did not set himself up as of exceeding virtue, but rather left the praise to God, who helped

his slave with strength to keep his law. Then left off thinking, judging the matter was ordained, and trotted, trotted over the burning plains, the gold fish dancing in the water as the miles melted and passed away.

Duar and Kasbah, castles of the Caid, Arabs' black tents, suddra zaribas, camels grazing—antediluvian in appearance—on the little hills, the muddy streams edged all along the banks with oleanders, the solitary horsemen holding their long and brass-hooped guns like spears, the white-robed noiseless-footed travellers on the roads, the chattering storks upon the village mosques, the cow-birds sitting on the cattle in the fields—he saw, but marked not, as he trotted on. Day faded into night, no twilight intervening, and the stars shone out, Soheil and Rigel with Betelgeuse and Aldebaran, and the three bright lamps which the cursed Christians know as the Three Maries—called, he supposed, after the mother of their Prophet; and still he trotted on. Then by the side of a lone palm-tree springing up from a cleft in a tall rock, an island on the plain, he stopped to pray; and sleeping, slept but fitfully, the strangeness of the business making him wonder; and he who cavils over matters in the night can never rest, for thus the jackal and the hyena pass their nights talking and reasoning about the thoughts which fill their minds when men lie with their faces covered in their haiks, and after prayer sleep.

Rising after an hour or two and going to the nearest stream, he changed the water of his fish, leaving a little in the bottom of the bowl, and dipping with his brass drinking-cup into the stream for fear of accidents. He passed the Kasbah of el Daudi, passed the land of the Rahamna, accursed folk always in 'siba', saw the great snowy wall of Atlas rise, skirted Marakesh, the Kutubieh, rising first from the plain and sinking last from sight as he approached the mountains and left the great white city sleeping in the plain.

Little by little the country altered as he ran: cool streams for muddy rivers, groves of almond-trees, ashes and elms, with grape-vines binding them together as the liana binds the canela and the urunday in the dark forests of Brazil and Paraguay. At midday, when the sun was at its height, when locusts, whirring through the air, sank in the dust as flying fish sink in the waves, when palm-trees seem to nod their heads, and lizards are abroad drinking the heat and basking in the rays, when the dry air shimmers, and sparks appear to dance before the traveller's eye, and a thin, reddish dust lies on the leaves, on clothes of men, and upon every hair of horses' coats, he reached a spring. A river springing from a rock, or issuing after running underground had formed a little pond. Around the edge grew bulrushes, great catmace, water-soldiers, tall arums, and metallic-looking sedge-grass, which

gave an air as of an outpost of the tropics lost in the desert sand. Fish played beneath the rock where the stream issued, flitting to and fro, or hanging suspended for an instant in the clear stream, darted into the dark recesses of the sides; and in the middle of the pond enormous tortoises, horrid and antediluvian-looking, basked with their backs awash or raised their heads to snap at flies, and all about them hung a dark and fetid slime.

A troop of thin brown Arab girls filled their tall amphorae whilst washing in the pond. Placing his bowl of fish upon a jutting rock, the messenger drew near. 'Gazelles,' he said, 'will one of you give me fresh water for the Sultan's golden fish?' Laughing and giggling, the girls drew near, looked at the bowl, had never seen such fish. 'Allah is great; why do you not let them go in the pond and play a little with their brothers?' And Amarabat with a shiver answered, 'Play, let them play! and if they come not back my life will answer for it.' Fear fell upon the girls, and one advancing, holding the skirt of her long shift between her teeth to veil her face, poured water from her amphora upon the fish.

The Amarabat, setting down his precious bowl, drew from his wallet a pomegranate and began to eat, and for a farthing buying a piece of bread from the women, was satisfied, and after smoking, slept, and dreamed he was

approaching Tafilet; he saw the palm-trees rising from the sand; the gardens; all the oasis stretching beyond his sight; at the edge the Sultan's camp, a town of canvas, with the horses, camels, and the mules picketed, all in rows, and in the midst of the great 'duar' the Sultan's tent, like a great palace all of canvas, shining in the sun. All this he saw, and saw himself entering the camp, delivering up his fish, perhaps admitted to the sacred tent, or at least paid by a vizier, as one who has performed his duty well. The slow match blistering his foot, he woke to find himself alone, the 'gazelles' departed, and the sun shining on the bowl, making the fish appear more magical, more wondrous, brighter, and more golden than before.

And so he took his way along the winding Atlas paths, and slept at Demnats, then, entering the mountains, met long trains of travellers going to the south. Passing through groves of chestnuts, walnut-trees, and hedges thick with blackberries and travellers' joy, he climbed through vineyards rich with black Atlas grapes, and passed the flat mud-built Berber villages nestling against the rocks. Eagles flew by, and moufflons gazed at him from the peaks, and from the thickets of lentiscus and dwarf arbutus wild boars appeared, grunted, and slowly walked across the path, and still he climbed, the icy wind from off the snow chilling him in his

cotton shirt, for his warm Tadla haik was long ago wrapped round the bowl to shield the precious fish. Crossing the Wad Ghadat, the current to his chin, his bowl of fish held in one hand, he struggled on. The Berber tribesmen at Tetsula and Zarkten, hard-featured, shaved but for a chin-tuft, and robed in their 'achnifs' with the curious eye woven in the skirt, saw he was a 'rekass', or thought the fish not worth their notice, so gave him a free road. Night caught him at the stone-built, antediluvian-looking Kasbah of the Glaui, perched in the eye of the pass, with the small plain of Teluet two thousand feet below. Off the high snow-peaks came a whistling wind, water froze solid in all the pots and pans, earthenware jars and bottles throughout the castle, save in the bowl which Amarabat, shivering and miserable, wrapped in his haik and held close to the embers, hearing the muezzin at each call to prayers; praying himself to keep awake so that his fish might live. Dawn saw him on the trail, the bowl wrapped in a woollen rag, and the fish fed with bread-crumbs, but himself hungry and his head swimming with want of sleep, with smoking 'kief', and with the bitter wind which from El Tisi N'Glaui flagellates the road. Right through the valley of Teluet he still kept on, and day and night still trotting, trotting on, changing his bowl almost instinctively from hand to hand, a broad leaf floating on the top to keep the water still, he

left Agurzga, with its twin castles, Ghresat and Dads, behind. Then rapidly descending, in a day reached an oasis between Todghra and Ferkla, and rested at a village for the night. Sheltered by palm-trees and hedged round with cactuses and aloes, either to keep out thieves or as a symbol of the thorniness of life, the village lay, looking back on the white Atlas gaunt and mysterious, and on the other side towards the brown Sahara, land of the palm-tree (Belad-el-Jerid), the refuge of the true Ishmaelite; for in the desert, learning, good faith, and hospitality can still be found—at least, so Arabs say.

Orange and azofaifa trees, with almonds, sweet limes, and walnuts, stood up against the waning light, outlined in the clear atmosphere almost so sharply as to wound the eye. Around the well goats and sheep lay, whilst a girl led a camel round the Noria track; women sat here and there and gossiped, with their tall earthenware jars stuck by the point into the ground, and waited for their turn, just as they did in the old times, so far removed from us, but which in Arab life is but as yesterday, when Jacob cheated Esau, and the whole scheme of Arab life was photographed for us by the writers of the Pentateuch. In fact, the self-same scene which has been acted every evening for two thousand years throughout North Africa, since the adventurous ancestors of the tribesmen of to-day

left Hadrumut or Yemen, and upon which Allah looks down approvingly, as recognizing that the traditions of his first recorded life have been well kept. Next day he trotted through the barren plain of Seddat, the Jibel Saghra making a black line on the horizon to the south. Here Berber tribes sweep in their razzias like hawks; but who would plunder a rekass carrying a bowl of fish? Crossing the dreary plain and dreaming of his entry into Tafilet, which now was almost in his reach not two days distant, the sun beating on his head, the water almost boiling in the bowl, hungry and footsore, and in the state betwixt waking and sleep into which those who smoke hemp on journeys often get, he branched away upon a trail leading towards the south. Between the oases of Todghra and Ferkla, nothing but stone and sand, black stones on yellow sand; sand, and yet more sand, and then again stretches of blackish rocks with a suddra bush or two, and here and there a colocynth, bitter and beautiful as love or life, smiling up at the traveller from amongst the stones. Towards midday the path led towards a sandy tract all over-grown with sand rac bushes and crossed by trails of jackals and hyenas, then it quite disappeared, and Amarabat waking from his dream saw he was lost. Like a good shepherd, his first thought was for his fish; for he imagined the last few hours of sun had made them faint, and one of them looked heavy

and swam sideways, and the rest kept rising to the surface in an uneasy way. Not for a moment was Amarabat frightened, but looked about for some known landmark, and finding none started to go back on his trail. But to his horror the wind which always sweeps across the Sahara had covered up his tracks, and on the stony paths which he had passed his feet had left no prints. Then Amarabat, the first moments of despair passed by, took a long look at the horizon, tightened his belt, pulled up his slipper heels, covered his precious bowl with a corner of his robe, and started doggedly back upon the road he thought he traversed on the deceitful path. How long he trotted, what he endured, whether the fish died first, or if he drank, or faithful to the last, thirsting met death, no one can say. Most likely wandering in the waste of sandhills and of suddra bushes he stumbled on, smoking his hashish while it lasted, turning to Mecca at the time of prayer, and trotting on more feebly (for he was born to run), till he sat down beneath the sun-dried bushes where the Shinghiti on his Mehari found him dead beside the trail. Under a stunted sandarac tree, the head turned to the east, his body lay, swollen and distorted by the pangs of thirst, the tongue protruding rough as a parrot's, and beside him lay the seven golden fish, once bright and shining as the pure gold when the goldsmith pours it molten from his pot, but now

turned black and bloated, stiff, dry, and dead. Life the mysterious, the mocking, the inscrutable, unseizable, the uncomprehended essence of nothing and of everything, had fled, both from the faithful messenger and from his fish. But the Khalifa's parting caution had been well obeyed, for by the tree, unbroken, the crystal bowl still glistened beautiful as gold, in the fierce rays of the Saharan sun.

A. E. W. MASON
HOW BARRINGTON RETURNED
TO JOHANNESBURG

1901

NORRIS wanted a holiday. He stood in the market-place looking southwards to the chimneys, and dilating upon the subject to three of his friends. He was sick of the Stock Exchange, the men, the women, the drinks, the dances—everything. He was as indifferent to the price of shares as to the rise and fall of the quicksilver in his barometer; he neither desired to go in on the ground-floor, nor to come out in the attics. He simply wanted to get clean away. Besides, he foresaw a slump, and he would be actually saving money on the veld. At this point Teddy Isaacs strolled up and interrupted the oration.

‘Where are you off to, then?’

‘Manicaland,’ answered Norris.

‘Oh! You had better bring Barrington back.’

Teddy Isaacs was a fresh comer to the Rand, and knew no better. Barrington meant to him nothing more than the name of a man who had been lost twelve months before on the eastern borders of Mashonaland. But he saw three pairs of eyebrows lift simultaneously, and heard three simultaneous outbursts on the latest Uitlander grievance. However, Norris answered him quietly enough.

‘Yes, if I come across Barrington, I’ll bring

him back.' He nodded his head once or twice and smiled. 'You may make sure of that,' he added, and turned away from the group.

Isaacs gathered that there had been trouble between Barrington and Norris, and applied to his companions for information. The commencement of the trouble, he was told, dated back to the time when the two men were ostrich-farming side by side, close to Port Elizabeth in Cape Colony. Norris owned a wife; Barrington did not. The story was sufficiently ugly, as Johannesburg was accustomed to relate it, but upon this occasion Teddy Isaacs was allowed to infer the details. He was merely put in possession of the more immediate facts. Barrington had left the Cape Colony in a hurry, and coming north to the Transvaal, when Johannesburg was as yet in its brief infancy, had prospered exceedingly. Meanwhile, Norris, as the ostrich industry declined, had gone from worse to worse, and finally he too drifted to Johannesburg with the rest of the flotsam of South Africa. He came to the town alone, and met Barrington one morning eye to eye on the Stock Exchange. A certain amount of natural disappointment was expressed when the pair were seen to separate without hostilities; but it was subsequently remarked that they were fighting out their duel, though not in the conventional way. They fought with shares, and Barrington won. He had the clearer head, and

besides, Norris did not need much ruining; Barrington could see to that in his spare time. It was, in fact, as though Norris stood up with a derringer to face a machine gun. His turn, however, had come after Barrington's disappearance, and he was now able to contemplate an expedition into Manicaland without reckoning up his pass-book.

He bought a buck-wagon with a tent covering over the hinder part, provisions sufficient for six months, a span of oxen, a couple of horses salted for the thick-head sickness, hired a Griqua lad as wagon-driver, and half a dozen Matabele boys who were waiting for a chance to return homewards, and started north-eastward.

From Johannesburg he travelled to Makoni's town, near the Zimbabwe ruins, and with half a dozen brass rings and an empty cartridge case hired a Ma-ongwi boy, who had been up to the Mashonaland plateau before. The lad guided him to the head waters of the Inyazuri, and there Norris fenced in his camp, in a grass country, fairly wooded, and studded with gigantic blocks of granite.

The Ma-ongwi boy chose the site, fifty yards west of an ant-heap, and about a quarter of a mile from a forest of machabel. He had camped on the spot before, he said.

'When?' asked Norris.

'Twice,' replied the boy. 'Three years ago and last year.'

'Last year?' Norris looked up with a start of surprise. 'You were up here last year?'

'Yes!'

For a moment or two Norris puffed at his pipe, then he asked slowly:

'Who with?'

'Mr. Barrington,' the boy told him, and added, 'It is his wagon-track which we have been following.'

Norris rose from the ground, and walked straight ahead for the distance of a hundred yards until he reached a jasmine bush, which stood in a bee-line with the opening of his camp fence. Thence he moved round in a semicircle until he came upon a wagon-track in the rear of the camp, and, after pausing there, he went forward again, and completed the circle. He returned to his wagon chuckling. Barrington, he remembered, had been lost while travelling northwards to the Zambesi; but the track stopped here. There was not a trace of it to the north, or the east, or the west. It was evident that the boy had chosen Barrington's last camping-ground as the site for his own, and he discovered a comforting irony in the fact. He felt that he was standing in Barrington's shoes. In the old days it had been Barrington who had stood in his.

That night, as he was smoking by the fire, he called out to the Ma-ongwi boy. The lad came forward from his hut behind the wagon.

'Tell me how you lost him,' said Norris.

'He rode that way alone after a sable antelope.' The boy pointed an arm to the south-west. 'The beast was wounded, and we followed its blood-spoor. We found Mr. Barrington's horse gored by the antelope's horns. He himself had gone forward on foot. We tracked him to a little stream, but the opposite bank was trampled, and then we lost all sign of him.' This is what the boy said, though his language is translated.

Norris remained upon his encampment for a fortnight. Blue wildebeests, koodoos, elands, and gemsbok were plentiful, and once he got a shot at a wart-hog boar. At the end of the fortnight he walked round the ant-heap early one morning, and of a sudden plumped down full length in the grass. Straight in front of him he saw a herd of buffaloes moving in his direction down a glade of the forest a quarter of a mile away. Norris cast a glance backwards; the camp was hidden from the herd by the intervening ant-heap. He looked again towards the forest; the buffaloes advanced slowly, pasturing as they moved. Norris crawled behind the ant-heap on his hands and knees, ran thence into camp, buckled on a belt of cartridges, snatched up a .450-bore Metford rifle, and got back to his position just as the first of the herd stepped into the open. It turned to the right along the edge of the wood, and the others followed in file.

Norris wriggled forward through the grass, and selecting a fat bull in the centre of the line, aimed behind its shoulder and fired. The herd stampeded into the forest, the bull fell in its tracks.

Norris sprang forward with a shout; but he had not run more than thirty yards before the bull began to kick. It kneeled upon its forelegs, rose thence on to its hind legs, and finally stood up. Norris guessed what had happened. He had hit the bull in the neck instead of behind the shoulders, and had broken no bones. He fired his second barrel as the brute streamed away in an oblique line south-eastwards from the wood, and missed. Then he ran back to camp, clapped a bridle on to his swiftest horse, and without waiting to saddle it, sprang on its back and galloped in pursuit. He rode as it were along the base of a triangle, whereas the bull galloped from the apex, and since his breakfast was getting hot behind him, he wished to make that triangle an isosceles. So he jammed his heels into his horse's ribs, and was fast drawing within easy range, when the buffalo got his wind and swerved on the instant into a diagonal course due south-west.

The manœuvre left Norris directly behind his quarry, and with a long stern chase in prospect. However, his blood was up, and he held on to wear the beast down. He forgot his breakfast; he took no more than a casual notice of the direction he was following; he simply braced his

knees in a closer grip, while the distorted shadows of himself and the horse lengthened and thinned along the ground as the sun rose over his right shoulder.

Suddenly the buffalo disappeared in a dip of the veld, and a few moments later came again into view a good hundred yards farther to the south. Norris pulled his left rein, and made for the exact spot at which the bull had reappeared. He found himself on the edge of a tiny cliff which dropped twenty feet in a sheer fall to a little stream, and he was compelled to ride along the bank until he reached the incline which the buffalo had descended. He forded the stream, galloped under the opposite bank across a patch of ground which had been trampled into mud by the hoofs of beasts coming here to water, and mounted again to the open. The bull had gained a quarter of a mile's grace from his mistake, and was heading straight for a huge cone of granite.

Norris recognized the cone. It towered up from the veld, its cliffs seamed into gullies by the rainwash of ages, and he had used it more than once as a landmark during the last fortnight, for it rose due south-west of his camp.

He watched the bull approach the cone and vanish into one of the gullies. It did not reappear, and he rode forward, keeping a close eye upon the gully. As he came opposite to it, however, he saw through the opening a vista of

green trees flashing in the sunlight. He turned his horse through the passage, and reined up in a granite amphitheatre. The floor seemed about half a mile in diameter; it was broken into hillocks, and strewn with patches of a dense undergrowth, while here and there a big tree grew. The walls, which converged slightly towards an open top, were robed from summit to base with wild flowers, so that the whole circumference of the cone was one blaze of colour.

Norris hitched forward and reloaded his rifle. Then he advanced slowly between the bushes on the alert for a charge from the wounded bull; but nothing stirred. No sound came to his ears except the soft padding noise of his horse's hooves upon the turf. There was not a crackle of the brushwood, and the trees seemed carved out of metal. He rode through absolute silence in a suspension of all movement. Once his horse trod upon a bough, and the snapping of the twigs sounded like so many cracks of a pistol. At first the silence struck Norris as merely curious, a little later as very lonesome. An uneasiness, a foreboding, for which he could not account, grew upon him. The extraordinary stillness of a summer morning was a thing familiar to him, yet to-day it was somehow suggestive of evil. He had a notion that he was being watched. Once or twice he stopped his horse with a sudden jerk of the reins, and sat crouched forwards with his neck outstretched,

listening. Once or twice he cast a quick, furtive glance over his shoulder to make certain that no one stood between himself and the entrance to the hollow. He forgot the buffalo; he caught himself labouring his breath, and found it necessary to elaborately explain the circumstance in his thoughts on the ground of heat.

The next moment he began to plead this heat, not merely as an excuse for his uneasiness, but as a reason for returning to camp. The heat was intense, he argued. Above him the light of an African midday sun poured out of a brassy sky into a sort of inverted funnel, and lay in blinding pools upon the scattered slabs of rock. Within the hollow, every cup of the innumerable flowers which tapestried the cliffs seemed a mouth breathing heat. He became possessed with a parching thirst, and he felt his tongue heavy and fibrous like a dried fig. There was, however, one obstacle which prevented him from acting upon his impulse, and that obstacle was his sense of shame. It was not so much that he thought it cowardly to give up the chase and quietly return, but he knew that the second after he had given way, he would be galloping madly towards the entrance in a child's panic of terror. He finally compromised matters by dropping the reins upon his horse's neck in the unformulated hope that the animal would turn of its own accord; but the horse kept straight on.

As Norris drew towards the innermost wall of

granite, there was a quick rustle all across its face as though the screen of shrubs and flowers had been fluttered by a draught of wind. Norris drew himself erect with a distinct appearance of relief, loosened the clench of his fingers upon his rifle, and began once more to search the bushes for the buffalo.

For a moment his attention was arrested by a queer object lying upon the ground to his left. It was in shape something like a melon, but bigger, and it seemed to be plastered over with a black mould. Norris rode by it, turned a corner, and then with a gasp reigned back his horse upon its haunches. Straight in front of him a broken rifle lay across the path.

Norris stood still, and stared at it stupidly. Some vague recollection floated elusively through his brain. He tried to grasp and fix it clearly in his mind. It was a recollection of something which had happened a long while ago, in England, when he was at school. Suddenly, he remembered. It was not something which had happened, but something he had read under the great elm trees in the close. It was that passage in 'Robinson Crusoe' which tells of the naked footprint in the sand.

Norris dismounted, and stooped to lift the rifle; but all at once he straightened himself, and swung round with his arms guarding his head. There was no one, however, behind him, and he gave a little quavering laugh, and picked up the

rifle. It was a heavy 10-bore Holland, a Holland with a single barrel, and that barrel was twisted like a corkscrew. The lock had been wrenched off, and there were marks upon the stock—marks of teeth, and other queer unintelligible marks as well.

Norris held the rifle in his hands, gazing vacantly straight ahead. He was thinking of the direction in which he had come, south-west, and of the stream which he had crossed, and of the patch of trampled mud, where track obliterated track. He dropped the rifle. It rang upon a stone, and again the screen of foliage shivered and rustled. Norris, however, paid no attention to the movement, but ran back to that melon-like object which he had passed and took it in his hands.

It was oval in shape, being slightly broader at one end than the other. Norris drew his knife and cleaned the mould from one side of it. To the touch of the blade it seemed softer than stone, and smoother than wood. 'More like bone,' he said to himself. In the side which he had cleaned, there was a little round hole filled with mould. Norris dug his knife in and scraped round the hole as one cleans a caked pipe. He drew out a little cube of mud. There was a second corresponding hole on the other side. He turned the narrower end of the thing upwards. It was hollow, he saw, but packed full of mould, and more, deliberately packed, for there were

finger-marks in the mould. 'What an aimless trick!' he muttered vaguely.

He carried the thing back to the rifle, and comparing them, understood those queer marks upon the stock. They were the mark of fingers, of human fingers, impressed faintly upon the wood with super-human strength. He was holding the rifle in his hands and looking down at it; but he saw below the rifle, and he saw that his knees were shaking in a palsy.

On an instant he tossed the rifle away, and laughed to reassure himself—laughed out boldly, once, twice; and then he stopped with his eyes riveted upon the granite wall. At each laugh that he gave the shrubs and flowers rippled, and shook the sunlight from their leaves. For the first time he remarked the coincidence as something strange. He lifted up his face, but not a breath of air fanned it; he looked across the hollow, the trees and bushes stood immobile. He laughed a third time, louder than before, and all at once his laughter got hold of him; he sent it pealing out hysterically, burst after burst, until the hollow seemed brimming with the din of it. His body began to twist; he beat time to his laughter with his feet, and then he danced. He danced there alone in the African sunlight faster and faster, with a mad tossing of his limbs, and with his laughter grown to a yell. And, as though to keep pace with him, each moment the shiver of the foliage increased. Up and down, crosswise and

breadthwise, the flowers were tossed and flung, while their petals rained down the cliff's face in a purple storm. It appeared, indeed, to Norris that the very granite walls were moving.

In the midst of his dance he kicked something and stumbled. He stopped dead when he saw what that something was. It was the queer, mud-plastered object which he had compared with the broken rifle, and the sight of it recalled him to his wits. He tucked it hastily beneath his jacket, and looked about him for his horse. The horse was standing behind him some distance away, and nearer to the cliff. Norris snatched up his own rifle, and ran towards it. His hand was on the horse's mane, when just above its head he noticed a clean patch of granite, and across that space he saw a huge gray baboon leap, and then another, and another. He turned about and looked across to the opposite wall, straining his eyes, and a second later to the wall on his right. Then he understood; the twisted rifle, the finger-marks, this thing which he held under his coat, he understood them all. The walls of the hollow were alive with baboons, and the baboons were making along the cliffs for the entrance.

Norris sprang on to his horse, and kicked and beat it into a gallop. He had only to traverse the length of a diameter, he told himself, the baboons the circumference of a circle. He had covered three-quarters of the distance when he

heard a grunt, and from a bush fifty yards ahead the buffalo sprang out and came charging down at him.

Norris gave one scream of terror, and with that his nerves steadied themselves. He knew that it was no use firing at the front of a buffalo's head when the beast was charging. He pulled a rein and swerved to the left; the bull made a corresponding turn. A moment afterwards Norris swerved back into his former course, and shot just past the bull's flanks. He made no attempt to shoot then; he held his rifle ready in his hands, and looked forward. When he was fifty yards from the passage he saw the first baboon perched upon a shoulder of rock above the entrance. He lifted his rifle, and fired at a venture. He saw the brute's arms wave in the air, and heard a dull thud on the ground behind him as he drove through the gully and out on to the open veld.

The next morning Norris broke up his camp and started homewards for Johannesburg. He went down to the Stock Exchange on the day of his arrival, and chanced upon Teddy Isaacs.

'What's that?' asked Isaacs, touching a bulge of his coat.

'That?' replied Norris, unfastening the buttons. 'I told you I would bring back Barrington if I found him,' and he trundled a scoured and polished skull across the floor of the Stock Exchange.

ALEC J. DAWSON
THE STORY OF PAT DERRY

1904

'I GUIDE! I guide! Ihyeh—I guide!'

The too-persistent wight who thus chanted his claim upon public attention sat crouched beside the hotel's front steps, a blurred, picturesque break in the moonlit emptiness of a sea-fronting terrace. In that light the bay beyond was a crescent of molten lead, its two horns, the gun-mounted port arsenal (impressive till you learned that the guns were fitted for no tougher work than that of saluting), and the old tower which links decadent modern Morocco to the Mauretania of Roman occupation. In the crescent's shimmering centre the Sultan's navy rode at anchor; an old merchant steamer, purchased from the infidels and used, when not engaged in the transport of pickled rebels' heads, chiefly for the purpose of carrying grain for his Shareefian Majesty's troops from one port to another.

Inside the white hotel was electric light and silence. Hotel and electricity both were spawn of the infidels, and established there on Moorish territory, because that the Sultan, when wearied by the giving of many refusals, had given his consent. In the little hall office, the maestro,

scanning figures, sipped his evening coffee. In the bend of the marble stairway a sloe-eyed Spanish chambermaid sat chewing nougat. In the passage between kitchen and dining-hall, two Moors, waiters, squatted on their heels, smoking kief. In the drawing-room, the Spanish widow resident ogled provocatively a middle-aged English tourist, who drank champagne at thirty-two pesetas a bottle, and shared the same with his neighbour at the table d' hôte. In this way, then, the widow paid for her wine. She was scrupulously honourable. She postponed her serious evening rendezvous with the young gentleman from the Italian Legation by exactly thirty minutes each night, to permit of the just settlement of this wine and ogle barter.

As for me, I lounged in the entrance way, looking out over the terrace at the moonlit bay beyond, marvelling at the blackness of the Hill of Apes, picturing to myself the doings of the crooked, yard-wide streets of the city behind me, wondering how it could be that I had stayed away from the glamour and fascination of this bloody but beautiful Morocco for so long a stretch as eleven years. I had landed no longer than the afternoon of that very day. And the epicure in me had bade me land as a tourist, telling no one of my coming, seeking out no old friends, and allowing myself to be borne off to the hotel by a jabbering donkey-man. 'Thus,' the epicure had said, confident in its undying

foolishness, 'shall you taste again the savoury sting of first impressions; so shall you lend subtle bouquet to your pleasure.'

'I guide! I guide! O, N'zrani, b'Allah! I guide. Naddil! Jirri!' (I will arrange! Haste thou!)

The discordant wretch beside the steps was mazy with hasheesh, as I had seen at a glance. His head far back in a dingy djellab-hood, he had crooned over his 'I guide!' till recollection of his objective had left the man. Suddenly he had been wakened to realities, probably by hunger for food, or for opiates. Hence his exclamations, and the boldness which made him pluck at my coat. This clouded my charmed vista; it interfered with my enjoyment of the moon-washed scene.

'Seer fi-halak-um!' (Get hence!) I snapped, forgetting that the use of Arabic was out of keeping with my *rôle* as tourist.

The Moor started dreamily to his feet. His obedience cuffed me to repentance. Was I not a tourist and fair game?

'All right,' I said in English. 'Go ahead! I come.'

And with a gesture I explained myself, accepted the would-be guide's services, and assured to him the kief and coffee money which his soul desired. He grunted, as though his unaffected satisfaction required explanation, and forged ahead of me on the sands, bound apparently for the city gate.

At least the tattered rascal no longer worried me, for he had no other English than the brief lie that introduced as guide a beggar who lived idly upon bounty, and had never thought of playing guide until that evening, when an empty kief-pipe and an empty belly combined to inspire an effort of some sort. So much I gathered from the mutterings which reached me from out the djellab-hood of my escort.

We reached that corner whence one advances either to the city gate, or by the hill road to Tangier's great outer Sök. The would-be guide hesitated. The business was strange and distasteful to him. 'Nay,' I heard him muttering in Arabic. 'Others may show Tanjah to the Nazarene to-morrow. I will take him to the Fool's Fandak, where I shall be fed and he shall give me money to buy hasheesh from some traveller withal—im sha' Allah!' (By God's grace!)

This rather interested me, and I followed along the hill road contentedly enough. The city might wait. My time was my own, B'ism Illah; and I needed no guide in those familiar intricate alleys. Also, I desired knowledge as to what and where the 'Fool's Fandak' might be. A fandak, you must know, is a place. No lesser or more particular word will serve. It is generally an enclosed space in which beasts are tethered, and in the cloisters about which men may rest and eat and gossip. Attached to your fandak

there may or may not be a house; there will almost certainly be a smell, biting, acrid, and far-reaching, the odour of congregated men and beasts in a land where sanitation is not.

As we bent our heads to escape contact with the lamp outside Hadj Absalaam's little Sök coffee-house, a breath of wind from the sea—no more than a careless yawn, an out-puff of drowsy Africa's breath, so to say—lifted my escort's djellab-hood backward to his left shoulder and showed me the face of the man. I confess to starting back a pace. Morocco is full of disfigured faces, but you might almost have said my guide had no face at all. It was just a flattened expanse of cross-seamed skin, a slanting gash for mouth, two fiery eye-holes, and—no more; a nightmarish and horrible sight.

'Tortured in a country kasbah, or man-handled and kept for dead in some mountain gorge,' I told myself, and was relieved when the poor wretch jerked forward the mask-like hood of his djellab.

We crossed the Sök, mounted by the British Legation, and dipped into the valley beyond. Just then my nostrils became aware of the unmistakable proximity of a fandak. Sure enough we halted a minute later at a great gateway set in a wall of aloe and prickly pears, and, odours apart, I heard the stamping of heel-roped animals and the monotonous twanging of gimbri strings, sounds thriddled by a weak,

unceasing tootling upon a wheezy ghaitah or flageolet.

'Give a little money, N'zrani!' exclaimed my guide, extending his right hand, scoop-wise, before me, and speaking in his own tongue—the only one he knew.

'A nice sort of guide,' I thought. Had I been truly a tourist and strange in this country the situation had been disconcerting enough without doubt. We were some distance from the protecting publicity of Tangier's lights. 'For what purpose, rascal, should I give thee money?' I said sharply, and in my best Moghrebin.

'That I may have hasheesh and kief,' replied the Moor, with no inflection of surprise in his voice.

'H'm! We shall see. There is earning to be done here as well as giving, sir guide. If this be thy 'Fool's Fandak', lead on. I will rest here awhile and drink a glass of coffee.'

The *ñere* was no startling the fellow. He was a most singularly imperturbable dog. It may be that his phlegm was born of hasheesh, however, or that he fancied most tourists passed their evenings in this manner. At all events, with a sharp tug at a palmetto cord, my guide lifted the stone which kept the fandak gate latched, and we entered a roomy courtyard or corral wherein a score of mules, stallions, and donkeys were fidgeting over the wispy remains of their supper. A pool of light in one of the farther

corners of this yard indicated the opening by which one reached the humanly-inhabited part of the fandak. This corner my guide steered for, I after him, picking my way cautiously among miry foot-ropes and loose cobbles.

From the pool of light we passed into a very spacious, oblong apartment, ventilated in Moorish fashion by narrow perpendicular slits in its walls close to the raftered roof, and by the ever-open doorway. On the walls two great wicks floated in Moorish lamp-brackets of oil, and about the paved floor stood a few cheap German lamps. Some two score men, all Moors, lounged about the room, which had no other furniture than mats, rugs, and half a dozen little tables each about six inches high. Two groups were card-playing. Two men were strumming at gimbri, their eyes fixed as hemp will fix a man's eyes. One made his moan listlessly upon a ghaitah, and the rest, lighting, knocking out, and relighting long kief-pipes, gossiped, or lay at ease, silent.

At the far end of the apartment a man sat bolt upright, scanning a newspaper through steel-framed spectacles. His dress was nondescript and negligent to the verge of indecency, but purely Moorish. Yet there was the newspaper! This man sat upon a mattress. One guessed it was his sleeping-place. Suddenly he turned his head toward the door; a movement of the man who had brought me to this 'Fool's Fandak' had

caught his ear. The light fell across his unshaven chin. I stared. The man moved and caught light upon the upper part of his face. I started forward.

'Good God, Derry! What—what do you here?' I cried, and strode forward, careless of my booted feet, and scattering a row of slippers by the door as I moved.

'Eh? Oh—hang it! Where have you come from? U'm? Sit down!'

I squatted on the mattress beside him when our hands had met. After touching my hand I noticed that he mechanically raised his own fingers to his lips, Moorish fashion. The last occasion upon which I had taken this man's hand had been somewhat otherwise. It was eleven years before, and the young Irishman had then been setting out upon the third of his adventurous exploring journeys in the interior, disguised, as his custom was, as a Moor, at the head of a little caravan of seven beasts and four men. A week later I had left the country. And now—now I sat down beside Derry on his mattress.

'Well, whose is this Fool's Fandak, anyhow?' I asked, feeling my way among the innumerable questions engendered by the situation.

'Eh? Heard that, then, have you? It's mine.'

'Well, but—do you—I mean—'

'Yes, I live here, it's my show. It's not exactly a business, not a paying concern, you

know. But it doesn't cost much. You knew that I had a little money of my own. Yes, I live here. I wonder no one's told you. Of course, the white men don't know me—now, you know. They'd tell you I'd gone Fantee, lived native, or—something. I do, in a way. The clothes? Oh, yes, one picks up habits. Yes, I live here right enough. Let me see; nine, ten—over ten years now. Have a—er—won't you smoke?'

Kief-pipes lay before my old friend, but nothing nearer a white man's taste. He had just noticed it. I drew cigarettes from my pocket.

'Look here, Derry,' I said, whilst taking a light from him, 'I don't want to pry, you know. *Chacun à son goût*, and—and so on; but what the Dickens are you driving at anyway? How do you come to be living in—living here?'

He regarded me heavily, and I noted with regret the yellow cloudiness of his eyes. I thought he seemed to be weighing in recollection's scales the quality of our friendship as warranty for my curiosity.

'Well,' he said slowly, 'it's a queer, beastly sort of story. But if you want it, and won't repeat it to any of the other Christians in Tangier, I'll tell it you.'

I gave my word and waited.

'Well,' he began, and then paused, a vaguely pained look flitting over his thin face. 'By the way, ye know, you mustn't think I run a hasheesh den. Nothing of that sort. By God, 'Fool's

Fandak' it may be, but it is a genuine fandak for travellers anyway. No women here; no dancing-boys, or trash of that sort. Coffee and tea I give 'em, and, mark you, I've got 'em to take the English tea at that—the black sort, I mean; less nerve shattering than their green truck, ye know. The hasheesh and kief; well, you know what Moors are. They will have it. They bring it. I don't supply it. I—er—'

His eyes fell on the kief-pipes and little embossed hasheesh cup beside the mattress, rose then and met mine. Then, slowly, colour mounted in Derry's face, and a silence fell between us while the Moors stared incuriously at the Fool and his guest. We must be frank, I thought.

'Hang it, old man, I can see! You don't suppose the contracted pupils and yellowness mean nothing to me. I noticed all that as soon as I saw you.'

'Ah! well,' he said, 'habits fall upon one, grow about you from the soil you live in—hey? I don't take much.'

I sighed. 'But let me hear the yarn,' said I.

'Well, when I last saw you I was starting for Tafilet; wasn't that it? Yes. Well, it was a devil of a bad journey in every possible way; in every possible way it was bad, was the last of my journeys. My men all died or left me in the Atlas, and I was stranded in Ain Tessa with lame beasts, and not another soul but old

Hamadi the cook. One day's journey from there—I was making homeward toward Fez in disgust—I reached a big fandak, after sundown and in a howling storm of rain and wind. Oh, but it was a horrible night! Up to your girths in mud, no road, lame beasts, and poor old Hamadi whining like a wounded dog. We couldn't possibly have pitched a tent, so we went into this great fandak, thinking to make sure of one comfortable night's rest after a very exhausting week. I was keen about it. I remember thinking how fine it would be to roll in my blankets on a dry floor. Man, I ran at it, b'Allah, I ran into the place!

Derry paused, glaring vacantly over my right shoulder toward that mouldering, wind-swept grey fandak in a savage Atlas gorge, a place that in all human probability no other white man had ever clapped eyes on. I had tasted something of the strenuous delights of the Open Road in Morocco. I knew with what an appetite a man views walls and roofs, be they ever so crumbling and weather-worn, after a dozen hours spent in a high-peaked Moorish saddle, scrambling over rock-strewn quagmires in drenching rain.

'But it was an uncanny place, that fandak,' hummed Derry, rolling the words reminiscently over his tongue; 'a howling, god-forsaken Stonehenge kind of place it was. Had been a mountain kasbah of sorts; big as a village, old as the Flood, and rottenly decayed in every stone of it.

We tethered the beasts and got my pack into one of the two rooms built in a corner. You know the style. One a sort of store-room, that we made for; the other, the tea and coffee-making place, and head-quarters of the fandak-keeper. Most of the travellers slept round about the roofed-in sides with their animals, and so paid nothing beyond the fee for stabling.

'You remember my horse—old Zemouri? The most gallant beast, the bravest, gamest horse ever lapped in hide.'

I nodded. Derry's love for this barb had been something of a byword in Tangier in the old days. It was said that when he was so nearly starved, on the Berber trip, Zemouri munched the last score of Taflet dates while Derry cinched up his belt a hole or two and comforted himself sucking the stones. Not many women have been better loved, I fancy.

'Well, it had been a devil of a day, apart from the going and the weather. It seemed that for a week we had passed close to mares at least once an hour. Now you remember how old Zemouri carried on when there was a mare in the case. That journey he was worse than ever. By the Lord, the old horse was in a lather before ever you clapped saddle on his back. Mares—Heavens and earth, he could scent them miles away! He travelled in a tremble on his hind legs, and near wrenched the arms out o' me, on a Mequinez curb that would have broken some

horses' jaws to look at. Barley—b'Allah, Zemouri had no time to eat; it stopped his neighing. He never closed an eye at night, and rarely ate a mouthful, if there was anything feminine within sight. Poor old Zemouri! He grew thin as a rail, and yet pranced all day like a two-year-old. He carried me where no other horse could, when he was dying, and he did it all with an air, bedad! A brave, a cavalier, was Zemouri, if ever there was one.

'Well, of course I had found him the best place in the fandak; the corner close to the rooms, with no other beast within twenty yards of him. The horse was utterly worn out, but glad of the shelter, and inclined to feed and rest, I thought. So we went into the room to boil tea and enjoy our precious comfort. We fed and rested, listening to three very decent and sociable robbers, who were for making an evening of it, in a mild sort of way, in the little coffee place. Then I made up my bed, and went out to feed Zemouri, reckoning he'd be cooled by then. He was, and I was mighty pleased with the idea of the old horse having a good night. Two brimming tumnies of washed barley I left him, and then I went in and curled up under my blanket, praising St. Patrick.

'I was asleep in two minutes, and in five I was wakened by Zemouri's neighing and stamping. 'Bless the old fool,' I cried, 'what 's wrong with him now?' I climbed over Hamadi, and out

into the mire and rain, to get round the arch sheltering Zemouri. An egg-pedlar had just arrived and was already chewing black bread, while his raw-boned skeleton of a mare with the egg-pack was sidling up within six paces of Zemouri, and never so much as a string to her fetlocks. I cursed the man for a pig-eating clown, and told him to tether his ramshackle mare somewhere the far side of Al Hôtoma. He stared and grinned like an idiot. God knows! It may have been hasheesh. I wasn't so used to that stark intolerable phlegm then. However, he called me 'Sidi' humbly enough, and mumbled something about moving his mare and seeing that my lordship's horse was not again disturbed. And so, as he led his poor beast away, and Zemouri quietened down quite remarkably, I went back to bed, and was asleep before I could cover myself.

'Ten minutes later Zemouri was neighing wildly and pawing the fandak wall like a mad thing. I tumbled out, swearing, and found that wretched egg-pedlar lying smoking on a pack-saddle, watching his straying mare as she dodged Zemouri's heels and squirmed in towards my barley. The man gave me his insufferable glassy grin again when I spoke to him. I didn't lift my hand. I laid hold on myself properly. I gave the man a tumni of barley and a loaf of good bread for himself, and I bade him civilly—By God, I begged him!—go and hang himself

and his mare on the other side of the fandal. It made me sweat to see his grin. I coaxed Zemouri and went back to my bed.

'But I didn't get to sleep so quickly this time. I was overtired, I was worrying horribly about poor old Zemouri, and all my nerves seemed in a listening strain, shivering like harp-strings. However, I dropped off after a while and slept a few minutes. Then Zemouri brought me out in one bound, my skin all pricking. The mare was browsing about within a few yards of my horse, and the pedlar, back in his old place, chewing my bread and staring stupidly, half asleep, at his beast. I was angry. Oh, yes, too angry to dare say much. I drove the pair out as a man shoos poultry. Zemouri hadn't eaten six mouthfuls and seemed to be treading on hot irons, I reckon my temperature was well past fever point when I got back to bed.

'I don't know if you've ever been placed that way, to be so dog tired that you ache with it in every muscle, and yet to be in such a feverish sweat of irritation that you can't even lie still, leave alone sleep. I was listening. My God, how I listened! That was the trouble. I could not give over listening, with every hair on my head and every pore in my skin, it seemed. It was—

Derry paused, staring over my shoulder as before.

'Well, to cut the yarn shorter the same thing

happened seven separate times. Seven times that poor wretch of a pedlar grinned and stared stupidly in my face, when fury was boiling out at my pores like steam at a safety-valve. What possessed the pedlar, heaven knows. The devil possessed me. I could have sat down and cried to see dear old Zemouri using up the last drops of his vitality so. But I was too red-hot with irritable fury and aching weariness.

'The seventh time came, and the pedlar grinned again. I still think he had no right to grin in that maddening, fat-headed way at a wretch in my condition. Poor chap! There was a big mallet there, used for driving in tethering stakes. I lifted it above my head. I felt myself foaming at the mouth. I couldn't speak to that staring, grinning thing. The muscles in my arms leapt to strike him. I smashed that mallet down full and square on the pedlar's glassy face. I felt the thing give—horrible! I swung the mallet again and again—all over him. I jumped on him with both feet. I—and then men came running from everywhere, and I stopped. I knew I had killed the pedlar; I had murdered a defenceless man. I heard the people hiss at me like serpents. I saw them turn the body, find no life in it, and turn again to me. I was very cold. The mallet I still held. I was very cold. By the saints, how cold and still I was, who had been so hot!'

The egg-pedlar could never have stared more

fixedly than poor Derry was staring over my shoulder now. I thought I should not get another word out of him. But presently his attitude became relaxed, his figure, as it were, caved in. I noticed then how the last decade had aged and broken up the sinewy young Irishman I had known. 'I must get him out of this hemp-chewing, tea-sipping death trap somehow, if he is to live at all,' I told myself. Then he went on again, speaking very listlessly, and with a slurring economy of words.

'I don't know how we managed to get out of that place alive, Zemouri, Hamadi, and me. If they'd 've guessed I was a Christian the Moors would have torn me in pieces. As it was I kept the mallet and let my gun be seen. You know what Moors are—in the country, too. A man more or less! He is dead, it is written. You know the tone. I gave the fandak-keeper four dollars and told him to see to a burying. Then we got away with our animals before daylight. But I had to live with myself, you see. You might think I had left that dead pedlar behind, got quit of him. But I hadn't, by thunder! He rode on my back that day, and I've never been free of his smashed grinning headpiece since. Eh?'

I had not spoken.

'But he hasn't worried me so much of late. I fancy I've pretty near worked clear. It's odd, you know, but I've an idea that the nearer I get to him—if he went to the place I'm going to

when he died—the freer I get of him. And that's queer, isn't it?

'H'm! But how about this place and your living here?' I asked.

'Why, don't you see that's how I'm working it off? I murdered a Moor in a fandak, and a pretty bad fandak too. Well! This is a pretty good fandak, don't you see? And Moors come and go here as they like, and never a bilyun to pay. It's all free. My little two-fifty a year was for life, you know. Oh, I'm working it off. You'll excuse the habit, but I must have a pipe,' he said with a dismal sort of smile. And he filled and lighted a long kief-pipe with an ease of familiarity that my gorge rose to see in a white man.

I had to leave him at last, for I had no notion of sleeping in that kief-clouded den. He took hasheesh before we parted, and I left him pretty muddled. A strong man in a way, I thought, and beyond the ordinary true to an active conscience. Yet, in another way, how pitiably weak! Perhaps I did not rightly understand living native then. I know more of it now. And I have never met a man strong enough to do as Derry had done, and still—and yet not do as he had done in the days of weakness.

Next morning I found that beggar-guide crooning on the hotel door-steps, bemused and hasheesh-drunk. He asked me for money, and remembering that I had paid him nothing the

night before, I tossed the wretch a few reales and turned to leave him.

'You talk with the Nazarene at the fandak. He tell you everything, eh?' said the beggar, in Arabic. 'Maybe you do not believe. Christians believe nothing. But it is all true—true as Al Koran. Ihyeh, all true; all true!'

I wondered why the man chuckled, and how he knew. I could see he was in no condition to weigh his words.

'What is true?' I asked him. 'What do you know about it?'

'What does old Cassim know? Ha! Ihyeh, old Cassim knows many things. What do I know? Look! Here is the face the Christian smashed with his mallet in the fandak by Ain Tessa! What do I know? I know I have grown fat these ten years in the Fool's Fandak. Not for nothing was Cassim's face smashed. What do I know?—Ihyeh! But, Sidi! the white lord will not tell his Christian brother of these things. It were not well that an old man should lose his home. I—I—Cassim sayeth many foolish words, meaning nothing. What do I know? Ha! Ihyeh, ihyeh! Give a little more money, Sidi!'

He had lowered his hood again, so that I no longer had the featureless horror of his head before me. But the creature's proximity was something more than I could stomach just then, so I walked off slowly, thinking. There was no doubt of the truth of his words, I thought. He

was the egg-pedlar of the fandak. And my old friend had dragged through ten years of living death, with murder on his soul, for—this!

In my ignorance I decided I could make up for all that now. I had a horse saddled, and rode up to the 'Fool's Fandak'.

Yellow, frowsy, cloudy, and sad, I found my friend, a typical picture of the hemp slave in morning time. My news stirred him deeply, but not as a free man had been stirred by it. Rather as one who, relieved of an aching pain, would turn upon his other side and sleep, there in the bed of his sickness.

Three full days I was kept busy before I finally had him clothed as a white man and sitting in a room next mine at the hotel. And then, in the garments of his own people, he looked a strange, shrunken creature, far more of a wreck than before at the fandak. He refused to see other white men; and, after a few days, the hotel-keeper, with many apologies, complained to me of the kief smoke and smell of hasheesh in the corridor by my friend's room.

Silver stopped this complaint. But within a day or two the man came puling to me about Moors—'disreputable natives' he called them—trapesing about his hotel and congregating in my friend's room.

I did what I could, but the thing was disheartening.

One afternoon I was surprised to find Derry's

room empty. I waited till sundown, but he did not return. I had my suspicions, but barely admitted them to myself. After dinner I rode up to the fandak, foisting upon myself the pretence that I wanted to take another look at the wretched place—that monument to a good man's fatally wrong-headed devotion to a very honest conscience.

I found Derry there, as I knew I should, surrounded by flattering Moors, dressed Moorish fashion, and sipping hasheesh in honey from a gilt-flowered mug. He never left the fandak again, for four days later the Moors came to me with word that the 'Fool' was dead.

'You must forgive me, old man,' I found scrawled on a scrap of brown paper that was clenched betwixt his dead fingers. 'You don't understand. I know how kindly you meant. But it's better this way, perhaps. Anyhow, I think I've worked it off now.

PATRICK DERRY.'

PERCEVAL GIBBON

THE COWARD

1905

'AFTER all,' said the Vrouw Grobelaar weightily, 'a coward is but one with keener eyes than his fellows. No young man fears a ghost till it is dark, but the coward sees the stars in the daytime, like a man at the bottom of a well, and ghosts walk all about him.

'A coward should always be a married man,' she added. 'You may say, Katje, that it is hard on the woman. It is what I would expect of you. But when you have experience of wifehood you will come to the knowledge that it is the man's character which counts, and it is the woman's part to make up his deficiencies. With what men learn by practising on their wives, the world has been made.

'If you would cease to cackle in that silly fashion I would tell you of Andreas van Wyck, the coward—a tale that is known to few. Well, then!

'He was a bushveld Boer, farming cattle on good land, not a day's ride from the Tiger River. His wife, Anna, was of the de Villiers stock from over the borders of the Free State, a commandant's daughter, and the youngest of fourteen children. They were both people of a

type common enough. Andreas was to all seeming just such a Burgher as a hundred others who have grown rich quietly, never heard of outside their own districts, yet as worthy as others whom every one nods to at *Nachtmaal*. Anna, too, was of an everyday pattern, a short plump woman, with a rosy solemn face and pleasant eyes—a sound Boer woman, who could carry out her saddle, catch her horse and mount him without help. You see, in her big family, the elders were all men, and most had seen service against the Kafirs, and a girl there won esteem not by fallals and little tripping graces, but by usefulness and courage and good fellowship. She saw Andreas first when he was visiting his mother's aunt in her neighbourhood. There was shooting at a target, for a prize of an English saddle, and no one has ever said of him that he was not a wonderful shot. He carried off the prize easily, against all the Boers of those parts, and Anna's father and brothers among them. A few months later they were married.

'They drove from Anna's home to Andreas' farm on the bushveld in a Cape cart with two horses, and sat close under the hood while the veld about them was lashed with the first rains of December. It was no time for a journey by road, but in those days the country was not checkered with railway lines as it is now, and Anna had nothing to say against a trifle of hardship. For miles about them the rolling

country of the Free State was veiled with a haze of rain, and the wind drove it in sheets here and there, till the horses staggered against it, and the drum of the storm on the hood of the cart was awesome and mournful. Towards afternoon, after a long, slow trek, they came down the slope towards Buys' Drift, and Andreas pulled his horses up at the edge of the water.

'The rains had swelled the river to a flood, and it ran with barely a ripple where ordinarily the bushes were clear of the water. Full a hundred and fifty yards it spanned, and as they looked, they saw it carry past a dead ox and the rags of uprooted huts.

'“We can never cross till it goes down,” said Andreas. “I am sorry for it, but there is no choice. We must go back to your father's house.”

'Anna pressed his arm and smiled.

'“You are joking,” she said. “You know well that I will not go back there to-night for all the floods in ten years. No girl would that valued her husband and herself.”

'“But look at the drift!” he urged.

'“It is a big head of water,” she agreed. “I was once before upset in such a flood as this. You must head them up-stream a little, and then strike down again to the opposite bank.”

'“Not I,” he answered. “I am not going to drown myself for a trifle of pride, nor you either. We must go back.”

'She shook her head. “Not that,” she replied.

"Give me the reins and the whip." Before he could resist she had taken them from his hands. "Put your feet on our box," she directed, "or the water will float it away. Now then!"

'She drew the whip across the horses' quarters, and in a minute they were in the river, while Andreas sat marvelling.

'You understand that it was first necessary to move up-stream to a point in the middle of the river. She steadied the horses with a taut hold on the reins, for her young wrists were strong as iron, and spoke to them cheerily as the flood leaped against their chests, and they stood and hesitated. The rain drove in their faces viciously: Andreas, his face sheltered by the wide brim of his hat, had to rub away the water again and again in order to see; but Anna knit her brows and endured the storm gallantly, while with whip and rein and voice she pushed the team on towards the place of turning.

'The rushing of the water filled their ears, and before them, between the high banks of the Vaal, they saw only a world of brown water, streaked with white froth, hurling down upon them. It rose above the foot-board and swilled to the level of the seat. The horses, with heads lifted high, were often, for an anxious moment or two, free of the shifting bottom and swimming. A tree, blundering down-stream, struck the near wheel, and they were nearly capsized, the water rushing in over their knees. As they tilted

Andreas gave a cry, and shifted in his place. Anna called to her horses and knit her brows.

'At last it was time to humour them around, and this, as I need not tell you, is the risky business in crossing a flooded drift. With somewhat of a draw on the near rein, Anna checked the team, and then, prodding with her whip, headed the horses over and started them. They floundered and splashed, and Andreas half rose from his seat, with lips clenched on a cry. The traces tightened under the water, a horse stumbled and vanished for a moment, and, as the cart tilted sickeningly, the man, ashen-faced and strung, leaped from it and was whirled away.

'The water took him under, drew him gasping over the bottom, and spat him up again to swim desperately. His head was down-stream, and, as there was a sharp bend half a mile below, he had no extraordinary difficulty in bringing his carcass to shore. He lay for a minute among the bushes, and then ran back to see what had become of the cart, the horses, and his wife. He found them ashore, safe and waiting for him, and Anna wringing the wet from her hair as she stood beside the horses' heads.

'"You are not hurt?" she asked, before he could speak. Her face was grave and flushed, her voice very quiet and orderly.

'"No," he said.

'"Ah!" she said, and climbed again into the

cart, and made room for him in the place of the driver.

'That was how he discovered himself to his wife. In that one event of their wedding-day he revealed to Anna what was a secret from all the world—perhaps even from himself. He was a coward, the thing Anna had never known yet of any man—never thought enough upon to learn how little it may really matter or how greatly it may ruin a character. When her brothers, having drunk too much at a *waapenschauw*, wished to make a quarrel quickly, they called their man a coward. But for her it had been like saying he was a devil—a futile thing that was only offensive by reason of its intention. And now she was married to a coward, and must learn the ways of it.

'They spoke no more of the matter. Anna shrank from a reference to it. She could not find a word to fit the subject that did not seem an attack on the man with whom she must spend her life. They settled down to their business of living together very quietly, and I think the commandant's daughter did no braver thing than when she recognized the void in her husband, and then, holding it loathsome and unforgivable, passed it over and put it from her mind out of mere loyalty to him.

'The years went past at their usual pace, and there occurred nothing to ear-mark any hour and make it memorable, till the Kafirs across the

Tiger River rose. I do not remember what men said the rising was about. Probably their chief was wearied with peace and drunkenness and wanted change; but anyhow the commando that was called out to go and shoot the tribe into order included Andreas, the respected Burgher and famous shot. The field-cornet rode round and left the summons at his house, and he read it to Anna.

“Now I shall get some real shooting,” he said, with bright eyes.

She looked at him carefully, and noted that he lifted down his rifle with the gaiety of a boy who goes hunting. It brought a warmth to her heart that she dared not trust.

“It is a pity you should go before the calves are weaned,” she said.

“Pooh! You can see to them,” he answered.

“But you could so easily buy a substitute. It would even be cheaper to send a substitute,” she urged half-heartedly.

“You see she had no faith at all in his courage. The years she had lived with him had brought forth nothing to undo the impression he had left in her mind when he sprang from the cart and abandoned her in the middle of the Vaal River, and this emergency had awakened all her old fear lest he should be proclaimed a coward before the men of his world.

“I dare say it would be cheaper and better in every way,” he answered with some irritation.

“But for all that I am going. This is a war, the first I have known, and I am not going to miss the chance. So you had better get my gear ready!”

‘With that he commenced to tear up rags and to oil and clean his rifle.

‘She bade him adieu next day and saw him canter off with some doubt. He had shown no hesitation at all in this matter. From the time of the coming of the summons he had been all eagerness and interest. It might have led another to think she had been wrong, that the man who feared water feared nothing else; but Anna knew well, from a hundred small signs, that her husband had no stability of valour in him, that he was and would remain—a coward.

‘Next day the fighting had commenced, and Anna, working serenely about her house, soon had news of it. There was a promise of interest in this little war from the start. The commando, under Commandant Jan Wepener, had made a quick move and thrust forward to the crown of the little hills that overlook the Tiger River and the flat land beyond it, which was the home of the tribe. Here they made their laager, and it was plain that the fighting would consist either of descents by the Burghers on the kraals, or of attacks by the Kafirs upon the hills. Either way, there must be some close meetings and hardy hewing, a true and searching test for good men. The young Burgher that told her of it, sitting

upon his horse at the door as though he were too hurried and too warlike to dismount and enter, rejoiced noisily at the prospect of coming to grips.

'Anna puckered her brows. "It is not the way to fight," she said doubtfully. "A bush and a rifle and a range of six hundred yards is what beat the Basutos."

"Pooh!" laughed the young Burgher. "You say that because your husband shoots so well, and you want him to be marked for good fighting."

'She frowned a little, inwardly accusing herself of this same meaning. She would gladly have put these thoughts from her, for brave folk, whether men or women, have commonly but one face, and she hated to show friendship to her husband and harbour distrust of him in her bosom. When the young Burgher at last rode away, galloping uselessly to seem what he wished to be—a wild person of sudden habits—she sat on the stoep for a while and thought deeply. Then she sighed, as though pondering brought her no decision, and went once more about her work, always with an eye cocked to the window to watch for any rider coming back from the laager with news of affairs.

'But there was a shyness on both sides for a week. The Kafirs had not yet ripened their minds to an attack on the hills, nor had the Burghers quite sloughed their custom of orderliness and respect for human life. There was a

little shooting, mostly at the landscape, by those whose trigger-fingers itched; but at last a man coming back with a hole in his shoulder to be doctored and admired halted at the door and told of a fight.

'He sat in a long chair and told about the pain in his shoulder, and opened his shirt to show the wound. Anna leaned against the doorpost and heard him. Outside his brown pony was rattling the rings of the bit and switching at flies, and she perceived the faint smell of the sweat-stained saddlery and the horse-odour she knew so well. Before her, the tall grimy man, with bandages looped about him, his pleasant face a little yellow from the loss of blood, babbled boastfully. It was a scene she was familiar with, for of old on the Free State border the Burghers and the Basutos were for ever jostling one another, and—I told you her father was a commandant!

'“But tell me about the battle,” she urged.

'“Alle-machtag!” exclaimed the wounded man. “But that was a fight! It was night, you know, about an hour after the dying of the moon, and there was a spit of rain and some little wind. The commandant was very wakeful, I can tell you, and he had us all out from under the waggons, though it was very cold, and sent us out to the ridge above the drift. And there we lay in the long grass among the bushes on our rifles, while the field-cornet crawled to and fro

behind us on his belly and cursed those who were talking. I didn't talk—I know too much about war. But your man did. I heard him, and the field cornet swore at him in a whisper."

' "What was he saying?" Anna asked quickly.

' "Oh, dreadful things. He called him a dirty takhaar with a hair-hung tongue, and——"

' "No, no!" cried Anna impatiently. "What did my husband say, I mean? What was he talking about when the field-cornet stopped him?"

' "Oh, he was just saying that it would be worth turning out into the cold if only the Kafirs would come. And then he cried out, "What's that moving?" and the field-cornet crawled up and cursed him."

' "Go on about the fight," said Anna, looking from him, that he might not see what spoke in her eyes.

' "Yes. Well, I was just getting nicely to sleep, when somebody down on my left began firing. Then I saw, down the hill, the flashes of guns, and soon I could hear great lumps of pot-leg screaming through the air. They are firing a lot of pot-leg, those Kafirs. I fired at a flash that came out pretty regularly, and by-and-by it ceased to flash. Then, as I rose on my knees, a great knob of pot-leg hit me in the shoulder, and I cried out and fell down. Your husband came to me and helped me to go back to the rocks, and soon after all the shooting stopped.

The Burghers found three dead Kafirs in the morning, so we won."

"You were very brave," said Anna.

"Yes, wasn't I? And so was your husband, I believe," said the wounded man. "I couldn't see him, but I've no doubt he was. They'll try to rush the drift again to-night."

"What makes you think so?" Anna demanded, starting.

"Oh, they've been gathering for some days," answered the other. "It's what they are trying to do. You see there are no farms to plunder on the other side of the river, so they must cross."

"I see," said Anna slowly.

When he was ready, she helped the wounded man again to his saddle, and saw him away, then turned, with the light of a swift resolution in her eyes, to the task of getting ready to go to Andreas. The river and the hills were but a short six hours from her farm, and on a horse she could have ridden it in less. But it was no wish of hers to bring any slur upon her husband, so she prepared to go to him in a cart, taking shirts and shoes and tobacco, like a dutiful wife visiting her husband on commando. And for a purpose she took no trouble to name to herself, she put in her pocket a little pug-nosed revolver which Andreas had once bought, played with for a while, and then forgotten.

'A Kafir came with her, to see to the horses

and so on, for she was to travel in no other manner than that in which Burghers' wives travel every day; but once clear of the farm she took the reins and the whip to herself, and drove swiftly, pushing the team anxiously along the way. So well did she guide her path, that by evening they were slipping down the road towards the drift of the Tiger River, and when the light of day began to be mottled with night, they had crossed the drift and were passing up the right bank. When at length the darkness came, they were at the foot of the hills which the commando held.

'Here Anna alighted, and left the "boy" to outspan and watch the cart. In a basket on her arm she had a bottle of whisky and a bottle of medicine for rheumatism, that would make her coming seemly, and with the little revolver in her pocket knocking against her knee at every step, she faced the dark and the empty veld, and began the ascent of the hill alone. She was come to be a spur to her husband. This she knew clearly enough, yet as she went along, with the thin wind of the night on her forehead, she wasted no thoughts, but bent herself to the business of finding the laager and coming to Andreas. About her were the sombre hills, that are, in fact, mere bushy kopjes, but in the darkness, and to one alone, portentous and devious mountains. Veld-bred as she was, the business of path-finding was with her an instinct, like

that of throwing up your hand to guard your eyes when sparks spout from the fire. Yet in an hour she lost herself utterly.

'She strove here and there, practising all the tricks of the hunter to avoid moving in a circle, and so on. She wrenched her skirts through bushes that seemed to have hands. She plunged over stones that were noisy and ragged under-foot; she stumbled in ant-bear holes and bruised herself on ant-hills. And after a long time she sat down and listened—listened patiently for the alarm of firing to beckon a course to her. And there she waited, her basket on her knee, her arms folded across it, for all the world like a quiet woman in church, with no tremors, but only a mild and enduring expectancy.

'It came at last, a tempest of shooting that seemed all round her. Below her, and to her left, there were splashes of white flame. The fighter's daughter knew at once that these were from Kafir guns. Overhead, the rip-rip-rip of the Burghers' rifles pattered like rain on a roof, like hoofs on a road. And all was near at hand. Despite her endeavours, she had come nearly the whole way round the hill, and was now barely outside the cross-fire. She stood up, shaking her skirts into order, and took in the position. It was a bad one, but it pointed the way to Andreas, and with a pat to her tumbled clothes she settled the bottles safely again in the basket and resumed her climbing.

'She thrust along through the bushes, while the clatter of the rifles grew nearer, and presently there was a flick—like a frog diving into mud—close by her feet, and she knew there were bullets coming her way. Flick—plop! It came again and again and again.

'“Some one sees me moving and is shooting at me,” said Anna to herself, and stopped to rest where a rock gave cover. The bullets, lobbing like pellets tossed from a window, came singing down towards her, clicking into the bushes, while below she could see the progress of the battle written in leaping dots of fire. The Kafirs were spreading among the boulders—so much could be read from the growing breadth of the line of their fire, and Anna was quick to grasp the meaning of this movement. They were preparing to rush the hill, as of old the Basutos had done. The Kafirs with guns were being sent out to the flanks of the line to keep up a fire while the centre went forward with the assegais. It was an old manoeuvre; she had heard her brothers talk of it many times, and also—she remembered it now—of the counter-trick to meet it. There must be bush at hand, to set fire to, that the advance may be seen as soon as it forms and withered with musketry.

'Regardless of that deft rifleman among the Burghers who continued to drop his bullets about her, Anna took her basket again on her

arm, came forth from her rock, and resumed the climb. She was obliged to make a good deal of noise, for it was too dark and uncomfortable to enable her to choose her steps well. Up above, the Burghers must have heard her plainly, though none but a keen eye would pick the blackness of her shape from the bosom of the night. The summit and the foot of the hill were alive with the spitting of the guns, and all the while the unknown sharpshooter searched about her for her life with clever plunging shots that flicked the dirt up. One bullet whisked through a piece of her skirt.

“Now, I wonder if it can be Andreas who shoots so neatly,” said Anna, half-smiling to herself. “He would be surprised if he knew what he is shooting at. Dear me, this is a very long and tiresome hill.”

‘It was almost at that moment that she heard it—the beginning of the rush. There came up the hill, like a slow and solemn drum-music, the droning war-song of the Kafirs as they moved forward in face of the fire. It was an awful thing to hear, that bloody rhythm booming through the dome of the night. It is a song I have heard in the daytime, for a show, and it rings like heavy metal. Anna straightened herself and looked about her; there was nothing else for it but that she must start a fire, ere the battle-line swept up and on to the laager. It would draw more shooting upon her; but that

gave her no pause. She had matches in her pocket, and fumbled about her and found a little thorn-bush that crackled while it tore her naked hands. Crouching by it, she dragged a bunch of the matches across the side of the box,—they spluttered and flamed, and she thrust them into the bush. It took light slowly, for there were yet the dregs of sap in it; but as it lighted, the deft rifleman squirted bullet after bullet all around her, aiming on the weakling flame she nursed with her bleeding hands.

‘But for this she had no care at all. She had ceased to perceive it. Sheltering the place with her body, she drew out more matches, tore up grass, and built the little flame to a blaze that promised to hold and grow. As it cracked among the twigs, she wrenched the bush from the ground and ran forward with it upheld.

“‘Burghers, Burghers!’ she screamed. ‘Pas op! Look out! The Kafirs are coming up the hill!’”

‘And whirling it widely she flung the burning bush from her with all her force, and watched its fire spread in the grass where it fell. Then she, too, fell down, and lay among the rocks and plants, scarcely breathing.

‘Up above, the old commandant, peering under the pent of his hand, saw the torch waved and the figure that flung it.

“‘Allemachtig!’ he cried. ‘It’s the Vrouw van Wyck!’”

‘The next instant he was shouting, “And here

come the Kafirs! Shoot, Burghers, shoot straight and hard."

'Where she lay, near the fire that now spread across the flank of the hill in broad bands among the dry grass and withered bushes, the Vrouw van Wyck heard that last cry and lifted her head as a torrent of shooting answered it. The Kafirs and the Burghers were at grips, and it seemed that all around her the night rustled with secret men that slunk about. There was great danger to her at last, for either in going forward or going back she might fall into the hands of the Kafirs, and—oh, you can never tell what that may mean! At the best and choicest it is death, but at the worst it is torment with loathly outrage, the torment and the degradation of Sheol. Anna knew that, knew it well and feared it. That daunted her, and as the thought grew clearer in her mind, dread gripped her, and she huddled among the stones with ears alert and a heart that clacked as it beat.

'Noises threatened her, and to them, the casual noises of the night, she gave ear anxiously, while above her the fight raged direfully and all unheard. At one time she truly saw naked Kafirs go up the hill,—the light of the fire glinted on the points of their assegais and threw a dull gleam on the muscle-rippled skin of them. Next, stones falling made her start, and ere this alarm was passed she heard the unmistakable clatter of shod feet among the boulders, and—

plain and loud—an oath as some man stumbled. He was already to be seen, vaguely; then he was near at hand, coming upon her.

“Now, what in God’s name is this?” she cried, and rose. In her hand was the little blunt-nosed revolver.

‘The man ran through a bush towards her. “Anna,” he cried, “Anna!”

‘It was Andreas, and he took hold of her body and pressed her close to him.

‘She thrilled with a superb exaltation of pride and joy, and put her arms about him.

‘“What are you doing here?” he demanded.

‘“I was coming to you,” she said, and with a little laugh, as of a girl, she showed him the basket, with the bottles yet in it. “And you?” she asked, then.

‘“Me?” he said. “Why, I’ve come for you, of course. The Kafirs are at the ridge, and God knows what might happen to you. Was it you I was shooting at down there all the time?”

‘“You shot very well,” she answered, and showed him the hole in her skirt where the bullet had pierced it. She heard him mutter another oath.

‘“But we must be going,” he said; “this is no place to be talking—no place at all. We must get round to the laager again. Let me have your arm, and tread quietly, and we must leave the basket.”

“Not I,” she answered. “I have brought it all this way, and I will not leave it now.”

He answered with a short laugh, and they commenced to move upward. But by now the fire had hold of the thorn-trees all about, and their path was as light as day. It was too dangerous to attempt to climb to the ridge, and after walking for a while they were compelled to find the cover of a rock and remain still. Anna sat on the ground, very tired and content, and her husband peered out and watched what was to be seen.

“We have beaten them,” he said. “I can see a lot of them running back. Pray God none come this way. I wish I had not left my rifle.”

“Yes,” said Anna, “you left your rifle, and came unarmed to help me.”

“It would have been awkward among the bushes,” he explained, and was suddenly silent, looking out over the top of the rock.

“What is it?” asked Anna. He gave no answer, so she rose and went to his side and looked too, with her arms on his shoulder.

“The rip-rip of the Burghers’ rifles sounded yet, but there was now another sound. The bushes creaked and the stones rocked with men returning down the hill. Not two hundred paces away they were to be seen—many scores of Kafirs dodging downhill, taking what cover they could, pausing and checking at each rock and mound that gave shelter from the bullets.

'Anna felt her husband quiver as he saw the crowd swooping upon him.

'“Take this,” she said, and pressed the little revolver into his hand. “It would be well not to be taken. But kiss me first.”

'He looked from the retreating and nearing Kafirs to her, with a face knotted in perplexity.

'“It is the only thing,” she urged, and drew his lips to hers.

'He looked down at the little weapon in his palm, and spoke as with an effort.

'“I was never a brave man, Anna,” he said, “and I can't do this. Will you not do it?”

'She nodded and took the pistol. The Kafirs found nothing to work their hate upon.'

THE KING OF THE BABOONS

1905

THE old yellow-fanged dog-baboon that was chained to a post in the yard had a dangerous trick of throwing stones. He would seize a piece of rock in two hands, stand erect and whirl round on his heels till momentum was obtained, and then—let go. The missile would fly like a bullet, and woe betide any one who stood in its way. The performance precluded any kind of aim; the stone was hurled off at any chance tangent; and it was bad luck rather than any kind of malice that guided one three-pound boulder through the window, across the kitchen, and

into a portrait of Judas de Beer which hung on the wall not half a dozen feet from the slumbering Vrouw Grobelaar.

She bounced from her chair and ballooned to the door with a silent swift agility most surprising to see in a lady of her generous build, and not a sound did she utter. She was of good veld-bred fighting stock, which never cried out till it was hurt, and there was even something of compassion in her face as Frikkie jumped from the stoep with a twelve-foot thong in his hand. It was, after all, the baboon that suffered most, if his yells were any index to his feelings. Frikkie could smudge a fly ten feet off with just a flick of his whip, and all the tender parts of the accomplished animal came in for ruthless attention.

'He ought to be shot,' was Frikkie's remark as he curled up the thong at the end of the discipline. 'A baboon is past teaching if he has bad habits. He is more like a man than a beast.'

The Vrouw Grobelaar seated herself in the stoep chair which by common consent was reserved for her use, and shook her head.

'Baboons are uncanny things,' she answered slowly. 'When you shoot them, you can never be quite sure how much murder there is in it. The old story is that some of them have souls and some not: and it is quite certain that they can talk when they will. You have heard them

crying in the night sometimes. Well, you ask a Kafir what that means. Ask an old wise Kafir, not a young one that has forgotten the wisdom of the black people and learned the foolishness only of the white.'

'What does it mean, tante?' It was I that put the question. Katje, too, seemed curious.

The old lady eyed me gloomily.

'If you were a landed Boer, instead of a kind of schoolmaster,' she replied, witheringly, 'you would not need to ask such a question. But I will tell you. A baboon may be wicked—look at that one showing his teeth and cursing—but he is not blind nor a fool. He runs about on the hills, and steals and fights and scratches, and all the time he has all the knowledge and twice the strength of a man, if it were not for the tail behind him and the hair on his body. So it is natural that sometimes he should be grieved to be such a mean thing as a baboon when he could be a useful kind of man if the men would let him. And at nights, particularly, when their troop is in laager and the young ones are on watch among the high rocks, it comes home to the best of them, and they sob and weep like young widows, pretending that they have pains inside so that the others shall not feel offended and turn on them. Any one may hear them in the kloofs on a windless night, and, I can tell you, the sound of their sorrow is pitiful.'

Katje threw out a suggestion to console them

with buckshot, and the Vrouw Grobelaar nodded with meaning.

'To hate baboons is well enough in the wife of a Burgher,' she said sweetly. 'I am glad to see there is so much fitness and wifeliness about you, since you will naturally spend all your life on farms.'

Katje's flush was a distress signal. First blood to the Vrouw.

'Baboons,' continued the old lady, 'are among a farmer's worst enemies. They steal and destroy and menace all the year round, but for all that there are many farmers who will not shoot or trap them. And these, you will notice, are always farmers of a ripe age and sense-shaped by experience. *They* know, you may be sure. My step-sister's first husband, Shadrach van Guelder, shot at baboons once, and was so frightened afterwards that he was afraid to be alone in the dark.'

There was a story toward, and no one moved.

'There were many Kafirs on his farm, which you have not seen,' pursued the Vrouw Grobelaar, adjusting her voice to narrative pitch. 'It was on the fringe of the Drakensberg, and many spurs of hill, divided by deep kloofs like gashes, descended on to it. So plenty of water came down, and the cattle were held from straying by the rocks, on one side at any rate. The Kafirs had their kraals dotted all about the land; and

as they were of the kind that works, my step-sister's husband suffered them to remain and grow their little patches of mealies, while they worked for him in between. He was, of course, a cattle Boer, as all of our family have always been, but here were so many Kafirs to be had for nothing, that he soon commenced to plough great spaces of land and sow valuable crops. There was every prospect that he would make very much money out of that farm; for corn always sells, even when cattle are going for only seven pounds a-piece, and Shadrach van Guelder was very cheerful about it.

'But when a farmer weighs an ungrown crop, you will always find that there is something or other he does not take into account. He tells off the weather and the land and the Kafirs and the water on his fingers, and forgets to bend down his thumb to represent God—or something. Shadrach van Guelder lifted up his eyes to the hills from whence came the water, but it was not until the green corn was six inches high that he saw that there came with it baboons. Armies and republics of them; more baboons than he had thought to exist—they swooped down on his sprouting lands and rioted, ate and rooted, trampled and wantoned, with that kind of bouncing devilishness that not even a Kafir can correctly imitate. In one night they undid all his work on five sown morgen of fat land, and with the first wink of the sun in the east they

were back again in their kopjes, leaving devastation and foulness wherever they passed.

'It was my step-sister's husband that stood on one leg and cursed like a Jew. He was wrathful as a Hollander that has been drinking water, and what did not help to make him content was the fact that hardly anything would avail to protect his lands. Once the baboons had tasted the sweetness of the young corn, they would come again and again, camping in the kloofs overhead as long as anything remained for them, like a deaf guest. But for all that, he had no notion of leaving them to plunder at their ease. The least one can do with an unwelcome visitor is to make him uncomfortable; and he sent to certain kraals on the farm for two old Kafirs he had remarked who had the appearance of cunning old men.

'They came and squatted before him, squirming and shuffling, as Kafirs do when a white man talks to them. One was quite a common kind of Kafir, gone a little grey with age, a tuft of white wool on his chin, and little patches of it here and there on his head. But the other was a small twisted yellow man, with no hair at all, and eyes like little blots of fire on a charred stick; and his arms were so long and gnarled and lean that he had a bestial look, like a laborious animal.

'"The baboons have killed the crop on the lower lands," said Shadrach, smacking his leg

with his sjambok. "If they are not checked, they will destroy all the corn on this farm. What is the way to go about it?"

The little yellow man was biting his lips and turning a straw in his hands, and gave no answer, but the other spoke.

"I am from Shangaanland," he said, "and there, when the baboons plague us, we have a way with them, a good way."

He sneered sideways at his yellow companion as he spoke, and the look which the latter returned to him was a thing to shrink from.

"What is this way?" demanded Shadrach.

"You must trap a baboon," explained the old Kafir. "A leading baboon, for choice, who has a lot to say in the government of the troop. And then you must skin him, and let him go again. The others will travel miles and miles as soon as they see him, and never come back again."

"It makes me sick to think of it," said Shadrach. "Surely you know some other way of scaring them?"

The old Kafir shook his head slowly, but the yellow man ceased to smile and play with the straw and spoke.

"I do not believe in that way, baas. A Shangaan baboon"—he grinned at his companion—"is more easily frightened than those of the Drakensberg. I am of the bushmen, and I know. If you flay one of those up yonder, the others will make war, and where one came

before, ten will come every night. A baboon is not a fat lazy Kafir; one must be careful with him."

"How would you drive them away, then?" asked Shadrach.

The yellow man shuffled his hands in the dust, squatting on his heels. There! There! See, the baboon in the yard is doing the very same thing.

"If I were the baas," said the yellow man, "I would turn out the young men to walk round the fields at night, with buckets to hit with sticks, and make a noise. And I—well, I am of the bushmen——" he scratched himself and smiled emptily.

"Yes, yes?" demanded Shadrach. He knew the wonderful ways of the bushmen with some animals.

"I do not know if anything can be done," said the yellow man, "but if the baas is willing I can go up to the rocks and try."

"How?"

But he could tell nothing. None of these wizards that have charms to subdue the beasts can tell you anything about it. A Hottentot will smell the air and say what cattle are near, but if you bid him tell you how he does it, he giggles like a fool and is ashamed.

"I do not know if anything can be done," the yellow man repeated. "I cannot promise the baas, but I can try."

“Well, try then,” ordered Shadrach, and went away to make the necessary arrangements to have the young Kafirs in the fields that night.

They did as he bade, and the noise was loathsome—enough to frighten anything with an ear in its head. The Kafirs did not relish the watch in the dark at first, but when they found that their work was only to thump buckets and howl, they came to do it with zest, and roared and banged till you would have thought a judgement must descend on them. The baboons heard it, sure enough, and came down after a while to see what was going on. They sat on their rumps outside the circle of Kafirs, as quiet as people in a church, and watched the niggers drumming and capering as though it were a show for their amusement. Then they went back, leaving the crops untouched, but pulling all the huts in one kraal to pieces as they passed. It was the kraal of the old white-tufted Shangaan, as Shadrach learned afterwards.

Shadrach was pleased that the row had saved his corn, and next day he gave the twisted yellow man a lump of tobacco. The man tucked it into his cheek and smiled, wrinkling his nose and looking at the ground.

“Did you get speech of the baboons last night among the rocks?” Shadrach asked.

The other shook his head, grinning. “I am old,” he said. “They pay no attention to me.

but I will try again. Perhaps, before long, they will listen."

"When they do that," said Shadrach, "you shall have five pounds of tobacco and five bottles of dop."

The man was squatting on his heels all this time at Shadrach's feet, and his hard fingers, like claws, were picking at the ground. Now he put out a hand, and began fingering the laces of the farmer's shoes with a quick fluttering movement that Shadrach saw with a spasm of terror. It was so exactly the trick of a baboon, so entirely a thing animal and unhuman.

"You are more than half a baboon yourself," he said. "Let go of my leg! Let go, I say! Curse you, get away—get away from me!"

The creature had caught his ankle with both hands, the fingers, hard and shovel-ended, pressing into his flesh.

"Let go!" he cried, and struck at the man with his sjambok.

The man bounded on all-fours to evade the blow, but it took him in the flank, and he was human—or Kafir—again in a moment, and rubbed himself and whimpered quite naturally.

"Let me see no more of your baboon tricks," stormed Shadrach, the more angry because he had been frightened. "Keep them for your friends among the rocks. And now be off to your kraal."

That night again the Kafirs drummed all about the green corn, and sang in chorus the

song which the mountain-Kafirs sing when the new moon shows like a paring from a fingernail of gold. It is a long and very loud song, with stamping of feet every minute, and again the baboons came down to see and listen. The Kafirs saw them, many hundreds of humped black shapes, and sang the louder, while the crowd of beasts grew ever denser as fresh parties came down and joined it. It was opposite the rocks on which they sat that the singing-men collected, roaring their long verses and clattering on the buckets, doubtless not without some intention to jeer at and flout the baffled baboons, who watched them in such a silence. It was drooping now to the pit of night, and things were barely seen as shapes, when from higher up the line, where the guardians of the crops were sparser, there came a discord of shrieks.

“The baboons are through the line,” they cried, and it was on that instant that the great watching army of apes came leaping in a charge on the main force of the Kafirs. Oh, but that was a wild, a haunting thing! Great bull-headed dog-baboons, with naked fangs and clutching hands alert for murder; bounding mothers of squealing litters that led their young in a dash to the fight; terrible lean old bitches that made for the men when others went for the corn,—they swooped like a flood of horror on the aghast Kafirs, biting, tearing, bounding through the air like uncouth birds, and in one second

the throng of the Kafirs melted before them, and they were among the corn.

Eight men they killed by rending, and of the others, some sixty, there was not one but had his wound—some bite to the bone, some gash, where iron fingers had clutched and torn their way through skin and flesh. When they came to Shadrach, and woke him warily with the breathless timidity of beaten men, it was already too late to go with a gun to the corn-lands. The baboons had contented themselves with small plunder after their victory, and withdrew orderly to the hills; and even as Shadrach came to the door of the homestead, he saw the last of their marshalled line, black against the sky, moving swiftly towards the kloofs.

‘He flung out his hands like a man in despair, with never a word to ease his heart, and then the old Shangaan Kafir stood up before him. He had the upper part of his right arm bitten to the bone and worried, and now he cast back the blanket from his shoulder and held out the quivering wound to his master.

‘“It was the chief of the baboons that gave me this,” he said, “and he is a baboon only in the night. He came through the ranks of them bounding like a boulder on a steep hillside, and it was for me that his teeth were bared. So when he hung by his teeth to my arm and tore and snarled, I drew my nails across his back, that the baas should know the truth.”

“What is this madness?” cried Shadrach.

“No madness, but simple devilry,” answered the Shangaan, and there came a murmur of support from the Kafirs about him. “The leader of the baboons is Naqua, and it was he who taught them the trick they played us to-night.”

“Naqua?” repeated Shadrach, feeling cold and weak.

“The bushman,” explained the old man. “The yellow man with the long lean arms who gave false counsel to the baas.”

“It is true,” came the chorus of the Kafirs. “It is true; we saw it.”

Shadrach pulled himself together and raised a hand to the lintel of the door to steady himself.

“Fetch me Naqua!” he ordered, and a pair of them went upon that errand. But they came back empty: Naqua was not at his hut, and none had news of him.

Shadrach dismissed the Kafirs to patch their wounds, and at sun-up he went down to the lands where the eight dead Kafirs still lay among the corn, to see what traces remained of the night’s work. He had hoped to find a clue in the tracks, but the feet of the Kafirs and the baboons were so mingled that the ground was dumb, and on the grass of the baboons’ return there remained, of course, no sign. He was no fool, my step-sister’s first husband, and since a wild and belly-quaking tale was the only one

that offered, he was not ready to cast it aside till a better one was found. At any rate it was against Naqua that his preparations were directed.

‘He had seven guns in his house for which ammunition could be found, and from among all the Kafirs on the land he chose a half-dozen Zulus, who, as you know, will always rather fight than eat. These were only too ready to face the baboons again, since they were to have guns in their hands; and a kind of ambush was devised. They were to lie among the corn so as to command the flank of the beasts, and Shadrach was to lie in the middle of them, and would give the signal when to commence firing by a shot from his own rifle. There was built, too, a pile of brushwood lying on straw soaked in oil, and this one of them was to put a light to as soon as the shooting began.

‘It was dark when they took their places, and then commenced a long and anxious watch among the corn, when every bush that creaked was an alarm and every small beast of the veld that squealed set hearts to thumping. From where he lay on his stomach, with his rifle before him, Shadrach could see the line of the ridge of rocks over which the baboons must come, dark against a sky only just less dark; and with his eyes fixed on this he waited. Afterwards he said that it was not the baboons he waited for, but the yellow man, Naqua, and he had in his head an

idea that all the evil and pain that ever was, and all the sin to be, had a home in that bushman. So a man hates an enemy.

‘They came at last. Five of them were suddenly seen on the top of the rocks, standing erect and peering round for a trap; but Shadrach and his men lay very still, and soon one of these scouts gave a call, and then was heard the pat! pat! of hard feet as the body of them came up. There was not light enough to tell one from another, except by size, and as they trooped down among the corn Shadrach lay with his finger throbbing on his trigger, peering among them. But he could see nothing except the mass of their bodies, and waiting till the main part of them was past him, so that he could have a shot at them as they came back, should it happen that they retired at once, he thrust forward his rifle, aimed into the brown, and fired.

‘Almost in the same instant the rifles of the Zulus spoke, and a crackle of shots ran up and down their line. Then there was a flare of light as the bonfire was lit, and they could see the army of baboons in a fuss of panic dashing to and fro. They fired again and again into the tangle of them, and the beasts commenced to scatter and flee, and Shadrach and his men rose to their full height and shot faster, and the hairy army vanished into the darkness, defeated.

‘There was a guffaw of laughter from the

Zulus, but ere it was finished a shout from Shadrach brought their rifles leaping up again. The baboons were coming back—a line of them was breaking from the darkness beyond the range of the fire, racing in great leaps towards the men. As they came into the light they were a sight to terrify a host, all big tusked, and charging without a sound. Shadrach, aiming by instinct only, dropped two as they came, and the next instant they were upon him. He heard the grunt of the Zulu next him as a huge beast leaped against his chest and bore him down, and there were screams from another. Then something heavy and swift drove at him like a bullet and he clubbed his rifle. As the beast flew, with hands and feet drawn in for the grapple, he hewed at it with the butt and smashed it to the ground. The stock struck on bone, and he felt it crush and fail, and there was the thing at his feet.

How they broke the charge, with what a frenzy of battle they drove the baboons from them, none of the four who spoke again could ever tell. But it must have been very soon after Shadrach clubbed his rifle that the beasts wavered, were beaten, and fled screaming, and the farmer found himself leaning on his weapon and a great Zulu, shining with sweat, talking to him.

“Never have I had such a fight,” the Zulu was saying, “and never may I hope for such

another. The baas is a great chief. I watched him."

'Something was picking at Shadrach's boots, and he drew back with a shudder from the form that lay at his feet.

'"Bring a stick from the fire," he ordered. "I want to see this—this baboon."

'As the man went, he ran a cartridge into the breach of his rifle, and when the burning stick was brought, he turned over the body with his foot.

'A yellow face mowed up at him, and pale yellow eyes sparkled dully.

'"Tck!" clicked the Zulu in surprise. "It is the bushman, Naqua. No, baas," as Shadrach cocked his rifle, "do not shoot him. Keep him and chain him to a post. He will like that less."

'"I shoot," answered Shadrach, and shattered the evil grin that gleamed in the face on the ground with a quick shot.

'And, as I told you, my step-sister's first husband, Shadrach van Guelder, was afraid to be alone in the dark after that night,' concluded the Vrouw Grobelaar. 'It is ill shooting baboons, Frikkie.'

'I'm not afraid,' retorted Frikkie, and the baboon in the yard rattled his chain and cursed shrilly.

SIR J. PERCY FITZPATRICK
THE KOODOO HUNT

1907

JOCK was lost twice: that is to say, he was lost to me, and, as I thought, for ever. It came about both times through his following up wounded animals and leaving me behind, and happened in the days when our hunting was all done on foot; when I could afford a horse and could keep pace with him that difficulty did not trouble us. The experience with the impala had made me very careful not to let him go unless I felt sure that the game was hard hit and that he would be able to pull it down or bay it. But it is not always easy to judge that. A broken leg shows at once; but a body shot is very difficult to place, and animals shot through the lungs, and even through the lower part of the heart, often go away at a cracking pace and are out of sight in no time, perhaps to keep it up for miles, perhaps to drop dead within a few minutes.

The great charm of Bushveld hunting is its variety: you never know what will turn up next—the only certainty being that it will not be what you are expecting.

The herd-boy came in one afternoon to say that there was a stembuck feeding among the oxen only a couple of hundred yards away. He had been quite close to it, he said, and it was very

tame. Game, so readily alarmed by the sight of white men, will often take no notice of natives, allowing them to approach to very close quarters. They are also easily stalked under cover of cattle or horses, and much more readily approached on horseback than on foot. The presence of other animals seems to give them confidence or to excite mild curiosity without alarm, and thus distract attention from the man. In this case the bonny little red-brown fellow was not a bit scared; he maintained his presence of mind admirably; from time to time he turned his head our way and, with his large but shapely and most sensitive ears thrown forward, examined us frankly while he moved slightly one way or another so as to keep under cover of the oxen and busily continue his browsing.

In and out among some seventy head of cattle we played hide-and-peek for quite a while—I not daring to fire for fear of hitting one of the bullocks—until at last he found himself manœuvred out of the troop; and then without giving me a chance he was off into the bush in a few frisky skips. I followed quietly, knowing that as he was on the feed and not scared he would not go far.

Moving along silently under good cover I reached a thick scrubby bush and peered over the top of it to search the grass under the surrounding thorn trees for the little red-brown form. I was looking about low down in the

russety grass—for he was only about twice the size of Jock, and not easy to spot—when a movement on a higher level caught my eye. It was just the flip of a fly-tickled ear; but it was a movement where all else was still, and instantly the form of a koodoo cow appeared before me as a picture is thrown on a screen by a magic-lantern. There it stood within fifty yards, the soft grey-and-white looking still softer in the shadow of the thorns, but as clear to me—and as still—as a figure carved in stone. The stem of a mimosa hid the shoulders, but all the rest was plainly visible as it stood there utterly unconscious of danger. The tree made a dead shot almost impossible, but the risk of trying for another position was too great, and I fired. The thud of the bullet and the tremendous bound of the koodoo straight up in the air told that the shot had gone home; but these things were for a time forgotten in the surprise that followed. At the sound of the shot twenty other koodoo jumped into life and sight before me. The one I had seen and shot was but one of a herd all dozing peacefully in the shade, and strangest of all, it was the one that was farthest from me. To the right and left of this one, at distances from fifteen to thirty yards from me, the magnificent creatures had been standing, and I had not seen them; it was the flicker of this one's ear alone that had caught my eye. My bewilderment was complete when I saw the big bull of the herd

start off twenty yards on my right front and pass away like a streak in a few sweeping strides. It was a matter of seconds only and they were all out of sight—all except the wounded one, which had turned off from the others. For all the flurry and confusion I had not lost sight of her, and noting her tucked-up appearance and shortened strides set Jock on her trail, believing that she would be down in a few minutes.

It is not necessary to go over it all again: it was much the same as the impala chase. I came back tired, disappointed, and beaten, and without Jock. It was only after darkness set in that things began to look serious. When it came to midnight, with the camp wrapped in silence and in sleep, and there was still no sign of Jock, things looked very black indeed.

I heard his panting breath before it was possible to see anything. It was past one o'clock when he returned.

Jock had learned one very clever trick in pulling down wounded animals. It often happens when you come unexpectedly upon game that they are off before you see them, and the only chance you have of getting anything is with a running shot. If they go straight from you the shot is not a very difficult one, although you see nothing but the lifting and falling hind-quarters as they canter away; and a common result of such a shot is the breaking of one of the

hind-legs between the hip and the hock. Jock made his discovery while following a rietbuck which I had wounded in this way. He had made several tries at its nose and throat, but the buck was going too strongly and was out of reach; moreover, it would not stop or turn when he headed it, but charged straight on, bounding over him. In trying once more for the throat he cannoned against the buck's shoulder and was sent rolling yards away. This seemed to madden him: racing up behind he flew at the dangling leg, caught it at the shin, and thrusting his feet well out, simply dragged until the buck slowed down, and then began furiously tugging sideways. The crossing of the legs brought the wounded animal down immediately, and Jock had it by the throat before it could rise again.

Every one who is good at anything has some favourite method or device of his own: that was Jock's. It may have come to him, as it comes to many, by accident; but having once got it, he perfected it and used it whenever it was possible. Only once he made a mistake; and he paid for it—very nearly with his life.

He had already used this device successfully several times, but so far only with the smaller buck. This day he did what I should have thought to be impossible for a dog of three or four times his size. I left the scene of torn carcass and crunched bones, consumed by regrets and disappointment; each fresh detail only added

to my feeling of disgust, but Jock did not seem to mind; he jumped out briskly as soon as I started walking in earnest, as though he recognized that we were making a fresh start, and he began to look forward immediately.

The little bare flat where the koodoo had fallen for the last time was at the head of one of those depressions which collect the waters of the summer floods and, changing gradually into shallow valleys, are eventually scoured out and become the dongas—dry in winter but full charged with muddy flood in summer—which drain the Bushveld to its rivers. Here and there where an impermeable rock formation crosses these channels there are deep pools which, except in years of drought, last all through the winter; and these are the drinking places of the game. I followed this one down for a couple of miles without any definite purpose until the sight of some greener and denser wild figs suggested that there might be water, and perhaps a rietbuck or a duiker near by. As we reached the trees Jock showed unmistakable signs of interest in something, and with the utmost caution I moved from tree to tree in the shady grove towards where it seemed the water-hole might be. There were bushy wild plums flanking the grove, and beyond them the ordinary scattered thorns. As I reached this point, and stopped to look out between the bushes on to the more open ground, a koodoo

cow walked quietly up the slope from the water, but before there was time to raise the rifle her easy stride had carried her behind a small mimosa tree. I took one quick step out to follow her up and found myself face to face, at less than a dozen yards, with a grand koodoo bull. It is impossible to convey in words any real idea of the scene and how things happened. Of course, it was only for a fraction of a second that we looked straight into each other's eyes; then, as if by magic, he was round and going from me with the overwhelming rush of speed and strength and weight combined. Yet it is the first sight that remains with me: the proud head, the huge spiral horns, and the wide soft staring eyes—before the wildness of panic had stricken them. The picture seems photographed on eye and brain, never to be forgotten. A whirlwind of dust and leaves marked his course, and through it I fired, unsteadied by excitement and hardly able to see. Then the right hind-leg swung out and the great creature sank for a moment, almost to the ground; and the sense of triumph, the longed for and unexpected success, 'went to my head' like a rush of blood.

There had been no time to aim, and the shot—a real snap shot—was not at all a bad one. It was after that that the natural effect of such a meeting and such a chance began to tell. Thinking it all out beforehand does not help much, for things never happen as they are

expected to; and even months of practice among the smaller kinds will not ensure a steady nerve when you just come face to face with big game—there seems to be too much at stake.

I fired again as the koodoo recovered himself, but he was then seventy or eighty yards away and partly hidden at times by trees and scrub. He struck up the slope, following the line of the troop through the scattered thorns, and there, running hard and dropping quickly to my knee for steadier aim, I fired again and again—but each time a longer shot and more obscured by the intervening bush; and no tell-tale thud came back to cheer me on.

Forgetting the last night's experience, forgetting everything except how we had twice chased and twice lost them, seeing only another and the grandest prize slipping away, I sent Jock on and followed as fast as I could. Once more the koodoo came in sight—just a chance at four hundred yards as he reached an open space on rising ground. Jock was already closing up, but still unseen, and the noble old fellow turned full broadside to me as he stopped to look back. Once more I knelt, gripping hard and holding my breath to snatch a moment's steadiness, and fired; but I missed again, and as the bullet struck under him he plunged forward and disappeared over the rise at the moment that Jock, dashing out from the scrub, reached his heels.

The old Martini carbine had one bad fault;

even I could not deny that; years of rough and careless treatment in all sorts of weather—for it was only a discarded old Mounted Police weapon—had told on it, and both in barrel and breech it was well pitted with rust scars. One result of this was that it was always jamming, and unless the cartridges were kept well greased the empty shells would stick and the ejector fail to work; and this was almost sure to happen when the carbine became hot from quick firing. It jammed now, and fearing to lose sight of the chase I dared not stop a second, but ran on, struggling from time to time to wrench the breech open.

Reaching the place where they had disappeared, I saw with intense relief and excitement Jock and the koodoo having it out less than a hundred yards away. The koodoo's leg was broken right up in the ham, and it was a terrible handicap for an animal so big and heavy, but his nimbleness and quickness were astonishing. Using the sound hind-leg as a pivot he swung round, always facing his enemy; Jock was in and out, here, there, and everywhere, as a buzzing fly torments one on a hot day; and indeed, to the koodoo just then, he was the fly and nothing more; he could only annoy his big enemy, and was playing with his life to do it. Sometimes he tried to get round; sometimes pretended to charge straight in, stopping himself with all four feet spread—just out of reach; then like a red

streak he would fly through the air with a snap for the koodoo's nose. It was a fight for life and a grand sight; for the koodoo, in spite of his wound, easily held his own. No doubt he had fought out many a life and death struggle to win and hold his place as lord of the herd, and knew every trick of attack and defence. Maybe, too, he was blazing with anger and contempt for this persistent little gad-fly that worried him so and kept out of reach. Sometimes he snorted and feinted to charge; at other times backed slowly, giving way to draw the enemy on; then with a sudden lunge the great horns swished like a scythe with a tremendous reach out, easily covering the spot where Jock had been a fraction of a second before. There were pauses too in which he watched his tormentor steadily, with occasional impatient shakes of the head, or, raising it to full height, towered up a monument of splendid and contemptuous indifference, looking about with big angry but unfrightened eyes for the herd—his herd—that had deserted him; or with a slight toss of his head he would walk limpingly forward, forcing the ignored Jock before him; then, interrupted and annoyed by a flying snap at his nose, he would spring forward and strike with the sharp cloven fore-foot—zip-zip-zip—at Jock as he landed. Any one of the vicious flashing stabs would have pinned him to the earth and finished him; but Jock was never there.

Keeping what cover there was I came up slowly behind them, struggling and using all the force I dared, short of smashing the lever, to get the empty cartridge out. At last one of the turns in the fight brought me in view, and the koodoo dashed off again. For a little way the pace seemed as great as ever, but it soon died away; the driving power was gone; the strain and weight on the one sound leg and the tripping of the broken one were telling; and from that on I was close enough to see it all. In the first rush the koodoo seemed to dash right over Jock—the swirl of dust and leaves and the bulk of the koodoo hiding him; then I saw him close abreast, looking up at it and making furious jumps for its nose, alternately from one side and the other, as they raced along together. The koodoo holding its nose high and well forward, as they do when on the move, with the horns thrown back almost horizontally, was out of his reach and galloped heavily on completely ignoring his attacks.

There is a suggestion of grace and poise in the movement of the koodoo bull's head as he gallops through the bush which is one of his distinctions above the other antelopes. The same supple balancing movement that one notes in the native girls bearing their calabashes of water upon their heads is seen in the neck of the koodoo, and for the same reason: the movements of the body are softened into mere undulations, and the head

with its immense spiral horns seems to sail along in voluntary company—indeed almost as though it were bearing the body below.

At the fourth or fifth attempt by Jock a spurt from the koodoo brought him cannoning against its shoulder, and he was sent rolling unnoticed yards away. He scrambled instantly to his feet, but found himself again behind: it may have been this fact that inspired the next attempt, or perhaps he realized that attack in front was useless; for this time he went determinedly for the broken leg. It swung about in wild eccentric curves, but at the third or fourth attempt he got it and hung on; and with all fours spread he dragged along the ground. The first startled spring of the koodoo jerked him into the air; but there was no letting go now, and although dragged along the rough ground and dashed about among the scrub, sometimes swinging in the air, and sometimes sliding on his back, he pulled from side to side in futile attempts to throw the big animal. Ineffectual and even hopeless as it looked at first, Jock's attacks soon began to tell; the koodoo made wild efforts to get at him, but with every turn he turned too, and did it so vigorously that the staggering animal swayed over and had to plunge violently to recover its balance. So they turned, this way and that, until a wilder plunge swung Jock off his feet, throwing the broken leg across the other one; then, with feet firmly planted, Jock tugged again, and the

koodoo trying to regain its footing was tripped by the crossed legs and came down with a crash.

As it fell Jock was round and fastened on the nose; but it was no duiker, impala, or rietbuck that he had to deal with this time. The koodoo gave a snort of indignation and shook its head: as a terrier shakes a rat, so it shook Jock, whipping the ground with his swinging body, and with another indignant snort and toss of the head flung him off, sending him skidding along the ground on his back. The koodoo had fallen on the wounded leg and failed to rise with the first effort; Jock while still slithering along the ground on his back was tearing at the air with his feet in his mad haste to get back to the attack, and as he scrambled up, he raced in again with head down and the little eyes black with fury. He was too mad to be wary, and my heart stood still as the long horns went round with a swish; one black point seemed to pierce him through and through, showing a foot out the other side, and a jerky twist of the great head sent him twirling like a tip-cat eight or ten feet up in the air. It had just missed him, passing under his stomach next to the hind-legs; but, until he dropped with a thud and, tearing and scrambling to his feet, he raced in again, I felt certain he had been gored through.

The koodoo was up again then. I had rushed in with rifle clubbed, with the wild idea of stunning it before it could rise, but was met by

the lowered horns and unmistakable signs of charging, and beat a retreat quite as speedy as my charge.

It was a running fight from that on: the instant the koodoo turned to go Jock was on to the leg again, and nothing could shake his hold. I had to keep at a respectful distance, for the bull was still good for a furious charge, even with Jock hanging on, and eyed me in the most unpromising fashion whenever I attempted to head it off or even to come close up.

The big eyes were blood-shot then, but there was no look of fear in them—they blazed with baffled rage. Impossible as it seemed to shake Jock off or to get away from us, and in spite of the broken leg and loss of blood, the furious attempts to beat us off did not slacken. It was a desperate running fight, and right bravely he fought it to the end.

Partly barring the way in front were the whitened trunks and branches of several trees struck down by some storm of the year before, and running ahead of the koodoo I made for these, hoping to find a stick straight enough for a ramrod to force the empty cartridge out. As I reached them the koodoo made for me with half a dozen plunges that sent me flying off for other cover; but the broken leg swayed over one of the branches, and Jock with feet planted against the tree hung on; and the koodoo, turning furiously on him, stumbled, floundered,

tripped, and came down with a crash amongst the crackling wood. Once more like a flash Jock was over the fallen body and had fastened on the nose—but only to be shaken worse than before. The koodoo literally flogged the ground with him, and for an instant I shut my eyes; it seemed as if the plucky dog would be beaten into pulp. The bull tried to chop him with its fore-feet, but could not raise itself enough, and at each pause Jock, with his watchful little eyes ever on the alert, dodged his body round to avoid the chopping feet without letting go his hold. Then with a snort of fury the koodoo, half rising, gave its head a wild upward sweep, and shook. As a springing rod flings a fish the koodoo flung Jock over its head and on to a low flat-topped thorn-tree behind. The dog somersaulted slowly as he circled in the air, dropped on his back in the thorns some twelve feet from the ground, and came tumbling down through the branches. Surely the tree saved him, for it seemed as if such a throw must break his back. As it was he dropped with a sickening thump; yet even as he fell I saw again the scrambling tearing movement, as if he was trying to race back to the fight even before he reached ground. Without a pause to breathe or even to look, he was in again and trying once more for the nose.

The koodoo lying partly on its side, with both hind-legs hampered by the mass of dead wood, could not rise, but it swept the clear space in

front with the terrible horns, and for some time kept Jock at bay. I tried stick after stick for a ram-rod, but without success; at last, in desperation at seeing Jock once more hanging to the koodoo's nose, I hooked the lever on to a branch, and setting my foot against the tree wrenched until the empty cartridge flew out and I went staggering backwards.

In the last struggle, while I was busy with the rifle, the koodoo had moved, and it was then lying against one of the fallen trunks. The first swing to get rid of Jock had literally slogged him against the tree; the second swing swept him under it where a bend in the trunk raised it about a foot from the ground, and gaining his foothold there Jock stood fast--there, there, with his feet planted firmly and his shoulder humped against the dead tree, he stood this tug-of-war. The koodoo with its head twisted back, as caught at the end of the swing, could put no weight to the pull; yet the wrenches it gave to free itself drew the nose and upper lip out like tough rubber and seemed to stretch Jock's neck visibly. I had to come round within a few feet of them to avoid risk of hitting Jock, and it seemed impossible for bone and muscle to stand the two or three terrible wrenches that I saw. The shot was the end; and as the splendid head dropped slowly over, Jock let go his hold.

He had not uttered a sound except the grunts that were knocked out of him.

PAULINE SMITH

THE PAIN

1925

ALL their married, childless life of nearly fifty years, Juriaan van Royen and his wife Deltje had lived in the Aangenaam valley in lands that he hired from Mijnheer van der Wenter of Vergelegen.

His lands lay an hour by foot from the Vergelegen homestead, on a little plateau on the mountain-side facing the north and the sun. The soil was poor and thin, and of all the poor men working hired lands in the Aangenaam valley Juriaan was one of the poorest. He was a tall, thin, loosely built man, slow and quiet in his speech, and slow and quiet in his movements. His lanky dust-coloured hair, fading with age instead of turning grey, and worn long like a Tak-Haar Boer's from the Transvaal, gave him a wild and unkempt look that seemed but to accentuate his gentleness of heart. For his wife Deltje his tenderness had increased with age, and, lately, with her pain. The little old woman, plump and round, with skin as soft and smooth as a child's, and a quiet, never-failing cheerfulness of spirit in spite of her pain, was dearer to him now than she had been as his bride. As his bride she had come to him up in the mountains from the

harsh service of Mevrouw du Toit of Leeuw Kraal with but the clothes she wore and her Bible tied up in a red-and-white handkerchief. Mevrouw's eyes had been weak, and to save her mistress's eyes Deltje as a young girl had been taught to read. Juriaan could neither read nor write, and when on their marriage night Deltje had opened her Bible and read to him it had seemed to him that no music in all the world could be so beautiful as this. In old age her voice had become thin as a bird's, but her reading was still beautiful to him. Their years of poverty, which might have embittered them, their childlessness, which might have driven them apart, had but drawn them closer together, and it was together that they now faced Deltje's pain. And to them both, because all their lives they had been healthy, Deltje's pain was like a thing apart: a mysterious and powerful third person who, for incomprehensible reasons, clutched at Deltje's side and forced her to lie helpless for hours on the low wooden bedstead in the little bedroom.

The three-roomed mud-walled house in which the old couple lived stood close to a small stream behind a row of peach-trees. Every year from these trees they took a thank-offering of dried fruit to the Thanksgiving at Harmonie, and year by year they had beaten the stones of the peaches into the earthen floor of the living-room. Every morning Deltje sprinkled this floor with clear

water from the stream and swept it with a stiff besom. The floors of the kitchen and bedroom she smeared regularly with a mixture of cow-dung and ashes called *mist*. The little house smelt always of *mist*, of strong coffee, the beans of which were ground with peas to make it go farther, and of griddle cakes baked in the ashes of the open fire in the kitchen.

The living-room, with its three chairs strung with thongs of leather, its table scrubbed a bright yellow with the yellow-bush that grew on the mountain-side, and its gaily painted wagon-box, was a small square room with a half-door opening on to the yard behind the peach-trees. This was the only door the house possessed, for the doorways between the living-room and the kitchen and the living-room and the bedroom were empty. The partition wall, built like the outer walls of mud, did not go up to the reed-and-thatch roof, but ended, within reach, in a flat ledge on which pumpkins, twisted rolls of tobacco, little bags of seed, bars of home-made soap and water-candles, and various odds and ends were stored. From the rafters hung cobs of dried mealies, and just outside the door was the worn mealie-stamper, cut out of a tree-trunk and shaped like an hour-glass, in which the mealies were pounded into meal. There was one window, in the wall opposite the half-door. It had no glass, and was closed by an unpainted wooden shutter. Built into the wall between

the living-room and the bedroom were three small shelves, and here Deltje kept their few treasures: her Bible, two cups and saucers, thick and heavy, with roses like red cabbages around them, a little pink mug, with 'A Present for a Good Girl' in letters of gold on one side of the handle and a golden Crystal Palace on the other, a green and red-crocheted wool mat, a black-bordered funeral card in memory of Mijnheer van der Wenter's mother, an ostrich egg, and a small box lined with blue satin and covered with rows of little shells round an inch-square mirror. This was the pride of their simple hearts, and these, after fifty years of life together, were their treasures.

It was on the uppermost of the three shelves that for over a year now Deltje had kept the little bottles of 'Grandmother's Drops' which, from time to time, Juriaan had got for her from the Jew-woman's store at Harmonie, for the pain in her side. At first the drops had seemed definitely to relieve Deltje's pain, to baffle the mysterious third person who caused it, and even when the attacks became more frequent and more violent the faith of both Deltje and Juriaan had persisted because of the printed word on the wrapper. But in the month of January Juriaan's faith at last was shaken. In that month of long hot days there came a succession of attacks which exhausted all the remaining drops and left Deltje weak and helpless as an infant on

the low wooden bed. And leaving her there Juriaan went down in haste to the Jew-woman's store at Harmonic.

When Juriaan reached the little white-washed store, with the sign 'Winkel' printed crookedly with a blue-bag over its door, he found there Piet Deiselmann, the transport rider between Platkops dorp and Princetown village. Piet Deiselmann, eager, impetuous, a Platkops man who was full of pride for Dutch Platkops and contempt for English Princetown, was speaking to the old Jew-woman and her grandson of the new hospital which had lately been opened in Platkops dorp, and of which Juriaan up in the mountains had never heard before. The hospital was the first to be built in the Little Karoo, and it was Dutch Platkops that had built it. In Princetown, said Piet Dieselmann contemptuously, men might still die by hundreds for want of a hospital, but in Platkops there was now no need to suffer pain. One went to Platkops hospital so ill that one had to be carried there, and one left it leaping and praising the Lord.

All that Piet Deiselmann said of the hospital filled Juriaan, with Deltje's damp twisted face always before him, with a strange agitation of hope, wonder, and fear. For long he dared not speak. But at last, in a voice that quavered and broke, he asked:

'And must a man then be rich to go to the hospital in Platkops dorp?'

'Rich!' cried Piet Deiselmann. 'Rich? Let a man be so poor as he can be to live and at the hospital they will take him in.'

'Our Father!' said Juriaan in wonder. 'Our Father!' And it was as if, staring at the transport rider, he already saw Deltje, her round, soft, childish face alight with joy, leaping and praising the Lord on the hospital *stoep*.

Juriaan went back to the mountains and found Deltje as he had left her on the feather bed. He poured out some drops for her, made some strong black coffee and brought it to her with a little black bread, and then sitting down on a low stool by her side spoke of the hospital in Platkops dorp. All that Piet Deiselmann had said he repeated, and in his slow quiet speech everything Piet Deiselmann had said seemed to gain a greater significance. And holding Deltje's hand in his he told her how he would put the feather bed in the ox-cart, and his reed-and-canvas tent over the cart, and his love, his heart, the joy of his life, would lie there like a bird in its nest; and so carefully as if it were the very Ark of the Lord that he were driving he would take her in to the hospital in Platkops dorp and her pain would be cured. . . . He spoke as Piet Deiselmann had done of men leaping and praising the Lord, and so great was now their faith in everything that Piet Deiselmann had said that it was as if within their old and worn bodies their hearts were already leaping and praising Him.

Early the next morning the old man began his preparations for the journey. He went first up to the kraal on the mountain-side where Jafta Nicodemus, the Vergelegen shepherd, kept his master's flocks, and it was so settled that for some rolls of tobacco Jafta would take charge of his goats and his hens. His lands he must leave to God. He went back to the house, and stretching an old sail-cloth across a bamboo frame fixed this tent to his ox-cart. Under the cart he tied the big black kettle and the three-legged pot which were their only cooking utensils. He filled a small water-cask from the stream and tied that also below the cart. He brought out the painted wagon-box and fixed it in front of the cart for a seat. In the box was their small store of provisions: biltong, a small bag of coffee, a kid-skin full of dried rusks, meal for griddle cakes, and the salted ribs of a goat recently killed. Behind the cart he tied some bundles of forage, and below the forage dangled a folding stool. On the floor of the cart he spread the feather bed, pillows and blankets for Deltje's nest.

When all was ready, and the two plough-oxen were inspanned, Deltje came out to the cart. She wore her black calico Sacrament gown and sunbonnet, and on her stockingless feet were *zeldschoen* which Juriaan himself had made for her. She carried in her hand a red cotton handkerchief, sprinkled with white moons, in which

were her Bible, the Present for a Good Girl, and the little satin-lined, shell-covered box. Excitement, or the drops, had eased for the time her pain, and her round, smooth, innocent face was alight with her faith in the Almighty, her faith in the hospital, and her faith in Juriaan. And as Juriaan helped her into the cart he called her again by those tender, beautiful, and endearing names which were the natural expression of his love.

The journey to Platkops dorp by ox-cart from Vergelegen took three nights and the greater part of three days. They travelled slowly because of Deltje's pain, and with frequent outspans to rest their oxen. From Vergelegen to Harmonie all was familiar to them, but not for many years had they been farther afield than Harmonie, and even in the blazing January heat the straight grey road through the brown parched veld, with far-lying homesteads in bare parched lands, was full of interest to them. At night, when the oxen moved steadily forward with a rhythm that the darkness accented, or when they outspanned and the flames of Juriaan's fire danced to the stars above them, their hearts were filled with a quiet content. And before them, day and night, they saw not the grey stone building which Piet Deiselmann had described, but a golden wonder like the Crystal Palace on Deltje's mug. And to this golden wonder, this haven of refuge for the sick and

suffering, they clung with unwavering faith through those desperate hours when Deltje, like some gentle dumb animal, lay clamp and twisted in the sweat and agony of her pain.

It was towards midday on the fourth day of their journey that they reached Platkops dorp, a long straggling village on the east bank of the Ghamka river. Its low, white-washed thatched houses stood back from the wide Hoeg Straat in gardens or green lands sloping down to the river. The street was lined with poplars, willows, and giant eucalyptus trees, and one looked up this green avenue to the Zwartkops Mountains or down it to the Teniquotes. North, south, east, and west the Platkops plain was bounded by mountain ranges, and the village lay in the heart of the plain. The hospital was the only building on the west bank of the river, and was one of the few houses built of stone. It had as yet no trees, no garden, and no green lands around it, but stood, grey and new, with even its yard unenclosed, in the open veld. It did not look in the least like the Crystal Palace on Deltje's mug, but faith, hope, and the tears which dimmed their eyes as they came within sight of it made that bare building, surrounded by a wide *stoep*, beautiful to the old couple. They crossed the river by the nearest drift and drove slowly across the veld towards it.

When Juriaan and Deltje reached the hospital steps the building was already closed and shut-

tered for the midday heat, and beyond the creaking of the ox-cart, and the slow 'Our Father! Our Father!' breathed by the old man as he gazed around him, all was silence. The closed doors and shutters, the empty *stoep*, upon which they had expected to see men and women, cured of their pain, leaping and praising God, did not shake their faith, as the faith of others might have been shaken, in Piet Deiselmans's report. That burning midday silence was for them but the Peace of God, and with the unquestioning patience of poverty and old age they awaited in it whatever was to befall them.

It was the matron who, half an hour later, found the ox-cart at the *stoep* steps. The matron was a kindly, capable, middle-aged woman who spoke both English and Dutch. Juriaan, holding his soft, wide-brimmed hat in his hand, answered her questions humbly. He was Juriaan van Royen, seventy-five years old, working lands on Mijneer van der Wenter's farm of Vergelegen in the Aangenaam valley, and in the cart there, in a nest that he had made for her of the feather bed and pillows, was his wife Deltje, seventy years, come to be cured of the pain in her side. . . .

The matron turned from the old man, so wild and unkempt, so humble and so gentle, to the patient suffering little old woman seated with her bundle on the feather bed. With Juriaan's help she lifted Deltje out of the cart, and together the old couple followed her up the steps

to her office. Here she left them, and in that quiet darkened room they sat on a couch together like children, hand in hand. They did not speak, but now and then the old man, drawing his wife towards him, would whisper that she was his dove, his pearl, his rose of the mountains, and the light of his eyes.

When the matron returned she brought with her a young pleasant-faced nurse. Nurse Robert, she explained, would take Deltje to the woman's ward, and here, on his afternoon round, the doctor would examine her. Juriaan, she said, must await the doctor's report, and had better drive his cart round to the side of the hospital and outspan. Afterwards he might go back to his lands in the Aangenaam valley, or across the river to his friends in Platkops dorp. . . . It was now that for the first time the old couple realized that the hospital was to part them, and that Deltje's cure was not to be immediate. God knows what the little old woman thought as, clinging to the red-and-white handkerchief which held her Bible, her mug, and her shell-covered box, she was led meekly away by the nurse; but for Juriaan it was as if the end of the world had come. Stunned and shaken, groping his way like a man suddenly blinded in paths that are strange to him, he went out into the dazzling sunshine and outspanned.

It was not until after coffee-time—but the old man had had no heart for coffee-making—that

Juriaan was sent for to the matron's office, where the doctor was waiting for him. The doctor was an Englishman, and that he had settled in Dutch Platkops when he might have settled in English Princes town was a fact never forgotten by Platkops and never forgiven by Princes town. With the old man standing humbly before him he explained now, in slow careful Dutch, the nature of Deltje's pain. It was a bad pain. Such a pain in a younger woman might perhaps be cured, but for an old woman there was no cure, only a treatment that for a time might ease it. If Juriaan would leave his wife for some weeks in the hospital all that could be done for her the doctor would do, and it might be that after some weeks she would be well enough to go back again to the Aangenaam valley. It was for Juriaan himself to say whether she should stay, and it was for Juriaan to say whether, in the meantime, he would go back to his lands on the mountain-side or to his friends in Platkops dorp.

The old man thanked the doctor, and in the quiet measured speech which gave weight and dignity to all he said, answered that if it was in the hospital that the doctor could ease Deltje's pain it was in the hospital that she must stay. As for himself, he could not go back to the Aangenaam valley without his love, his life, his dear one. Nor could he go to his friends in Platkops dorp, for he had none there. He was

a stranger to Platkops dorp. All his life had he lived on the mountain-side in the Aangenaam valley, and fifty years had his little dove lived with him. If it was not the will of the Lord that she should be cured of her pain, let the doctor do what he could to ease it, and let him, of his goodness and mercy, give Juriaan leave to camp out in the veld by the hospital to be near her until he could take her home. . . .

The doctor turned to the matron and said briefly: 'Let him stay. Take him to her.'

Juriaan followed the matron out of the office down a long, bare passage, which ended in a long, bare, bright room. In this room were six narrow white beds. By the side of each bed was a well-scrubbed locker, and above each bed hung a plain white card. The floor was as white as were the lockers, and this bright, bare cleanliness was all that at first the old man could grasp. Presently he saw that in three of the beds were women, wearing little white frilled caps that made them look like babies. And slowly it dawned upon him that one of these women, one of these babies, was Deltje.

At the sight of Deltje's smooth, round, innocent face set off so oddly by the little frilled cap, Juriaan forgot the strangeness of that strange room, forgot the white-capped heads in the other beds, forgot the matron standing by his side. He saw only his love, his joy, his treasure. And kneeling down by her side he drew her two

brown hands into his and held them close against his breast.

That night, for the first time since their marriage, Juriaan and Deltje lay apart. For the old man there was neither rest nor sleep. For long he watched the lights in Platkops dorp twinkling across the river, and for long after those lights died out he watched the stars above him. He lay now on the feather bed in the cart, and now on the hard ground beneath it. He wandered like a ghost round the silent hospital buildings and came back to the ox-cart with a pain that brought tears to his eyes, though he could trace it to no definite part of his body whatever. He did not now cry 'Our Father! Our Father!' for help. The silence of the night, the silence of the grey stone building which held his little dove, his pearl, was still for him the silence of the Peace of God. But it was of a God withdrawn as if for ever from his reach.

For Deltje, too, the night was endless. For the first time in her life she lay, not in her shift and petticoats on a feather bed, but in a cotton nightgown on a narrow mattress. The unaccustomed freedom of her limbs made that narrow bed wide and empty as a desert to her. And when she slept, in short broken snatches between attacks of pain, it was to dream that Juriaan lay dead by her side and that she pressed against his cold body for comfort and warmth in vain. When morning came it was not the pain in

Deltje's side that made life a mystery to the old couple. It was the pain in both their hearts.

Through the long, hot days, and the hot, still, moonlit nights that followed, the loneliness of the old people, and for Juriaan the sense of a God withdrawn, steadily increased. The ways of the hospital, the order and routine necessary for the running of it, remained to the end incomprehensible to them both. For fifty years on their mountain-side in the Aangenaam valley life had been for them as simple as were their daily needs, as humble as were their hearts. In this new and bewildering world the kindness of the English doctor, of the matron, and of the nurse reached them only as the kindness of human beings reaches the suffering of dumb animals. On neither side was there, nor could there be, complete understanding. The doctor and the matron might know all that was to be known about the pain in Deltje's side. About the pain in her heart and in Juriaan's they knew nothing. And from the inquisitiveness of the other patients in the ward the little old woman shrank with a gentle timidity which increased her isolation.

Alone among strangers in that bright, bare room Deltje would lie, quiet and uncomplaining, thinking of her house on the mountain-side: of the warmth and comfort of the feather bed in the little bedroom that smelt so pleasantly of *mist*: of the wooden shutter, held by a

leather thong, which creaked with the lightest of mountain breezes: of the peach-stone floor, with patches of sunlight crossing it from the open half-door: of the peach-trees by the little stream that never once in fifty years had failed them: of fruit-drying for the Thanksgiving: of the Thanksgiving service in front of the church door at Harmonie, when Juriaan, bareheaded among the men, would smile across to her among the women: of the journey home again and the first glimpse that came to one down in the valley road of the little brown-walled house perched high up on the mountain-side by the peach-trees and the stream. . . .

With his own hands had Juriaan built that house for her. For fifty years had the little stream quenched their thirst, and now they drank of a strange, lifeless water stored in tanks. For fifty years they had slept side by side in the little room with the friendly creaking shutter, and now they lay apart. . . . What was it that had brought them here? The pain in her side. . . . But she had now no pain in her side. All her pain was now in her heart. Every day she would insist to the nurse that she had now no pain in her side. And the nurse would laugh, jerk her head a little to one side, and say: 'Am I then a child? Wait a little, Tanta! Wait a little! It is for me to say when you have no pain in your side!' Of the pain in her heart she spoke only to Juriaan, when, in the evenings, he sat with her for half an hour. . . .

The old man had made his camp on that side of the hospital in which the women's ward lay, and from her bed Deltje could see the smoke of his fire as it rose into the still, hot, clear air. He seldom left the camp except to wander disconsolate round the hospital buildings, or out into the veld to attend to his oxen. Twice a day he sat for a little with Deltje in the ward, and in her thin, clear voice she would read to him from her Bible. But nothing that she read in that bright, bare room, smelling so strangely of disinfectants, brought comfort to his soul. His God was still withdrawn. Night and day the pain in his heart gave him no peace. He lived like a man in a trance. Once he was sent across the river to Platkops dorp. He saw there, in the windows of the shops in the Hoeg Straat, such things as he never before had seen and was never to see again, but they made no impression on his mind whatever. He passed down the Hoeg Straat as if in a dream of unbearable sadness and never revisited it.

It was the young, pleasant-faced Nurse Robert who had sent Juriaan into Platkops dorp. To her there still remained the bright, hard self-confidence of youth, and in Juriaan and Deltje she saw only two aged innocents whose affairs it was her duty, and certainly her pleasure, to control. Her management of them, she was convinced, was for their good, and in all she did for them there was a certain brusque kindliness. It was she who answered for Deltje when the

doctor made his daily round, and though even to the doctor Deltje would timidly protest that she had now no pain in her side her protests were drowned in the brisk common sense of the nurse. It was Nurse Robert, too, who timed Juriaan's visit to his wife, and who, on occasions, shooed him out of the ward like a hen. And, humble and gentle as they were, the aged innocents were unaccustomed to any control beyond that love of God and of each other which up on the mountain-side had ruled their simple lives. This brisk, bright, personal interference bewildered them as nothing else in the hospital did. They came to resent it. They came to fear the pleasant-faced nurse as they had never before feared any other human being. She stood between them and the doctor: between them and the matron: and, by her refusal to allow that Deltje's pain was cured and her return to the Aangenaam valley possible, between them and everything that made life dear. With her brisk, bright contempt for the Aangenaam valley, and her praise for everything that Platkops, by contrast, produced, even to its rain-water, she drove them into a bewildered silence, and at last to flight.

It was the rain-water that, for the old couple, brought the pain in their hearts to its quiet and unnoticed crisis. In Platkops dorp the water in the furrows and rivers was so brackish that in marshy lands the ground had always a thin

white coating of salt, and for drinking purposes rain-water was stored in iron tanks. For this water Deltje had what Nurse Robert considered an unreasonable distaste. It was in fact the gentle uncomplaining little old woman's one whim, and as the days passed and, though neither she nor Juriaan realized it, as her weakness increased, her mind dwelt more and more on the brown bubbling mountain stream which for fifty years had quenched her thirst. There came a day when in her weakness her talk wandered brokenly from the stream by the peach-trees to the well of Bethlehem, and from David's cry for the water of that well, to the River of Water of Life. . . . Juriaan sitting helpless by her side felt that his heart must break with its sorrow, that his body must die of the dull heavy pain that possessed it. . . . And slowly, through his suffering, his mind came to its deliberate resolve.

When Nurse Robert ordered Juriaan out of the ward that evening, the old man left by the French door close to Deltje's bed. In those hot January nights this door was left open, and only the outer shutters were closed. The catch of these, Juriaan knew, could be raised from the outside with a knife. He knew also that Deltje's clothes had been folded away into the locker that stood by her bed. There was now only one other patient in the ward, an old, old woman dozing her life away at the far end of the room.

And because there were at present no serious cases in the hospital no one was on duty at night. On all these things his mind worked slowly, but clearly, as he went out into the veld to look for his oxen. He found them, drove them back to the cart, fed them, and tied them to it. He lit a fire and made himself some strong, black, bitter coffee. He ate nothing. His stock of provisions, in spite of his daily meal from the hospital kitchen, was now so low for what he had in hand that he dared not lessen it. Night had now fallen, and after arranging the feather bed and pillows into a little nest, the old man lay down on the hard ground beneath the cart. Above him the sky was sprinkled with stars, and the Milky Way made a broad white path across the heavens. But Juriaan did not look at the stars, and if God walked in His starry heavens His servant Juriaan did not know it. His God was still withdrawn. Sorrow was all his company. . . .

When the last of the lights had twinkled into darkness across the river the old man took off his *veldschoen* and crept cautiously round the hospital buildings. Here, too, all was silence and darkness. He returned to the cart and inspanned the oxen, placing stones before the wheels. Then he went back to the hospital, mounted the *stoep*, raised the hasp of the shutters with his knife, and slipped into the silent ward, where Deltje on her narrow bed, that wide and empty desert, lay quietly, awake.

The old man went up to her and said, without haste, without fear, but with an infinite tenderness:

'Look now, my little one! Look now, my dove! Have I not made again a nest in the cart for you? And are not our oxen once more inspanned? Come now, in my arms will I carry you out to the cart, and back to the Aangenaam valley we will go.'

He stooped down, opened the locker, and drew out her clothes. With a strange, gentle deliberation he helped her into her petticoats, and tied up her Bible, her mug, and her shell-covered box. The bottle of medicine left standing on the locker he slipped into his pocket. Then he gathered the little old woman up into his arms and carried her out into the moonlit night.

In her little nest in the feather bed Deltje lay content. She had ceased now to tremble, and not for one moment did she question Juriaan's right to act as he was doing. Already her heart was filled with that sense of security which his mere presence brought her. Already the hospital was but a dream that only for a moment had parted them. The pain in her heart had gone. Of the pain in her side she would not think. Had she not learned in the hospital how to hide it? Up in the mountains sitting by the stream and drinking of its clear brown water she would have no pain. . . . Lying through the

night by Juriaan's side she would have no pain. . . . She lay back among the pillows, a gentle, dying woman, her heart overflowing with its quiet content.

Seated on the wagon-box before her, Juriaan drove steadily across the veld, through the drift, and out on to the Platkops-Princestown road. Slowly his numbed heart regained its warmth. Slowly he came to feel that his God was no longer withdrawn. Here, in the ox-cart with his little love, was his God. Had He not eased her pain? If she was weak had He not given His servant Juriaan arms that were strong to carry her? Against his breast like a little child he would carry her, and so should she rest. . . .

They reached the top of the Groot Kop, the highest of the low, flat-topped hills that surrounded Platkops dorp, and here the old man wheeled round the cart and halted to rest his oxen. Below them, in the clear pale moonlight, lay the quiet village, but it was across the river that they looked, at the grey stone building standing there alone. A moment only they halted, then turned, and went on.

THE SINNER

1925

NIKLAAS DAMPERS, the *bijwoner*¹ who worked Mijnheer van Reenen's lands near Platkops

¹ *Bijwoner*=by-dweller: a man who lives on the farm

dorp, was fifty-six years old when his favourite daughter Saartje married and went to live with her husband in the Philip district. Niklaas had prayed that Saartje might never leave him, and the Lord's strange answer to his prayer filled his mind with an unreasoning hatred of his ten remaining children and of his wife Toontje. The bijwoner was a small, weak, religious man, with pale red-lidded eyes, arms that seemed too long for his body, and a heart that was full of bitterness and the fear of the Lord. Of all his children, it seemed to him now, Saartje alone had been dear to him, and if he had ever loved his wife he had long ago forgotten it. Toontje was a tall, patient, silent woman, who shared with none the secrets of her soul. God might know what Toontje hid in her heart, but in all their years of poverty together Niklaas had never fathomed it, and now that Saartje had left him, his wife's patience and silence, and his own increasing hatred of her, became a torture which drove the bijwoner to the verge of madness. And it did drive him to Koba Nooi for comfort.

Jacoba Nooi, a stranger to the district, had but lately come to Platkops dorp on a visit to her uncle, the bijwoner Godlieb Nooi, whose lands came next to those of Niklaas Dampers. Koba was a plump unmarried woman of forty, with a round childish face, a tongue like a running of another working certain lands in part-shares for the owner.

sluice, and a gentle sing-song voice. On Sundays, with an air of great simplicity and innocence, she wore a sprigged cotton gown and a hat trimmed with ribbons. All other women of her age in the *bijwoning* class wore plain black dresses and black calico sunbonnets, and Koba's hat made much talk among them. So also did her hand-mirror, which was rimmed with little shells and set with larger shells at the back. Such a mirror had never before been seen by any *bijwoner's* wife or daughter in the *Platkops* district. Many strange things were whispered about it, and many more about Koba herself, who, when her work was done, would sit out in the yard, or down by the river, flashing her mirror in the sun.

Of the mirror, and of the whispers about Koba, *Niklaas* knew nothing. *Toontje* had never spoken of them to him, and his own distress of mind was now so great that he himself spoke to none whom he might avoid. For many years this weak, harsh, embittered man had feared the Lord and worshipped Him. For many years he had believed that at the last the Lord would deal justly with such righteousness as his, and visit vengeance upon all such sinners as were most other men in the *Platkops* district. Through all his years of poverty this alone had been his comfort. And now because *Saartje* had loved a stranger from the *Philip* district and left her parents to marry him, neither righteousness nor

sin, neither justice nor vengeance, had any meaning for the bijwoner, and he searched for his God in vain.

Towards the end of February month, by Mijneheer van Reenen's orders, Niklaas had begun to cut his tobacco, and it was now hanging in open shelters on the land to dry. Andries van Reenen was a hard master, whose one passion, even now when men said that he was dying, was the tobacco he grew on his various lands throughout the Platkops district. Any bijwoner who did not plant, weed, cut, dry, strip, dip, and twist to please him he dismissed without pity, and all men knew it. Niklaas, a good servant, was never, in the tobacco season, without fear of this dismissal. This year the crop had been good, and his master, for the moment, was satisfied. But in a few weeks now the tobacco would be dry, and then, waiting for a dewy night to soften the leaves, the bijwoner must take the stalks from the shelters and begin to 'strip'. If a man stripped the leaves from the stalks in weather that was too dry, the leaves crumbled and would not afterwards 'twist'. If he stripped them in weather that was too damp they mildewed. A dewy night he must wait for if the wrath of Mijneheer were not to overtake him.

All this Niklaas knew, but it was not of this that he thought as he walked across the hot, empty lands, from shelter to shelter, one still March day. Mijneheer van Reenen might be

merciless to his bijwoners if they failed with his tobacco, but no man, it seemed to Niklaas now, could be so merciless to another as God had been to him in taking Saartje to Philip dorp and leaving Toontje in Platkops. If the Lord now, by some miracle, had taken Toontje to Philip and left Saartje in Platkops how gladly would he have praised Him! But God was no longer his friend. God was, in fact, but another Toontje . . . as patient, and as secret, and as silent.

This thought brought the bijwoner to the bank of the river. And as he stood there with his soul in a torment of hatred that now embraced both his wife and the Almighty, Koba Nooi, with a little giggle from down below him, flashed her mirror up on to his face, on to his shirt sleeve, on to the bushes and stones that lay between them, and drew him slowly, slowly, down the bank towards her.

The bijwoner could never afterwards remember how he reached the river-bed, but presently he found himself seated by Koba's side with the mirror in his hands. Niklaas, who had never seen the sea, held the mirror-back towards him, and drew his fingers gently over the smooth round shells. Koba, who had been to Zandtbaai, and seen not only the sea but the ships that sail upon it, told him, in her gentle sing-song voice, many strange and wonderful things about it. Then suddenly, with a little giggle, she twisted the mirror round, and Niklaas saw before him

part of his own wild and sorrowful face, and part of Koba Nooi's plump, round, childish one pressing against it. Giggling still, Koba twisted the mirror back, then round again, then back and round and round till Niklaas, who saw his face only on Sundays, in a small cracked piece of looking-glass that Toontje kept in a drawer, was like a drunken man in his bewilderment. And because his heart was empty now of all sense of righteousness and sin, of all fear of justice and of vengeance, there swept into it a wild tumult of desire that was but another madness.

Three weeks later, while Niklaas's tobacco still hung in its shelters, Toontje went, a calm inscrutable woman in a black calico gown and sunbonnet, to the farm of Mijnheer van Reenen, which lay an hour by foot from Platkops dorp. Here Andries van Reenen, a rich man and a hard master, respected and feared, but loved by none even among his own family, was dying slowly of stone in the bladder. Toontje's father had been one of his many *bijwoners*, on lands that he once had owned and afterwards sold, in the Kombuis—a valley which lay to the north of the district among the Zwartkops foot-hills. Not for many years had Toontje visited the farm, and not once since her marriage had she spoken with her master alone. When she came to the house the old man sat out on the *stoep* in a big iron-wood chair made specially for his comfort. His face was grey and drawn, and he answered her greeting

with an abrupt, bitter 'Good day'. In her youth in the Kombuis this tall patient woman, so quiet in her speech, so controlled in all her movements, had been free and beautiful to him as a roe-buck in the mountains. But he did not now remember it and saw in her only the bearer of news about that last passion of his life, his tobacco.

'How goes it?' he asked.

'Mijnheer,' answered Toontje, 'the tobacco dries well. But look how it is! Five-and-twenty years has Niklaas worked for Mijnheer, and a good servant has he been, but now a madness has come upon him and up to the Kombuis with Koba Nooi he has gone, and is working tobacco there for the Hollander.'

'Niklaas? In the Kombuis!' cried his master, incredulous. And he added in a sudden blaze of anger, 'May his soul burn in hell and Koba's also.'

'Mijnheer,' said the bijwoner's wife in her quiet level voice, 'may God forgive him in his madness, but is it for Mijnheer and me to judge him?'

'Fool,' thundered the old man, 'are you then also mad?'

And Toontje answered: 'Mijnheer knows that once I was mad. Mijnheer knows how my madness ended. Did Mijnheer never himself go up to the Kombuis? Or is it that he has perhaps forgotten?'

'Toontje!' cried the old man, his mind

moving, slow and bewildered, from his tobacco to the past. 'Toontje!'

'Andries!'

For a moment their eyes met, and in that moment the secret which Toontje hid in her heart and Niklaas had never fathomed, lay bared between them. The moment passed, and as if it had never been, the *bijwoner's* wife, calm, inscrutable, said to her master:

'Mijnheer, see how it is. My son Ockert is now sixteen years, and if Mijnheer will but trust his tobacco to Ockert and me, so soon as it is dry, after the first dewy night, we will strip and afterwards do all as it should be done till Niklaas comes again from the *Kombuis*. Mijnheer knows that such a madness will not last, and Mijnheer knows that I will serve him well. Have I not served Mijnheer for more than Niklaas's five-and-twenty years? And what is it that I ask of him now but still to serve him?'

'And is this then all that you will have of me,' asked the old man slowly. 'You that once lived for me in the *Kombuis*?'

'Mijnheer, there is but one thing more. If Mijnheer will but say, to all that speak of it, that he himself has sent Niklaas up to the *Kombuis*, to see how the *Hollander* works his tobacco . . .'

In a flash, in that passion for his tobacco which through all his months of terrible dying was still to hold him, Andries van Reenen's anger blazed up afresh.

'And to save your husband Niklaas you ask me this,' he cried. 'A fool that could leave his tobacco and you for Koba Nooi?'

'Mijnheer! Mijnheer!' answered Toontje, 'did I not marry the fool to save the master?'

Again the old man's mind went slowly back to the past. 'God forgive me that and many other things,' he said. 'Go. I will say it.'

That night Toontje made up a small bundle of clothing for Niklaas, and with great labour wrote him a letter. This letter she slipped into the bundle, but in the middle of the night she rose, withdrew the letter, and after adding a single sentence again inserted it. Next day she took the bundle up to the morning-market, and finding a wagon there from the Kombuis gave it to the driver to deliver to Niklaas. And to those that stood by her she said:

'Look now! Up to the Kombuis has the master sent Niklaas, to see how the Hollander works his tobacco, and the lands by the river he has left to Ockert and me.'

Up in the Kombuis—that most beautiful and most isolated of all the valleys among the Zwartkop foot-hills—Niklaas, having abandoned his wife and his children, his lands and his tobacco, his conscience and his God, now lived in a mud-walled, one-roomed hut with Koba Nooi and worked for his new master the Hollander. The Hollander was a young and ambitious man who had built a small factory in the valley,

and was working tobacco there in ways that were new and strange to Niklaas. Koba's ways were also strange to him, and, as the fever of his madness subsided, it seemed to the *bijwoner* that this plump, pleasant, and rather greedy woman, with her gentle chatter and her little giggle, was as secret as his own wife Toontje. Toontje's silence, it dawned upon him slowly, hid no more from him than did Koba's talk, which was often now as bewildering to him as was her mirror. The mirror she kept in a little cardboard box shaped like a coffin, and there came a day when Niklaas found her down by the Hollander's gaily painted house flashing her mirror in the sun. When questioned she giggled, slipped the mirror into its box, and said, in her gentle sing-song voice:

'Ach no, then, Niklaas! Leave me and my mirror alone, or I also one day will be sending your clothes after you like your wife Toontje!'

The bundle which Toontje had sent him was stowed away on top of the mud wall, under the thatch, and because of Koba's jeers Niklaas had never opened it.

This meeting, for Niklaas, was the beginning of a vague uneasiness about Koba which steadily increased as her disappearances from the hut became more and more frequent and prolonged. In the factory also the *bijwoner* was far from happy, and there was constant friction between him and his new master. No man in

all the Kombuis valley knew more about Plat-kops tobacco than Niklaas had learned in his long service with Mijnheer van Reenen, but he parted with his knowledge to the Hollander in a spirit of bitter, contemptuous niggardliness which not only the young man, but Koba Nooi, resented.

One day Koba said to him strangely: 'Ach no, then, Niklaas! Did I not bring you here to please the Hollander, and now you will not please him!'

'But, Koba,' said Niklaas, 'was it only for this that we came to the Kombuis . . . to please the Hollander?'

'Ach no, then,' answered Koba. 'Such a nice young man as the Hollander is, who would not wish to please him? Rich he is and all, and did he not need such a man as you, that knows all about Platkops tobacco, when I brought you here to help him?'

'But, Koba,' began Niklaas again . . .

'Ach no, then, Niklaas!' interrupted Koba. 'If the Hollander says to you "Go!" where will you go? To your daughter Saartje or your wife Toontje? Say for me now, which will it be?'

Niklaas could not say, and knew that Koba knew it. That night he lay for long awake, and in the new anxiety which Koba's question had aroused, the conscience which he had so triumphantly abandoned in his flight from Platkops regained its possession of his soul. His sense of

righteousness and sin returned to him, his fear of justice and of vengeance, and he who had once counted himself among the elect now knew himself to be among the damned. In the days that followed so great became his distress that he tried even to speak with Koba of their sin. But no regrets for the past, no fears for the future, had ever troubled Koba, and she would not, to oblige the weak and repentant Niklaas, allow them to trouble her now.

'Ach no, then, Niklaas,' she said, 'surely now if you talk to me so both you and your clothes after you will I send out of the Kombuis, and where then will you go?'

And Niklaas saw himself for ever a prisoner in the Kombuis, a sinner who had sold himself to Koba Nooi and the Devil.

In September month Niklaas planted out for the Hollander the tobacco which had been sown for him in April. The lands lay some distance from the factory, and here Niklaas was free from both Koba and his master, but this freedom brought no peace to his soul. His thoughts, burdened always now by the sense of his sin, went back in a dull hopeless brooding to his own lands near Platkops dorp, to his wife Toontje for whom his hatred had long since died down, to his children, and to Saartje in the Philip district. In the lands, he thought, a stranger must now be planting out tobacco for Mijnheer van Reenen as he was here planting it out for the Hollander.

But where, when his hard and pitiless old master had turned them off his lands, had Toontje gone with the children? There was but one thing she could do, he thought. And he saw his children adopted into the homes of others, as the children of poor whites were sometimes adopted, and Toontje herself in the house of strangers. So, he thought, was his sin, and their shame, published to all the world in Platkops dorp.

There came a day when Niklaas, in a drifting, aimless misery of remorse and indecision, ceased working in the lands and went down to the factory. As he neared the Hollander's gay blue wooden house he saw Koba on the steps of the *stoep*. She wore her sprigged cotton gown and her hat trimmed with ribbons, and sat there flashing her mirror in the sun. As Niklaas watched her the Hollander himself came out of the house and sat down beside her. Niklaas heard Koba's little giggle and her pleasant sing-song, 'Ach no, then, Mijnheer!' as the Hollander put his arm round her waist. For a moment he lingered. Then as Koba, pressing her face against the Hollander's, held the mirror up before them, the *bijwoner* turned and fled.

When he came, exhausted, to the hut, Niklaas was clear about one thing only—he was no longer Koba's prisoner. With no thought but of escape he gathered together his few possessions, adding Toontje's bundle to the rest, and left the

but. Making his way along a low line of kopjes, bright with spring flowers, he left the valley behind him and came at last, after several hours, to the Platkops-Philip dorp road. Here he was brought to a sudden halt, for by that road a man must travel either south or north. And neither south to Platkops, where his children were bonded like slaves, nor north to Philip dorp, where his shame would be Saartje's, could he now go. His way must lie to the east, ahead of him, among the pathless foot-hills by which in time he might come to the Ghamka pass and so through the mountains to the Malgas district. The Malgas district, in the Great Karoo, was dry and waterless, and no tobacco was grown there. All his life he had lived in tobacco lands, but now to Malgas he must go, and live how and where he could. . . .

He turned aside to the shelter of a prickly-pear thicket, and sat there, a weak, foolish, suffering, and repentant old man, staring hopelessly with pale red-lidded eyes at the road before him. He thought again of his tobacco lands down by the river near Platkops dorp, of Toontje and his children, of Saartje, and through his soul there swept a desolation such as he had never before endured. Around him all the veld was gay as a carpet with flowers, and close to where he sat was a bright crimson cluster that made him think of the burning bush out of which the Lord had once spoken to Moses. But the Lord

never now spoke to His people, and who was he, a sinner from the Kombuis, that the Lord should speak to him?

He turned from the flowers and rearranged his bundles for the trek to Malgas. A slip of paper fluttered out on to the ground and he stopped to pick it up. Laboriously, holding it close to his pale weak eyes, he spelled out Toontje's letter.

'Niklaas,' it ran, 'the master told me this day that he will leave the lands to Ockert and me till you come again to Platkops dorp, and to all that speak of it he says that he himself has sent you to the Kombuis to see how the Hollander works his tobacco. This I will tell to our daughter Saartje, for surely, Niklaas, when your madness leaves you, you will come again to our children and me,

TOONTJE.'

And then came that sentence which Toontje had risen in the night to add: 'God forgive me, Niklaas, if I should judge you, for there is not one of us that has not sinned.'

Many, many times did Niklaas read this letter before its meaning became clear to him, and then it was as if in pity and forgiveness God Himself had spoken. With stupid, fumbling fingers, and eyes made redder than ever with tears, he tied his bundles together and took the road to Platkops dorp.

KINGSLEY FAIRBRIDGE

I SURVEY RUSAPI

1927

Gone are those resolute trekkers—pilgrims who passed
through the desert . . .

Suns no longer shall smite them, nor ever the moon
enchant! . . .

Stern was the conflict and long, but the desert has broken
and crushed them . . .

Merged are they in its fabric—one with the infinite veld!

FRANCIS CAREY SLATER.

(The Karoo.)

A NUMBER of farms and a township in the district of Rusapi required surveying. I went as my father's advance agent for the purpose of building survey beacons on all the kopjes for five miles or so around Carr's store on the Rusapi—or Lesapi—River. I walked the distance, sixty odd miles, following the survey line of the Mashonaland Railway. At the Odzi, Inyazura, and Inyamapamberi rivers the bridge builders had started work. At various points on the survey line were contractor's huts, where great gangs of Kafirs—ranging from the Mabandawi of the Lakes to the clean-built fighting men of Matshanga—were digging the cuttings and laying down the embankments of the permanent way.

'*Chai-ire!*'¹ called the overseers; and a hundred hungry voices would respond in chorus, '*Hara-hara!*'²

I camped with strange men at night, and heard strange speech and tales. Some of the men had worked on the Beira Railway—you knew them by their yellow faces—but most of them came from England or the Argentine. This high-veld work was a different matter from the here-to-day-and-gone-to-morrow struggle on the Pungwe Flats, but even here men died. I remember Robinson, a florid, jovial man who told us all about his wife and three little children in a London suburb—whither he was returning when his contract was over. He had calculated that he would make good money; he showed me his assets and his liabilities, and where he saved while other men drank. Before I returned the Head Overseer had come that way by night, calling '*Chai-ire*' as he passed. And Robinson had put by his figures and his tools, leaving an address for his last cable home.

The man who sent that cable was my friend Hutchinson, at that time working for my father; and he too has gone. And Dicky Marks, the mason; and his chum Angus. And Bloech of Transau and Ross of Rusapi. And the merry Irish lad at Inyazura, and the bridge-builder at

¹ '*Chai-ire!*' or '*chia-é!*', it has struck (i.e. noon has struck, therefore it is time to cease work and eat).

² '*Hara-hara!*', Hurrah.

the Odzi, and many another of whose hospitality I partook, whose names I have forgotten, but whose faces are still in my eyes. *Hara-hara!* my brothers, we may yet meet again.

A lad of thirteen, dressed in knickers and shirt sleeves, I walked on the outskirts of the Empire, where the shouting of men, the ring of hammers on stone, and the thud of picks in the baked earth were always in my ears. I saw the dust blow from the rising embankments, and the rocks rent asunder in the cuttings. Fig and thorn and kafir-orange vanished before the axes; villages of grass and canvas sprang to life amidst the virgin veld. Men sang along the flanks of mountains, within whose caves the forgotten Bushman had painted his gallery of beast and tree and battle. The little streams did not know themselves; perspiring bodies gloried in their crystal clearness where, perchance, men had never washed before. The long brown grass yielded her crop of thatch. The stone faces of the sleepy kopjes were rent with dynamite, that the bridges of the British people might be established in security. The wild bees were pestered by a score of thieves. The baboons shouted at the intruders; the horned game fled westwards to the Sabi.

And so I went ahead on the tide of progress, wondering and observing, and thinking of the thousand homesteads that would some day dot these fields.

It was spring. Over the granite kopjes of the high-veld came the lichens in lovely tints of ivory and red and yellow. The umsasas clustered round the giant rocks were a delicate intricacy of every shade from crimson to opal brightness. Scorpions and centipedes deserted their winter quarters under stone and bark; and every evening the long-tailed night-jars flitted noiselessly before us as we returned to camp. Sand-veld is merry veld, and we had a good time at Rusapi notwithstanding certain inconveniences.

The inconveniences were in the matter of food. My father had given me two or three pounds, and expected to join me at Rusapi in the course of about a week. I spent the money at Carr's store on ufu for my boys and bully beef and canned fruit for myself. But my father was delayed, and did not arrive for a month or more. In the course of the first fortnight I ran out of provisions, and a curious diffidence prevented me from buying further supplies 'on tick', so I ate ufu—plain, unappetizing ufu made from ropoko.¹

The bridge contractor and Carr himself several times invited me to dinner, but the pride of poverty had taken root in my heart, and only once did I leave my own camp fire. On that occasion I ate enormously of boiled fowl, notwithstanding my efforts to check my appetite, and went away resolutely determined not to go again. I had not taken a gun, so I had no way

¹ Maize.

of potting the few orebi that sped before us over the plains, or the sparse dikkop that bobbed their heads at us. Rusapi is high, open country, wide grass plains dotted here and there with granite kopjes. My two boys and I armed ourselves with knobkerries, and sometimes, on our way home from the day's work, we would have an impromptu game drive. We would approach a likely looking glade from different sides, and I would put Vic in to rouse the orebi. Our intention was to brain the orebi as it rushed out. But orebi are not so easily caught. Never did we get within a hundred yards of one.

We were more successful with the native fish-traps. My boys used to visit these early in the morning, and I am ashamed to say I did not scorn to share the two or three miserable little sardines that were only too seldom the reward of their dishonesty. There were no guinea-fowl to snare, no pheasants, no cane-rats, not even an oily lagevaan.¹ For a long time field-mouse was the only flesh we tasted. At sundown we used to dig the little animals from their earths. 'Six-pence', the picannin, would dig away with a pointed stick, while Vic, and the other boy—Simon—and I would wait around and keep a sharp look-out lest our quarry should escape by another exit. Sometimes we bagged three or four in the evening. We cooked them very simply—putting them straight on the burning

¹ Iguana, lizard.

embers, and when the hair had frizzled off and they looked cooked, we disembowelled them. If we had first skinned them, there would have been nothing left.

Sixpence was a pimply and bandy-legged youth with a great store of unedifying tales about life in his native Senna. Simon came from farther north, and was professedly a Christian; he belonged to the tribe of Mabandawi, of whom vast numbers have been Christianized by the Blantyre missionaries. He carried a small 'Reader' of a religious nature. From this book with some difficulty he could make out a few monosyllabic sentences. Even these became fewer in the unacademic atmosphere of Rusapi.

Simon was a flagrant braggart. One of his favourite utterances was that nothing could make him afraid. But he was obviously terrified of Vic, and when we pointed this out to him he admitted that, as a matter of fact, he did have an instinctive objection to dogs. He fell further in our estimation by taking to his heels while Sixpence and I were robbing a native hive. He explained this by saying that it was dishonest to steal honey, and moreover stolen honey was sure to give one a stomach-ache—'for the owners of the hive have buried magic at the foot of the tree.' On the same day we tried to scale a kopje known as the Lion's Head, in order to build a beacon on the summit. The kopje had been fortified against the Matabele or the Tshangaans

by the Makalanga of old. We had to crawl on all fours through a narrow stone gateway. No sooner had we all emerged than we became aware of a vast rock-python coiled amidst the fallen rocks of the upper side, and regarding us with a beady stare. We were all startled, for we must have passed within a few inches of the creature; but Simon was so thoroughly horrified that infection was transmitted to the picannin and myself, and we made no effort to kill the reptile. After this we discovered the skulls of several deceased baboons, which pointed to the prowess of the rock-python, and Simon became dubious about the advisability of proceeding up the kopje. He advised a swift descent by another route, saying that the place was bewitched. However, we reassured him, and came at length to the base of an immense boulder that crowned the summit. The boulder was rent in two parts, and was capped by a smaller. Up this rent I sent Simon, while Sixpence and I waited till the passage was clear.

It became clear sooner than we expected. As Simon put his face over the upper ledge, he uttered a piercing yell and, tumbling down the rent, fled helter-skelter and shouting down the kopje. His terror was so complete that his black face, as he dashed past me, appeared positively blanched—and this apparent whitening of the face is no exaggeration, for I have seen other Kafirs in a like state.

Sixpence and I, drawing clear of whatever demon guarded the summit of the boulder, sat down and roared with laughter; but I do not think either of us was feeling any too steady. I know that at length, when I faced the rent myself, I took my sheath knife naked between my teeth and made the ascent in a very leisurely manner. As I raised my head warily over the ledge I found myself looking into the cold eye and at the blunted nose and flicking tongue of a python at least twice—so it seemed to me—the length, girth, and potency of the one by the rocky gate!

Without further ado I lowered myself from that position of danger, and Sixpence and I joined Simon on the plain below—when the latter carefully explained to us that the missionaries had warned him more than once of the iniquity of snakes.

About this time we proposed erecting a new beacon on a hill called Commonage Kóp. It was fortified, like the Lion's Head, with several lines of stone walls. When we had surmounted these we came upon the real difficulty. Upon our left towered a mighty granite monolith, quite unscaleable; at our feet was a crevasse—a great rent in the granite, of profound depth and hideous aspect; before us, and separated from us by the crevasse, was another monolith crowned with a ring of boulders—the citadel of the fortification. The monolith upon our left,

which was the highest point, was coped with an immense boulder, and could be reached only by surmounting Menhir No. 2. From Menhir No. 2 clung perilously an ancient and decrepit pole, over which, no doubt, some one had once essayed to reach the sky-supporting crest of Menhir No. 1.

A yawning chasm lay before us, and this could be crossed only by the aid of long stout poles set against the slippery face of Menhir No. 2. But the thought of creeping across another wobbly pole afterwards, and at a still greater altitude, sent a cold shiver down my back. The nervousness of Simon was quite comforting to witness. We all three sat down (in order to get a surer purchase of terra firma) to discuss the situation, and fixed our eyes on the ancient pole that hung fifty feet above us. It was an extraordinary coincidence, but seemed to us fraught with a horrid significance, that at that very moment the ancient pole slipped, lost its balance, and hurtled directly down the crevasse to fall with a sickening crash a hundred feet below. I flung myself a yard or two back. A grey smile of horror pulled wryly at the pimpled face of Sixpence. Simon merely groaned and rolled over on his face, grasping convulsively at the lichened granite. Even Vic was moved and, deserting the alluring entrance of a badger hole, peered shiveringly over the rent.

As soon as I felt sufficiently recovered I

ordered the two boys to go down to the plain and cut a long stout pole, but Simon hysterically declined to take any part in the surmounting of either of the massive menhirs, and declared that this place—the gloomy, yawning chasm—was very much like the ‘Hell-o’ of whose torments the Blantyre missionaries had frequently spoken.

Not altogether ungrateful to the missionaries, I determined to leave Commonage Kop to my father. A week or two later he turned up, accompanied by his assistant, Cadoux. We thus changed our frugal diet for plenteous boiled fowl, rice, sweet potatoes, and tinned stuff. I told my father of the difficulties of Commonage Kop, and we set off there at once, taking a good supply of rope and axes. Simon absented himself for the day. When we arrived at the foot of the great monoliths it struck me that I was feeling a good deal bolder than before; and for the first time I realized that confidence is catching.

We cut long poles, lashed them together, and laid them against Menhir No. 2. We took off our boots and climbed up, one by one. Then we hauled up two more poles and laid them across the abyss. The far ends of them rested unsteadily on the edge of Menhir No. 1 at an upward angle. Upon the summit was the great boulder, upon the top of which my father proposed to set up his theodolite and take

observations. All round the base of the boulder, between it and the monolith, was a narrow ledge overlooking the gulf. It was proposed to crawl round this ledge to the other side, from which it appeared that the big boulder might be climbed. My father was for going first, to reconnoitre the position, for he was a fearless man. But Cadoux would not let him, and insisted on a picannin being sent first with a rope, for the smaller the climber the better chance of life he would have on that narrow ledge. My father had a picannin, but he promptly prostrated himself on the rock, and refused to budge. So finally my poor pimply Sixpence was selected. We roped him well, and sent him off. It was hair-raising to see the poles wobble. Four boys tried to steady them, while the rest of us payed out Sixpence's life-line. He passed the poles in good style, and wormed his way agonizingly round the narrow ledge: but once in safety on the far side his spirit failed him, and we could hear him sobbing aloud, '*Yowe, maiwango-maiwango-we!*' ('Alas, my mother, my mother!')

Then my father went across, and then Cadoux; and they set up the theodolite, and took their observations. But I remained on the top of Menhir No. 2; in the first place because I was not wanted on the boulder, and in the second place because I would not have made the journey if I had been. And when they made

the return journey I found that Cadoux, too, was a brave man. He was a Londoner, and could not be expected to have much experience of places like Commonage Kop; but, my father and he being the last to make the descent, he insisted that my father should precede him. So that he himself crossed the two poles with no one at the farther end to hold them steady.

When we were at length on solid earth again, I had a narrow escape from losing my life. I was standing at the foot of the second monolith from which the boys were coming down, one by one. My back was towards the monolith, and my father and Cadoux were standing about fifteen yards away across a little crevasse and facing me. Suddenly I became aware of a dull, gritting noise, and glancing towards my father I saw him gesticulating wildly and struggling to speak.

'Look out!' shouted Cadoux; and I drew back into the hollow base of the monolith.

On the same instant a great boulder, that must have weighed five hundredweight, crashed from the monolith above and splintered into a thousand fragments upon the very spot where I had been standing.

One of the boys on the summit had set the great stone sliding down the monolith, not knowing that I was standing just below. My father reached over to a forked shrub and seized his

rifle; and the boy who set that stone a-sliding came very near to following it. But even as my father opened the breech-block he changed his mind, and putting down the rifle again said quietly:

'That was a narrow squeak, old Turnip-top!'

ANTHONY PARSONS

STRONG MEASURES

1927

THAT the Dutchman was disgruntled seemed evident from the way he slammed down the lid of the big chest.

'Here!' he growled, holding out a suit of a cut fashionable, perhaps, in Cecil Rhodes's day. 'What about these? Will they do?'

'Fine!' pronounced Dick Sandling, determined not to be put out by his host's boorishness. He laid the trousers against his legs. 'Fit me like a bally glove, eh?'

'Humph! Got all you want?'

'Everything, thanks,' answered Sandling, sweetly. 'And a darned sight more than I ever expected!' he added under his breath, as, without another word, the Dutchman turned and left him.

'Funny kind of chap,' was his thought as he stripped off his sodden clothes. His mind ran over the events which had led up to his practically forcing himself upon this surly Dutchman for a night's lodging. He thought of the light, which, while serving to guide him from the jungle to this lonely house, had been so uncompromisingly put out at the precise second in which he had knocked at the door for admission.

'There's one thing about it,' he told himself, as he wrung out his soaking puttees and festooned them across the bottom of the bed to dry, 'it's pretty obvious that he didn't want me here!'

He picked up the coat the Dutchman had so grudgingly lent him, and for the first time noticed a large hole in its back. A jagged hole it was, and with its edges badly iron-moulded, and since the Dutchman had not thought to provide him with a dry shirt it meant that his bare back would be thus prettily exposed.

'Ah, well,' was his cheerful comment. 'Good soldiers never look behind!' But as his fingers came to the buttons, and encountered a small, round, neatly-punched hole lying exactly in the centre of the breast, he stopped dead, a startled look replacing the dry humour in his eyes.

Dick Sandling was not a nervous man, nor yet a man over-given to introspection, but as he stripped off that coat and studied the two holes in juxtaposition, he was aware of a distinctly quickened pulse. It didn't need an expert eye to realize that somebody had been shot while wearing that coat, and a very cursory examination of the relative position of those holes showed him at once that that somebody had been most assuredly killed.

'Feels like a shroud!' he muttered, as he put on the coat again. He ran his fingers through his hair, wiped his face on his handkerchief, but all the time he was thinking of the Dutchman's

queer lack of welcome. 'He didn't want me to come here,' he thought. 'Why?'

It was a very uneasy man who, ten minutes later, walked slowly into the middle room to rejoin his host.

The Dutchman was sitting at the table in exactly the same position as when he had first discovered him. His long, matted beard overflowed his chest, while his fingers lay tightly interlocked upon the table.

'So!' he growled, as Sandling came into the circle of light cast by the hurricane-lamp. 'They fit you, eh? Draw up that chair yonder, and sit down. I suppose you'll want a drink?'

Sandling nodded. He felt he did need a drink, and, moreover, needed it strong. The discovery of those holes had not only given him a nasty shock, but had actually engendered a vague suspicion in his mind. Twenty years of jungle wanderings had carried him into many strange camps, but in all his experience he was able to recall no such lonely house as this, nor any such queer character as the mysterious hook-nosed Dutchman who was his host.

'Water?'

He shook his head.

'I'll have it neat, thanks. Here's how!'

The dop was strong. It went down his throat like liquid fire, and when he had recovered from the fit of coughing consequent upon its unexpected rawness, he felt considerably better for it.

The Dutchman, however, had not joined him.

'Tell me,' he asked, as Sandling's eye caught his. 'Why did you come here?'

'Why did I come here?' Sandling repeated the question in surprise. 'I've already told you that three times. I've told you how I left my safari at midday in order to follow up an elephant spoor, and how, as luck would have it, I not only didn't get the elephant but lost my safari as well!'

'Yes; but how did you come to find *me*?'

'I saw your light from the jungle,' explained Sandling. 'The light,' he added, bluntly, 'which you so hospitably doused when you heard my foot on the door-step.'

'But did you come to find *me*?', persisted the Dutchman, in no way disconcerted by this revelation of his boorishness.

'To find you!' Sandling stared. 'Why the devil should I come to find you?'

'But did you?'

'Good Lord, no! I hadn't the foggiest notion that there was another white man within a couple of hundred miles of me.'

'Then you were lost?'

'Was—and, for that matter, still am!'

'And you didn't know I lived here?'

'Hadn't the very foggiest notion.'

'And you didn't come here to find me?'

'Holy Moses!' Sandling crashed his fist on the table so that the tin cups rattled. 'Haven't

I already said so, a score of times? What the dickens are you getting at? What are you *afraid* of?' he asked, softly, a sudden thought of those holes coming back to his mind.

'I'm afraid,' admitted the Dutchman, 'I'm afraid that you are a police officer.'

'Eh?' With a startled look in his blue eyes Sandling sat bolt upright. 'A police officer?' he stammered. 'Now, why the devil should you think that?'

The Dutchman's eyes flickered and fell under the other's earnest scrutiny.

'Because it so happens that my last visitor was a police officer,' he admitted.

'Was he—so?' Sandling was beginning to see daylight. No wonder the fellow had been so slow to let him in. He was beginning to catch the drift of those persistent questions now. To understand something of what was in the fellow's mind.

'And, curiously enough,' volunteered the Dutchman, 'he came on just such a night as this.'

'Did he?' Sandling tried to keep all trace of excitement from his voice. 'Er—why did he come here?'

'To arrest me.'

'What for?' And in spite of himself the question was like a pistol-shot in its abruptness.

'Murder!' shrugged the Dutchman, his yellow teeth exposed in a cheerless smile.

'Murder?'

'Yes. He didn't say what he'd come for, of course, but I guessed it even before he had time to speak.' He glanced across at Sandling's horror-stricken face before adding: 'And, curiously enough, I thought for a moment that you were the same man.'

Sandling merely shook his head. Speech, at that precise moment, was utterly beyond him.

'Of course you aren't,' agreed the Dutchman, smilingly. 'I know you aren't. You can't be. I buried that one.'

'Buried him?' gasped Sandling. 'You——'

'Yes,' interrupted the other's easy voice. 'I shot him!'

Sandling's jaw dropped. For what seemed to him to be hours, he sat there utterly bereft of words, bereft even of the power of thought. His eyes followed the Dutchman's fingers as they calmly filled a pipe, noticing—but attaching no importance to—the extraordinarily calloused condition of his hands.

'Yes,' he went on presently, 'and it was just such another night as this when he came. I lent him the same suit that you're wearing now, he said it would fit him like a bally glove, he took his drink neat, and when he drank it he said, "Here's how!" You see the similarity between you?'

'Wore—the same—suit?' jerked out Sandling. His brain was in a confused whirl. Either he had misunderstood, or else the monster across the

table was coolly confessing not to one but to *two* murders. His fingers lifted nervously to those holes in his borrowed coat.

'Yes,' confirmed the Dutchman. 'That's where I got him. It wasn't bad shooting, considering the poor light.'

Sandling winced, as his fingers fell away. To his heated imagination it seemed as though a shot had actually torn its way through his own flesh. Those holes were scorching him. He had a wild desire to tear the coat from his back and to dash it into the other's evil face. How right he had been as to the portent of those holes! How right about the house, and about its murderous occupant!

'I buried him over by the big baobab tree, just outside the clearing,' mentioned the Dutchman with that same air of imperturbable calm. 'Perhaps you noticed it as you came in—no?'—as Sandling merely stared—'perhaps you wouldn't in the storm, but he's there all right, all safe and snug by the little white gate.'

Sandling sat up. He had been debating with himself exactly why the Dutchman should have seen fit to confide in him, and had missed the beginning of that last sentence.

'Little white gate?' he repeated sharply. 'What gate?' There was no gate to the Dutchman's compound, and that he knew for a fact. Had he not stumbled all round the place while he had been waiting for someone to open the

door to him? 'What gate?' he repeated again, a new and amazing suspicion darting through his mind.

The Dutchman's pipe stopped half way to his mouth.

'Eh?' he stammered.

'Which gate?' Sandling's voice had risen to a shout. 'There is no gate! You're lying to me. You're pulling my leg. What's your game? Which gate are you talking about?'

'Which gate?' stammered the Dutchman, uneasily. It was plain that he was nonplussed. His eyes darted round the room like those of a trapped animal. He opened his mouth to speak, but apparently thought better of it, for he closed it again.

'Well?' jeered Sandling.

With an obvious effort the Dutchman pulled himself together. He scratched his head bewilderedly. Then, with a tremendous air of secrecy:—

'I'll tell you just what it is,' he whispered, wagging a calloused forefinger under Sandling's nose. 'That gate is a very funny gate. You can't always see it. It—it puzzles even me—sometimes.' He laughed, a queer, cackling, uncanny kind of laugh.

And after a second's blank amazement Sandling began to laugh, too. He wasn't over sure what there was to laugh about, but he felt suddenly weak—and very shaky—and to laugh

offered some slight relief. Actually, he realized, there was nothing at all to laugh about. Bush-madness is no laughing matter, and it was crystal clear to him, in those moments, that the wretched Dutchman was mad as a March hare. He had fallen a victim to the infernal loneliness of the bush, that dread spectre which stalks at the heels of every wanderer in the silent places of Central Africa. And presently the laugh died away on his lips, and in a dead silence the two sat eyeing each other across the table.

'Poor devil,' thought Sandling, as he watched the Dutchman's fingers nervously locking and unlocking. All that story of the murders was just so much drivel, a figment of a disordered brain—like the little white gate which wasn't there. He couldn't think why he hadn't tumbled to it in the beginning. The thing was clear as daylight. He watched the man nodding his shaggy head—nodding it slowly and rhythmically like some mechanically-operated figure of a Chinese mandarin. 'Mad as a hatter!' he thought, as he watched him fumbling in his pocket.

And then his heart missed one complete beat, for in place of the matches for which he had thought him to be searching, the Dutchman had suddenly produced a big revolver.

'Yes,' he went on coolly, taking up the tale at that point where it had been interrupted by mention of the gate. 'Yes, that's where I got

him. I'm a very good shot. Very quick and very straight. Very quick,' he added with peculiar emphasis, 'and very straight!'

Sandling sat fascinated. The movement had been so quick, the threat so utterly unexpected, that for a moment he could only stare blankly at that deadly weapon. Too late he saw the error into which he had fallen. Too late he remembered the damning evidence of those holes in the coat he was even then wearing. Slowly the truth dawned in upon his mind in all its ghastly realism. The Dutchman was no harmless loony, no mere bush-idiot, but rather a dangerous, homicidal maniac.

And he was armed.

'And you know,' he was saying with obvious relish, 'I can put another bullet through that very same hole.'

Sandling's eyes quivered. Looking into the mouth of that revolver he realized that it was touch and go. The slightest movement, the slightest sign of fear, and he knew he would go to join the company in that grave beneath the baobab tree. Forcing his voice to steadiness, he looked the Dutchman straight in the eye.

'I've no doubt you could,' he rasped. 'But in the meantime—I'm thirsty!' And feigning not to notice the menace of that levelled revolver, he picked up his tin cup and thrust it directly under the Dutchman's nose. 'What about another drink?' he asked.

The ruse worked admirably. His attention thus distracted, the Dutchman lowered his weapon and with his free hand pushed the bottle towards his guest.

'Help yourself,' he offered carelessly, at the same time moving his chair a full yard farther back from the table.

Sandling's face was like a mask in its impassiveness. That movement of the Dutchman's chair had defeated his plan to make a sudden lunge for the possession of the gun. Mad as the Dutchman undoubtedly was, he was yet cunning enough to have sensed his danger, and by that move to have put himself beyond the possibility of attack. It was now only too clear just how those others had met their ends, and Sandling began to cast round in his mind for some means by which he could escape the same fate. At all costs he must get hold of his rifle. His fingers were itching to feel its stock. With that in his hands he would be in a position to handle the madman. But how to get it? How to get into that inner room without arousing the other's quick suspicions?

'I don't like visitors,' remarked the Dutchman presently, breaking the long silence. 'They come here to spy. I've lived here for a good many years now, and nobody knows—nobody knows.'

Sandling actually shivered. It needed no particularly incisive intelligence to realize

exactly *why* nobody knew. He found himself speculating as to the probable number of wanderers who had stumbled against that house—and had never left it again except to be buried. And gradually a great loathing of the mad Dutchman began to obsess his mind. He pictured him as being a loathsome, hairy spider, waiting in his lonely house to devour any unwary traveller who might, fly-like, have the ill-luck to get caught in his web.

Outside the storm was raging with unabated violence. Great gusts of wind were shaking the shutters on their badly-fitting hinges and, coming surging in beneath the door, were tossing the hurricane-lamp to and fro on its string. Sandling's fingers were aching for the feel of his rifle. Somehow he must get hold of it. How? Frantically he sought round in his mind for some plausible excuse to leave the room, something that sounded reasonable, but it was the sight of the Dutchman's hand once more creeping round to his pocket which finally spurred him to action.

'Well,' he said, conscious of a queer hoarseness in his voice, 'if you don't mind I think I'll be getting off to bed. It's been a long day—and—and—and so I think I'll be getting off to bed.'

A long silence followed his words. He would have liked to get up and move towards the door, but the Dutchman's careless handling of that

revolver kept him chained to his chair. He wondered what was passing in the man's mind. What he was contemplating doing. Picking up his tin cup he made a pretence of draining it, and then, with a tremendous effort, rose shakily to his feet.

The Dutchman rose too, and for a second stood regarding him warily.

'Very well,' he said at last. 'Just as you like.' He lifted down the hurricane-lamp from where it hung suspended above his head, and with totally unexpected civility handed it to his guest. 'You'd better take this with you,' he said. 'Maybe you'll need it, and I can manage without it. Er—good night!'

'Good night!' stammered Sandling amazed at his easy victory. Taking the lamp from the other's outstretched hand he walked backwards towards the grass door, keeping a wary eye on that revolver. Nothing happened, however, and a moment later he had reached the temporary safety of the inner room.

'Ah!' he breathed, as he snatched up his rifle and ran his hands lovingly over its worn stock. Now he was all right. Thank God he had been able to get hold of that. With a sigh of relief he turned to close the door behind him, for it was in his mind to change into his own clothes and then boldly walk out of the house. Not for anything in the world would he spend the night there—so much he had long since decided. Bad

as was the jungle outside, he yet preferred it to the uncertainty of being murdered in his sleep. And if the Dutchman tried to stop him—well, so much the worse for him! And with that vicious thought, he rammed a cartridge into the breech.

The bolt shot home with a useless click, offering not the slightest resistance to his touch. Staggered, he wrenched it back again—only to find himself staring into an empty magazine. For a moment he was absolutely paralyzed. There had been five rounds in there when he had laid it down. Five rounds! Swallowing the panic that threatened to unman him, he poked his finger up the barrel, felt round the bottom of the magazine, frantically searched through all his pockets. And slowly a feeling of utter helplessness began to take possession of his mind. The Dutchman had been one too many for him. By some means or other he had managed to steal those cartridges, and so leave him defenceless. And just as those others had been put out of the way, so would he be put out of the way, unless—

With a sudden desire to know what was going on in the next room he crept across to the door and, parting a few strands of the grass, peered through. The Dutchman was sitting exactly as he had left him, revolver in hand, staring across at the opposite wall. So far, then, he had made no move, and Sandling was just about to close

the aperture when his eye was attracted to several pencil-like rays of light coming, apparently, from the dividing wall. He stared at those rays for a moment, puzzled, and then the truth dawned in upon his mind.

The light was from his own lamp, and the Dutchman had drilled the dividing wall so that he could see through into the inner room.

With a sharp catch in his throat, Sandling backed away. It was suddenly plain as a pike-staff not only what was in the madman's mind, but also how he intended carrying it out. With frantic haste he caught up the remainder of his clothes and, putting them where he could easily lay hands on them, turned down the light. The lamp creaked loudly, and simultaneously, from the other room, came the sounds of some one moving.

That lent speed to his already flying fingers. With a feeling akin to nausea he tore off that fateful coat and flung it across the room, and a second later the trousers followed suit. Sweat was pouring down his face as he dragged on his own clothes and, with fingers that trembled awkwardly, wound the soaking puttees round his bare legs. Was the Dutchman watching him, even then, through one or other of those holes? Could he see him sufficiently clearly to shoot? He had spoken of the bad light—Sandling realized what he had meant then. Every instant he expected to see the barrel of the

revolver come poking through the wall. Every hole, every cranny, every little crevice seemed to his heated imagination to be but the frame of a murderous eye.

At last he was dressed. With no clear plan in his mind he tiptoed back to the door and, opening the grass, peeped through. Blinking his eye, he looked again, looked this way and that, up and down.

The Dutchman had gone.

For a moment he stood staring in the most utter bewilderment. There were only two rooms in the house, and the Dutchman was in neither. Where, then, was he? A swift glance at the tightly-fitting shutters of his room showed him that he had nothing to fear from that direction, and once again he applied his eye to the door. And then he saw. There was one little bit of the room which, owing to the thickness of the grass through which he was spying, seemed to be out of his range. It was the bit lying along the dividing wall, and the instant he realized that he knew where the madman was hiding. He was standing close pressed to one of those holes.

To which?

Sandling's nerves were going. He was literally dripping perspiration as he tried to look in every direction at once. From one of those holes the madman was watching him. Every second he expected to hear the roar of that revolver, to feel the sting of the soft, flattened bullet. The

thought of the size of that hole in the back of the white duck coat filled him with a horrible nausea. He was waiting there to be shot down, to be shot down like a rat in a sewer.

But was he? Not if he knew it! With a tremendous effort he pulled himself together. He still had the empty rifle in his hands, and if only he could get within clubbing range of the madman—before he had time to fire—he could yet give a pretty useful account of himself. That was the right idea, he decided. To get at him while he was least expecting an attack.

Very softly he opened the grass door and listened. No sound whatever was coming from the darkened room. Could he have been mistaken about those holes? Was the room empty after all? Gripping his rifle firmly in both hands he took a tentative step forward. Paused—listened—took another step—

The room was empty.

And then he sprang to the door. Gone was all attempt at concealment, gone was all caution, only he knew that beyond that door lay safety. With fingers that fumbled in their eagerness he dragged out the bars. Once he thought he heard a whisper behind him, once he thought he heard a cry, and—as the door came crashing down to let in the full blast of the storm—he thought he heard a wild, demoniacal laugh.

But by that time he was running, running like one possessed.

He couldn't see where he was going, cared nothing for his direction, so long as he put as great a distance as possible between himself and that murderous Dutchman. Once only did he pause, and that was when, blanketed by the murk of mist and rain, he heard the unmistakable crack of a pistol-shot.

'And I wasn't there!' he panted, triumphantly. But the storm tore the breath from his lips and sent his yell of defiance hurtling and swirling away into the night.

.
'Has the bwana gone?'

The Dutchman looked up from his writing.

'Oh, it's you, Mattamulla, is it?' he asked. 'You heard my shot, then?'

'*N'dio*, bwana,' answered the smiling boy. And looking round the room, 'Has the bwana gone?' he asked again.

'Yes,' said the Dutchman, gravely. 'He's gone. But you'd better tell the boys to keep close to their compound to-morrow. He may come back—he was a bit difficult—but I don't think he will.'

'*Umepiga?*'

The Dutchman shook his head.

'No, I didn't beat him, Mattamulla. I—what the Englishmen term—led him right up the garden!' he explained. '“When the corn bins are full,” as the old saying goes, “it is wise to keep out the rats!”'

'Even so, bwana,' agreed the boy, laying five cartridges on the table. 'The bwana was surprised to find his gun empty,' he chuckled.

'And Heaven knows you made enough noise in getting through that window,' growled the Dutchman. 'I heard you very plainly.' He turned to his books again, and with a satisfied smile: 'Mattamulla,' he remarked, 'last month we panned a shade over forty-three ounces of the finest gold. It is our record month, so far.'

'Good, bwana!' The boy had started to make preparations for a belated meal. 'And there's plenty more in the stream, even yet!'

'If only we can keep the rats away from it,' assented the miner. 'Oh, and by the way Mattamulla, while I think of it, you'd better set on a boy to mend that gate which used to stand by the big baobab tree. I'd forgotten that you'd taken the thing away. I very nearly came to grief over that gate. What? Oh, yes; wash the old suit and put it ready for the next one!'

SARAH GERTRUDE MILLIN

A SACK FOR NINEPENCE

1928

I

THE tall Kafir, with his dirty shirt and trousers, the colour of mud, with his greenish-brown coat and dusty pepper-corn hair and bare feet, stood in the dock, and his eyes were concentrated on the interpreter. The interpreter was translating to him the judge's concluding remarks to the jury:

' . . . On the other hand, gentlemen, you must bear in mind, as the learned counsel for the defence has pointed out, that when a Kafir says he will kill a man, he is not necessarily threatening to take his life. He may only mean that he will hurt him. The expression "You shall not see the sun to-morrow" is another such exclamation of rage which may have no real significance. Moreover, it must be remembered that the principal testimony against the prisoner is that of his wife, Masangape, who has lost her child, and who has been badly treated by him. The matter of the stone has not been satisfactorily explained, but yet there is no evidence that the prisoner placed it where it was found, nor did any one see the burning of the hut. The

child is dead. The man who wore the sack is dead. All the inhabitants of the hut are dead. Only Masangape, the wife, is here to tell the story of that day and night. It is for you to say whether you believe Masangape, and whether in the light of the other evidence I have outlined to you, you think the prisoner committed this crime. If you find the evidence insufficient to establish his guilt beyond reasonable doubt, it is your duty to find him not guilty. Consider your verdict. . . .'

Pepetwayo listened to the interpreter, but he could discover no meaning in the judge's words. The jurymen scrambled to their feet. The judge gathered together his red robes and stood up, and, as he did so, the people in court—mostly Kafirs—rose. The policeman touched the prisoner's arm. The Kafir gave a start, looked round with rolling eyes, and, on the policeman's word, began hurriedly to descend the steps that led from the dock to the cells below.

He was still thinking about the sack.

II

This was the story of the sack:

Pepetwayo had married his wife when she was a widow with a year-old child. And it was now seven years since their marriage, and this child she had borne another man was still the only child in their hut. Pepetwayo spoke to her about it often, and sometimes he beat her. He

consulted a witch-doctor and he fought men who made jokes, but the days passed and the days passed and for ever he had to father only this child of the dead man.

He grew to hate the child with a terrible deep hatred. He could not bear to see the small white teeth crunching the bread for which he had to break his back hauling up stones on the Transvaal diamond diggings. In summer Gule ran naked, but this winter he had been bought a thick cotton singlet, and Pepetwayo could not rest his eyes on it without wanting to tear it from the boy's back. He could not keep his voice from scolding him or his hands from striking him. He said to Masangape in their native speech: 'Send Gule away, or there will be great trouble.'

She decided finally to bestow Gule on some friends in a neighbouring hut. It was, like all the other huts, a circular construction of rags and reeds and mud, a dozen feet in diameter, with no opening for entrance or exit but a flap of sacking. It stood, surrounded by a reed fence, on the side of a low, stony hill, a little apart from the rest of the location where Masangape lived with her husband. In the whole of that location there was no tree or flower or blade of grass. There was no well for water. Little girls, with tin cans on their heads, walked three miles to fetch the muddy water of the Vaal River. Only on the top of the hill there grew, near the half-

hearted and abandoned beginnings of a stone wall, a few prickly pears, and when the sun went down in a flare of scarlet scribbled with fire, these bold and fleshy weeds leaned against the sky in black relief, and the huts themselves clung together like the hives of gigantic wasps.

In this hut there were already five people maintained on the sixteen shillings a week earned by the head of the household. But no Kafir ever questions the right of a fellow-tribesman to share with him, and Gule was accepted without bargain or comment.

Yet only for a few days was there peace in Pepetwayo's home. It happened that he returned from his work on the diggings and Masangape was not there. Where she was he knew, of course. But he particularly resented her absence this evening because he was happy, because he wanted her to exult with him over a bargain. He had bought a grain-sack from the shop for ninepence when every one knew that the price of one so large as this was always a shilling. But he had said to the store-keeper: 'Look, Baas, how poor I am, and how the weather is cold. I want this sack to wear on my body to keep the wind out. But it is Monday to-day and I have just this ninepence, and why shall such a great person as the Baas wait till next Saturday for only a little threepence? Let the Baas give me the sack for ninepence.'

And, actually, the Baas had done it, and

Pepetwayo loved the sack as if it were a trophy in a game he had won.

Now he wanted his wife to open the sides for him and cut a hole for his head so that he might wear it against the cold. He could work better with his hands than she could - he had in his day sewn together the skins of jackals with sinew to make those great rugs which are called karosses—but it simply was his desire that she should do this thing for him.

And the hut was empty. There was no fat-soaked mealie-meal cooking in the tripod pot. His belly was fainting against his backbone, for he had eaten nothing all day except, at twelve o'clock, a piece of bread. There was no one to share his triumph about the sack.

He flung it down in a corner of the hut, and rushed over to the neighbours who housed Gule.

There his wife sat chattering with other women. There his wife's child ran about playing with other children. The air was leaping with gaiety. The terrific smell of a sheep's head and trotters cooking in a tripod pot attacked his nostrils. . . .

He thought of his quiet hut, of his unused pot, of the absence of small, rotund black bodies and rushing noises and high laughter in his yard, of his bargain of a sack lying rumpled, unhailed, in a corner, and he ran up to his wife and jerked her up by the shoulder and shouted awful words at her and dragged her home.

He beat her when they got home, and would not eat, and would not let her make in the hut the smoky fire of dung and sticks with which they kept themselves warm in the winter nights. And throughout the black hours, wearing still the clothes they used by day, they lay side by side on the goat-skins which separated them from the naked earth, covered with two cotton blankets, bitter, hostile, and yet drawn together by the cold.

In the morning Pepetwayo went to work as usual, a white scurf of frost on his face and hands. And when he was gone, his wife packed her belongings into the sack she found lying in the corner, and left him to go and live in the hut that sheltered also her child.

III

Pepetwayo was hungry and tired and cold all day long. And for this he blamed his wife and her child. If his wife had not neglected him the night before to go to see her child, he would have had something in his belly, he thought, he would have slept in the night, he would have been able to wear the sack to-day against the whipping wind. He could not forget the animation in the other people's yard.

In the evening he walked towards the location, picking up here and there as he went along a stick for the fire. But again, as he reached home, no smoke rose to greet him, and he saw soon

enough that Masangape was gone, and her belongings. He stood in the hut looking at he knew not what, and suddenly he remembered his sack. Where was his sack? Had she had the effrontery to take his sack, to steal his sack for which only the day before he had paid ninepence . . . not a shilling, as was usual, but a bargain, a diplomatic achievement - ninepence?

Once more he ran along to the other hut. This time there were no visitors in the yard, only the inhabitants of the hut were present, and his wife was sitting, silent, in their midst. She was frightened. She could not live with her husband any more, and she did not know what he would now do to her.

But he entered in among them shouting the word sack. 'Give me my sack. What have you done with my sack?'

He pulled his wife up by the stuff of her dress between her shoulders.

'You—'

His eyes fell on the child.

'He shall not see the sun to-morrow,' he cried. 'There will not be cause for you to leave me again. Where is my sack?'

His wife looked at him dumbly.

He let her go, for his eyes had seen something. There was a man barely visible in the smoke-filled hut and he was wearing a baggy garment over his shoulders. Pepetwayo sprang at the man, and they struggled towards the yard. He

could see now, in the last light of the day, that the man was the brother of Gule's protector, and that here was his very sack.

He attempted to pull it from the man as they fought. 'You shall not,' he panted, 'You shall—none of you—see the sun to-morrow.'

The sack was torn. His own clothes were torn. People flung themselves forward and separated them. He threatened to kill his wife if she did not come back with him. She walked beside him, weeping.

And, as on the night before, they lay down together on the ground in the small, dark hut.

But this time, in the middle of the night, Pepetwayo got up, and began fumbling about the hut.

His wife lay still, listening to his movements. Then she felt that—something—was happening. Terror filled her.

'Pepetwayo! What are you doing?'

'Nothing,' he said, in a voice unexpectedly peaceable.

She heard the rattle of matches as in the dark he put his hand on the box.

Now he went outside. She sat up.

'Pepetwayo! Where are you going? Pepetwayo!'

He came back to the hut.

'Lie still. I will be here again in a minute.'

She began to moan.

'Are you mad?' he said. 'Be quiet. I am not

ing to leave you for long. Wait for me. Don't make this noise. If I do not find you here when I come in I will kill you.'

She drew the blankets over her head, and lay aching and shivering.

He was gone for minutes - for an hour.

When he returned he put his arms round her.

'I am happy again. Let us sleep,' he said.

IV

In the morning the hut that contained Gule and the man who had worn Pepetwayo's sack and four other people was found burnt down, and every one in it was dead. A stone was lying against the flap that was the only opening to the hut, and the inhabitants had thus been stoned in while the old sacks and reeds of which the hut was made burnt round them and over them.

Masangape was led, screaming, to the police-station to tell her story. Pepetwayo was arrested.

'I know nothing,' he said. The police did not question him, and when towards the end of the six months that intervened before his trial, his young counsel came to talk with him he maintained firmly: 'I know nothing.'

At the trial he was not put in the box. And when he gathered dimly that the defending advocate was explaining to the jury how ridiculous it was that a man should kill six people for the sake of an empty sack, he nodded

his head slightly. Yes, that was wise talk. 'I need not inform you, gentlemen,' the advocate continued, 'how often native huts are burnt down, or how often sleeping natives are suffocated because the fire made for warmth has not been removed. . . .'

The judge addressed the jury. Pepetwayo was led back to his cell. The jury went away to deliberate.

They returned presently. The prisoner was once more prodded up the steps to the dock. The judge, who had retired, resumed his seat on the bench. The people in court duly stood up and sat down. The registrar addressed the foreman of the jury.

'Have you considered your verdict?'

'We have.'

'Are you all agreed?'

'We are.'

'What is your verdict?'

'Not Guilty.'

The judge addressed Pepetwayo. He had put the facts as he saw them before the jury, though it was reasonably clear to him that Pepetwayo had committed the crime. However, they had apparently considered the evidence insufficient.

He sat up and looked at Pepetwayo from under his heavy brow. 'The jury have found you not guilty. You may go.'

'You may go,' the interpreter translated.

The policeman tapped his shoulder.

'You may go.'

Pepetwayo looked from one to the other. What had happened? Was he free? He could not believe it.

'Hurry up,' said the policeman.

The native did not move.

The policeman pushed him. The man began to scramble down as if an hypnotic influence were directing him.

Outside the court other Kafirs surrounded Pepetwayo, giving him tobacco to chew and cigarettes.

He was free. He was a hero. The justice of the white man was a miracle.

He blew out a mouthful of smoke, and in a voice hushed by six months of waiting in gaol, he began to tell his worshipful audience about this sack, worth a shilling, which he had bought for ninepence, and which had been given by his wife to the brother of the man who had sheltered Gule.

ETHELREDA LEWIS

BLIND JUSTICE

1928

I

INTO his clay models Sandasa put all his memories of vision. It was as if sight, deprived of one abiding-place, were clamouring through the fingers, filling dull matter with light, piercing through solids to find form.

Before he lost his sight Sandasa had earned a merry living, sitting on the edge of a city pavement. He would set out rows of oxen, of sheep and plumed ostriches and warriors, hippos and giraffes and quilled porcupines, to catch the eye of strangers and white children. In the laughing young native children recognized a grown-up who saw life as a child sees it—a matter of mud-pies and serious preoccupation, followed by laughter and forgetfulness and moments of destructive excitement. For, to amuse them, he would sometimes snatch up the nice little sheep and oxen and, pressing them together, remould them into some grotesque creature of the imagination, such as a crocodile with the horns of an ox, or an elephant with quills. No shopwalker exhibiting expensive fur-clad lions and tigers ever seemed ready to play such pranks for their entertainment. Neither could he have produced

from the ruins such alluring fantasies of the imagination.

'Buy me *that*, please, Mummy!'

'Oh, no, dear; that's just rubbish. Not a real animal at all. You shall have this nice pair of oxen instead.'

And the child, sighing at the strange, wasteful ways of big people, would coldly clasp the oxen and move away with backward looks at the forbidden creatures of fantasy still held out to him by the young native. And the eyes of the child and the sculptor would meet and linger in a moment of ineffable understanding before the crowd parted that glance for ever.

Sandasa, too, would sigh and hide away the fictitious monster in the box where he carried stock and the day's food.

But now Sandasa was blind, and the impulses of those merry fingers were changed and sombre. Also the Big Town suited him no more.

In the kraal the blind sit and listen to the rustling voices of the mealie stalks, to the crackling and purring of the fire, to the sound of the far drift where water sometimes runs faint and shallow over the stones and sometimes goes rushing and roaring in the very same place. They hear the tranquil sounds that outline the movements of cattle and goats. They know the rhythm in the stirring of the pot and the grinding of the corn. The crescendo of the young girls approaching from the fields, or from the river with the full water-

pots; the diminuendo of their daily departure in song and laughter or quarrelsome speech—these are the music of the blind. Yes, in the kraal they are wrapped in the safe mantle of the familiar. Faint smiles come and go on their faces. They join eagerly in the talk where there is nothing to be afraid of. There is nothing passing by that will harm them.

Nothing.

No footstep they must not miss.

No voice amongst a thousand jarring sounds, a voice for which the very hearing is spread as a net is spread to catch fish.

And at night they sleep as safely in the warm hut as they slept away the safe daylight hours in the warm sun.

But in the town the blind sit still; so cold and still. They may not move after the moving sun-beam as in the kraal, amongst familiar objects that guide them almost as if they loved the feeling hand—the huts, the warmth of fires, the kraal wall of dead bush and stones. 'This way, Sandasa,' they whisper, 'this way.'

Oh, no; in the street you are led by a child to one spot for the day, and then the child will return for you at night when the blind are weary and dazed from the constant clanging of the trams and the hootings and swiftness of the motor-cars and the passing of feet and the talk in many tongues that is so rarely directed to a blind man's ear. And the sun leaves you, but

the child does not come to help you to find it. He will not come till nightfall. And then, at nightfall, stiff and shivering you rise and follow the child across street after street - and again street after street - for as long as in the country you would take to walk three or four miles. And still you cannot escape the trams and the motor-cars. And then you turn up a narrow alley and into a door. And there is warmth but no room, as there is in the rounded kraal huts. And the white woman who lives opposite with a coloured man begins to shriek and cry and say bad words with the drink she has had. And all the little children begin to cry when they hear her. But you eat, and presently sleep like a log; sleep as you did not dare in the long vigil in the town for fear you should be robbed. You sleep. And another day dawns sunless. For the sun can never reach your side of the alley.

Yes, Sandasa was blind now and sat in a street all day. But he never slept, nor did the day seem long. Shall the span of twenty-four hours, the sun's daily journey, seem long when for twenty years you have listened for a voice, a footstep?

Besides, Sandasa's work was different now. It is true he still made a few oxen and sheep for the children; and the tourists who were strange to Africa would buy his little feathered warriors. They were still set out on the kerb beside him. And both oxen and warriors were far more beautiful now than when Sandasa had been a

merry young boy of twenty who laughed into the eyes of children and whose shining teeth were the admiration of white people.

Yes, the little clay models were beautiful now from the sensitive fingers which have to see as well as feel. Also, in the box in which he carried his stock-in-trade there was always other work of his.

'Let me see what you've got. Open your box, please. These oxen are—they're sculpture. Not clay dolls.'

Sandasa shook his head. The voice pleased him, but no man ever intruded on his private affairs.

Then the white man stooped down beside him and said in a low voice: 'I also work with the clay. Not here—I come from a city far away. It is my living. I also make figures for my bread and drink. Show me your best work, my brother.'

And at that last word and the loving voice, Sandasa gazed sightlessly upward to the face of the white man. And he felt the eagerness of him in the faint trembling and psychic emanation which only the blind can sense. And by that he knew that the stranger could also weep and shiver for joy when his hands had moulded a face or—or a hand.

So he said to the stranger: 'When none is looking I will show you.'

And when there came a lull in approaching

footsteps he opened the box for a few swift moments—and the stranger saw what it held.

Under a wet rag were two compartments of wood such as might hold a large bottle. And in one of these, laid tenderly on a bed of soft clay, was the clay head of a man. And in the other there stood on its wrist the model of a hand: a fist that was clenched about a small sharp knife of a shape unknown in Europe.

The stranger made a sharp sound and gazed at the sculptured face. Fear and ferocity glowed like a fire in those drawn-back lips and in the down-staring, heavy-lidded eyes. In one flash of the brain he apprehended, too, the magnificent menace in the clenched fist.

When the box was closed again at the approach of passers-by, the stranger said, whisperingly: 'My God, brother, you are a sculptor. But tell me, why does the head have only one ear?'

'It is the last man I saw, white brother,' said Sandasa, his head at that strange, rapt angle of the blind, as if he were seeing visions, 'and that is how he was made.'

'And the broken finger on the fist?'

'That also is how he was made.'

The stranger felt a shudder stroke his flesh at the cold breath of bygone horror. He felt a question, one question, pushing its way inevitably to his lips, inevitably, automatically, fiercely.

But why ask the question when he knew—oh, surely he knew—the answer?

But he did ask it.

Leaning close to the blind man's ear, he whispered rapidly: 'But tell me, brother, what was the fist with the knife doing? What was it *doing?*'

Sandasa, not moving his head from that rapt angle of vision, said with unraised voice: 'It was the hand that pierced these eyes out.'

II

Before he left the Big Town the sculptor went several times to Sandasa's hut in one of the town locations. He had come to the town to model the bust of a dull politician, so many ways were there of earning a living. But what with the mine natives and the urge their fine elemental bodies gave him to do good work, and what with Sandasa and his story, the pot-boiling job had never gone so quickly and so easily. Just a few more public men with their cloth-padded shoulders and stiff, self-conscious tilt of the head, and he would be able to come back to an orgy of work of his own, with subjects in which the problem of trousers need not be considered.

'Good thing they can only afford a bust,' he had muttered viciously to himself when confronted with yet another middle-aged male in striped trousers and frock-coat, 'or I might have

to ask him to drape himself in one of those jolly Shangaan petticoats for the lower half.'

But in Sandasa's hut he found forgetfulness of soul-fretting sittings with the great. There he had discovered a shelf full of clay heads and hands. And each head had only one ear and each fist had the third finger broken off at the second joint. Some were already perished, dry and cracked. Others, under wet filthy rags, still possessed some sharpness and clearness, but were not so perfect as the head and fist the sculptor had first seen.

'Sandasa?' said the location superintendent. 'Well, sir, he's a bit queer in the head. My predecessor here told me that he was making these clay heads and hands fifteen years ago. Every now and then I have to make a raid and clear out the lot. Bury 'em in the rubbish pits. Then he begins again until the hut's full. Always wakes once every night, so his old mother says, to soak the cloths over them. Yes, he's queer. You should have seen the to-do we had one day when there was a fire in the location. Broke out about a quarter of a mile from Sandasa's place. No danger really. But you should have seen him trying to save his clay heads. On a Sunday it was. Rushing to and fro and stumbling and falling and hitting his head. And all the children laughing and staring—those that hadn't rushed over to the fire.

'Ever seen a blind man cry, sir? It's—it's

awful, sir. Makes you feel as if something was wrong up above. Something about a sparrow falling, and the Heavenly Father—you remember, sir. It doesn't square with what we were taught at Sunday-school. Providence and so on. Shaking and sobbing all the evening, long after the fire was put out. I had to go and soothe him down a bit. He'll always listen to me—I used to be a transport rider in his part of the country, and he always wants to talk about it. I know his lingo, too, fairly well. That's the only thing that'll bring you near a native. And they don't seem so queer when you have their speech and know where they come from. Yes, Sandasa's just as whole as a man with eyes when it comes to picturing Nyasaland. He had his sight when he first left it to come down here. Twenty years ago that must be.'

'I suppose he went on the mines?' said the sculptor, filling another pipe.

'No; he's always made clay figures. He had two brothers in the compounds making a good deal more than he did. But he wouldn't go down a mine. He always said the darkness would hurt him.'

'And so it has, by God!' murmured the sculptor. 'It—caught him all right, mine or no mine.'

He left the superintendent's office and walked slowly towards Sandasa's hut. In his mind he turned over the possible ways in which he could

break the spell that held the blind man to the making of heads and fists. The superintendent had outlined the story of it to him.

There was only one possible way.

'Sandasa,' he said, when he was seated on the little stool always brought forward for him by the old woman, Sandasa's mother, 'tell me, is it not true that you make more and more heads and hands of that man because you fear to lose the picture of what he was like? Is that not true, brother?'

'That is true,' said Sandasa, sombrely. 'Must I lose the day when a murderer is found? With these eyes I saw him kill my cousin. I had been asleep. Very far in dreams as the young sleep. When I awoke with the groaning he had already killed my cousin. He stood over him—so.' The blind man rose and stood over an imaginary victim. A shocking expression of hate and triumph struggled through that windowless mask. 'My cousin had stopped groaning. But he struck him again, twice. Thus— And thus— The man did not see that I also slept in the hut. My cousin said that I could sleep there until it was time for me to make another journey. He had sent his wife away because this man would have stolen her. In those days I wandered. Yes, white brother, in those days I wandered. Youth has greedy eyes, and one sings loudest over the fresh clay.'

The sculptor's heart melted within him.

'Oh, Sandasa,' he said gently, helping him to his place on the floor, 'so say all we who work with the clay. See, then, how many there are in the world who would call you brother—from where I came, many weeks' journey from across the sea!'

Sandasa stared long through the walls as if he tried to summon those unseen kinsmen. Presently he spoke again.

'There was always room for me at the farm and in the kraals when the Big Town made me too sick. When my heart felt too sore here'—he pressed a thin hand to his breast—'then would I go far away, running quickly and leaping, and making music. Now I must not go away from the Big Town. It is here, where all men come for the gold, that I may find him. Where else could I listen for the voice? There are no such voices in the mealie lands. And the mountains keep silence.'

'The voice? Did he speak to you, then?'

'He spoke to me. Certainly he spoke to me. Long he stared at me like an animal surprised at the drinking pool. Then he picked up his lantern and came near, stepping softly, very softly. I tried to rise, but he was too quick for me. Youth is full of sleep and the thoughts are confused. Those who laugh by day, brother, sleep well. Now I neither laugh nor sleep.

'You ask what were the words he said. I remember them, brother. Each night they wake me. And I rise and wet the clay.

'He put the candle on a box. Was I to know what his thoughts were? Not until it was too late and he held me tight. I was but a stripling in his grasp. Twenty summers I had seen and he was a man in the prime, and strong from striking out the gold from the rocks. Was I to know such thoughts as the wicked have?

'He stared into my eyes. And speaking very softly, for he feared to speak loudly in the hut, he stared and said, "An eyeless man will not know me again." And from the knife which he held aloft there fell a drop on my lips. And when I tasted it I cried out and struggled. I that had been dumb found voice against the knife that was unclean.'

Sandasa fell silent. But his head still kept the rapt angle of the seer of visions.

'Is it not possible,' said the sculptor presently, 'that the murderer is dead long ago? It is true he got away from the police, but how do you know that you are not waiting for a dead man? If he has died in his bed —'

Sandasa smiled.

'When the voice in the night comes to wake me no more, then will my task be done. I shall know when he is dead, white brother. Do not fear that I take these pains for a man in his grave. As for the police, they laugh at my clay heads, which I have many times made a gift to them for evidence. Long ago they used to listen. But now—these new ones are young and foolish.

What shall they know of this matter? They call me madman.'

The sculptor leaned across to touch the blind man's arm.

'Listen, Sandasa. I can make it so that you need not wake up to wet the clay in the night. Let me take away this newest head and hand and I will send you the very same in bronze—hard as this penny, Sandasa—which can never crack or bend or get smeared. And, first, I will take a photo of them, so that if anything happens you will still have the picture with you.'

'Do not trouble to make a picture, white brother. In seven days I make me another head and hand that are better than a picture. How can one feel a picture—*so*, with the finger-tips? But take these if you will and make them hard like pennies. That will truly be the task of a wise man, and my heart is soft and full of joy for the honour brought to the work of my hands.'

Peace shone from Sandasa's face; such peace as smote his friend with doubt and misgiving.

'It will be many months before they will come back to you, Sandasa. I shall have to take them far across the sea with me, and that will take long. You will not fret and think they are not coming?'

Sandasa smiled his strange, blind smile.

'My white brother forgets that to wait is both meat and drink to me. A little more meat and drink will surely not kill. Nay, it will give longer life, brother, to such as I.'

III

But not all the police were young and foolish and fluffy of chin. There was Inspector O'Gorman, for example, that stout Irish veteran who, after many years in the Big Town, had been moved at his own request to a small dorp in the Transvaal. He hated country life for himself, but for his ailing wife he loved it.

A silent man when on duty in the Big Town, where the police must be sharp as needles, the country made him talkative and friendly. And one night, when he had been telling the story of the blind native who in the street sold clay oxen but at home made nothing but heads of a one-eared man with a knife in his hand, a young farmer in the hotel bar said suddenly: 'What *sort* of a hand, O'Gorman? What *sort* of a hand?'

O'Gorman looked at him queerly.

'What sort of a hand would it be, then, but to have its four fingers and a thumb, Mr. Wilmot?'

His professional instinct warned him not to be putting ideas into the young man's head *before* he should explain himself. But his professional heart, after a long country sleep, began to beat pleasantly.

They looked at each other questioningly. Then young Wilmot said, slowly: 'Shouldn't it rather have a third finger that's broken——'

'At the second joint? It should, sir, it should.'

Suppressing this unprofessional eagerness,

O'Gorman glanced at the door, and together they stepped outside into the frosty, brilliant night.

'Now, Mr. Wilmot, tell me where I can find him. He's been wanted twenty years for that night's work.'

O'Gorman was retiring in a year's time. The thought of hooking a veteran fish where so many before him had failed made him feel twenty years younger.

'I'm sure he's living among the farm labourers on my neighbour's farm. A chap that always wears one of those knitted woollen caps that come over the ears. One day I saw him take it off to scratch his head. Beastly-looking fellow. Might be forty-five, fifty, as far as one can tell with a native. And then I saw the hand, too, roaming over his head. But only for a moment. When he saw me staring he quickly had his cap on again. Extraordinary that he can remember to be careful after so many years—if that is the chap.'

'I think so, sir. I'll have to trouble you to come with me to-morrow to identify him.'

O'Gorman stepped over to the bar window for light and became absorbed with a note-book.

'And still more extraordinary that a native criminal's ever caught in this country.'

'Indeed it is, sir. God's own country for a get-away. But there's no safe get-away from your physical deficiencies, if so I may put it.'

'That's true. Especially when there's a crazy blind chap taking care to perpetuate them.'

Great Scott, what a queer business! If anything comes of it, I'd give something to see those two faces when they're brought together.'

It was indeed a sight, as an impressionable young English policeman said to the mess afterwards, 'Very nearly fit for the pictures.'

'Pictures your grandmother,' said a South African; 'we get life here, not Hollywood.'

Sandasa, who had not slept since the day when a constable came to the hut and said: 'Should you know his voice if this one-eyed man of yours was in the same room with you?'

And he, Sandasa, had been seized with a dreadful cold shivering as he whispered, after long silence: 'Yes, Baas, yes. Is he coming *soon*? To-day?'

Sandasa sat on the floor with his back to the wall in his accustomed attitude. His blind gaze was lifted as if it pierced the office wall and could see something beyond. But his skin was ashen-grey and shone with moisture on the forehead.

When a blind man cannot sleep and the visions press upon him too fiercely in the tedious night—

Three or four natives were ready to pass through the office, with orders not to speak unless they were addressed by the sergeant. For O'Gorman had an idea that the blind man would know when the mutilator was near, even if he never heard the voice.

'It's not very probable,' said the Commandant, 'but we can try it first. I admit that natives have queer intuitions that would be very useful in my office.'

So Sandasa sat with his back to the wall, and at his left hand was the door from a corridor by which the natives were to enter. Opposite to him was another open door by which they were to make their exits into the Commandant's office.

The first man stepped in. His bare feet halted. They made little restless movements on the boards. Sandasa could have touched them. But he made no move, and the native, grinning widely at this experience, passed on to a beckoning policeman and burst into that high-pitched, almost girlish titter common to the black man.

Sandasa gazed through the wall, not having moved an eyelid. Only his nostrils made slight dilations.

A second prisoner entered and stood near the blind man.

'What's your name, Jim?' said the sergeant.

'My name, sir, is Methuen Malama.'

The deep voice made no impression on Sandasa. His brain was intent on some other vision.

A third bare foot padded sullenly through the door—a handcuffed man, huge and hideous—a repulsive ogre with a disgusting smoothness at one side of his head; a physical hiatus the sight of which would rouse a faint nausea.

Three steps and he stopped motionless, the very picture of an animal sensing a trap, but not yet locating it—glaring eye and flickering nostril.

A movement behind him brought him lunging round to the right. With his eye on the police in the farther office he had not noticed a man seated with his back to the wall.

Sandasa had risen to his knees. His hands mowed the air with a scythe-like movement. On his knees he moved forward, mowing, mowing.

His blind head was thrown back in an ecstasy of inward sight, and on the sibilant, smiling lips there formed froth and dripping saliva.

At the sight of those eyeless, staring sockets the giant screamed inhumanly as a wounded stallion. The first touch and grip of those mowing hands round his knees brought an indescribable shuddering roar from his wide-open mouth—the noise man makes when nightmare gently touches him, or when a snake curls about his neck. Roaring, he raised his manacled hands above his head as if to beat that appalling mask for ever from his dreams.

There was a rush from both doors.

'Gosh!' panted one of the men who were hanging to the plunging bull of a man. 'Close shave, that. Bennet, you get that blind devil away before we lock this beauty up again.'

But that was easier said than done. Sandasa

still mowed the air with his tentacles as if automatically driven by the dynamic forces let loose in that lost face—and in his scything right hand was a small sharp knife, held at a shockingly convenient angle for a billet in somebody's stomach.

Sandasa wept when they took him away to his hut. Not the feverish, lively tears that had arisen when fire broke out in the location, but slow, frozen tears that oozed one by one from eyes that seemed only now to have died.

For days he lay against the wall, a man shorn of a dream—Samson without the enemy-destroying pillars crashing grandly about doomed shoulders. Dark now, indeed, was the world to Sandasa—'all dark amid the blaze of noon'.

Not even when the superintendent brought him a biggish box that had come all the way from Europe to that poor hut did he rouse himself to feel at the wonderful 'One-Eared Negro' and 'The Murderer's Fist', the work of a blind savage that had for weeks drawn to themselves the amazed and pitiful eyes of every artist in Rome and, later, in Paris—not even then could he lay his sensitive hands on the smooth bronze in pride and peace.

As for the strange sum of money that came from his friend the sculptor—the proceeds, he wrote to the superintendent, 'of sales of Sandasa's work which must take him back to his own people'—Sandasa's old mother took it and went

back alone to her kraal with the prestige of a queen, a new sewing-machine, and a scarlet parasol. For Sandasa, his work filched from him by the unnatural processes of legal justice, turned his face to the wall and ceased to live.

Who but Death may wipe away the chill tears of the artist bereft of impulse?

JOHN BUCHAN
THE GREEN WILDEBEEST

1928

We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; there is all Africa and her prodigies in us.

SIR THOMAS BROWNE: *Religio Medici*.

WE were talking about the persistence of race qualities—how you might bury a strain for generations under fresh graftings but the aboriginal sap would some day stir. The obvious instance was the Jew, and Pugh had also something to say about the surprises of a tincture of hill blood in the Behari. Peckwether, the historian, was inclined to doubt. The old stock, he held, could disappear absolutely as if by a chemical change, and the end be as remote from the beginnings as—to use his phrase—a ripe Gorgonzola from a bucket of new milk.

'I don't believe you're ever quite safe,' said Sandy Arbuthnot.

'You mean that an eminent banker may get up one morning with a strong wish to cut himself shaving in honour of Baal?'

'Maybe. But the tradition is more likely to be negative. There are some things that for no particular reason he won't like, some things that specially frighten him. Take my own case. I haven't a scrap of real superstition in me, but I

hate crossing a river at night. I fancy a lot of my blackguard ancestors got scuppered at moonlit fords. I believe we're all stuffed full of atavistic fears, and you can't tell how or when a man will crack till you know his breeding.'

'I think that 's the truth of it,' said Hannay, and after the discussion had rambled on for a while he told us this tale.

Just after the Boer War (he said) I was on a prospecting job in the north-eastern Transvaal. I was a mining engineer, with copper as my speciality, and I had always a notion that copper might be found in big quantities in the Zoutpansberg foot-hills. There was, of course, Messina at the west end, but my thoughts turned rather to the north-east corner, where the berg breaks down to the crook of the Limpopo. I was a young man then, fresh from two years' campaigning with the Imperial Light Horse, and I was thirsty for better jobs than trying to drive elusive burghers up against barbed wire and block-houses. When I started out with my mules from Pietersburg on the dusty road to the hills, I think I felt happier than ever before in my life.

I had only one white companion, a boy of twenty-two called Andrew Du Preez. Andrew, not Andries, for he was named after the Reverend Andrew Murray, who had been a great Pope among the devout Afrikanders. He came of a rich Free State farming family, but his particular

branch had been settled for two generations in the Wakkerstroom region along the upper Pongola. The father was a splendid old fellow with a head like Moses, and he and all the uncles had been on commando, and most of them had had a spell in Bermuda or Ceylon. The boy was a bit of a freak in that stock. He had been precociously intelligent, and had gone to a good school in the Cape and afterwards to a technical college in Johannesburg. He was as modern a product as the others were survivals, with none of the family religion or family politics, very keen on science, determined to push his way on the Rand—which was the Mecca of all enterprising Afrikanders—and not very sorry that the War should have found him in a place from which it was manifestly impossible to join the family banner. In October '99 he was on his first job in a new mining area in Rhodesia, and as he hadn't much health he was wise enough to stick there till peace came.

I had known him before, and when I ran across him on the Rand I asked him to come with me, and he jumped at the offer. He had just returned from the Wakkerstroom farm, to which the rest of his clan had been repatriated, and didn't relish the prospect of living in a tin-roofed shanty with a father who read the Bible most of the day to find out why exactly he had merited such misfortunes. Andrew was a hard young sceptic, in whom the family piety produced acute

exasperation. . . . He was a good-looking boy, always rather smartly dressed, and at first sight you would have taken him for a young American, because of his heavy hairless chin, his dull complexion, and the way he peppered his ordinary speech with technical and business phrases. There was a touch of the Mongol in his face, which was broad, with high cheek bones, eyes slightly slanted, short thick nose, and rather full lips. I remembered that I had seen the same thing before in young Boers, and I thought I knew the reason. The Du Preez family had lived for generations close up to the Kafir borders, and somewhere had got a dash of the tar-brush.

We had a light wagon with a team of eight mules, and a Cape-cart drawn by four others; five boys went with us, two of them Shangaans, and three Basutos from Malietsie's location north of Pietersburg. Our road was over the Wood Bush, and then north-east across the two Letabas to the Pufuri river. The country-side was amazingly empty. Beyer's commandos had skirmished among the hills, but the war had never reached the plains; at the same time it had put a stop to all hunting and prospecting, and had scattered most of the native tribes. The place had become in effect a sanctuary, and I saw more varieties of game than I had ever seen before south of the Zambesi, so that I wished I were on a hunting trip instead of on a business job. Lions were

plentiful, and every night we had to *scherm* for our mules and light great fire which we listened to their eerie serenades.

It was early December, and in the West it was the weather of an English June. In the foot-hills, among the wormwood and bananas, it was pleasant enough, but when we got out into the plains it was as hot as in England. As far as the eye could reach the bush was all its scrub like the scrawled foliage a chalk on a slate, with here and there a baobab standing unsteadily in the glare. For long days we were away from water, and ceased to hunt game—only Kafir queens and tick-bites now and then a wild ostrich. Then one day out from Pietersburg we raised a range of mountains on the north, which I knew was the eastern extension of the Zoutpan range. I had never travelled this country before, and never met a man who had, so we steered our way by one of the old bad maps of the Transvaal Government. That night we crossed the Pufuri, and next day the landscape changed. The ground rose, so that we had a view of the distant Lebombo hills to the east. The mopani bushes began to appear—a sure sign of a healthier country.

That afternoon we were only a mile from the hills. They were the usual type which you find everywhere from Natal to Zambesi—cut sheer, with an overhang

places, but much broken up by kloofs and fissures. What puzzled me was the absence of streams. The ground was as baked as the plains, all covered with aloe and cactus and thorn, with never a sign of water. But for my purpose the place looked promising. There was that unpleasant metallic green that you find in a copper country, so that everything seemed to have been steeped in a mineral dye - even the brace of doves which I shot for luncheon.

We turned east along the foot of the cliffs, and presently saw a curious feature. A promontory ran out from the berg, connected by a narrow isthmus with the main *masif*. I suppose the superficial area of the top might have been a square mile or so; the little peninsula was deeply cut into by ravines, and in the ravines tall timber was growing. Also we came to well-grassed slopes, dotted with mimosa and syringa bushes. This must mean water at last, for I had never found yellow-woods and stink-woods growing far from a stream. Here was our outspan for the night, and when presently we rounded a corner and looked down into a green cup I thought I had rarely seen a more habitable place. The sight of fresh green herbage always intoxicated me, after the dust and heat and the ugly greys and umbers of the bushveld. There was a biggish kraal in the bottom, and a lot of goats and leggy Kafir sheep on the slopes. Children were bringing in the cows for the milking, smoke was going up from

the cooking fires, and there was a cheerful evening hum in the air. I expected a stream, but could see no sign of one: the cup seemed to be as dry as a hollow of the Sussex Downs. Also, though there were patches of mealies and Kafir corn, I could see no irrigated land. But water must be there, and after we had fixed a spot for our outspan beside a clump of olive-woods, I took Andrew and one of our boys and strolled down to make inquiries.

I daresay many of the inhabitants of that kraal had never seen a white man before, for our arrival made a bit of a sensation. I noticed that there were very few young men about the place, but an inordinate number of old women. The first sight of us scattered them like plovers, and we had to wait for half an hour, smoking patiently in the evening sun, before we could get into talk with them. Once the ice was broken, however, things went well. They were a decent peaceable folk, very shy and scared and hesitating, but with no guile in them. Our presents of brass and copper wire and a few tins of preserved meat made a tremendous impression. We bought a sheep from them at a ridiculously small price, and they threw in a basket of green mealies. But when we raised the water question we struck a snag.

There was water, good water, they said, but it was not in any pan or stream. They got it morning and evening from up there—and they pointed

to the fringe of a wood under the cliffs where I thought I saw the roof of a biggish *roulade*. They got it from their Father; they were Shangaans, and the word they used was not the ordinary word for chief, but the name for a great priest and medicine-man.

I wanted my dinner, so I forbore to inquire further. I produced some more Kafir truck, and begged them to present it with my compliments to their Father, and to ask for water for two white strangers, five of their own race, and twelve mules. They seemed to welcome the proposition, and a string of them promptly set off uphill with their big calabashes. As we walked back I said something foolish to Andrew about having struck a Kafir Moses who could draw water from the rock. 'The lad was in a bad temper. 'We have struck an infernal rascal who has made a corner in the water supply and bleeds these poor devils. He's the kind of grafter I would like to interview with a sjambok.'

In an hour we had all the water we wanted. It stood in a row of calabashes, and beside it the presents I had sent to the provider. The villagers had deposited it and then vanished, and our boys who had helped them to carry it were curiously quiet and solemnized. I was informed that the Father sent the water as a gift to the strangers without payment. I tried to cross-examine one of our Shangaans, but he would tell me nothing except that the water had come from

a sacred place into which no man could penetrate. He also muttered something about a wildebeest which I couldn't understand. Now the Kafir is the most superstitious of God's creatures. All the way from Pietersburg we had been troubled by the vivid imaginations of our outfit. They wouldn't sleep in one place because of a woman without a head who haunted it; they dared not go a yard along a particular road after dark because of a spook that travelled it in the shape of a rolling ball of fire. Usually their memories were as short as their fancies were quick, and five minutes after their protest they would be laughing like baboons. But that night they seemed to have been really impressed by something. They did not chatter or sing over their supper, but gossiped in undertones, and slept as near Andrew and myself as they dared.

Next morning the same array of gourds stood before our outspan, and there was enough water for me to have a tub in my collapsible bath. I don't think I ever felt anything colder.

I had decided to take a holiday and go shooting. Andrew would stay in camp and tinker up one of the wheels of the mule-wagon which had suffered from the bush roads. He announced his intention of taking a walk later and interviewing the water-merchant.

'For Heaven's sake, be careful,' I said. 'Most likely he's a priest of sorts, and if you're not civil to him we'll have to quit this country. I

make a point of respecting the gods of the heathen.'

'All you English do,' he replied tartly. 'That 's why you make such a damned mess of handling Kafirs. . . . But this fellow is a business man with a pretty notion of cornering public utilities. I'm going to make his acquaintance.'

I had a pleasant day in that hot scented wilderness. First I tried the low ground, but found nothing there but some old spoor of kudu, and a paauw which I shot. Then I tried the skirts of the berg to the east of the village, and found that the kloofs, which from below looked climbable, had all somewhere a confounded overhang which checked me. I saw no way of getting to the top of the plateau, so I spent the afternoon in exploring the tumbled glacis. There was no trace of copper here, for the rock was a reddish granite, but it was a jolly flowery place, with green dells among the crags, and an amazing variety of birds. But I was glad that I had brought a water-bottle, for I found no water; it was there all right, but it was underground. I stalked a bush-buck ram and missed him, but I got one of the little buck like chamois which the Dutch call *klipspringer*. With it and the paauw strung round my neck I sauntered back leisurely to supper.

As soon as I came in sight of the village I saw that something had played the deuce with it. There was a great hubbub going on, and all the

folk were collected at the end farthest away from our camp. The camp itself looked very silent. I could see the hobbled mules, but I could see nothing of any of our outfit. I thought it best in these circumstances to make an inconspicuous arrival, so I bore away to my left, crossed the hollow lower down where it was thick with scrub, and came in on the outspan from the south. It was very silent. The cooking fires had been allowed to go out, though the boys should have been getting ready the evening meal, and there seemed to be not a single black face on the premises. Very uneasy, I made for our sleeping tent, and found Andrew lying on his bed, smoking.

'What on earth has happened?' I demanded. 'Where are Coos and Klemboy and . . .'

'Quit,' he said shortly. 'They've all quit.'

He looked sulky and tired and rather white in the face, and there seemed to be more the matter with him than ill temper. He would lay down his pipe, and press his hand on his forehead like a man with a bad headache. Also he never lifted his eyes to mine. I daresay I was a bit harsh, for I was hungry, and there were moments when I thought he was going to cry. However, at last I got a sort of story out of him.

He had finished his job on the wagon wheel in the morning, and after luncheon had gone for a walk to the wood above the village at the foot of the cliffs. He wanted to see where the water

came from and to have a word with the man who controlled it. Andrew, as I have told you, was a hard young realist and, by way of reaction from his family, a determined foe of superstition, and he disliked the notion of this priest and his mumbo-jumbo. Well, it seemed that he reached the priest's head-quarters - it was the big *rondavel* we had seen from below, and there was a kind of stockade stretching on both sides, very strongly fenced, so that the only entrance was through the *rondavel*. He had found the priest at home, and had, according to his account, spoken to him civilly and had tried to investigate the water problem. But the old man would have nothing to say to him, and peremptorily refused his request to be allowed to enter the enclosure. By and by Andrew lost his temper, and forced his way in. The priest resisted and there was a scuffle; I daresay Andrew used his sjambok, for a backveld Dutchman can never keep his hands off a Kaffir.

I didn't like the story, but it was no use being angry with a lad who looked like a sick dog.

'What is inside? Did you find the water?' I asked.

'I hadn't time. It's a thick wood and full of beasts. I tell you I was scared out of my senses and had to run for my life.'

'Leopards?' I asked. I had heard of native chiefs keeping tame leopards.

'Leopards be damned. I'd have faced leopards.'

I saw a wildebeest as big as a house—an old brute, grey in the nozzle and the rest of it green—green, I tell you. I took a pot shot at it and ran. . . . When I came out the whole blasted kraal was howling. The old devil must have roused them. I legged it for home. . . . No, they didn't follow, but in half an hour all our outfit had cut their stick. . . . didn't wait to pick up their duds. . . . Oh, hell, I can't talk. Leave me alone.'

I had laughed in spite of myself. A wildebeest is not ornamental at the best, but a green one must be a good recipe for the horrors. All the same I felt very little like laughing. Andrew had offended the village and its priest, played havoc with the brittle nerves of our own boys, and generally made the place too hot to hold us. He had struck some kind of native magic, which had frightened him to the bone for all his scepticism. The best thing I could do seemed to be to try and patch up a peace with the water-merchant. So I made a fire and put on a kettle to boil, stayed my hunger with a handful of biscuits, and started out for the *rondavel*. But first I saw that my revolver was loaded, for I fancied that there might be trouble. It was a calm bright evening, but up from the hollow where the kraal lay there rose a buzz like angry wasps.

No one interfered with me; indeed, I met no one till I presented myself at the *rondavel* door. It was a big empty place, joined to the stockades on both sides, and opposite the door was another

which opened on to a dull green shade. I never saw a *scherm* so stoutly built. There was a palisade of tall pointed poles, and between them a thick wall of wait-a-bit thorns interlaced with a scarlet-flowered creeper. It would have taken a man with an axe half a day to cut a road through. The only feasible entrance was by the *rondavel*.

An old man was squatted on an earthen floor, which had been so pounded and beaten that it looked like dark polished stone. His age might have been anything above seventy from the whiteness of his beard, but there seemed a good deal of bodily strength left in him, for the long arms which rested on his knees were muscular. His face was not the squat face of the ordinary Kafir, but high-boned and regular, like some types of well-bred Zulu. Now that I think of it, there was probably Arab blood in him. He lifted his head at the sound of my steps, and by the way he looked at me I knew that he was blind.

There he sat without a word, every line of his body full of dejection and tragedy. I had suddenly a horrible feeling of sacrilege. That that young fool Andrew should have lifted his hand upon an old man and a blind man and outraged some harmless *tabu* seemed to me an abominable thing. I felt that some holiness had been violated, something ancient and innocent cruelly insulted. At that moment there was nothing in the world I wanted so much as to make restitution.

I spoke to him, using the Shangaan word which means both priest and king. I told him that I had been away hunting and had returned to find that my companion had made bad mischief. I said that Andrew was very young, and that his error had been only the foolishness and hot-headedness of youth. I said—and my voice must have shown him that I meant it—that I was cut to the heart by what had happened, that I bowed my head in the dust in contrition, and that I asked nothing better than to be allowed to make atonement. . . . Of course I didn't offer money. I would as soon have thought of offering a tip to the Pope.

He never lifted his head, so I said it all over again, and the second time it was genuine pleading. I had never spoken like that to a Kafir before, but I could not think of that old figure as a Kafir, but as the keeper of some ancient mystery which a rude hand had outraged.

He spoke at last. 'There can be no atonement,' he said. 'Wrong has been done, and on the wrong-doer must fall the penalty.'

The words were wholly without menace; rather he spoke as if he were an unwilling prophet of evil. He was there to declare the law, which he could not alter if he wanted.

I apologized, I protested, I pled, I fairly grovelled; I implored him to tell me if there was no way in which the trouble could be mended; but if I had offered him a million pounds I don't

believe that that old fellow would have changed his tone. He seemed to feel, and he made me feel it too, that a crime had been committed against the law of nature, and that it was nature, not man, that would avenge it. He wasn't in the least unfriendly; indeed, I think he rather liked the serious way I took the business and realized how sorry I was; his slow sentences came out without a trace of bitterness. It was this that impressed me so horribly—he was like an old stone oracle repeating the commands of the god he served.

I could make nothing of him, though I kept at it till the shadows had lengthened outside, and it was almost dark within the *rondavel*. I wanted to ask him at least to help me to get back my boys, and to make our peace with the village, but I simply could not get the words out. The atmosphere was too solemn to put a practical question like that. . . .

I was turning to go away, when I looked at the door on the far side. Owing to the curious formation of the cliffs the sinking sun had only now caught the high tree-tops, and some *ricochet* of light made the enclosure brighter than when I first arrived. I felt suddenly an overwhelming desire to go inside.

'Is it permitted, Father,' I said, 'to pass through that door?'

To my surprise he waved me on 'It is permitted,' he said, 'for you have a clean heart.'

Then he added a curious thing. 'What was there is there no more. It has gone to the fulfilling of the law.'

It was with a good deal of trepidation that I entered that uncanny *enceinte*. I remembered Andrew's terror, and I kept my hand on my revolver, for I had a notion that there might be some queer fauna inside. There was light in the upper air, but below it was a kind of olive-green dusk. I was afraid of snakes, also of tiger-cats, and there was Andrew's green wildebeest!

The place was only a couple of acres in extent, and though I walked very cautiously I soon had made the circuit of it. The *scherm* continued in a half-moon on each side till it met the sheer wall of the cliffs. The undergrowth was not very thick, and out of it grew tall straight trees, so that the wood seemed like some old pagan grove. When one looked up the mulberry sunset sky showed in patches between the feathery tops, but where I walked it was very dark.

There was not a sign of life in it, not a bird or beast, not the crack of a twig or a stir in the bushes; all was as quiet and dead as a crypt. Having made the circuit I struck diagonally across, and presently came on what I had been looking for—a pool of water. The spring was nearly circular, with a diameter of perhaps six yards, and what amazed me was that it was surrounded by a parapet of hewn stone. In the centre of the grove there was a little more light, and I

could see that that stonework had never been made by Kafir hands. Evening is the time when water comes to its own; it sleeps in the day but it has its own strange life in the darkness. I dipped my hand in it and it was as cold as ice. There was no bubbling in it, but there seemed to be a slow rhythmical movement, as if fresh currents were always welling out of the deeps and always returning. I have no doubt that it would have been crystal clear if there had been any light, but, as I saw it, it was a surface of darkest jade, opaque, impenetrable, swaying to some magic impulse from the heart of the earth.

It is difficult to explain just the effect it had on me. I had been solemnized before, but this grove and fountain gave me the abject shapeless fear of a child. I felt that somehow I had strayed beyond the reasonable world. The place was clean against nature. It was early summer, so these dark aisles should have been alive with moths and flying ants and all the thousand noises of night. Instead it was utterly silent and lifeless, dead as a stone except for the secret pulsing of the cold waters.

I had had quite enough. It is an absurd thing to confess, but I bolted—shuffled through the undergrowth and back into the *rondael*, where the old man still sat like Buddha on the floor.

'You have seen?' he asked.

'I have seen,' I said—'but I do not know what I have seen. Father, be merciful to foolish youth.'

He repeated again the words that had chilled me before. 'What was there has gone to fulfil the law.'

I ran all the way back to our outspan, and took some unholy tosses on the road, for I had got it into my head that Andrew was in danger. I don't think I ever believed in his green wildebeest, but he had been positive that the place was full of animals, and I knew for a fact that it was empty. Had some fearsome brute been unloosed on the world?

I found Andrew in our tent, and the kettle I had put on to boil empty and the fire out. The boy was sleeping heavily with a flushed face, and I saw what had happened. He was practically a teetotaller, but he had chosen to swallow a good third of one of our four bottles of whisky. The compulsion must have been pretty strong which drove him to drink.

After that our expedition went from bad to worse. In the morning there was no water to be had, and I didn't see myself shouldering a calabash and going back to the grove. Also our boys did not return, and not a soul in the kraal would come near us. Indeed, all night they had kept up a most distressing racket, wailing and beating little drums. It was no use staying on, and, for myself, I had a strong desire to get out of the neighbourhood. The experience of the night before had left an aftertaste of disquiet in

my mind, and I wanted to flee from I knew not what. Andrew was obviously a sick man. We did not carry clinical thermometers in those days, but he certainly had fever on him.

So we inspanned after breakfast, and a heavy job trekking is when you have to do all the work yourself. I drove the wagon and Andrew the Cape-cart, and I wondered how long he would be able to sit on his seat. My notion was that by going east we might be able to hire fresh boys, and start prospecting in the hill-country above the bend of the Limpopo.

But the word had gone out against us. You know the way in which Kafirs send news for a hundred miles as quick as the telegraph—by drum-taps or telepathy—explain it any way you like. Well, we struck a big kraal that afternoon, but not a word would they say to us. Indeed, they were actually threatening, and I had to show my revolver and speak pretty stiffly before we got off. It was the same next day, and I grew nervous about our provisions, for we couldn't buy anything—not a chicken or an egg or a mealie-cob. Andrew was a jolly companion. He had relapsed into the primeval lout, and his manners were those of a cave-man. If he had not been patently suffering, I would have found it hard to keep my temper.

Altogether it was a bright look-out, and to crown all on the third morning Andrew went down like a log with the worst bout of malaria I

have ever seen. That fairly put the lid on it. I thought it was going to be black-water, and all my irritation at the boy vanished in my anxiety. There was nothing for it but to give up the expedition and make the best speed possible to the coast. I made for Portuguese territory, and that evening got to the Limpopo. Happily we struck a more civil brand of native, who had not heard of our performances, and I was able to make a bargain with the headman of the village, who undertook to take charge of our outfit till it was sent for, and sold us a big native boat. I hired four lusty fellows as rowers, and next morning we started down the river.

We spent a giddy five days before I planted Andrew in hospital at Lourenço Marques. The sickness was not black-water, thank God, but it was a good deal more than ordinary malaria; indeed, I think there was a touch of brain-fever in it. Curiously enough I was rather relieved when it came. I had been scared by the boy's behaviour the first two days. I thought that the old priest had actually laid some curse on him; I remembered how the glade and the well had solemnized even me, and I considered that Andrew, with a Kafir strain somewhere in his ancestry, was probably susceptible to something which left me cold. I had knocked too much about Africa to be a dogmatic sceptic about the mysteries of the heathen. But this fever seemed to explain it. He had been sickening for it; that

was why he had behaved so badly to the old man, and had come back babbling about a green wildebeest. I knew that the beginnings of fever often make a man light-headed so that he loses all self-control and gets odd fancies. . . . All the same I didn't quite convince myself. I couldn't get out of my head the picture of the old man and his ominous words, or that empty grove under the sunset.

I did my best for the boy, and before we reached the coast the worst had passed. A bed was made for him in the stern, and I had to watch him by night and day to prevent him going overboard among the crocodiles. He was apt to be violent, for in his madness he thought he was being chased, and sometimes I had all I could do to keep him in the boat. He would scream like a thing demented, and plead, and curse, and I noticed as a queer thing that his ravings were never in Dutch but always in Kafir—mostly the Sesutu which he had learnt in his childhood. I expected to hear him mention the green wildebeest, but to my comfort he never uttered the name. He gave no clue to what frightened him, but it must have been a full-sized terror, for every nerve in his body seemed to be quivering, and I didn't care to look at his eyes.

The upshot was that I left him in bed in hospital, as weak as a kitten, but with the fever gone and restored to his right mind. He was again the good fellow I had known, very apologetic

and grateful. So with an easy conscience I arranged for the retrieving of my outfit and returned to the Rand.

Well, for six months I lost sight of Andrew. I had to go to Namaqualand, and then up to the copper country of Barotseland, which wasn't as easy a trek as it is to-day. I had one letter from him, written from Johannesburg—not a very satisfactory epistle, for I gathered that the boy was very unsettled. He had quarrelled with his family, and he didn't seem to be contented with the job he had got in the gold-fields. As I had known him he had been a sort of school-book industrious apprentice, determined to get on in the world, and not in the least afraid of a dull job and uncongenial company. But this letter was full of small grouses. He wanted badly to have a talk with me—thought of chucking his work and making a trip north to see me; and he ended with an underlined request that I should telegraph when I was coming down-country. As it happened I had no chance just then of sending a telegram, and later I forgot about it.

By and by I finished my tour and was at the Falls, where I got a local Rhodesian paper. From it I had news of Andrew with a vengeance. There were columns about a murder in the bushveld—two men had gone out to look for Kruger's treasure and one had shot the other,

and to my horror I found that the one who was now lying in Pretoria gaol under sentence of death was my unhappy friend.

You remember the wild yarns after the Boer War about a treasure of gold which Kruger in his flight to the coast had buried somewhere in the Selati country. That, of course, was all nonsense: the wily ex-President had long before seen the main funds safe in a European bank. But I daresay some of the officials had got away with Treasury balances, and there may have been bullion cached in the bushveld. Anyhow, every scallywag south of the Zambesi was agog about the business, and there were no end of expeditions which never found a single Transvaal sovereign. Well, it seemed that two months before Andrew and a Dutchman called Smit had started out to try their luck, and somewhere on the Olifants the two had gone out one evening and only one had returned. Smit was found by the native boys with a hole in his head, and it was proved that the bullet came from Andrew's rifle, which he had been carrying when the two set out. After that the story became obscure. Andrew had been very excited when he returned and declared that he had 'done it at last', but when Smit's body was found he denied that he had shot him. But it was clear that Smit had been killed by Andrew's sporting '303, and the natives swore that the men had been constantly quarrelling and that Andrew had always shown a very odd

temper. The Crown prosecutor argued that the two believed they had found treasure, and that Andrew had murdered Smit in cold blood to prevent his sharing. The defence seemed to be chiefly the impossibility of a guilty man behaving as Andrew had behaved, and the likelihood of his having fired at a beast in the dark and killed his companion. It sounded to me very thin, and the jury did not believe it, for their verdict was wilful murder.

I knew that it was simply incredible that Andrew could have committed the crime. Men are queer cattle, and I wouldn't have put even murder past certain fairly decent fellows I knew, but this boy was emphatically not one of them. Unless he had gone stark mad I was positive that he could never have taken human life. I knew him intimately, in the way you know a fellow you have lived alone with for months, and that was one of the things I could bank on. All the same it seemed clear that he had shot Smit. . . . I sent the longest telegram I ever sent in my life to a Scotch lawyer in Johannesburg called Dalgleish whom I believed in, telling him to move heaven and earth to get a reprieve. He was to see Andrew and wire me details about his state of mind. I thought then that temporary madness was probably our best line, and I believed myself that that was the explanation. I longed to take the train forthwith to Pretoria, but I was tied by the heels till the rest of my outfit came in.

I was tortured by the thought that the hanging might have already taken place, for that wretched newspaper was a week old.

In two days I got Dalglish's reply. He had seen the condemned man, and had told him that he came from me. He reported that Andrew was curiously peaceful and apathetic, and not very willing to talk about the business except to declare his innocence. Dalglish thought him not quite right in his mind, but he had been already examined, and the court had rejected the plea of insanity. He sent his love to me and told me not to worry.

I stirred up Dalglish again, and got a further reply. Andrew admitted that he had fired the rifle, but not at Smit. He had killed something, but what it was he would not say. He did not seem to be in the least keen to save his neck.

When I reached Bulawayo, on my way south, I had a brain-wave, but the thing seemed so preposterous that I could hardly take it seriously. Still I daren't neglect any chance, so I wired again to Dalglish to try to have the execution postponed, until he got hold of the priest who lived in the berg above the Pufuri. I gave him full directions how to find him. I said that the old man had laid some curse on Andrew, and that that might explain his state of mind. After all demoniacal possession must be equivalent in law to insanity. But by this time I had become

rather hopeless. It seemed a futile thing to be wiring this rigmarole when every hour was bringing the gallows nearer.

I left the railroad at Mafeking, for I thought I could save the long circuit by De Aar by trekking across country. I would have done better to stick to the train, for everything went wrong with me. I had a breakdown at the drift of the Selous river and had to wait a day in Rustenburg, and I had trouble again at Commando Nek, so that it was the evening of the third day before I reached Pretoria. . . . As I feared, it was all over. They told me in the hotel that Andrew had been hanged that morning.

I went back to Johannesburg to see Dalgleish with a cold horror at my heart and complete mystification in my head. The Devil had taken an active hand in things and caused a hideous miscarriage of justice. If there had been anybody I could blame I would have felt better, but the fault seemed to lie only with the crookedness of fate. . . . Dalgleish could tell me little. Smit had been the ordinary scallywag, not much of a fellow and no great loss to the world; the puzzle was why Andrew wanted to go with him. The boy in his last days had been utterly apathetic—bore no grudge against anybody—appeared at peace with the world, but didn't seem to want to live. The predikant who visited him daily could make nothing of him. He appeared to be sane enough, but, beyond declaring his inno-

cence, was not inclined to talk, and gave no assistance to those who were trying to get a reprieve . . . scarcely took an interest in it. . . . He had asked repeatedly for me, and had occupied his last days in writing me a long letter, which was to be delivered unopened into my hand. Dagleish gave me the thing, seven pages in Andrew's neat caligraphy, and in the evening on his stoep I read it.

It was like a voice speaking to me out of the grave, but it was not the voice I knew. Gone was the enlightened commercially-minded young man, who had shed all superstition, and had a dapper explanation for everything in heaven and earth. It was a crude boy who had written those pages, a boy in whose soul old Calvinistic terrors had been awakened, and terrors older still out of primordial African shadows.

He had committed a great sin—that was the point he insisted upon, and by this sin he had set free something awful to prey on the world. . . . At first it seemed sheer raving mania to me, but as I mused on it I remembered my own feelings in that empty grove. I had been solemnized, and this boy, with that in his blood which was not in mine, had suffered a cataclysmic spiritual experience. He did not dwell on it, but his few sentences were eloquent in their harsh intensity. He had struggled, he had tried to make light of it, to forget it, to despise it; but it rode him like a nightmare. He thought he

was going mad. I had been right about that touch of brain-fever.

As far as I could make it out, he believed that from that outraged sanctuary something real and living had gone forth, something at any rate of flesh and blood. But this idea may not have come to him till later, when his mind had been for several months in torture, and he had lost the power of sleep. At first, I think, his trouble was only an indefinite haunting, a sense of sin and impending retribution. But in Johannesburg the *malaise* had taken concrete form. He believed that through his act something awful was at large, with infinite power for evil—evil not only against the wrongdoer himself but against the world. And he believed that it might still be stopped, that it was still in the eastern bush. So crude a fancy showed how his normal intelligence had gone to bits. He had tumbled again into the backveld world of his childhood.

He decided to go and look for it. That was where the tough white strain in him came out. He might have a Kafir's blind terrors, but he had the frontier Boer's cast-iron courage. If you think of it, it needed a pretty stout heart to set out to find a thing the thought of which set every nerve quivering. I confess I didn't like to contemplate that lonely, white-faced, tormented boy. I think he knew that tragedy must be the end of it, but he had to face up to that and take the consequences.

He heard of Smit's expedition, and took a half share in it. Perhaps the fact that Smit had a baddish reputation was part of the attraction. He didn't want as companion a man with whom he had anything in common, for he had to think his own thoughts and follow his own course.

Well, you know the end of it. In his letter he said nothing about the journey, except that he had found what he sought. I can readily believe that the two did not agree very well—the one hungry for mythical treasure, the other with a problem which all the gold in Africa could not solve. . . . Somewhere, somehow, down in the Selati bushveld his incubus took bodily form, and he met—or thought he met—the thing which his impiety had released. I suppose we must call it madness. He shot his comrade, and thought he had killed an animal. 'If they had looked next morning they would have found the spoor,' he wrote. Smit's death didn't seem to trouble him at all—I don't think he quite realized it. The thing that mattered for him was that he had put an end to a terror and in some way made atonement. 'Good-bye, and don't worry about me,' were the last words, 'I am quite content.'

I sat a long time thinking, while the sun went down over the Magaliesberg. A gramophone was grinding away on an adjacent stoep, and the noise of the stamps on the Rand came like far-away drums. People at that time used to quote some Latin phrase about a new thing

always coming out of Africa. I thought that it was not the new things in Africa that mattered so much as the old things.

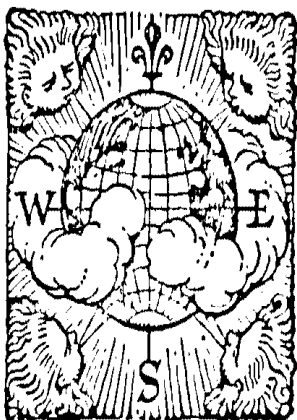
I proposed to revisit that berg above the Pufuri and have a word with the priest, but I did not get a chance till the following summer, when I trekked down the Limpopo from Main Drift. I didn't like the job, but I felt bound to have it out with that old man for Andrew's sake. You see, I wanted something more to convince the Wakkerstroom household that the boy had not been guilty, as his father thought, of the sin of Cain.

I came round the corner of the berg one January evening after a day of blistering heat, and looked down on the cup of green pasture. One glance showed me that there was not going to be any explanation with the priest. . . . A bit of the cliff had broken away, and the rock fall had simply blotted out the grove and the *rondavel*. A huge mass of debris sloped down from half-way up the hill, and buried under it were the tall trees through which I had peered up at the sky. Already it was feathered with thorn-bush and grasses. There were no patches of crops on the sides of the cup, and crumbling mud walls were all that remained of the kraal. The jungle had flowed over the village, and, when I entered it, great moon flowers sprawled on the rubble, looking in the dusk like ghosts of a vanished race.

There was one new feature in the place. The landslip must have released the underground water, for a stream now flowed down the hollow. Beside it, in a meadow full of agapanthus and arum lilies, I found two Australian prospectors. One of them—he had been a Melbourne bank-clerk—had a poetic soul. 'Nice little place,' he said. 'Not littered up with black fellows. If I were on a homesteading job, I reckon I'd squat here.'

GLOSSARY

- Bwana*, distinguished person, Sir.
dop, drink.
duar, circular enclosure.
haik, garment covering head and body.
hasheesh, kief, hemp.
kasbah, fort or castle.
kauri, cowrie.
konza, to make obeisance.
koumis, fermented liquor made from mare's milk.
lobola, bride price.
morgen, about two acres.
nachtmaal, The Lord's Supper.
pot-leg, bullets sawn from legs of iron pots.
razia, slaving expedition.
rehass, letter-carrier.
rondavel, circular native hut.
safari, hunting or other expedition.
scherm, barricade.
suddra zaribas, palisades.
Takhaar, backveld Boer.
ufu, porridge.



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