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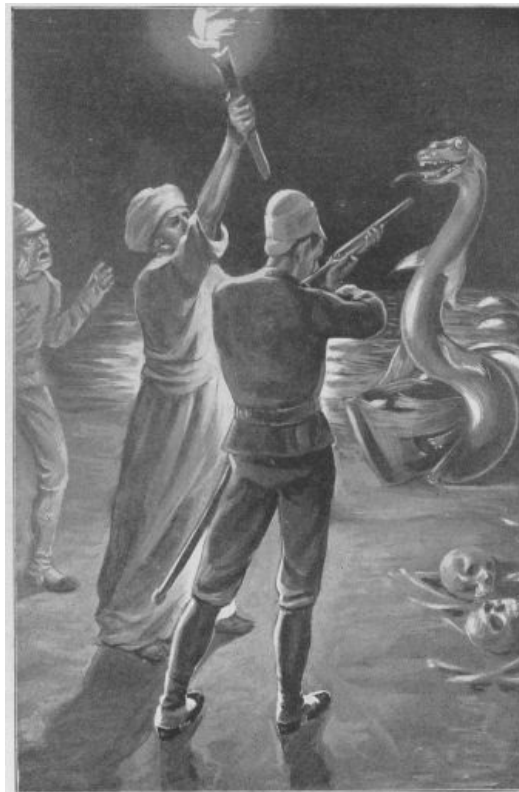
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A BLAZING TORCH IN THE GREEK'S HAND LIT UP THE SCENE AS GUY COCKED HIS RIFLE AND AWAITED AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A SHOT.

THE RIVER OF DARKNESS

By
WILLIAM MURRAY GRAYDON

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THE RIVER OF DARKNESS.

PROLOGUE.

It was November in London. The great city was buried under a dank, yellow fog. Traffic was temporarily checked; foot passengers groped their way by the light of the street lamps, and the hoarse shouts of the link boys running before cabs and carriages with blazing torches rang at intervals above the muffled rumble of countless wheels.

In the coffee-room of a quiet hotel on the Strand a young man stands by the window, looking pensively out on the misty street. He is quite young, with light hair that falls half over his forehead, and a drooping, golden mustache, and in rather startling contrast to these a deep-bronzed complexion that tells of foreign lands and tropical suns.

"Captain Chutney, sir?"

It is a hotel servant, with a big blue envelope in his hand, and, as the young man wheels round, he reveals the uniform and bright facings of a captain of hussars.

"Yes, I am Captain Chutney," he replies to the servant. "Thank you," and, taking the blue document, he stands for a moment in deep thoughtfulness.

Well may he hesitate to break that official seal which glares up at him so broadly. Were the gift of futurity his, and could he see mirrored before him the dread panorama of events that are inevitably linked with that innocent-looking missive, he would fling it with horror-stricken hands into the coal-fire that burns on the grate beside him.

But no disturbing thought enters his mind. The future looks bright and cheerful enough just at present, and ripping open the end of the envelope without breaking the seal, he pulls out a folded paper and reads:

COLONIAL OFFICE, DOWNING STREET, S. W.

TO CAPTAIN GUY CHUTNEY:

Your immediate presence is requested on urgent affairs.

(Signed) -----

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COLONIAL AFFAIRS.

Chutney looks with some surprise at the famous signature attached with a bold hand. He places the letter in his pocket, pushes open a swinging door at the left, and vanishes up a broad stairway.

In five minutes he reappears, clad in a big mackintosh, and, calling a cab, he rattles off westward through the fog.

He is not in the best of humors. He had made other plans for the day, for his furlough is up, and tomorrow he leaves for India to rejoin his regiment. He had come up yesterday from the country, where he had put in a week at grouse hunting with his brother, Sir Lucas Chutney, and today he intended bidding good-by to old friends, and, to attend to the making of a few purchases.

Downing Street is not far away, and presently the cab rolls into Whitehall and draws up before the big granite building.

Guy makes his way through the spacious corridors thronged with clerks, civilians, foreigners from every part of the globe, and at last reaches the private apartments of the chief.

The Right Honorable Lord is deeply engaged, but his private secretary receives Chutney cordially, and, leading him back into a still more secluded and stately apartment, motions him to a soft chair and sits down opposite him.

"Captain Chutney," he begins abruptly, "you leave for India tomorrow?"

"India Mail, eight o'clock in the morning," Guy replies briefly.

"Very well. We are going to intrust you with a very important commission. You will stop off at Aden, cross the Gulf of Aden in the semi-weekly steamer, and present these documents to Sir Arthur Ashby, the Political Resident of Zaila, the fortified town of the Somali Coast Protectorate."

The secretary hands Guy two bulky envelopes, stamped and sealed with the government seal.

"They relate to affairs of importance," he continues. "Your gallant record justifies us in intrusting the papers to your care. You can return in time to take the next steamer. Perhaps I had better tell you this much in confidence," the secretary adds:

"We have received from certain sources information to the effect that the Emir of Harar, on the southern harbor of Abyssinia, contemplates at no distant date an attack on Zaila. Our garrison there is weak, and, as you probably know, the Somali country is treacherous and unreliable. These papers contain necessary instructions for the Political Resident."

The secretary rises, and Guy gladly follows his example.

"I will see that the papers are delivered," he says earnestly.

"Thank you," the secretary responded. "I am sure that you will. I wish you a safe voyage, Captain Chutney, and fresh Burmese laurels, for you will no doubt take part in the Chittagong expedition."

They shake hands warmly, and in five minutes Guy is rattling cityward again through the increasing fog. Long afterward he looks back on that morning as the most memorable day of his life. At present his commission sits lightly on his mind. He attends to all his duties in London, catches the India Mail, and two days later is steaming across the Mediterranean on board the P. and O. steamship Cleopatra.

CHAPTER I.
THE STOLEN DESPATCHES.

Steadily the Cleopatra had traversed the Mediterranean, passed through the Suez Canal, plowed the burning waters of the Red Sea, and now, on this bright, sultry day, Aden was left behind, and with smoking funnels she was heading swiftly and boldly for the Indian Ocean.

A smaller steamer, a mere pigmy beside this gigantic Indian liner, had left the harbor of Aden at the same time, and was beating in a southwesterly direction across the gulf with a speed that was rapidly increasing the distance between the two vessels.

On the upper deck stood Guy Chutney, straining his eyes through a pair of field-glasses to catch a last glimpse of the Cleopatra, and to distinguish, if possible, the figures grouped under the white awnings. He had only arrived at Aden last night, and now he was bound for the dreary African coast, while all the gay friends he had made on board the Cleopatra were steaming merrily off for Calcutta without him.

It was by no means a comforting state of affairs, and Guy's spirits were at their lowest ebb as the steamer finally faded into the horizon. He put up the glasses and strode forward. From the lower deck came a confused babel of sounds, a harsh jabbering of foreign languages that grated roughly on his ear.

"This is a remarkably fine day, sir,"

It was the captain who spoke, a bluff, hearty man, who looked oddly out of place in white linen and a solar topee.

"It is a grand day," said Guy. "May I ask when we are due at Zaila?"

"At Zaila?" repeated the captain, with a look of sudden surprise. "Ah, yes. Possibly tomorrow, probably not until the following day."

It was now Guy's turn to be surprised.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that it takes two or three days to cross the Gulf of Aden?"

"No," replied the captain briskly. "You are surely aware, my dear sir, that we proceed first to Berbera, and thence up the coast to Zaila."

"Then you have deceived me, sir," cried Guy hotly. "You told me this morning that this steamer went to Zaila."

"Certainly I did," replied the captain. "You didn't ask for any more information, or I should have told you that we went to Berbera first. The great annual fair has just opened at Berbera, and I have on board large stores of merchandise and trading properties. On other occasions I go to Zaila first, but during the progress of the fair I always go direct to Berbera and unload. I supposed that fact to be generally understood," and, turning on his heel, the captain walked off to give some orders to his men.

Guy was half inclined to be angry at first, but on reflection he concluded he was just as well satisfied. Besides, it would give him a chance to see that wonderful African fair, which he now remembered to have heard about on different occasions.

But one other person was visible on the deck, a short, chunky man, with a dark complexion, and crafty, forbidding features.

A Portuguese or a Spaniard Guy put him down for at once, and he instantly conceived a deep mistrust of him. The fellow, however, was inclined to be sociable.

"Ah, an Englishman," he said, coming up to Guy and holding out his hand, an action which Guy professed not to see.

"You are going to Berbera, perhaps," he went on, nowise discomfited by the rebuff.

"No," said Guy shortly. "To Zaila."

"Ah, yes, Zaila! You have friends there, perhaps? I, too, am acquainted. I know very well Sir Arthur Ashby, the governor at Zaila."

His keen eyes scanned Guy's face closely, and noted the faint gleam of surprise at this information.

But Guy was too clever to be thrown off his guard.

"Yes," he said. "I know some people here. I have not the pleasure of Sir Arthur's acquaintance."

He would have turned away at this point, but the man pulled a card from his pocket and presented it to him. Guy glanced it over with interest:

C. MANUEL TORRES,
Trader at Aden and Berbera.

"A vile Portuguese slave-hunter," he thought to himself.

"Well, Mr. Torres" he said. "I am sorry that I have no cards about me, but my name is Chutney."

The Portuguese softly whispered the name once or twice. Then, without further questioning, he offered Guy a cigar, and lit one himself.

Manuel Torres proved to be quite an interesting companion, and gave Guy a vivid account of the wonders of the fair.

As they went below at dinner time he pointed out on the corner of the dock a great stack of wooden boxes.

"Those are mine," he said. "They contain iron and steel implements for the natives and Arabs."

"They look like rifle cases," Guy remarked carelessly; and, looking at the Portuguese as he spoke, he fancied that the dark face actually turned gray for an instant. In a moment they were seated at the table, and the brief occurrence was forgotten.

All that afternoon they steamed on across the gulf, overhead the blue and cloudless sky, beneath them waters of even deeper blue, and at sunset the yellow coast line of the African continent loomed up from the purple distance. 13

Guy had been dozing under an awning most of the afternoon, but now he came forward eagerly to get his first glimpse of eastern Africa.

To his great disappointment, the captain refused to land.

It was risky, he said, to make a landing at night, and it would be dark when they entered the harbor. They must lie at anchor till morning.

Most of the night Guy paced up and down the deck sleeping at brief intervals, and listening with eager curiosity to the strange sounds that floated out on the air from the shore, where the flickering glare of many torches could be seen.

Stretched on a mattress, the Portuguese slept like a log, without once awakening.

Before dawn the anchors were lifted, and at the captain's suggestion Guy hastened down to his cabin to gather up his scanty luggage, for most of his traps had gone on to Calcutta in the Cleopatra.

He buckled on his sword, put his revolvers in his pocket, clapped his big solar topee on his head, and then reached down for the morocco traveling case which he had stored away for better security under his berth.

A cry of horror burst from his lips as he dragged it out. The lock was broken, and the sides were flapping apart. For one brief second he stared at it like a madman, and then, with frantic haste, he fell on his knees, and, plunging his hands inside, began to toss the contents recklessly out upon the floor. Toilet articles, linen, cigars, writing-paper, jewelry, and various other things piled up until his finger nails scraped the bottom. He turned the case bottom up and shook it savagely, shook it until the silver clasps rattled against the sides, and then he sank back with a groan, while the drops of perspiration chased each other down his haggard cheeks. 14

The precious despatches were gone.

For the time being Guy was fairly driven out of his senses by the horror of the calamity. Ruin stared him in the face. What madness it was to leave those papers in his cabin! He had foolishly hesitated to carry them on his person for fear the perspiration would soak them through and through, and now they were hopelessly lost. The cabin door had been locked, too. The thief must have had a key.

The first shock over, his manliness asserted itself, and he took a critical view of the situation. He hardly suspected any person as yet. The despatches must be recovered. That was the first step.

He flew up the stairs, three at a time, and rushed panting and breathless upon deck.

All about him was the hurry and bustle of preparation. The shore was close at hand, and the steamer was moving toward the rude wharf. Manuel Torres was leaning over the rail, coolly smoking a cigar. The captain stood near by, gazing intently at the shore. He looked up with wonder as Guy appeared, crying out in hoarse tones: 15

"I have been robbed, captain, treacherously robbed. Documents of the greatest importance have been stolen from my cabin, and not a soul shall leave this steamer till every inch of it has been searched. I demand your assistance, sir!"

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE MEETING.

Torres looked up in apparent surprise from his cigar, and the captain's ruddy face flashed a shade deeper. 16

"Are you sure, sir?" he cried. "This is a strange place for a robbery."

Guy turned on him hotly.

"A robbery has been committed, nevertheless, and the articles stolen are despatches for the governor of Zaila. They were intrusted to me for delivery, and I look to you to recover them."

"Ah! Government despatches, were they?" said the captain. "Just step below and we'll look into the matter."

They turned toward the cabin, leaving the Portuguese still gazing over the rail.

At the foot of the steps the captain stopped.

"Why, what's this?" he said, stooping down and pulling from under the lowest step a bunch of papers.

"The stolen despatches!" cried Guy wildly. "But look! The seals have been broken."

Together they inspected the documents. Each envelope had been opened, but the contents appeared to be all right. The thief had plainly been satisfied with their perusal.

"Whoever stole them," said the captain, "was afraid to retain them lest a search should be made, and as he had no way to destroy them he tossed them down here where they could easily be found."

"Who else had a key to my cabin?" Guy asked sternly.

"The key to Torres' cabin will open yours," replied the captain, "and several of the crew also have keys."

"Then Torres is the man," said Guy. "The scoundrel looks capable of anything."

"I wouldn't advise you to accuse him," said the captain gravely. "He may cause trouble for you on shore. You must remember that British influence is little felt at Berbera. Your best plan is to say nothing, but relate the whole affair to the governor at Zaila. And now, as we may lie in the harbor here all day, you had better get on shore. You will see a strange sight."

Guy put the recovered documents away in an inner pocket, and followed the captain on deck, in a very angry frame of mind. Torres had disappeared, but Guy felt that he had not seen the last of him.

He half forgot his anger in the strange sight that now met his eyes, for the steamer was just approaching the wharf, and in a moment the gang-plank was dropped over the side.

He waited until the eager, jostling crowd of Arabs had passed over, and then he made his way to shore. The spectacle before him was marvelous and entrancing.

Extending apparently for miles up and down the yellow stretch of sand that fringed the coast was one great sea of canvas that fluttered under the African breeze.

There were tents of every description, some old and dingy, some spotlessly white and shining, and others brilliant in many colors, barred with red and green and yellow, while here and there, from their midst, rose the sun-baked walls and towers of the original Berbera, for all this floating canvas belonged to the nomadic population who flock hither from the interior during the fair, and add twenty thousand to the perennial population of the town.

Dazed as though in a dream, Guy moved forward, noting with wonder the strange people who thronged about him and regarded him with evident mistrust. Borne on by the crowd, he found himself presently in the main avenue of the fair, and his first amazed impression was that he had been transported to a scene in the "Arabian Nights."

On either side of the narrow street stretched the sea of tents, and before them, on rude stalls, were ranged everything that the imagination could devise: sacks of coffee and grain, great heaps of glittering ivory, packets of gold-dust, aromatic spices, and fragrant gums of all sorts, great bunches of waving ostrich plumes, bales of cotton and tobacco, tanned hides of domestic animals, tawny skins of lions, leopards, and panthers, oddly-woven grass mats, quaint arms, and bits of carving, fetish ornaments, and even live cattle and sheep tied to the poles of the tents.

Standing guard over their wares were natives from all parts of Africa, Arabs from the Zambesi, savage-looking Abyssinians, crafty Somalis with greasy, dangling locks, and brawny, half-naked fellows from the interior, the like of whom Guy had never seen or heard.

And up and down the narrow street moved in a ceaseless throng the traders who had come to purchase: Arabs from Aden and Suakim, Egyptians from Cairo, traders from Zanzibar, and a sprinkling of Portuguese and Spaniards.

Some of them bore their goods on camels, others had hired native carriers, who staggered under the heavy bales and cases, and the uproar was deafening and incessant as they wrangled over their bartering and dazzled the eyes of their customers with rolls of English and French silks, pigs of iron, copper, and brass, sacks of rice and sugar, glittering Manchester cutlery, American beads, and cans of gunpowder.

The builders of the tower of Babel itself could not have produced such a jargon or variety of tongues, Guy thought, as he picked his way onward, now stopping to gaze at some odd-looking group, and now attracted by the harsh music and beating drums of a band of native musicians.

He noted with secret satisfaction the occasional presence in the crowd of a dark-skinned soldier in British uniform, and he observed with some surprise the vast number of Abyssinian Arabs, whom he recognized by their peculiar dress.

Finally a stranger sight than all arrested his steps. In a small inclosure, cordoned off by a rope, lay a dozen poor slaves shackled to stakes driven deep in the ground and exposed to the burning sun.

Their owner, a brawny negro with a head-dress of feathers, a native of the Galla country, was disputing over their purchase with a gigantic Arab, whose powerful frame irresistibly fascinated Guy's attention.

He wore a loosely-flapping cotton gown, confined at the waist by a belt that fairly bristled with

knives and pistols, while a scarlet burnous was drawn over his head, affording a brilliant set-off to the glittering eyes, the tawny, shining skin, and the short chin-beard and mustache.

Behind the group of slaves, chained to the pole of a spacious tent, lay a sleek and glossy leopard, sleeping in the sun as unconcernedly as though he were in the midst of his native desert. The Arab, unaware probably of the beast's presence, walked slowly round the circle inspecting his prospective purchase.

21

The leopard perhaps was dreaming of the days when he was wont to chase the deer through the jungle, for suddenly his spotted body quivered and his long tail shot out like a stiffened serpent. The Arab's sandaled foot came down on the tapering end, and with a scream of rage the beast sprang up.

Overcome by a sudden fright, the Arab staggered backward a pace, and like a flash the leopard shot to the end of his chain, and fastening teeth and claws on the unfortunate man's neck, bore him to the ground. Panic-stricken, those who stood near made no move. The big negro danced wildly up and down, keeping well out of reach of his savage pet, and the slaves howled with fright.

An instant's delay and the man was lost. Suddenly Guy drew his revolver and sprang forward.

The negro uttered a howl and tried to push him back, but Guy forced his way past him, and pressing the revolver close to the brute's head pulled the trigger.

It was a good shot. The leopard rolled over lifeless, and the Arab, with Guy's assistance, rose to his feet very dazed, while the blood dripped down from his lacerated back.

Instantly the scene changed. The negro, angered at the death of his leopard, advanced menacingly on Guy with a drawn knife, and in response to his summons other negroes rallied to his aid.

22

But the Arab, too, had friends in the crowd, and they, pressing forward in turn, made it seem as though a bloody conflict were inevitable.

Just as the issue was trembling in the balance, a shout arose from the crowded street.

"The white man! Make room for the white man!" and through the parted ranks Guy saw advancing a bronzed Englishman in white flannels and helmet.

The stranger pushed right in through the sullen group of negroes until he reached the open space before the tent, and stood face to face with Guy.

Their eyes met in one amazed glance that startled the wondering spectators, and then from Guy's lips burst a glad, hoarse cry:

"Melton Forbes, or I am dreaming!"

"Chutney, by Jove! My dear fellow, can it be possible?"

All else forgotten in their deep joy of meeting, the two bronzed Englishmen fell into each other's arms, and the Arabs and negroes, dimly comprehending what it all meant, shouted in sympathy and lowered their arms.

23

CHAPTER III.

THE ARAB'S WARNING.

For a little while the British officer and the British newspaper correspondent could do nothing but stand off to look at each other, and then embrace again as though it were hard to believe that it was not all a dream.

The Arabs and negroes had drawn to one side, and the big savage was wrathfully inspecting the body of the leopard.

"Come," said Melton, plucking Guy's arm, "we will find a quiet place where we can talk in peace."

The crowd made way for them, but before they had taken half a dozen steps the big Arab staggered forward and seized Guy by the hand.

"You brave man," he cried. "Makar never forget."

He kept on with many protestations of gratitude until Guy tried to withdraw in embarrassment.

"Wait," said the Arab. "Come along. Me tell you something."

He fairly dragged Guy back to the entrance of the tent where none could hear, and bending low he whispered in his ear:

"Berbera no place for Inglis man this day. Better go away, quick. Heed what Makar tell you. Now go."

24

He fairly pushed Guy from him, and the latter, joining Melton, who had witnessed the scene with the greatest curiosity, led the way out into the street.

A curious crowd followed them closely for some distance, and not a word was spoken until they had turned off into a side avenue lined with low mud buildings.

"Now," said Melton quickly, "I need not tell you, my dear fellow, what a pleasant surprise this meeting has been, but all explanation must be deferred to a more suitable time. You have made a friend and an enemy today, for Makar Makalo is the most powerful Arab in the whole Somali country, while that big negro is Oko Sain, the head chief of all the Gallas who dwell two hundred miles back from the coast. What did Makar tell you?"

Guy repeated the Arab's warning, and Melton stood for a moment in deep thought.

"I suspected as much," he said finally. "Never before have there been so many Arabs and Somalis from the interior at Berbera. Only yesterday a caravan of two thousand camels arrived from Harar in the Galla country. Something is wrong, I have felt certain, and now Makar confirms my fears."

A glimmering suspicion of the truth flashed over Guy's mind at this juncture, but he hesitated to speak.

"Now then," continued Melton, "this can mean nothing but a massacre. The only soldiers in the place are about sixty of the Bombay infantry, who were sent down here from Zaila, and as for the fortifications, they are nothing but a few mud walls. There they lie yonder," and he pointed to an English flag floating over the house-tops some distance away.

"We are only wasting time here," he added. "We'll look about a little and then I'll decide what to do. I don't want to raise any false alarm."

They turned back to the main avenue. The crowds still surged up and down, and the tumult seemed as harsh and discordant as ever, but the place had nevertheless undergone a change since they had left it a short time before. Little bartering was going on, and but few Arabs and Somalis were to be seen. Those on the street were mostly harmless traders from Aden and Cairo.

"What has become of all the Arabs?" asked Guy.

"That is just what I want to know," said Melton; "I'll soon find out, though. Walk as fast as you can now, Chutney, and look as unconcerned as possible."

Melton led the way down the street for a little distance, and, turning into a side passage, soon stopped before a low, one-story building.

A dark-skinned fellow clad in ordinary Egyptian costume stood in the doorway, and with a cry of surprise Guy recognized Mombagolo, Forbes' trusty savage servant, who did much good service for them when they were in Burma together.

Their greeting was brief and hasty.

"I have work for you, Momba," said Melton. "Something is going on in the town, I don't know just what. You can go anywhere without being suspected. Find out what you can, and then come down to the wharf. Don't return here."

The man hastened away at once, and then Guy and Melton started for the shore.

"I won't give any alarm at the garrison," said Forbes, as they hurried along. "I'll wait till Momba reports. I don't suppose anything is contemplated before nightfall at the earliest, and, as the troops are scattered, it would only precipitate matters if I should have them called in."

The last bale of goods was being unloaded from the steamer when they reached the wharf. The captain and officers were smoking cigars against the rail, and catching sight of Guy, the former called out:

"Don't forget now. Six o'clock sharp."

Guy nodded, and followed Melton to one side, where the two sat down on a bale of cotton. Melton briefly explained how he came to be at Berbera. After his return from Burma, he had been dispatched as war correspondent of the London *Post* to Suakim, which town was at that time threatened by the Mahdi.

Mombagolo, or Momba as Melton now called him, had become his faithful servant, and a week ago, the war-scare at Suakim having subsided, Melton had come to Berbera to write up the great fair for his paper.

Then Guy, in his turn, simply stated that he had stopped off on his way to India to execute a commission at Zaila. He made no reference to the dispatches, feeling doubtful whether it would be proper or not, for a government secret is a thing of weighty importance.

The conversation drifted to their perilous adventures in Burma, and the time passed on unheeded.

At last Melton glanced up.

"Do you observe how quiet it is?" he exclaimed. "And look! There are but few people in sight."

It was indeed quiet. A dead, oppressive calm had settled on the sea; not a breeze rustled, not a ripple broke the glassy surface of the water, and from the town, instead of the loud babel of cries, came only a low murmur like a distant waterfall. A strange calm indeed, the calm that

serves as precursor to the unseen storm.

Suddenly, with startling abruptness, a rifle-shot broke the silence with its shuddering echoes. Guy and Melton sprang to their feet. The officers on the steamer crowded to the rail, up in the town dark figures ran to and fro, a soldier in bright uniform was seen speeding toward the garrison, and now plunging madly toward the wharf came a white clad figure, pursued by a howling group of Somali warriors, who brandished long spears and daggers. A shot from Melton's pistol brought them to a sudden halt, and Momba, for it was indeed he, ran a few paces and fell breathless at his master's feet.

"What fiendishness is this?" shouted the captain furiously, from the deck of the steamer.

Momba staggered to his knees.

"The Arabs!" he cried. "They are coming—they have rifles—the Portuguese—he broke open long boxes—and handed out guns—Makar's men all have them—the Somalis have them—they have plenty shells—"

Guy ground his teeth.

"The infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "So that's what those long boxes of his contained!"

"You mean Torres?" exclaimed Melton. "I know the villain. He is a partner of Makar Makalo's. But come. We must fight our way to the garrison."

Alas! too late! Bang—bang, bang—bang, a fusillade of rifle-fire rang out from the town, hideous yells of triumph mingled with cries of despair and agony, and over the garrison walls floated a constantly increasing cloud of white smoke. The firing deepened, and a hoarse yell arose as the English flag, shot from its staff, fluttered down into the curling smoke.

"They are murdering the garrison!" cried Melton.

He grasped a revolver in each hand, and would have gone madly forward, but at that moment a louder tumult burst forth close at hand, and swarming down the crooked street, curving in and out through the tents and heaped-up stalls, came a fierce and frantic horde of Arabs and Somalis, waving rifles and spears, and yelling like ten thousand fiends.

"On board for your lives!" shouted the captain, and as Guy and Melton dashed over the gang-plank, followed by Momba, a kick from the captain sent it whirling down into the water.

Providentially steam was up, slowly the engines started, the screw revolved, and just as the steamer moved lazily out into the harbor, the enraged mob swept to the very edge of the wharf. In futile rage they let fly showers of spears and a scattering rifle-fire that pierced and shattered the woodwork of the vessel, but fortunately without effect, for every man had got safely below.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ALARM.

They rushed upon deck again as soon as the steamer was beyond rifle-shot. A distant roar, like the blended shouts of thousands of people, floated across the water from the town, and at intervals a shot was fired.

Smoke no longer hovered over the garrison. The last man had succumbed, and with the fall of the garrison the massacre seemed to have come to an end. The uprising had been directed against the British troops alone.

"This is a terrible thing," said Melton, "and there is something back of it all. I can't understand it. Can it be possible the wretches have designs on Zaila, I wonder? It's a pity you interfered with that leopard, Chutney. If Makar Makalo had perished, this revolt might never have broken out. Makar is at the head of it, I know, and possibly he has influence behind him. He is an ally of that fanatical despot, Rao Khan, the Emir of Harar, who hates the English worse than poison, and—"

Guy started at the mention of this name.

"I want to see you a minute, Forbes," he cried excitedly; and, leading Melton to one side, he pulled out the despatches from his pocket, and said, "You have come closer to the truth than you imagine. I am going to confide a secret to you, and you can tell what had best be done. These papers were intrusted to me for delivery into the hands of Sir Arthur Ashby, at Zaila, and they contain instructions bearing on the very matter you have just mentioned. The authorities at the colonial office in London told me in secret that the Emir of Harar was supposed to be plotting the capture of Zaila, and these despatches contain Sir Arthur's orders in case of that emergency."

"By Jove, that explains it!" cried Melton. "The emergency has come. I see it all. Makar had collected his Arabs and Somalis at Berbera by the Emir's orders, and they were only waiting the arrival of that villainous Portuguese with the rifles. They have put the garrison at Berbera out of

the way, and now they will march on to Zaila."

"Then what can be done?" demanded Guy. "Shall we proceed to Zaila, or get the captain to steam direct for Aden and collect all the available troops?"

"No, no," groaned Forbes. "That would be useless. Zaila is sixty miles up the coast. We can beat the Arabs, and get there in time to prepare the town for defense. The garrison is wretchedly small, but they will have to hold out until assistance can come from Aden."

Melton was still more astounded when Guy told him of the stealing of the despatches.

"Then Torres knows their contents," he said, "and he will act accordingly. This is certainly a bad business, Chutney. Those papers must be delivered to Sir Arthur as soon as possible, though, to tell the truth, I fear Zaila is doomed. But we are losing precious time. Something must be done at once."

They called the captain aside, and told him just enough to impress him with the danger threatening Zaila, and he readily fell in with their plans.

Twilight was now falling, and by the time darkness had settled over the blue waters of the gulf the steamer was plowing her way steadily northward, Berbera but faintly visible in the rear by the glow of the burning torches.

Hour after hour they steamed on. Neither Guy nor Melton could sleep, but sitting aft on camp stools they talked in whispers of the dread events they had witnessed, and of what might be before them.

At midnight the steamer came to a sudden stop. The machinery, exerted to the highest pressure, had broken in some part. A delay was inevitable, the captain assured them, but in a couple of hours the repairs could be made.

Morning came, revealing the distant yellow line of the African coast, but still the steamer lay at anchor, rocking gently in the early morning breeze. It may be imagined with what a fever of impatience Guy and Melton lived through those weary hours.

It was nearly midday when the repairs were completed, and the vessel forged ahead again. For fear of fresh accidents, the captain refused to crowd on steam, and when at last the turrets and brown walls of Zaila came in view, it was late in the afternoon.

At a distance, all seemed peaceful; the English flag was floating from half a dozen different buildings of the town. In the harbor lay three or four Arab dhows and a neat little steamer, which the captain said belonged to the governor, and was used for transporting troops or despatches.

Captain Waller anchored close by the town, and accompanied Guy, Melton, and Momba on shore in a small boat. So far, at least, all was well.

A few Arabs and Somalis were sitting around lazily on the sand, and troops of the Bombay Infantry were seen moving about the streets.

"Appear as unconscious as possible," whispered Melton. "Let nothing be suspected."

A close observer might have detected traces of suppressed curiosity on the faces of the Arabs and Somalis, but they were evidently deceived by the careless manner of the new arrivals, for after a keen scrutiny they settled back into lazy attitudes.

"I don't like the looks of those fellows," said Melton, "and another thing I don't like is the presence of those Arab dhows in the harbor. But look, Chutney, there is the residency ahead of us."

They were approaching a low building of sun-baked brick, with Venetian awnings at the entrance and windows. Half a dozen sentries were on guard, and an officer came forward to meet the little party.

Guy saluted.

"I am the bearer of important despatches for the governor of Zaila," he said, "and must see him at once."

The officer disappeared for a moment, and presently came back and announced that the governor would see them. They were ushered in through a wide hall, and, passing half along its length, they turned to the right, and found themselves in the presence of Sir Arthur Ashby. He was a very pompous looking man of middle age, with reddish mustache, and long side whiskers. He was seated on an easy chair beside an ebony table. Opposite him sat an English officer.

They were smoking cigars, and on the table were glasses and champagne bottles packed in ice. Lamps were lit, for already twilight was falling.

He half arose as his visitors entered, and then dropped back. Guy briefly introduced himself and party, and handed Sir Arthur the despatches, explaining how the seals came to be broken, but making no mention of Torres.

The governor knit his brow as he read them over, and then, to his companion, he remarked lightly, "All nonsense, all nonsense. Another government scare, Carrington."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Arthur," said Guy, "but I was informed in London of the tenor of those despatches. Yesterday afternoon the Arabs at Berbera massacred the garrison to a man, and are doubtless now marching on Zaila. We barely escaped with our lives. Captain Waller and Mr.

Forbes and his servant will confirm my statement.”

Sir Arthur sprang to his feet with a sharp cry.

“What is this you tell me?” he gasped. “Can it be true?”

Guy repeated his account, with all the particulars, but the governor actually seemed incredulous.

“Colonel Carrington,” he cried, “how many troops have we?”

“Five companies of the Bombay Infantry,” replied the colonel in a hollow tone. “We had six yesterday, but if this account be true——”

“Don’t delay a moment,” shouted Sir Arthur; “prepare for the defense, colonel, and see that the steamer is ready in case it comes to the worst.”

The governor’s condition was now truly pitiable. He was trembling with fright.

“There is indeed but little time,” said Guy. “There is danger at your very door. I see many Arabs and Somalis in the town.”

“True, true,” groaned Sir Arthur, and, turning over the despatches with trembling hands, he added, “I am instructed to order troops from Cairo and Suakim. What madness! What madness!”

Sir Arthur continued to talk in a rambling, excited way until Colonel Carrington assumed control of affairs.

“Your steamer is here now?” he said to the captain. “Then you must make haste to Aden, and bring us what troops you can. I doubt, though, if we can resist a heavy attack for twenty-four hours. And you, gentlemen, you will return on the steamer?”

“No, we will remain,” Guy and Melton replied almost in one voice.

The colonel glanced at them approvingly.

“You are brave men,” he said. “Stop!” he added suddenly. “You say you left Berbera at sunset last night, and were delayed by an accident. Were there any camels there?”

“A caravan of two thousand arrived two days ago,” replied Melton.

The colonel’s face paled.

“Then the enemy are due here now,” he said huskily. “On camels they could traverse the sixty miles in from fifteen to twenty hours. It is already dark,” and he pointed out through the window.

At this Sir Arthur groaned aloud, and tossed down three or four glasses of champagne in rapid succession.

“To your steamer, quick!” cried the colonel, addressing Captain Waller; “and you, gentlemen, since you decide to throw your fate in with ours, come with me, and we will inspect the fortifications, and do what little we can.”

They had risen to their feet, and were giving a hasty look to their arms, when a bright flash lit up the gloom from without, followed by a sharp report, and at the same moment, from all quarters of the town, rose a continuous rifle-firing, a violent uproar and shouting, and a deep beating of drums.

Sir Arthur sprang to his feet, crying frantically, “To the steamer, to the steamer—it is our only hope;” but before he could take a step the outer doors were burst open, shouts were heard in the hall, and then, through the curtained entrance, staggered blindly an officer of infantry, his uniform torn and disheveled, and blood pouring from half a dozen wounds. He plunged forward, and rolled in a lifeless heap at the very feet of Colonel Carrington.

CHAPTER V.

THE NIGHT ON THE ROOF.

The tragic scene described at the close of the preceding chapter, following on the very heels of the outbreak, was a fearful shock to all who saw it, and for an instant they could only stare at one another with mute, frightened faces.

Colonel Carrington broke the spell. With drawn sword he made a dash for the door, closely followed by the rest, but before they could cross the apartment a louder burst of firing came from the very courtyard, bullets whistled through the windows, and then a scuffle began in the hall, and angry voices were heard. It was over in a moment; a cry of pain, a low groan, followed by the sound of bars dropped in their sockets, and then into the room burst three Hindoo soldiers, grimy with blood and powder.

“Sahib colonel,” cried the foremost, “we are lost. The Arabs and Somalis have revolted.

Hundreds of them surround the residency. Yonder in the hall lies a dead Somali. We have barred the doors, but they will soon be in."

Even as he spoke the portals shook under a succession of thunderous blows.

"The rear door," cried the colonel. "We may escape that way."

"No, no; the building is surrounded," rejoined the Hindoo. "There is no escape."

He was right. Shouts were heard on all sides, the blows on the doors redoubled, and stray shots came in at the windows, both front and rear.

Sir Arthur lay prostrate in his chair.

"The roof! the roof!" he groaned. "We must take to the roof."

"By Jove, he's right," cried the colonel. "It's our last hope. Blow out the lights and come on, quick!"

The lamps were out in a second, but a dim glare still shone into the room from the torches outside. With an effort, Sir Arthur staggered to his feet. Two of the soldiers assisted him, and then in great haste they hurried through the hall to a rear room.

The building was of one story, and from this apartment a ladder led to an open trap overhead.

Sir Arthur was pushed up first, followed closely by the rest, and just as Momba brought up the rear and dragged the ladder after him, the great residency doors gave way with a crash, and a wild yell of triumph told only too plainly that the enemy had effected an entrance.

Guy's quick eye observed a big flat stone lying near, a precautionary measure provided by some former governor, no doubt, and, calling on Momba to assist him, he dragged it over the trap.

From below came a rush of footsteps and the sound of smashing furniture as the Arabs hurried to and fro in search of their prey.

"We are safe for the present," said the colonel; "they can't possibly reach us, and they may not even discover where we are."

The roof comprised the whole extent of the building, and was probably thirty feet square. It was surrounded by a stone parapet three feet in height, and from this parapet the little band of fugitives witnessed a scene that none forgot to his dying day.

North and west of the residency the town seemed to be in comparative quiet and darkness, for only stray lights were to be seen at intervals. But off to the south lay the fortifications, and here a sharp conflict was waging.

Through the darkness of the night the flash of every shot was seen, and all along the line blazed out three continuous sheets of flame as the beleaguered garrison poured their fire into the attacking parties that advanced from both sides.

"They can't hold out an hour," said Melton. "The foe are too strong for them."

A sharp cry from Captain Waller turned all eyes on the harbor, where the water was illumined by twinkling lights and the flash of rifles. The meaning of this was plain. The steamer had been attacked. No doubt those innocent looking dhows had been filled with armed Arabs, waiting for the signal, and now every escape was cut off. The firing was sharp and severe for a while, and then it gave way to loud cheers.

The steamers had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

"There goes the last hope," said the colonel; "and look, even the garrison has succumbed."

It was true. The firing had almost entirely ceased, and the few stray shots that still rang out were drowned in the vast roar that rose from all parts of the town.

The residency was cordoned by a surging mass of wretches, intoxicated with triumph, and fresh hordes came pouring in, riotous from the slaughter of the garrison.

"Some cunning fiend has planned all this," muttered Colonel Carrington, "and planned it infernally well, too."

"The Arab, Makar Makalo, is the ringleader, sir," said Melton, "but he is only acting for Rao Khan, the Emir of Harar, who has long desired the port of Zalia."

"A swift retribution will come," replied the colonel, "but it will come too late to aid us."

No person seemed inclined to talk. Sir Arthur sat up against the parapet in a sort of stupor, the three Hindoos were grouped on one side, and Momba mutely followed his master from point to point, as with Guy and the colonel he made the circuit of the housetop.

And now for the first time it became evident that the presence of the fugitives on the roof was known. Thousands of Arabs and Somalis surrounded the building, their dark faces plainly seen in the glare of the torches, but no hostile demonstration was made. They appeared to be waiting on something or someone. It was very evident that the whole population of the town was in revolt. It was equally plain, too, that they had been prepared for this uprising, for it had apparently broken out in all quarters of the town at once, and the expected signal had no doubt been the approach of the Arabs from Berbera, for the vast number of rifles used in the fight proved conclusively their arrival.

Wonderful success had crowned their plans. Yesterday the garrison at Berbera had fallen to a man; and now Zaila was in their hands, and all that remained of the British possessors was the

miserable band of fugitives on the residency roof.

With bitter feelings Guy looked down on the sea of faces. He was wondering if he would ever see Calcutta or England again. But he had been in bad predicaments before, and, hopeless as it now seemed, something might turn up to save them yet.

43

Melton was inclined to think that the Arabs were only waiting for daylight to make their attack, and yet they seemed to have no idea of abandoning their position, but encircled the building with a sea of torches, talking loudly and excitedly all the while.

Once Guy ventured to peer down over the parapet, and to his surprise he saw Arab guards at the residency door, sternly keeping back the crowd. Then he pulled aside the stone from the trap. All was dark and quiet beneath. The solution to this mystery was close at hand.

Of a sudden a great hush fell on the vast crowd, the tumult died away to a low murmur, and from the outskirts came a strange sound, at first low and indistinct, and then louder and more vivid, like the tinkling of bells mingled with the trampling of hoofs.

The Arabs and Somalis fell silently apart, leaving open a wide passage like a swath cut through a field of standing corn that led straight to the residency doors. Up this triumphal avenue trotted a dozen stalwart Arabs bearing lighted torches, and directly behind came a gigantic camel, decorated with gorgeous trappings and hung with strings of silver bells. And on the camel's back, gazing haughtily around him, sat the Arab, Makar Makalo.

"Behold Makar Makalo, the new ruler of Zaila!" cried the heralds, and from the vast crowd burst one universal shout of satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI.

A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH.

44

At the sight of the daring Arab chief Guy could scarcely restrain himself. He would have drawn his revolver and shot him down then and there, but Colonel Carrington interfered.

"Don't excite them," he said cautiously; "their punishment is sure in the end. How can they defend Zaila against the British gunboats that will be sent here? We have possibly a chance for our lives yet. Don't destroy that last chance."

The colonel plainly had strong hopes. It is well enough in some cases to fight to the very last, and have your names printed in the army list as heroes who died at their post, but in this case the safety of Sir Arthur was plainly the important point, and any concession must be made to secure this. So all idea of making a fight of it was given up. Short and brief would have been the struggle for Guy and Melton, as the three Hindoos were the only ones armed, and they had but a scant supply of ammunition.

Makar held a short conversation with three or four Arabs, and then, slipping down from his camel, he walked off a little from the residency and shouted loudly, "Inglis men, come down. You no be killed. You prisoners of war."

The idea of Kakar's investing this bloody outbreak with all the dignity of legitimate warfare was ridiculous, and the colonel laughed.

45

"What's that about prisoners?" cried Sir Arthur, coming eagerly forward. "Will they spare our lives, I wonder? Let me talk to the fellow. I'll try to conciliate him."

He walked pompously to the parapet and bent over. Perhaps the champagne he had drunk had affected his head. At all events he leaned a little too far, and, suddenly losing balance, he toppled over and fell with a thud plump on the heads of two Arab sentries at the door. All three came to the ground in a heap, and it was a great relief to the anxious watchers above to see Sir Arthur stagger to his feet apparently unhurt.

The effect on the Arabs was electric. The remaining guards glanced up apprehensively, and very speedily changed their location.

As for Makar, he evidently believed that Sir Arthur had come down expressly in response to his summons, for he waited for the rest to follow his example.

"Bless my heart!" muttered Sir Arthur. "What a narrow escape!"

He started toward Makar, but two Arabs laid hold of him and pulled him roughly to one side.

"We'd better go down," said the colonel, and raising his voice he shouted,

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"Do you swear to preserve our lives if we come down?"

"By the shades of Mohammed, I swear it. Come down," replied Makar.

"We'll have to trust to his word," said the colonel. "Put the ladder in position."

The ladder, with one end on the ground, failed to reach the top of the parapet by four or five

feet. It was a ticklish business to drop down on the upper round, but one by one they accomplished it, and, descending to the ground, were speedily seized and relieved of everything on their persons.

Perhaps Makar doubted his ability to keep his word, for he hurried his prisoners into the residency, away from the turbulent crowd, and left them in the hall in custody of a dozen armed Arabs.

They had not been here five minutes when a commotion was heard outside, and the shattered doors were pulled apart to admit half a dozen weary, blood stained soldiers of the garrison. They were the last survivors, and they told a fearful story.

The fortifications had been attacked, they said, at the same time by the population of the town on one side, and on the south by a vast horde of Arabs and Somalis, who suddenly appeared over the sand-hills mounted on camels. They alone had been made prisoners. All others had been shot, including the officers, the port surgeon, and the native assistant resident.

47

This sad story brought tears to the eyes of all, and even Sir Arthur waxed terribly indignant and prophesied speedy retribution.

But now the guards sternly forbade conversation. An hour or more passed on, during which time many persons indistinguishable in the gloom, passed in and out of the residency.

Then came a summons to appear before the chief.

"Don't be alarmed," said Sir Arthur reassuringly. "We shall be sent across the gulf of Aden. This wretch will not dare do injury to her majesty's representatives."

Sir Arthur's sudden change of spirits was not shared by the rest.

"Nerve yourself," Melton whispered to Guy. "I have an idea of what is coming," and before Guy could reply they were ushered into the very apartment which they had left so hastily a few hours before.

It had undergone no change. The lamps had been relit, the wine bottles and glasses still stood on the table, and in Sir Arthur's chair of state sat Makar Makalo, very stern and dignified, while around him, squatted on the rugs, were four Arabs of superior caste and intelligence, comprising, no doubt, the freshly formed cabinet of the great governor of Zaila.

48

Makar waited until his captives had ranged themselves along the wall, and then, with great *sang froid*, he helped himself to a cigar from Sir Arthur's choice box of Partagas, lit it, and poured off a glass of champagne which he despatched at a gulp.

Having thus proved beyond a doubt that he possessed all the chief qualifications of a British political resident, he settled back in his chair and surveyed his prisoners with lowering brow.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated Sir Arthur. "What most amazing imptu—" a sudden rap on the head from one of the guards cut short his speech, and he relapsed into indignant silence.

Makar was plainly a man of iron nerve, for he met calmly and even boldly the indignant, defiant glances that were turned upon him as he scanned the row of prisoners ranged before him.

Glancing toward the windows he dispersed with a wave of his hand the dark swarm of faces peering eagerly within, and then at last he deigned to break the silence which had become so ominous.

"I have promised ye your lives," he said. "Makar never breaks his word. Allah is great, and it is the will of Allah that Zaila should belong to the true followers of the prophet. Already has his will been fulfilled. The hated Inglis soldiers are dead. Rao Khan is the ruler of Zaila, and Markar is his servant."

49

He paused and helped himself to another glass of champagne. It was evident that Makar was not at heart a true follower of the prophet, for the Koran strictly forbids all intoxicants.

Another impressive pause followed. Guy glanced at Melton and was alarmed to see the dead white pallor on his face. Melton alone perhaps knew what was coming. On the rest the blow fell with crushing severity.

"Have I not said that Makar's word is inviolate?" the Arab resumed, leaning forward and uttering each syllable sharply and distinctly.

"Can Makar break his pledge?" and he turned to his solemn visaged ministers.

"No, no, no," they muttered in guttural accents, and solemnly shaking their heads.

"Then hark ye all," Makar went on. "I have sworn on the Koran that whatsoever prisoners fell to my lot should be delivered over as slaves to the Somalis of the Galla country. I have spoken. It is Kismet. At daybreak ye start for the interior."

Sir Arthur staggered back against the wall with a dismal groan, the Hindoos fell on their knees begging piteously for mercy, Colonel Carrington seemed dazed, stupefied, Guy clinched his hands and made a desperate effort to bear up bravely, while Melton's face wore the same pale, hopeless expression.

50

No one spoke. Supplications and prayers would alike be useless. The Arab's stern, pitiless countenance spoke plainer than words. Mercy was an unknown word in his vocabulary.

"Spare us, spare us!" moaned Sir Arthur, coming forward a pace or two and making as though he would fall on his knees.

"I have spoken," cried Makar harshly. "Words will avail ye nothing."

He made a signal to the guards, who at once closed in on the wretched captives and led them away.

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CHAPTER VII.

SOLD INTO SLAVERY.

The party were taken to a rear apartment of the residency and placed under strong guard. During the remainder of that night no one slept, of course, nor did they hold much conversation, for all instinctively avoided a subject which could only add to their wretchedness.

Slavery among the Somalis was a fate worse than death. It was a living death indeed, for hope of escape there was none. Far better if Makar had ordered them to be shot at daybreak.

Guy spoke hopefully to Melton of the situation, counting somewhat on the claim he had on Makar; but Melton seemed to think that the Arab had ignored the affair, and would not interfere with Guy's fate.

All too soon gray dawn came stealing into the residency, revealing the haggard faces of the captives, and with it came a summons from Makar to prepare for the journey. Food was brought and partaken of with some relish, for, under even the most distressing circumstances, men seem able to eat. Closely watched, they were led into the open air, and halted for a brief space in the court.

The sun was not up yet, and the blue waters of the gulf stretched afar until lost in the pale mist. In the harbor lay the two steamers, but the British flag no longer floated over their decks.

52

Finally they were led through a curious rabble of Arabs and Somalis to the outskirts of the town, where the caravan was in process of formation. It was no ordinary caravan. There were no bales of goods lying about, no camels laden down with burdens, but surrounded by many of the population drawn hither by curiosity were about fifty camels with simple trappings, and a group of Somalis and Arabs all heavily armed, the Arabs with rifles, the natives with long spears.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the captives, Makar made his appearance with an armed escort and proceeded to hold a close conversation with the two Arabs who seemed to be the leaders of the caravan. He spoke earnestly for quite a while, making many gestures, and pointing from time to time at the prisoners. Then he turned away, and instantly all was excitement.

The Arabs and Somalis quickly pulled themselves upon their camels, and with the aid of the guards the Englishmen were mounted in the same way, each man being hoisted up beside an Arab or a Somali.

No resistance was made. The Hindoo soldiers were in a state of deep dejection, and poor Sir Arthur seemed hardly to realize his position.

The caravan was now ready to start. At the last filed at a slow trot over the sandy plain in a southerly minute Makar Makalo passed carelessly by Guy and whispered, "Keep good heart. Makar no forget." Then he vanished in the crowd, and, with a loud cheer to speed them on their way, the line of camels direction.

53

Guy turned his head for a last look at Zaila and the harbor, now beginning to glimmer in the first rays of the sun, and then a stretch of sand-hills hid the town from view.

Little did he realize that which he must pass through before he saw the coast again.

From the ruined fortifications of the town an unseen observer watched the departure of the caravan. It was Manuel Torres. The crafty Portuguese was well pleased to see the hated Englishmen speeding away to their doom.

He was a cunning knave, and had laid his plans well. Perhaps he feared the stability of the new government. If the English came into possession of Zaila again, he could invent some clever tale to disprove his connection with the Arab revolt; and who could bear witness against him? None, indeed, for the lips of those who alone knew his guilt would be hopelessly sealed. Africa never gives up her slaves.

To the wretched captives that day's journey over the scorching desert was a fearful experience. Nothing is more painful to the novice than riding camel-back, and when at last a halt was made at sunset every man was aching from head to foot.

54

The heat, too, had been fearful, though the Arabs had provided them with big sun helmets before starting. No intercourse was permitted. The captives were kept rigorously apart. But little sleep was allowed. The caravan started again before dawn, and, as before, traveled rapidly and steadily until sundown.

At the end of the second day they had become in a measure accustomed to the motion of the

camels, and no longer suffered so much. Yet in all this time no words had been exchanged. Each man was kept apart. The Arab with whom Guy rode could speak some English, and from him he learned that the chief object of the caravan was to carry to Rao Khan the news of the capture of Zaila. Further information the Arab refused to give.

The caravan comprised a dozen Arabs and thirty or forty Somalis of the Galla country. It was to these crafty savages that the captives belonged. The Somalis had assisted Makar in the revolt, and these slaves were their reward. Their chief, who accompanied the caravan, was none other than Guy's vindictive enemy, Oko Sam.

Late in the afternoon of the fifth day the caravan came to a sudden halt. In the distance were visible green hills and rolling plains covered with verdure. The desert seemed to have ended. It was evident that something of importance was about to happen.

All dismounted, and while the Arabs and Somalis entered into an excited conversation, the captives were for the first time allowed to converse.

Their hopeless situation was too well understood for discussion. Strange to say, Sir Arthur was the only one who had not abandoned hope.

"The government will save us," he repeated gloomily. "They will send an army into the interior."

No one ventured to dispute this assertion. They talked in low tones of their probable destination, and regarded with some uneasiness the conference going on among the Arabs, which had now assumed a more excitable phase.

"They are quarreling over something," said Guy. "Why do you suppose they have stopped here?"

"I don't know," replied Melton, "unless they intend to separate, the Arabs going on to Harar, the Somalis to their own country, which lies to the south of Harar."

Melton's theory was very plausible, but before anyone could reply the conference terminated suddenly, and the Arabs, drawing apart, came quickly up to the captives, and, laying hold of Sir Arthur and the colonel, led them over to the Somalis.

This was repeated with Momba, Captain Waller, and the Hindoo soldiers, but, to their surprise, Guy and Melton were ordered to remain where they were.

Foremost among the Somalis stood Oko Sam, his leopard skin dangling about his loins, and a fiendish expression on his face.

He advanced a step or two, talking fiercely, and pointing with his spear to Guy and Melton. The Arab leader strode out toward him, and cried in a loud voice, "Makar has ordered it. The two white men must go to Harar."

Scarce had the words left his lips when the Somali chief poised his spear and hurled it forward with such force and accuracy of aim that it passed through the Arab's body and the point came out at the back. With a cry he dropped on the sand.

A second of terrible suspense followed, and then snatching another spear from one of his followers, the maddened Somali leaped furiously at Guy, who unfortunately was standing directly in his path.



SUDDENLY GUY DREW HIS REVOLVER AND SPRANG FORWARD.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SEPARATION.

But help was at hand. Before Oko Sam could reach his victim, an Arab directly behind Guy fired, and the fellow stumbled blindly on the sand.

A shout of rage burst from the Somalis, and, hastily pushing their captives to the rear, they advanced in a very ugly manner, shaking their long spears.

Leaving the dead Arab and the wounded Somali where they had fallen, the Arabs moved back a short distance, taking Guy and Melton with them, and shouted to the Somalis to remain where they were.

The Arabs were reluctant to fire, and would have avoided further bloodshed, but the enraged savages continued to press forward, and finally let fly a shower of spears that wounded one of the Arabs, and unfortunately killed a camel. The Arabs at once retaliated with a rifle-volley, and to such good effect that three or four of the Somalis were killed.

This brought them to their senses. Their spears could not compete with the firearms of the Arabs. They moved back to their animals, and, with a few farewell shouts of vengeance, rode away to the south, while the Arabs hastily bestrode their camels, and, taking the two Englishmen with them, calmly resumed their journey to the southwest.

For a time the two caravans, moving on the sides of an acute angle, as it were, remained close together; but, gradually diverging, the sharp outlines of the Somalis began to fade into the twilight, and at last, as Guy and Melton strained their tear-dimmed eyes into the distance, the shadows obliterated the last traces of their captive friends. To Momba Melton had been deeply attached, and their separation was a hard blow.

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And now a terrible feeling of desolation came over them, and they were half inclined to wish that they, too, had been led away to share the fate of Sir Arthur and the colonel.

Though it was now fast growing dark, the Arabs evinced no intention of stopping. With long, sweeping strides the unwearied camels swept over the sandy plain, and their riders from time to time spurred them to greater speed.

Melton was back in the rear, but Guy rode in front, with the Arab who had assumed the leadership since the death of his companion.

Guy ventured to address him, and was surprised to find him grown somewhat communicative. He explained to Guy in broken English that by Makar's orders he and Melton were to be delivered up to Rao Khan instead of being sent into slavery among the Somalis. Harar, he said, was a day's journey away, and by traveling all night they would arrive at sunrise. His account of Rao Khan, the Emir, was by no means reassuring, but Guy did not allow this to trouble him much. Makar's last words were still ringing in his ears, and he felt certain that their deliverance from the Somalis was the first step toward the fulfillment of Makar's promise.

59

The little caravan moved on in silence. The Arabs were probably uneasy. They may have feared an attack from the Somalis or some other foe, for they kept a close watch, and held their rifles in constant readiness. But presently the moon came up in the east, casting a pale glamour over the desert, and tracing on the sand in weird, fantastic designs the shadows of the camels and their riders.

As the night wore on the Arabs relaxed their caution, and, dropping their rifles to their sides, began to refresh themselves with crackers brought along from Zaila, together with dates and figs, which they washed down with water.

The Arab with whom Melton was mounted now rode up beside the leader, and, to their great joy, Guy and Melton were permitted to converse. Though they had had no rest or sleep since the previous night, excitement had driven away all fatigue, and they looked forward with deep interest to their arrival at Harar.

To Guy's surprise, Melton did not believe that he had been singled out to accompany Guy.

"No, no, Chutney," he said, "depend upon it, Makar has some other object in view. I believe now that he will effect your escape in some way, but don't be surprised to find yourself sent back to Zaila alone. Makar's clemency will be extended to no one but yourself."

60

"Nonsense," returned Guy. "I tell you he means to save you, too. However, we shall not be parted, Melton. I assure you of that. I will accept no deliverance that does not include you, too."

Forbes made no reply, and for a time they rode on in silence. Absorbed in conversation, they had failed to observe that the aspect of the country had begun to change. They were now ascending a slight ridge, and from its crest could be seen the vague outline of mountains on both the right and the left, while all around them, in place of the dreary sand, were low bushes and vegetation. The camel's thorn and tamarisk shrub of the desert had disappeared. Once some huge animal glided across their path, and one of the Arabs half raised his rifle, but

lowered it again.

With feelings which they would have found it hard to express, Guy and Melton saw the dawn come creeping over the sky, and just as it became fully light, they rode over the crest of a hill and perceived in the distance a mass of walls and turrets stamped against the pale-gray sky.

A pleasant breeze blew from the mountains which rose steep and rocky on all sides, while the valleys were richly wooded, and a silver thread, curving to and fro, marked the presence of a hillside stream.

The little caravan now descended into a narrow gorge and traveled rapidly along the course of a brawling torrent for nearly an hour. Then, crossing the stream, they rounded a sharp spur of rocks, and the dreaded city of Harar was before them.

Thirty years before the intrepid Burton had penetrated to that hotbed of fanaticism, and had by a miracle come back alive. From that day to this none had dared to emulate him.

Well might the two young Englishmen shrink from meeting that detestable despot, Rao Khan, who ruled his people by the sword, and hated all Christians with, hatred that fanaticism alone can breed.

The caravan ascended the hill, and across the brow of the ridge stretched the massive, irregular wall of the town. The great brazen gates were closed, and in the oval turrets that rose sentinel-like above the wall appeared no sign of life or motion.

Then with startling suddenness came a trumpet blast and the quick, sharp roll of drums; and from the town burst a tumult and volume of sound, and then over the walls, and peering curiously from the turrets, appeared a swarm of dark, repulsive faces.

The tumult deepened and changed to one vast murmur as the caravan moved in dignified state up to the very gates of the ancient city of Harar.

CHAPTER IX.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

A brief pause, then the gates swung on creaking hinges, and the caravan filed in between the dingy walls that had reared themselves for centuries from the summit of that hill.

For an instant a hush of curiosity fell on the multitude within, as the caravan appeared; but as the Arab leader suddenly trailed in the dust the English flag that had once floated from the fortifications of Zaila a great shout arose, so that the very air seemed to tremble, and the people pressed tumultuously on the caravan from all sides.

"Zaila has fallen! Zaila has fallen!" they cried, and with wild joy they beat their arms in the air, while those in the rear sought the house-tops, so as better to see the new arrivals.

In the first excitement Guy and Melton had escaped notice, but now they were suddenly espied, and the sight of the two hated Englishmen roused the passions to the highest pitch of ferocity. The foreigners' presence in the town was a sacrilege, an insult, and with threats and angry cries the mob surged round the group. At last, so great was the crush, the camels were forced to halt.

"Kill the infidels! Kill the dogs of unbelievers!" howled the multitude, and waxing more furious with every shout, they drew daggers and knives and raised their spears.

The Arabs had quietly closed round Guy and Melton, forming with their camels a protective circle, and this alone saved the Englishmen from death. But every instant the situation was becoming more critical. The mob grew bolder, and even tried to force the group apart in spite of the protestations of the Arabs, who had begun to point their rifles threateningly. Hundreds of savage faces glared unutterable hatred at the two strangers, hundreds of wretches were thirsting for their blood, and, finally roused to uncontrollable fury, the crowd swept impetuously against the caravan from all sides.

The frightened camels pranced and reared, and the cordon of defense suddenly broken, a dozen savages rushed on Guy and Melton. A long spear pierced Forbes under the arm and down he went beneath the camels.

A burly wretch dashed at Guy with a dagger, but the Arab brought down the butt of his rifle on the fellow's head just in time, as he dropped like a log.

A man behind hurled his spear, but his aim was poor, and, instead of striking Guy, it entered the poor camel's neck; the beast, plunging madly forward, hurled Guy and the Arab to the ground.

This alone saved their lives. As Guy staggered to his feet, cries of quite a different nature burst from the mob, and in fright and panic they began to scatter in all directions. The rattle of musketry broke out some distance ahead, and the Arabs, joining in eagerly, began to empty their rifles into the fleeing mass.

The Englishmen were saved. A compact body of men in linen tunics and leopard skin caps came sweeping forward. They were armed with rifles, and as they ran they kept shooting into the struggling crowd which was shrieking and groaning with agony.

In five minutes the place was deserted, and the stony ground was literally covered with bodies. It was a terrible example of Rao Khan's despotic rule.

Melton was lifted up, and to Guy's deep sorrow it was seen that he had received an ugly thrust along the side, not of a serious nature, but ragged and painful.

Two of the Emir's troopers, for such they proved to be, carried him, for he was unable to walk or ride.

Guy and the Arab mounted a fresh camel, first putting the wounded animal out of his misery, and then, preceded by the Emir's guard, the caravan resumed its march up the street.

The first sight of Harar was novel and interesting. Before them was a long avenue, fully a mile in length, at the extreme end of which could be dimly seen the northern wall of the town. This avenue was like a barren mountain road, strewn with rubbish and heaps of rocks, and the dwellings, which rose on all sides to the height of two stories, were, many of them, constructed of sandstone and granite, cemented with a reddish clay. They were impressively gloomy and clingy. 65

The terrible scene just enacted had terrorized the people. Many Arabs came flocking across the streets and exchanged greetings with the newcomers, but very few Somalis or Gallas were to be seen. The sight of the Emir's guard seemed to have stricken the town like a palsy. The shops and booths were closed and deserted. The curtains of the houses were closely drawn; here and there at the doors lay goods that had been dropped in the sudden panic, and at one place a man lay dead across the threshold, still clutching in his stiffened fingers a bunch of brightly colored rugs.

But now the scene became animated and lively; people flocked out from their houses, among them many women, whom Guy regarded curiously, for they seemed to be of quite a different type from the men, and passably good-looking. They made no demonstration, however, but very quietly followed the caravan.

The center of the town was now close at hand, and a short distance ahead, on the left-hand side, rose a more imposing abode than those around it. It was built of granite, and above the flat roof rose a square tower with circular windows. It boasted a spacious courtyard, inclosed by a low stone parapet, and within this space were a dozen armed guards, clad in leopard skin caps, and bearing brightly polished rifles. 66

It was the palace of the Emir. As the caravan drew up to the gates the escort sounded a blast of trumpets, and almost immediately the doors were opened and a grave and dignified Arab came slowly out.

He spoke a few words to the leader of the caravan, who dismounted at once, and bidding Guy follow him, entered the courtyard. Close behind him came Melton, borne by the soldiers.

Passing between the guard, they entered a narrow vestibule hung with rich curtains, and in a moment more were ushered into the dreaded presence of Rao Kahn.

The Emir was seated on a low dais at the further side of a spacious apartment. The first glance struck terror to Guy's heart. Rao Khan was a short, thickset man, with a round, smooth face. His eyes were sunken deeply under the forehead, and the expression of his face was a strange blending of brutality, avarice, and treachery. He was simply clad in white linen, with a great sword at his side, and on his head was a leopard skin cap, so constructed that the tail of the leopard hung down his back. 67

Before him squatted four solemn-faced Arabs. The floor was spread with rugs and the skins of various animals, and on the heavily curtained walls hung a dazzling array of every description, bronze and copper shields, and strips of oddly-woven tapestry. At sight of the English flag which the Arab now produced, the Emir's eyes sparkled, his face lit up with fiendish joy, and he began to talk wildly in a strange tongue.

The Arab replied, giving him no doubt an account of the insurrection, for the names Berbera, Zaila, and Makar Makalo were frequently mentioned.

Guy, from his position at Melton's side, who had been placed on a soft lion skin, watched the strange scene with wonder. He was more worried at present about Melton than anything else. The spear wound had not yet been dressed, and the poor fellow was in too much pain even to talk.

At last the Arab turned round, and, pointing to the Englishmen, spoke in a low tone to the Emir, who half rose from his seat and looked sharply at the captives.

Guy met his gaze calmly and steadily. In a moment the suspense would be over, and their fate would be decided one way or the other.

CHAPTER X.

THE SLAVE PRISON.

The Emir's reply was brief and apparently forcible. He clapped his hands, and half a dozen soldiers appeared instantly. He addressed them with a word or two, but before they could execute his orders, Guy hastened forward and said to the Arab, "I pray you have my friend's wound dressed. He is suffering much pain."

The Arab addressed the Emir, pointing to the wounded man, and then, turning to Guy, he said, "It is well. Rao Khan will see to the Inglis man."

Guy would have sought more information, but the soldiers now came forward and picking Melton up motioned Guy to follow them. They passed out of the apartment by a rear door, and traversing a long hall, entered a big courtyard.

On the right and left were high stone walls, and directly opposite was a low, gloomy sandstone structure, with one narrow door opening on the court.

Here were standing more armed guards, who obsequiously opened the door for the approaching captives.

As they passed through the gloomy portal Guy's heart sank. His eyes at first could see nothing but darkness, and he blindly followed his conductors until they came to a stop. A heavy door was closed and bolted behind him, and then all was silent.

69

In a few seconds he was able to see his surroundings. He was in a square dungeon, lighted by a narrow aperture high up in the wall. The floor was of stone, strewn with straw. Melton sat up and leaned against the wall.

"Where are we, Chutney?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Guy; "in some sort of prison, I suppose. Why—hello, Melton, here are iron rings sunk in the floor all along the side."

"That settles it, then," rejoined Melton. "This is Rao Khan's slave prison. I don't suppose there are many inmates now while the fair is going on."

Approaching footsteps put an end to the conversation, and in a moment the door opened to admit a tall Arab, followed by a native with bandages and a basin of water.

The Arab quietly loosened Melton's shirt and coat, and, washing the wound, wrapped bandages spread with some soft ointment round his body. He did the work speedily and dexterously, and then departed as silently as he had come. He had barely gone, however, when a soldier entered with a tray containing dates, figs, and a peculiar kind of cakes, which he placed before the prisoners. They ate with relish, and then, overcome by weariness, they lay down on the straw and fell asleep.

It was some hours later when Guy awoke. Night had come, for no light shone through the aperture. He lay for some time listening to Melton's deep breathing and thinking of their terrible situation.

70

He was not without hope of deliverance, for he placed a great deal of faith in Makar's promise; yet even then the chances were against them. Perhaps at this very moment Zaila had been retaken, and Makar was killed or a prisoner. If this should happen they were lost. Guy shuddered to think of Rao Khan's vengeance under such circumstances.

Presently he became aware of vague noises somewhere in the distance. He fancied he heard shots fired and a loud tumult of voices.

He thought it might be imagination, but suddenly the sounds increased, and once or twice footsteps hurried past the dungeon. The noise now woke Melton, and together they listened, convinced that it was a presentiment of coming evil. The strange sounds rose and fell, at times nearly dying away and then bursting out with renewed violence.

"I can't understand it at all," said Guy. "It can't be a rejoicing over the capture of Zaila, for they are plainly cries of anger."

"We'll know pretty soon what it means," returned Melton; "it concerns us, you may be sure."

In his excitement he arose and began to pace the floor. His wound was giving him no pain, he said, adding that he really felt pretty well again.

71

At last the shouts seemed to come a little nearer, and before long the fierce, angry cries were heard close at hand.

"They are surrounding the prison," said Guy, huskily.

He was right. A howling mob was on all sides of them now, and it was quite clear that they were beginning to attack the walls of the courtyard, for suddenly half a dozen shots were fired as though the guards were resisting the invaders.

It was a period of terrible suspense. The shouts increased, the firing grew heavier, powder-

smoke drifted into the prison; but just when they expected to see their dungeon door torn open by a mad swarm of fanatics the uproar suddenly ceased.

A full minute of silence followed, and then on the night air rose a howl of triumph, so savage, so vindictive, that Guy and Melton shivered from head to foot. For some reason the attack had been suddenly abandoned. What that reason was they could only surmise.

The silence continued. The invaders had dispersed. Sleep was impossible, and they passed the time in conversation until a streak of light, flickering through the opening, showed that morning had come.

Food and drink were brought in. The prisoners ate sparingly. The shadow of a great calamity was overhanging.

"I am just as sure," said Melton, "that something will shortly happen, as I am that you and I are in Rao Khan's slave prison at Harar."

"Listen," answered Guy.

Footsteps approached. The door creaked and opened, and a man entered. With a cry of wonder Guy and Melton sprang to their feet. The newcomer was bronzed and burnt, he had light hair, a mustache and a soft blond beard, but he wore trousers and a tunic of white linen.

The surprise was mutual. The stranger scanned them closely from head to foot.

"Who are you?" cried Guy hoarsely. "Can it be possible that you are an Englishman—an Englishman in Harar?"

The man paused a moment, and then said quietly: "I am a Greek. My name is Canaris Mataplan. At present I am an interpreter to Rao Khan, the Emir."

"But your English?" cried Melton. "It is perfect."

"I was a cafe-keeper at Cairo for seven years," replied the Greek. "I learned English there."

An embarrassing pause now occurred. It was certain that the Greek was the bearer of tidings from the Emir. No one dared speak. At last the Greek said quietly: "You are truly unfortunate. Tell me how you came here. I know that Zaila has fallen into the possession of Rao Khan's emissaries. I know nothing else."

Guy briefly told the tale, and Canaris listened quietly.

"Fools!" he said. "The English will be in Zaila again in a month."

"And you?" rejoined Guy. "What brought you to Harar?"

"I left Cairo for Calcutta," said Canaris. "The steamer was lost off Cape Guardafui; ten of us reached shore in a boat; the Somalis slaughtered all but myself. I was sold to the Arabs and came ultimately to Harar. I was useful to Rao Khan in many ways, and my life was spared. I have been here two years, two long years. I shall never see Greece again," he added gloomily. "I am a slave to the Emir for life."

"Is escape then impossible?" asked Guy.

"Absolutely. Between here and the coast is the desert. To the south are the bloodthirsty Gallas. No, no; one can never escape from Harar."

The tramp of the guard was heard in the corridor, and a sudden change passed over the Greek's face.

"I have come from Rao Khan," he said in a low voice. "He sends me with a message."

He paused.

"Go on," said Guy; "we are listening." He was breathing heavily.

"Two hours after you arrived here yesterday morning," resumed Canaris, "Rao Khan despatched the Arabs to Zaila again, in company with two hundred of his best soldiers, who will assist in holding the town. They had scarcely gone when an insurrection broke out. The people were angered at the slaughter done by the Emir's troops when they rescued you from the crowd. It is an ancient law in Harar that every Christian stranger who enters her gates must die. Englishmen are most detested of all. The populace became maddened and furious; from all quarters of the town they came, clamoring, demanding your lives. When Rao Khan called out his remaining troops they refused to fire. The people, they said, were right. A very few remained faithful to the Emir. The mob surrounded the palace and the prison; they tried to scale the walls; the guards in the court fired on them. Then Rao Khan appeared and spoke to the angry crowd. He begged them to wait. He told them that you belonged not to him, but that Makar Makalo had sent you here for safe-keeping, that you were the slaves of Makar Makalo. The people only howled in derision. They became more angry and infuriated, and refused to listen any longer. 'The Englishmen must die!' they cried. Rao Khan was fearful in his anger. But he was powerless. He feared the destruction of the palace, the loss of his own life." Here Canaris paused and looked with infinite pity at the Englishmen.

Guy tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat. Melton laid his hand on the Greek's arm. "Go on, go on," he whispered hoarsely. "We are men, not cowards. Let us know the worst."

CHAPTER XI.

CANARIS UNFOLDS A TALE.

"Well," said Canaris, "I will tell you. Rao Khan has promised your lives to the people. It was his only hope, and now, his word once given, he will not dare to break it."

Melton covered his face with his hands, and Guy staggered backward.

"When?" he cried huskily. "Today?"

"No," said Canaris, "not today. The Emir bids me tell you that you will have four days yet to live. On the fifth day you will die by the executioner, in the square of the town."

They shuddered as these dreadful words fell from the Greek's lips.

"Is there no hope, then, at all?" said Melton. "Let us know the worst at once and be done with it."

Canaris made no reply for a moment. His eyes were fixed on the floor, and he seemed to be thinking deeply. When he looked up the expression of his face was changed. A strange light shone in his eye, a mixture of triumph and fear.

"I can tell you nothing now," he said hastily. "Tonight you shall have an answer. But tell me, how is your wound?"

"Better," replied Melton. "I can scarcely feel it at all."

"Good," said Canaris. "Now do just as I tell you. Lie down on the straw; pretend that you are much worse; moan loudly from time to time, and when I come tonight I shall have something to impart to you."

With this strange admonition, Canaris hastily left the dungeon and the guard rebolted the door.

"Is the fellow crazy?" said Melton. "What can he mean to do?"

"Crazy?" rejoined Guy. "No; I have a strange faith in that man, Melton. Do just as he tells you and see what turns up tonight."

With much grumbling Melton assumed the part of a very sick man. He rather overdid the thing, in fact, for twice the guard opened the door and looked in. About noon food was brought, and from that time no one came near them.

The minutes dragged along like hours. They tried to forget the awful fate that stared them in the face, but in spite of the Greek's encouraging words the future looked very black.

At last the feeble light in their dungeon began to fade away, and soon they were in darkness.

"The fellow will never come back," said Melton bitterly. "It's all up with us, Chutney, so don't try to raise any more false hopes."

But Guy refused to give up, and his faith was rewarded. Quick footsteps approached the dungeon, the bolts rattled, and Canaris entered with a rude lamp and a leather case, which he placed carefully on the floor.

Then he pulled a paper from his pocket and waved it gleefully.

"See," he cried, "a permit from Rao Khan, admitting me to the prison at all times. I told him that your wound was very bad, that the Arab doctor had failed to help you, and that I knew enough of English surgery to cure you if he would allow it. Rao Khan reluctantly consented, and here I am."

He listened intently for a moment, glanced round the dungeon, and then went on in a low, excited tone:

"Get close together. I have something important to tell you."

They squatted down in a group on the straw, and with a strange, exultant sparkle in his eyes, Canaris began:

"When I came to Harar two years ago this very cell held a white slave, like yourselves an Englishman. He was an old man, with long white hair and beard, and had been so long in slavery that he had forgotten his own name and could scarcely speak the English tongue.

"My duties then were to carry food and drink to the slaves, and before long I was on intimate terms with the old Englishman. He was very ill, and the Arab doctors made him no better. Perhaps it was old age that was the trouble, but at all events he died two months after I came. At different times he had told me the story of his life, and that is what I am going to tell you now.

"He had been thirty years in slavery. How and where he had been captured he could no longer remember. His mind was a blank on that point. But one thing he told me that is important. For twenty years he had lived among the Gallas in a village fifty miles to the south of Harar, and it was a few years after he had been brought there that he nearly succeeded in making his escape.

"He had often heard from the natives of an underground river that was said to exist, and which

emptied either into the River Juba or into the sea. The tales concerning the river were many and strange, but the chief of the Gallas assured him that at one time a tribe of natives had lived in the mouth of a huge cavern which gave access to the river."

"I have heard something of that myself," interrupted Melton. "An Arab at Zanzibar told me, but I never had any faith in the story."

"That river exists," said Canaris solemnly. "The Englishman found it."

"What!" cried Guy and Melton in one breath. "He found the underground river?"

"Yes, he discovered it," resumed Canaris. "He found it one day while hunting in a concealed cavern. He ventured down and came to a great sandy beach, past which flowed swiftly a broad stream. On the beach lay half a dozen strong canoes with paddles. All this he saw by the light that streamed in from narrow crevices overhead. He went back to the village and began to lay aside provisions for the journey, for he intended making his escape by the river. In a week all was ready. He had concealed near the cavern supplies for a long voyage. The very day fixed for his escape he was sold to a Galla chief who lived twenty miles distant. In the years that followed he made many attempts to escape, but on every occasion was captured and brought back. At last he was given as tribute to the Emir by this Galla chief, and here in this dungeon, on the spot you are sitting on now, he breathed his last."

Canaris paused and helped himself to a glass of water.

"A strange story, indeed," said Guy; "but what has it got to do with us?"

"I will tell you," responded Canaris, with a slight tremor in his voice. "It may have nothing to do with any of us, and it may be of the greatest importance to us all."

"Did the old man tell you where to find the cavern?" asked Guy.

"No," answered Canaris, "but before he died he gave me this," and, pulling a folded bit of linen from his pocket he handed it to Guy.

"Can you read that?" he asked in strange excitement. "I have never been able to make anything out of it."

Guy pulled it carefully open and gazed with interest on the faded characters that had apparently been written in blood.

"Yes," he said after a pause, "I can read it. It is French."

"Go on," said Canaris. "Tell me quickly what it is."

"It translates as follows," rejoined Guy:

"Half way between Elephant Peak and the Lion's Head. The south side of the stone kraal. The rock with the cross."

Canaris sprang to his feet and staggered back against the wall of the dungeon.

"It was Providence that brought you here," he cried. "It is wonderful, wonderful!"

"What do you mean?" said Guy. "How can this aid us?"

"It is the secret of the cave," replied Canaris. "The stone kraal is a curious formation of rocks that lie between the two mountains that bear those names. Close by is the village of the chief of all the Gallas."

"But how under the sun can this discovery benefit us?" repeated Guy, half angrily. "Can you open our prison for us, Canaris?"

The Greek threw a cautious glance toward the door and then whispered in a voice that trembled with emotion: "Nothing is impossible; hope for the best. But stay," he added in sudden fear; "I must have money, or all is lost. Alas! you have none, I am sure."

For answer Guy hastily rose, and, loosening his clothes, unhooked a small buckskin belt. He tore open the end and dropped a stream of golden sovereigns into his hand.

"Here is money!" he cried. "The Arabs overlooked this when they searched me."

The Greek's eyes glittered.

"Give me twenty," he said. "That will be plenty."

He stowed the coins away in his clothes and picked up the lamp.

"I must leave you now," he said. "I will return in the morning."

He would have added more, but steps were heard in the corridor. The dungeon door clanged behind him, and Guy and Melton were left in darkness, half stupefied by the strange story they had just heard and by the hope of escape which the Greek so confidently held out to them.

CHAPTER XII.

A DARING MOVE.

When daylight came the captives could scarcely believe that the events of the preceding night had not been all a dream. There was the document, however, to prove their reality, and Guy was deeply studying its faded characters when the Greek arrived.

His face was radiant with happiness, an expression which quickly gave way to deep sadness as a big Somali entered with a platter of food. The latter had barely closed the door when Canaris held up a warning finger and motioned the Englishmen to draw near.

"It is well," he said softly. "I will tell you what I have done. Near the palace lives a Jewish merchant whom I know well. To him I went last night and by the aid of your gold made a good bargain. On the western side of the city, close by the wall, is a deserted guard-house that was once used before the watch-towers were built. Here the Jew promised to take for me the goods I purchased—namely, a supply of dates, figs, and crackers, three revolvers, three rifles with boxes of shells, three sabers, two ancient bronze lamps with flasks of palm oil, a box of English candles, and four long ropes with iron hooks on the end."

"He will betray you to the Emir," said Guy in alarm.

"Oh, no," returned Canaris, "no danger of that. I know a little secret concerning my Jewish friend that would put his head above the town walls in an hour's time. The things are even now hidden in the deserted house, you may rely on that."

"But how are we going to get out of this infernal dungeon?" asked Guy. "And how can we pass through the streets to the edge of the town?"

For answer the Greek opened the leather case that he had brought with him and took out three revolvers, three boxes of shells, a coil of rope, and a sharp knife.

"These are my surgical instruments," he said. "I will put them under the straw," and he suited the action to the word.

"Affairs outside have changed somewhat," he continued. "The people are sullen and restless. They mistrust the Emir, and fear they will be cheated of the pleasure they are looking forward to."

Guy turned pale. "Then we are lost!" he cried.

"No, you are saved," said Canaris. "That very fact works for your salvation. The Emir is alarmed; he fears for himself, not for you. His troops are few since he despatched the caravan to Zaila, and at night, for better security, he takes guards from the prison courtyard and stations them before the palace. This leaves three guards to contend with; one watches in the corridor, one stands before the prison door, and the third guards the gateway that opens from the prison yard on to a dark avenue of the town. If all goes well you will be free men at midnight. I must hurry away now. Listen well to my instructions, and do just as I tell you."

"You," and he turned to Melton, "must pretend that your wound is bad. Refuse to eat and lie on the straw all the time. It will be better if I do not return today. I fear that even now Rao Khan grows suspicious. The Arab doctor is angered because I have assumed his duties. At midnight, if you listen sharply, you will hear the guard relieved by a new man. Soon after that knock on the door, and when the guard looks in show him the wounded man, who will then feign to be very bad. I sleep in a rear apartment of the palace. The guard will send for me, and I will come. Otherwise my visiting you at that time of night would be looked upon with suspicion. The rest I will tell you then. Don't despair. All will be well; till midnight, farewell."

Canaris glided from the dungeon, and the prisoners were alone. They passed the long hours of that day in a strange mixture of hope and fear. The difficulties to be overcome seemed insurmountable. They must escape from the prison, pass through the very midst of their bloodthirsty enemies, scale the wall, and then—where were they? Hundreds of miles from the coast, surrounded by barbarous and savage people, and their only hope that mysterious underground river which in itself was a thing to be feared.

But, on the other hand, speedy death awaited them in the dungeon of Rao Khan. The chances were truly worth taking.

They followed instructions closely when the guard brought them food at noon, and in the evening Melton tossed on the floor as though in pain. The thrice-welcomed darkness came at last, and the light faded out of their dungeon. Once a horrible thought entered Guy's mind. What was to prevent the Greek from making his escape alone, and abandoning the Englishmen to their fate? It was but momentary, however, and then he dismissed the suspicion with a feeling of shame. He had already learned to trust the Greek implicitly.

Crouched by their dungeon door, they listened by the hour, and at last their patience was rewarded. Voices were heard, steps approached and died away, and then all was silent.

The time for action had come.

Melton threw himself on the straw and moaned. Guy rapped sharply on the door and waited in suspense. Almost instantly it opened, and the guard, a tall Nubian, pushed his lamp into the doorway and followed it up with head and shoulders.

"Canaris, Canaris!" said Guy earnestly, pointing to Melton, who uttered at that moment a most unearthly groan.

The guard drew back and shut the door. His soft tread echoed down the corridor, and all was still.

The suspense of the next five minutes Guy will never forget as long as he lives. It seemed to his excited imagination as though an hour had passed by, when suddenly sounds were heard in the corridor, and in an instant more Canaris stood before them, his leather case at his side, a lamp in his hand. He closed the door, opened the case, and drew out two wide linen tunics and two long jackets such as the Emir's troops wore.

"Put these on," he whispered. "You can wear your helmets; there are many of them in Harar."

As he spoke he drew an Arab burnous over his head, shading entirely his light hair and mustache. He next pulled the revolvers and shells from under the straw, distributed them around, and with the knife cut the rope in a dozen parts. By this time Guy and Melton had donned their disguises and were ready for action.

Up to this point Guy had supposed that Canaris had bribed the guards and paved the way out of prison.

"You are sure the guards will let us pass?" he said.

Canaris looked at him in wonder, and then a smile rippled over his face.

"You thought I had bribed the guards," he said. "Ten thousand pounds could not tempt them. They would only lose their heads in the morning. It matters little," he added. "They will lose them anyhow. But our time has come; be ready now to assist."

He motioned Guy and Melton behind the door, and then, pulling it partly open, uttered a few words in a strange tongue.

Instantly the powerful frame of the big Nubian entered, and as he stood for one second on the dungeon floor, sudden mistrust in his ugly features, Canaris leaped at his throat and bore him heavily to the ground.

"Quick!" he cried, and in an instant Guy and Melton had seized the struggling man's arms and feet.

Still pressing the fellow's windpipe with one muscular hand, Canaris thrust a gag into the gaping mouth, and in two minutes their captive was lying bound and helpless on the straw.

"What did you tell him?" asked Guy.

"I said our lamp was going out," Canaris replied. "And now for the man at the prison door. I must get him inside, for the post is in plain view of the guard at the gate."

A solution of this puzzling problem was closer at hand than anyone imagined. The creaking of a door was heard, followed by approaching footsteps.

"Here he comes now!" said Canaris in an excited whisper. "He has grown suspicious, and has determined to investigate. Quick!"

Canaris darted to the other side of the doorway, and then ensued another period of chilling suspense.

The tread came nearer, and at last another stalwart Nubian blocked the doorway with his massive bulk. His look of wonder was comical as he saw his comrade gagged and bound on the dungeon floor, but before the half articulated exclamation could escape his lips Canaris had him by the throat, and down they came. The fellow uttered one cry, and then, as his head struck the edge of the door in falling his struggles lessened, and with no trouble at all he was gagged and bound.

Canaris tore the ammunition from their belts, handed Guy and Melton their rifles, and then, blowing out the lamp, he pushed them into the corridor and bolted the door.

"Two heads will be off in the morning," he remarked grimly. "One more victory and we are out of prison."

He blew out the light that stood in the corridor and led the way through the darkness till he reached the door. He pulled it open, a crack revealing the moonlit courtyard, and took a long, careful survey.

"There is the man we want," he whispered, pointing across the court, and putting his eyes to the crevice Guy saw against the massive prison wall a dark shadow leaning grimly on a rifle.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FLIGHT THROUGH THE TOWN.

It was a critical situation for the three fugitives, crouching behind the heavy prison door. That grim sentry over yonder by the gate must be noiselessly and effectually overpowered, and that

at once. Any moment guards might come from the palace, and then—oh, it was horrible! The public square, the executioner's gleaming knife, the roar of the populace!

Guy's brain whirled at this appalling panorama, and he clutched the door for support.

"Can't we rush on him?" asked Melton.

Canaris laughed grimly.

"Before we could take three steps from the door," he said, "the fellow would see us and alarm the palace. If I go alone the chances are that before you can reach me he would succeed in making an outcry. Our only hope lies in getting away from the town before our escape is discovered."

"But what are you going to do, Canaris?" asked Guy excitedly. "We are losing precious time."

"Keep cool," replied the Greek. "I will fix him in five minutes. Stay where you are and don't make a sound. When I wave my hand, then come."

He removed his burnous and stuffed it under his tunic. Then he calmly opened the door and walked straight across the court toward the guard, who looked up carelessly at his approach. With their eyes glued against the cracks of the door Guy and Melton waited in terrible suspense.

A short conversation ensued. Canaris turned and pointed toward the prison. The guard replied with many gestures, and finally in his eagerness placed his rifle against the wall. What followed was so swift and dexterous that it seemed like a dream.

The Greek's right hand shot out from his bosom clasping some glittering object. It struck the astonished guard on the forehead with a sharp click that echoed across the courtyard, and without a sound he dropped on his knees and then rolled over on the stone pavement.

Canaris waved his hand, and then the two captives dashed breathlessly across the courtyard.

"Is he dead?" asked Guy in a horrified whisper.

"Only stunned," replied Canaris. "I struck him with the butt of my revolver. Quick now; bind and gag him while I find the key and open the gate."

Guy hastily fastened the fellow's feet and arms and stuffed a roll of linen in his mouth.

Melton stood looking on. His wound was beginning to give him some pain again.

With a low exclamation of triumph Canaris pulled from the Nubian's waist a narrow belt on which hung a ponderous iron key. All rose to their feet. Guy dropped the unconscious guard under the shadow of the wall. The supreme moment had come. The great courtyard, white in the light of the moon, was empty. The heavy doors leading to the palace were shut. Behind the high prison walls all seemed quiet. The city was asleep.

The first stage of the journey was accomplished in safety. The terrible passage through the town was before them now. With a hand that trembled slightly Canaris inserted the key in the lock. It turned with a harsh rattle, and at a touch of the hand the brazen gate swung outward.

The Greek made a hasty survey and then stepped noiselessly outside. They were in a narrow side street which ran past the Emir's palace. The side toward the prison was in deep shadow. On the other side was a long stone building, with two or three narrow grated windows.

"That is an Arab storehouse opposite," said Canaris. "We are safe for the present. Now follow me closely. Walk boldly and fearlessly and keep a few feet apart."

He started off at a rapid gait, his white burnous tossing on his shoulders, and with fast-beating hearts Guy and Melton came close behind. In five minutes they turned into another narrow passage running at right angles, and, continuing along this for forty or fifty yards, made still another turn.

The two streets they had just traversed had been lined for the most part with big warehouses and slave-markets. It was, in fact, the business part of the town, alive with people during the day, deserted at night. But now a crisis was at hand. Canaris halted his little party in the shadow of a building and pointed straight up the street.

"Yonder lies the main avenue," he said. "We must cross it to reach our destination. Keep yourselves well under control, don't show any fear, and if any people are about don't look at them. If they address you make no reply."

Guy marveled at the Greek's coolness under such terrible circumstances. Every moment was a torture to him as long as they remained in the midst of these bloodthirsty fiends.

In five minutes they reached the main street. From the slight ridge on which they stood they could see stretching afar on either hand the moonlit roadway, spectered with the dark shadows of the houses. They had been traveling on three sides of a square. Fifty yards down the street the tower of the Emir's palace was visible, outlined faintly against the pale-gray sky.

As they stepped from the shadows upon the open roadway, an Arab stalked from a doorway opposite, and without troubling himself to come nearer addressed Canaris in a strange tongue.

Guy's heart seemed to leap into his throat as he nervously handled the revolver that stuck in his belt.

Canaris coolly replied in a low voice. The Arab evinced no intention of coming any nearer, and in an instant more the fugitives had plunged into the gloom of another cross street.

On all sides now were rude abodes, some of sandstone, others of clay, and at some places even tents were to be seen. Laughter and loud talking came from open windows. Two or three fierce looking Somali warriors stalked past in dignified silence, and an Arab sheik, wrapped closely in his garment, looked at them cautiously as he hurried by.

Melton now walked with difficulty. His wound had broken out afresh and was bleeding. The weight of the rifle was too much for him, and he was compelled to abandon it in the road.

"A little farther now," said Canaris encouragingly, "and we shall be safe."

Melton tried to walk faster, leaning on Guy's arm, but at last, with a moan of pain, he sank to the ground.

"Go on, leave me; save yourselves," he whispered feebly, as they bent over him and tried to lift him to his feet.

"One more effort, my dear Melton," implored Guy in an agony, "only one more effort and we shall be safe. We can carry you if you can't walk."

"No," he gasped. "Go at once. You can escape. I would only keep you back and cause your capture; better one than three."

Guy threw an appealing glance at Canaris. The Greek's features were immovable. He calmly waited the result of Guy's pleading.

"My brave fellow," said Chutney, in a husky voice, kneeling down and clasping Melton's hand, "I refuse to accept your sacrifice. I shall remain here with you and we will meet our fate together. Canaris, save yourself while there is yet time. I will not desert my friend."

The Greek paused irresolutely. The convulsive workings of his face showed the struggle going on in his mind. Suddenly Melton rose on one elbow and cried excitedly:

"Go, go, I tell you."

Guy shook his head. "No," he said decidedly. "I shall remain."

"You are throwing your lives away," said Melton bitterly. "Here, help me up. I will make another effort."

In an instant Guy and Canaris had gladly pulled him to his feet, and off they went again as rapidly as possible. All was quiet around them. A deep silence, broken only by the occasional low of a cow, had enwrapped the town. So far their escape had remained undiscovered.

"Ah, here we are," said Canaris joyfully, turning down a dark, dirty passage, so narrow that the three could barely walk abreast. "In three minutes we shall reach the wall."

Three minutes is not a long time, but it is long enough for many things to happen. They had traversed half the length of the street when Guy, moved by one of those sudden, unexplainable impulses, turned his head.

Ten yards behind, crawling with soft and stealthy tread, was a grim, half naked Somali. How long he had been following in their track it was impossible to tell. But there he was, a stern Nemesis, the moonlight shining on spear and shield, and glowing on the dark, villainous features.

Guy and Canaris wheeled round and stood with drawn revolvers. The Somali clutched his spear and drew up his shield. The silence remained unbroken.

One single cry and a mad horde would rush forth like bees from a hive. The Somali made one step backward, then another, and then, opening his mouth, he gave a yell that was caught up in horrible echoes till the street fairly rang.

"Malediction!" cried Canaris, in uncontrollable fury, "that's your last shout," and, taking quick aim, he pulled his revolver on the shouting Somali.

A stunning report, a hollow groan, and down came the savage all in a heap, while the heavy shield bounded with a clatter over the stones.

CHAPTER XIV.

OVER THE WALLS.

The crack of the revolver, following closely on the Somali's loud yell, had barely died away in echoes when the dark street seemed fairly to burst into life.

The fugitives did not wait to see the result of the shot, but as they dashed madly forward they heard the people calling wildly to one another as they hurried from their dwellings.

Even Melton kept up with wonderful endurance. The excitement had given him false strength, and he kept even pace with Guy and Canaris.

Close at hand was the termination of the street, and as they were within ten yards of it a big Somali suddenly leaped out and barred the way.

The fugitives were going at a rate of speed which it was simply impossible to check. Canaris was a foot in advance, and in an instant more he would have impaled himself on the savage's outpointed spear.

It was too late to use the revolver which he still carried in his hand, but quick as a flash he hurled it with all his might, and with such correct aim that it landed plump on the fellow's head with an ugly crack.

The Somali howled with agony, letting the spear drop from his nerveless hands, and just as it clattered to the ground Canaris was upon him with a rush, and down they went together, the Somali undermost.

Canaris was up in a trice, and Guy and Melton, bounding on behind, trampled the half unconscious savage under their feet.

"Go on," said Guy fiercely. "We will outwit them yet. Brace up, Melton; we'll soon be out of this hole."

Forbes gritted his teeth to suppress a cry of pain.

"I can't keep up much longer," he said. "I'll faint from loss of blood."

The place they had just entered was the great trading locality and slave market of the town. At this time of year it was deserted, but the empty stalls and booths stood about in endless confusion.

The wisdom of the route chosen by Canaris was now apparent, for this labyrinth of paths, which wove an intricate network through the stalls, offered just the opportunity they wanted; and, following the Greek's guidance, they twisted in and out in a tortuous line that gradually brought them toward the opposite side of the market.

The outcry behind them had by this time swelled to a perfect tumult, and the night air bore it to their ears with startling distinctness.

Fortunately for the fugitives, this vast court was surrounded by grim slave prisons, and they encountered no one in their flight. They reached the opposite side of the market in safety, and, plunging in among the mass of empty prisons, ran on, panting and breathless.

The Greek's white burnous fluttered on ahead, turning angle after angle, diving into dark alleys and shooting across open spaces. At last he stopped and, too exhausted to speak, waved his hand in triumph at the frowning wall of the town that towered directly over their heads for twenty feet.

Close by the wall was a circular stone tower, partly in ruins, and into this Canaris dived eagerly. It was an anxious moment to the two who waited on the outside, but at last the Greek reappeared in triumph with his hands full. The Jewish merchant had kept his promise.

He paused a second or two to listen to the outcry in the town.

"They are coming nearer," he said. "Keep cool and don't get excited. They will search every stall in the market before a man comes near us, and besides this is the last place they would look. They will never suspect us of any intention to scale the wall. Still we must lose no time," he added. "Now here is a box of shells apiece; put them in your pockets, buckle these sabers around your waists, take the rifles I bought. They are better, so you may throw the others away."

"Forbes can't carry one," said Guy. "What shall we do with it?"

"Leave it behind," replied Canaris. "We have burden enough. I had the Jew put up the stuff in three oilcloth bags. We must divide it into two loads."

He turned the contents of all on the ground.

"Yes, everything is here," he said. "Crackers, dates, figs, two lamps, a box of candles, matches, and two flasks of palm oil. Now, then, for the final move."

He divided the stuff into two bags, and then, going back into the guard tower, came out with a bunch of long ropes.

"Hurry up," said Guy. "Do you observe how close the sounds are coming?"

"They are searching the market," said Canaris calmly. "They take us for a party of drunken Arabs out on a lark."

"Then they don't suspect the truth?" asked Guy.

Canaris laughed.

"If it were known that the Emir's English prisoners had escaped," he said, "the fiends up yonder would be making more noise than the surf that breaks on the rocks at Bab el Mandeb."

The ropes had at one end a rude iron hook, and, taking one of them, Canaris threw it over the wall, retaining the other end in his hand.

He pulled it in a yard or two, and then the rope became suddenly taut. The hook was secure. He took a sharp glance around him, measured with his ear the hoarse shouts that still rose from the slave market, and then went nimbly up the rope, hand over hand. He reached the top in safety.

"Now fasten the stuff on," he whispered down; "put the other ropes in the bag."

Guy obeyed instructions, and Canaris rapidly drew the string up. He then speedily hooked a second rope to the wall and dropped it down.

"Fasten Forbes to one rope, and come up the other yourself," he called out to Chutney.

Here a difficulty arose. Melton was, of course, unable to climb the rope, and if a noose were slipped under his arms the wound would be torn and lacerated by the strain.

"It's no use, Chutney," he said. "I foresaw this. You must get off without me."

Guy was in despair. He was just on the point of bidding Canaris make his escape alone, when a happy thought struck him.

"I have it, Melton," he cried joyfully. "Have you much power in your arms?"

"Yes," said Melton, "but not enough to go up that rope."

"That's all right. I don't want you to go up the rope," returned Guy. "Here, put your feet together and stand straight."

Hastily noosing the rope, he drew the knot tightly about Melton's legs just above the knee.

"You take a good grip with your hands," he added. "There won't be much strain on your wound and we'll have you on the top in a jiffy."

Melton obeyed instructions, and Guy pulled himself speedily to the top.

"Crouch down," said Canaris; "don't you see that watch-tower?" and he pointed to a dim mass rising from the wall some distance off. "That is the nearest tower," he added. "I hardly think they can see us, but it is better to take precautions."

The other two ropes were already dangling on the outer side of the wall. Canaris had planned everything for an emergency.

Guy took a hasty glance at the roofs and battlements spread before them on one side, the moonlit landscape on the other, and then he whispered down, "All right. Melton?"

"Yes, go ahead," came the faint reply.

"Quick, they are coming!" cried Canaris in sudden excitement, and as he spoke a yell went up close at hand, and three or four dark figures turned the corner of the nearest slave-prison.



THEN THE SPEAR FLASHED IN THE TORCHLIGHT.

A big Somali was in the lead, and, spying Melton, he raised his spear.

"You fiend!" cried Guy, and, lifting a loose stone from the wall, he hurled it down.

It struck the spear from the rascal's hand, and, before he could recover himself, Guy and Canaris had dragged Melton to the top of the wall by a prodigious effort.

"Down, down!" cried Canaris, and as they crouched low three or four spears went over their heads and a hoarse shout of rage went up from the baffled Somalis that was caught up and repeated far back into the town.

"Keep cool," cautioned Canaris; "the ropes are up; they can't reach us. Five minutes more, and ——" The words froze on his lips. Loud above the shouts of the savages rose a harsh, metallic

sound that vibrated in shuddering echoes through the night air. It was the beating of the tomtom at the Emir's palace.

An electric circuit could not have more speedily roused the town. A vast, sullen roar went up instantly, and then, mingled with the clang of the tomtom and the tumult of the people, rang out a harsh rattle of alarm-drums that swelled and spread until every oval watch-turret on the town walls was sounding the tocsin announcing to the subjects of Rao Khan the escape of the hated Englishmen.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUIT.

"Now for it," cried Canaris. "Don't be scared. In two minutes we'll be out of reach of these fiends."

His appearance belied his words, for he was trembling with fright. The rope about Melton's legs had not been loosened, and he was instantly lowered on the other side. In less time than it takes to tell, Guy and Canaris had joined him, and all three felt the solid earth beneath their feet again.

The situation was now extremely critical. The tomtom still rang out from the palace, and the drums were beating in the watch-towers, though their volume of sound could be heard but faintly above the constantly increasing roar of the maddened people.

The fugitives had scaled the wall at a point on the western side of the city very close to the southern angle; the western gate was still more remote, and from these gates the pursuit must come.

That it would come quickly no one could doubt, for the rabble of Somalis who had led the chase through the market-place had by this time reached the gates with the tidings of the fugitives' escape over the wall.

Canaris took a bag and a rifle and Guy followed his example.

Not a second of time was lost, but, turning to the southwest, they dashed down the long, slanting hill toward the valley that opened clear and distinct at their feet. Their ears rang with the horrid din and turmoil, and this spurred them on to greater efforts as they plunged forward with great strides.

At the angle of the wall stood a watch-tower, and from this coign of vantage the guards saw the fleeing fugitives, outlined by the treacherous moonlight.

Crack! crack! crack! rang their rifles, and the bullets whistled keenly through the air, but the flying figures went straight on and speedily vanished over the crest of the hill.

The valley beneath the town was skimmed across, and then, scaling a low stone wall, they plunged into the shadow of a big plantation and ran on between rows of limes and coffee trees.

Guy feared that the Arabs who owned these orchards would join in the pursuit, but Canaris assured him that there was little danger of that. An uproar in the town, he declared, was always the signal for the dwellers outside the walls to shut themselves in their houses.

A danger from another source, however, threatened them, for with a furious growl a great dog came bounding on behind, and by his loud outcry made the location of the fugitives very plain to their enemies.

The brute persistently followed them up, snapping at their heels, and baying loudly. No stones could be found, and to use firearms would only make matters worse. On the farther side of the plantation, however, the dog stopped and uttered a long-drawn howl that was caught up in echoes across the valley.

"I'm giving out," cried Melton faintly. "You'll have to leave me."

Canaris turned on him fiercely.

"Do you hear the mad fiends howling behind us? They are scattering over the country, and if we are caught, good by," and he whipped his hand across his throat. "You must keep up, only half a mile more, and I'll hide you so securely that the fiends can never find us."

"Year hear?" added Guy. "Only half a mile more, Melton, and then rest."

But all this encouragement was of little use. Forbes was suffering now from the reaction, and his strength was almost gone. A sound of shouting suddenly rose from the valley, and taking Melton by the arms they fairly dragged him along.

A hill now loomed up before them, and clutching stones and limbs of trees they made their way painfully to the summit.

Looking toward the town they could see torches moving to and fro across the valley, and

twinkling through the leafy avenues of the plantation.

Their old enemy, the dog, began to howl again, but a rifle-shot speedily cut his career short.

As they hastened down the western slope of the hill the sound of water broke on their hearing, and then the stream came in view, a swift and narrow torrent brawling over rocks and ledges.

Guy ran ahead, and filling his helmet, offered it to Melton, who drank deeply.

"I feel like a new man," he cried; "that was splendid."

Canaris now led them down the stream for some distance until a shallow place permitted them to wade across. The valley had become a gorge. The sloping hills gave way to great frowning masses of rock so high and so close that no moonlight pierced the shadows. Finally the Greek stopped and pointed above his head.

"We must climb the rocks," he said. "Are you equal to it?"

Melton looked dubiously at the steep side of the gorge, but before he could reply Canaris started up, and he had no alternative but to follow. Guy came close behind to catch his friend if he should give out.

The ascent, however, was not so bad as it looked. Canaris picked his way with great skill, winding along the face of the cliff in a zigzag manner. Had it been daylight dizziness would have caused them to lose their heads, for the gulf below grew deeper every moment, and at places the path was but a foot wide.

At length Canaris climbed over a big rock that barred the way, and then assisted Melton and Guy to the top.

"Here we are," he said cheerily, "and just as safe as though we were in the Acropolis at Athens."

They stood on a small plateau, protected by a low parapet of jagged rocks that extended in a half circle. The top of the cliff was close over their heads, and behind them was a natural grotto scooped concavely out of the solid rock. It was a perfect hiding place and a splendid point of defense in case of an attack.

Melton dropped feebly on the stone floor, and Guy and the Greek sat down against the parapet. Reaction had come to all of them. Now they were really safe, the terror and excitement of the flight was visible on their faces. Their clothes were soaking wet, and the perspiration rolled down their cheeks.

"Look," exclaimed Canaris, leaning over the parapet, "look down there!"

He pointed into the gorge, and Guy, glancing down, saw torches flaring against the rocky walls, revealing in their glow dark, swiftly-moving figures, and weird shadows dancing on the waters of the torrent.

Canaris observed Guy's expression of alarm, for he said calmly: "Don't fear. We are perfectly safe; try and sleep some; you need rest badly."

Canaris stretched himself out flat, and, after making sure that Melton was sleeping—for the poor fellow's weariness was greater than the pain of the wound—Guy, too, lay down on the hard rock, and fell instantly asleep.

Dawn had been very near when they reached their hiding place. Through the early hours of the morning they slept on, heedless of the loud cries, the sounds of anger and wrath that floated up from the shadows of the gorge, and when the sun was past its meridian, Guy awoke. Canaris stretched himself and sat up at the same time.

Their first thought was of Melton. He was still sleeping, but it was a restless, uneasy slumber, for he tossed about and moaned.

The heat was now very great, and they suffered terribly from thirst. Far below they could hear the water rushing over its stony bed, and the sound was maddening.

Even had one dared to attempt that perilous descent in the broad light of day, there would have been danger from another source, for all that afternoon Somalis and Arabs in large and small parties passed up and down the gorge, even scanning at times the rocky sides of the cliff, but never for a moment suspecting the close proximity of those they sought.

At last Melton awoke. He was weak and feverish. His wound had opened, and his clothes were heavy with stiffened blood. He complained bitterly of thirst, and talked at times in a rambling, excited manner.

"He's in a bad way," said the Greek. "We must leave here as soon as night comes, and as he is too ill to walk, he must be carried."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Guy.

"Well," rejoined Canaris, "we shall travel only at night. If all goes well, we will be fifty miles distant in four or five days, and on the fifth night we shall reach our journey's end."

"Our journey's end?" queried Guy.

"Yes; of our land-journey at least, for we shall then be at the entrance to the underground river."

CHAPTER XVI.

BESIEGED.

The African sun had gone down, leaving only a reddish tinge against the western horizon, when the three fugitives left their refuge and climbed to the top of the cliff. In the dim twilight it was impossible to make out the country which lay vaguely outspread at their feet.

Canaris made a rude stretcher of branches, and, arranging Melton as comfortably as possible, they started away. The top of the gorge sloped on this side into a valley, and following this for some distance they finally reached more open country.

No trace of their pursuers was seen. They had all gone back to Harar, for none ever remained outside the walls at night, Canaris declared.

Soon a small stream was reached, where they lunched and quenched their thirst. Canaris washed Melton's wound, and bound it up in soft, wet bandages. After a while the moon came out, and they could see for some distance on either side.

It seemed strange to reflect that they were now traveling through a vast and absolutely unexplored part of Africa. All was wild and desolate, for Harar and its vicinity once left behind, no villages or habitations were found.

The cries of various animals echoed from the forest, and once a lion roared loudly; but without molestation from man or beast our little party toiled on painfully until dawn.

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They carried Melton every step of the way, and when they halted in a glade close to a pool, he was sleeping soundly.

Either the fresh water or the long rest had helped him, for when night came again he was able to walk, and day by day he grew better.

For three nights they journeyed to the southward, sleeping all day in secluded spots.

The wisdom of night travel was plainly seen, for they often discovered camp fires gleaming on each side of them, and on one occasion nearly ran into a wandering group of Gallas, while from their hiding place during the day they saw caravans and hordes of natives journeying to and fro.

The night had its disadvantages too, for twice they were attacked by howling animals, and on one occasion had to climb trees while a herd of elephants went trumpeting past. Fortunately, more dangerous beasts kept their distance.

The third night's journey led them through a most unusually rich and fertile country, miles of mellow pasturage watered by many streams, bits of forest land, and meadows clumped with bushes and patches of trees, while on both sides were the dark profiles of huge mountains.

That day they slept on the side of a hill among great rocks, and when they were preparing to start at sundown, Canaris said briefly:

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"We ought to reach our journey's end before morning."

Of the stores they had brought along there now remained but a handful of crumbs. Guy was deeply concerned over the question of supplies for their voyage in case the underground river was discovered, but Canaris bade him not to worry until the time came.

With feelings which it would be difficult to describe, they resumed their night-march. An unknown future, full of terrors and fears, yawned before them.

It is hard to say what guided Canaris in the direction he took. He had once been over the ground, but it was scarcely possible that he could remember the road so well. He strode on full of confidence, however, his rifle over his shoulder and his revolver ready for use in his right hand. Guy and Melton followed behind in single file.

They made slow progress, for Canaris led them in among mountain gorges, and they were compelled to ford streams and clamber painfully over big stones.

At last they emerged again on more open ground and traveled through patches of waving grass and scrub, keeping parallel all the while with two mountain ranges that lay to the right and left. The land was full of rolling swells like ocean waves, and as they passed over the crest of one of these ridges a sudden gleam of moonlight shining on water some distance off riveted their attention.

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As they descended into the hollow it was hidden from view. Several times the Greek halted and scrutinized his surroundings closely. He was not altogether satisfied, for he no longer strode on confidently, but walked with a hesitating step. Guy and Melton shared his anxiety.

"What's wrong?" inquired the former. "Have you missed the way, Canaris?"

"I don't know," replied the Greek. "We must stop soon and wait for daylight. We ought to be close to the stone kraal by this time."

While conversing they had crossed another slight swell, and they were half way down the hollow when a hoarse cry from Melton brought them to a halt.

The scene before them was enough to appall the stoutest heart. Twenty yards away lay a broad pool of water and along its sandy edge were grouped half a dozen great lions, some lapping up the water greedily, others sitting lazily on their haunches, waiting no doubt for some fat deer to pass that way.

A low chorus of growls greeted the approach of the travelers, and made them shiver from head to foot.

"Shall I fire?" whispered Guy excitedly.

"No, for your life, no," retorted Canaris. "Back up the hill as silently as possible. Don't shoot unless we are attacked."

With arms in readiness they moved backward step by step. The lions began to pace up and down the strip of sand, tossing their shaggy heads toward the frightened men, and then the leader, a monstrous fellow with a mane that swept the ground, advanced a few paces and uttered a tremendous roar that seemed to shake the earth.

Guy cocked his rifle, but at the sharp click Canaris turned on him fiercely.

"Don't shoot," he whispered. "Don't shoot. If we can get over the ridge we may escape. I don't think they will attack us."

In a moment more they reached the crest of the slope. The lions were still down by the pool.

"Look," exclaimed Canaris, pointing to the right. "Do you see those rocks! We must make a run for them."

The spot referred to was a dim mass rising out of the plain some fifty yards distant. Whether they really were rocks or not it was hard to tell.

Another fearful roar put an end to indecision, and they ran at the top of their speed toward the hoped-for refuge. No one glanced behind. In imagination they felt the hot breath on their necks and heard the soft patter through the grass.

Then the refuge was before them, a tall column of rock rising from a clump of jungle grass and some low, stunted timber.

It towered up in ledges and in a trice Canaris had sprung upon the first platform, and extended a helping hand to his companions.

With frantic haste they climbed another jutting ledge and pulled themselves to the top. None too soon, for as they turned to look, the big lion sprang into the air and landed with a roar of baffled rage on the ledge beneath.

He rose instantly for another spring, but as he reared upward Guy brought down the butt of his rifle on the massive head, and the beast rolled down into the grass at the foot of the rock.

Another lion loomed up in the shadows, and together the two paced about, lashing their tails and growling with fury.

"That was a narrow escape," said Guy. "A moment more and we would have been caught."

"We're not altogether safe yet," replied Canaris. "Those are hungry looking brutes, and it's hard to tell what they may do. We must remain quiet and watch them closely."

The two lions continued to prowl up and down, licking their chops and occasionally glancing at the top of the rock. Suddenly they halted in the middle of their beat, and, pricking up their ears, assumed an expectant attitude.

"They hear something," said Guy. "I wonder what it can be."

For a full minute the two noble beasts stood like bits of statuary, not a muscle quivering, their tails slowly waving to and fro. Then with a couple of bounds they vanished in the high grass.

"The siege is raised," exclaimed Guy, breathing a low sigh of relief.

"Hush," replied Canaris, "not a sound, not a whisper for your lives. Down, down, crouch low; throw yourselves flat!"

His voice was tremulous with sudden fear, and his hand shook as he pointed one nerveless finger in the direction taken by the lions.

"Look, look!" he muttered with chattering teeth. "One sound and we are doomed."

CHAPTER XVII.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

The Greek's extreme terror sprang from no insignificant cause. Over the crest of a ridge some thirty yards distant came a large body of men. It was very evident that they would pass close to the rock, and the three fugitives, crouching on its flat surface in the gloom, may well be

pardoned for believing that the enemy were on their track.

As the advance guard drew still closer, Canaris thrust his face against the stone. Melton did the same; but Guy, whose curiosity fairly mastered his fear, ventured to raise his head slightly, and a single glance showed him that the strange foe had no intention of halting.

They passed within ten yards of the rock, it is true, but not a man looked to right or left, and they moved at a rapid and steady pace.

Guy's amazement grew deeper as the long procession went by in constantly increasing numbers, for even to his unskilled eyes it was plain that these men were neither Arabs nor Somalis.

The dim light revealed their powerful stature, the dark faces crowned with turbans, the linen cloaks that were flung carelessly on their shoulders, and the various arms, comprising shields, swords, spears, and even guns.

At intervals the stalwart figure of a man towered above the rest, mounted high on a camel or an elephant.

Melton and Canaris ventured to raise their heads in response to a nudge from Guy, and all three witnessed the passing of this strange procession, which comprised nearly a hundred men.

As the rear guard vanished over a ridge to the south, Canaris, without a word, swung himself nimbly to the ground and picked up some glittering object that lay in the path.

"Look," he exclaimed in a tone of wonder, as Guy and Melton followed him down, "do you recognize this workmanship? But no, how could you?" he resumed, without waiting for an answer. "This weapon is of Abyssinian make, and those men were Abyssinians."

"But what are they doing here, so far from their own country?" demanded Guy.

"It is a war party," said Canaris, "and we are not so far from the borders of Abyssinia, after all. It is no uncommon thing for them to raid on the Gallas."

The dagger passed from hand to hand, and was inspected with much curiosity, until Canaris pointed toward the east and said: "Morning has come, and the sun will soon be up. Let us climb the rock and make a survey of the country."

Daylight came on with marvelous rapidity, and as the range of vision gradually became clear for a distance of several miles, the Greek rose to his feet and scanned the surroundings with a sweeping gaze.

His countenance expressed first perplexity, then delighted surprise, and turning to his companions he cried:

"We have reached our destination. See! There is the stone kraal, those scattered columns of rock to the south that rise from the jungle. Yes, the old Englishman was right, for yonder lies the Elephant Peak and the Lion's Head."

It was indeed as the Greek said. The broad valley was dotted with a curious rock formation that bore a strong likeness to a native village of huts, and on either side of the valley, from the rugged chains of mountains, rose two lofty peaks, one fashioned like a recumbent elephant, the other a perfect semblance of a lion's shaggy head.

A murmur of surprise burst from the trio as they gazed along on this strange verification of their hopes.

The mountain peaks were at least four miles distant, for the breadth of the valley was about eight.

For the moment the recent passage of the warlike Abyssinians was forgotten. Then a very significant occurrence recalled it forcibly to their minds.

From the base of the Lion's Head suddenly rose a column of yellow smoke, and two or three gun shots echoed distinctly across the valley.

"The Abyssinians have attacked the town of the Gallas," cried Canaris. "It lies at the foot of that peak, and is the same kraal at which the Englishman was kept in slavery when he discovered the underground river."

"I hope they'll eat each other up like the Kilkenny cats," observed Guy coolly.

"But you don't understand," cried the Greek in strange excitement. "They will scatter over the valley, they will flee to those rocks yonder for protection, and unless we find the entrance to that river at once we are lost."

"Canaris is right," spoke up Melton. "We must make immediate search for the rock with the cross. It is our only hope."

"Yes, our only hope," echoed the Greek. "Come quickly, there is no time to lose."

He slipped to the ground and led his companions rapidly down the valley toward the stone village.

They hastened on among the scattered rocks for a quarter of a mile or more, until the extreme southern edge was reached, and then Canaris stopped.

"This is the south side," he said; "we must search the rocks for one with a cross."

They scattered, Guy toward the west, Melton to the east. It was a time of peril, for the yellow

smoke was curling up over the Lion's Head in heavier columns, and the firing was more distinct, as though the conflict were spreading toward them across the valley.

"The rock with the cross, on the south side of the stone kraal." A simple enough direction on the face of it, and yet the eager searchers, as they hurried from stone to stone, scrutinizing every side and angle, failed to discover the faintest trace of anything resembling a cross.

Canaris wrung his hands in dismay when they came together after the fruitless search.

"We are lost, we are lost!" he groaned. "What will become of us? Go, make another search; inspect the base of every stone; the hidden entrance must exist."

Guy shook his head.

"That cross was made twenty years ago," he said. "In that time the storms could have destroyed all trace of it unless the Englishman carved it very deep, and in that event we should have discovered it already."

"It must be found," persisted Canaris in his terror. "Hark! The firing is coming nearer. In half an hour the valley will swarm with savage foes. Go! Go! Go!"

He fairly shrieked out the last words, and threw himself in despair down amid the jungle grass.

The Greek did not exaggerate the danger. A startling confirmation of his fears was at hand.

Warned in time by a commotion in the bushes, Guy and Melton dropped flat, as a savage, spear in hand, and bleeding from a wound in the head, burst out of the jungle twenty yards distant and made full speed for a rock a few yards to the north of that by which the Englishmen lay concealed.

All unconscious of the three pairs of eyes watching his movements, he stooped, flung the tangled grass madly aside, and, rolling a loose stone from the base of the rock, revealed a dark cavity in the smooth side.

He threw a frightened glance in the direction he had come, and, dropping his spear and diving into the hole, pulled the stone back in place from within.

All this happened in less time than it takes to tell.

"Saved!" burst thankfully from Guy's lips as he sprang to his feet.

"Saved!" echoed Melton and Canaris.

Snatching up their baggage, they dashed across the narrow space that divided the two great boulders. Guy tore the rock from the entrance, and, as the imprisoned savage within uttered a hoarse cry, he pointed his rifle at the opening.

"Go ahead," called out Melton; "he's unarmed; he can't harm you."

Guy hesitated for an instant, and then crawled into the forbidding cavern on hands and knees.

A distant sound of scuffling and rattling of stones told that the savage was retreating into the bowels of the earth.

Melton handed in the rifles and the baggage, and crawled in after them. Canaris was the last to enter, and with Melton's aid the stone, which was round in shape, was pulled back against the entrance, and all was darkness, save for one crevice an inch or two wide.

The Greek peered sharply through this, and then exclaimed in a low whisper: "We are just in time. A party of Abyssinians are approaching through the jungle in pursuit of the Galla fugitive.

"Hush!" he added; "don't make a sound; they are coming directly toward the rock."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

A moment of terrible suspense followed the Greek's announcement. From without could be plainly heard a chorus of angry shouts as the Abyssinians searched for their missing prey.

Then the sounds grew fainter and Canaris said quietly: "They have gone on past the rock. We had better strike a light and see what has become of that black rascal. I cannot understand how he knew anything about this place. It may not be the proper entrance after all."

One of the bronze lamps was filled with palm oil and lighted, and Guy undertook to lead the way into the depths of the cavern.

The passage was amply large enough to hold two or three men standing up, but it led downward at a very sharp angle. The journey was performed in silence, and after traveling ten or fifteen minutes Guy stopped.

A vast empty space was before him, and at his feet lay a sharp slope of loose earth. Here were seen the tracks of the savage, and without hesitation Guy began the descent, and half crawling,

half sliding, reached firm ground a few yards below.

Melton and Canaris were close behind, and together they went up into the vast expanse of the cavern. Under foot was hard, compact sand, and in a moment more the glare of the lamp was reflected on running water, and they stood on the brink of the mysterious underground river.

"We have found it?" exclaimed Canaris exultingly. "The Englishman was right."

It was impossible to judge of the width of the stream. It might be very narrow and it might be very broad. The flowing water made not a sound, and yet the current was swift, for a bit of paper that Melton tossed in was snatched from sight immediately.

As they gazed on this strange sight with emotions that it would be impossible to describe, a vague, shadowy object passed down the stream and vanished in the darkness.

"There goes that fellow," cried Guy. "He has escaped in a canoe," and hastening up along the shore, waving the lamp in front of him, he uttered a cry of astonishment that echoed through the cavern and brought his companions quickly to his side.

Drawn back a few yards from the water lay two long, heavy canoes, and a sharp furrow in the sand leading to the river's edge showed that a third canoe had recently stood beside the others. Half a dozen rude paddles were strewn on the sand. The savage had evidently been in such haste to escape that the thought of turning the other canoes adrift, and thus eluding pursuit, never entered his head.

Beyond the canoes, further progress was blocked by masses of earth.

"This was the abode of that strange race of natives," said Guy solemnly, "and under those stones they have lain buried since the earthquake years ago."

He turned and led the way down the stream.

Fifteen yards below lay another jutting mass of earth. This was the extent of the cavern, a beach fifty yards long running back to the narrow passage and terminated by walls of earth; beyond was darkness and the river, running none knew where.

Yet the only hope of seeing home and friends, vague and uncertain as it was, rested with this mysterious, cavernous stream. It might lead to the coast and safety, but far more likely death and destruction awaited anyone daring enough to trust himself to its treacherous current.

"The sea is hundreds of miles away," said Guy gloomily, as he sat down on the sand and placed the lamp carefully beside him. "How are we going to live through such a journey as that? Even now our last bit of food is gone, and where shall we get more?"

Canaris pondered a moment before he ventured to reply.

"I see but one plan," he said finally. "At nightfall we must visit the burned village. The enemy will have gone by then, and we may discover abandoned provisions."

"If we could shoot any game——" began Melton, but Guy interrupted him.

"The fighting has scared everything away from the vicinity," he remarked.

"Yes, that is true," said the Greek. "The animals have fled to the mountains, and, besides, Oko Sam and his tribe of Gallas keep the game well thinned out."

"What did you say?" cried Guy, springing to his feet in excitement. "Is this Oko Sam's village yonder that the Abyssinians have raided?"

The Greek nodded assent.

"Yes, Oko Sam is the chief."

"Then Sir Arthur Ashby and Colonel Carrington are close at hand," exclaimed Guy.

"And Momba," added Melton fervently. "All may be saved yet."

"And was it to Oko Sam your comrades were sold as slaves?" cried Canaris. "Why did you not mention his name before? I could have told you this long ago."

"I never thought of it," rejoined Guy. "I gave them up as lost forever. Alas! they are probably in the hands of the Abyssinians now."

"Either that or dead," said the Greek, "but undoubtedly the former, for Menelek, the Abyssinian king, is fond of white captives, and their lives would be spared if they fell into the hands of the raiding party."

"And how shall we find out?" demanded Guy. "I will not embark on this river until uncertainty about their fate is removed."

"When darkness comes we will leave the cavern," replied Canaris. "It is possible we shall learn something. Until then have patience."

The hours of tedious waiting were a little relieved by a discovery that Melton made.

In some of the canoes he found a couple of rude bone fishhooks. This seemed pretty fair proof that fish existed in the underground river, and as Guy happened to have a roll of cord, three strong lines were constructed and laid away for possible future use.

When, to the best of their judgments, evening was close at hand, they started back through the passage and reached the entrance shortly before ten o'clock.

Darkness soon came on, and as all seemed quiet they ventured to roll back the stone and crawl

out. Far across the valley a faint glow was visible against the somber sky, probably from the smoldering embers of the burned village, while directly north of the cavern, in the vicinity of the pool of water where the lions had been encountered the previous night, a number of camp fires were twinkling merrily through the scattered boulders.

"This is the camp of the Abyssinians," declared Canaris without hesitation. "One of us must spy into it and see if your friends are prisoners; another must go to the village for provisions, and a third man should remain here at the mouth of the cavern."

This proposed division of the forces did not please Guy and Melton.

"Why must a man remain at the cavern?" demanded Chutney.

"To mark the place in case one of us is pursued and loses his bearings in the darkness," was the Greek's calm reply.

Guy saw the advisability of this and made no further objection. After brief discussion it was decided that he should remain on guard, while Canaris visited the village and Forbes reconnoitered the Abyssinian camp. Without any delay they started off on their respective missions, and Guy was left alone.

For a while he paced up and down before the cavern, his rifle in the hollow of his arm, and then sitting down on the round stone he reflected over his perilous situation and the strange train of events that had led up to it. The stars shining down on him from the blackness of the African sky seemed to whisper of his far-away English home and the friends he would probably never see again.

Then he thought of his comrades in India and the expedition he had so fondly hoped to join, that even now was fighting its way through the hills of Chittagong. His reverie was broken by a sharp "hist!" and Forbes glided swiftly out of the gloom.

"No, they have not been captured," he whispered in response to Guy's eager inquiries. "I was around the camp on all sides. The Abyssinians have secured some Galla prisoners, and among them the chief himself, Oko Sam, but none of our friends are there. I am terribly afraid they have been massacred, Chutney."

"We will know when the Greek returns," replied Guy, who did not care to admit his belief that Melton was right.

They sat down together by the rock and conversed in low tones. An hour passed and then another.

"Canaris should be here by this time," said Guy uneasily. "Can anything have happened to him, I wonder?"

Almost as he spoke a muffled trampling sound was heard, two huge objects loomed out of the darkness ahead, and as Guy's hand trembled on the trigger of his rifle the Greek's familiar voice uttered a low exclamation and he advanced slowly, leading two big camels loaded down with trappings.

"Well by Jove——" began Guy, but Canaris checked him instantly.

"Not so loud. I picked up these animals only a quarter of a mile back. They have strayed away from the Abyssinian camp."

"But tell me, what have you discovered?" exclaimed Guy. "And you have brought no food. Must we starve, then?"

CHAPTER XIX.

A DARING EXPEDITION.

"I have discovered this," replied Canaris. "The Gallas are preparing for an attack; fresh men have come in from distant towns. They are encamped at the edge of the burned village, and in a small hut, which is surrounded by guards, your friends, I am confident, are confined. The struggle was a severe one, for the ground is strewn with dead, both Gallas and Abyssinians. I could find no food, and what we are to do I cannot tell. To attempt a rescue would be madness, and yet our sufferings would only end the sooner. Without food we can make no use of the river, and escape in any other way is equally impossible."

Canaris threw himself on the ground and buried his face in his hands. Guy stood in silence, his face stern and set, a silence that remained unbroken for five minutes. In that space of time his fertile mind had sought a way out of the difficulty and grasped an expedient so daring, so posthumous, that he hesitated to frame it in words.

His face betrayed something of his emotions, for Forbes and Canaris exclaimed eagerly: "What is it, Chutney? You have thought of something, have you?"

"Yes," said Guy. "I have. As you say, the case is desperate. If my plan fails we can be no worse off. What I have resolved to do is this: Forbes will remain at the cavern. You and I, Canaris, will stain our faces to pass for Portuguese, and mounted on these camels, we will ride boldly into the camp of the Gallas and proclaim ourselves messengers from Makar Makaol at Zaila. We will say that the English are pressing the town hard, that they agree to withdraw on condition that the English prisoners are returned safe and sound, and that Makar has sent us to bring them to the coast. We will add, furthermore, that we came as far as yonder mountains with a caravan bound for Harar, and to allay any suspicions they may have, we will ask for an escort of two men to accompany us to Zaila and receive the money which Makar will pay for the safe delivery of the Englishmen. If all goes well they will give up our friends and load us with provisions for a long journey. The escort we can easily dispose of, and then for the river and freedom!"

Guy snapped his fingers exultantly as he concluded the recital of his daring plan and waited to see how his friends would receive it.

"Marvelous!" cried Forbes, drawing a long breath.

"Yes, it is marvelous," added the Greek, "truly marvelous. If it succeeds it will be a miracle indeed. But suppose they have received recent news from Zaila, or that our disguise is penetrated?"

"As for that," replied Guy coolly, "we must take the chances. I should fear recognition most from Oko Sam, but he is fortunately a prisoner among the Abyssinians. Make up your minds quickly. Do you agree to my proposal or not? Perhaps you can devise a better plan."

"We will try it," said Canaris, decidedly. "It must be done at once, for at daybreak the Gallas will advance to attack the Abyssinians. Make your preparations and we will be off." Stepping up to the camels, which were quietly grazing on the jungle grass, he proceeded to remove every part of their trappings which would betray its Abyssinian make, until only the simple covering remained. With a cry of delight he held up two white burnouses that had been fastened to the saddle bags, and said:

"With these on and our faces darkened it will take a clever man to penetrate our disguise in the night time."

It was not such an easy matter to stain their faces, but with the application of a little moist earth from the mouth of the cavern, it was finally accomplished to their satisfaction, and after a hasty review of their plans and a code of instructions for Melton's guidance during their absence, the two daring adventurers mounted their camels and rode slowly off into the darkness toward the hostile camp of the Gallas.

It was very near midnight, and as they trotted briskly across the desert, sounds of mirth floated on the air from the camp where the Abyssinians were making merry over their victory, serenely ignorant of the surprise that dawn was to bring them.

The distant glow ahead seemed to come nearer and nearer with every stride of the camels, and Guy could hardly believe that nearly four miles had been traversed when Canaris pointed out the camp just in front of them.

It was too late to think of retreat now, for already the approach of the camels was detected and a host of dark figures were visible moving across the still glowing embers.

Fearful of an attack, Canaris shouted out loudly, "Makar Makalo! Makar Makalo!" and then, lashing his beast, they galloped into the very center of a turbulent throng, who crowded around them with blazing torches.

Canaris knew barely enough of the language to request an interpreter and the head man of the tribe, and the savages, awed for a moment by the fierce manner in which he made these demands, fell back a little, and Guy had opportunity to observe his surroundings.

He was in a corner of the village which seemed to have escaped the worst of the fray, for a dozen or more huts were standing, and the largest of these was encircled by a dozen heavily armed men. His heart beat fast at the thought that Sir Arthur and Colonel Carrington were confined within.

Just then a huge savage, wearing a leopard skin about his waist, advanced through the crowd, which fell back at his approach. He was accompanied by a small, weazened Arab who at once demanded if the newcomers could "spik Inglis?"

"Go ahead now," whispered Canaris, "and luck be with you. That big fellow is the head man."

For a moment Guy could find no voice, and failure stared him in the face.

The horrified expression on the Greek's countenance broke the spell, and raising his voice he said clearly and distinctly:

"Tell your master we are Portuguese who have come from Zaila at the bidding of Makar Makalo, the ruler."

The Arab communicated this piece of news in a loud tone that drew a murmur of surprise from the people, but brought no response from the chief, who merely stared impudently.

"The English have made an attack on Zaila by land and sea," Guy went on in a louder voice. "The town is at their mercy. They have promised Makar to withdraw on condition that the British governor of the town and his friend, who were taken and sold into slavery, be delivered up to them safely. Therefore Makar Makalo has sent us to demand of you the two Englishmen, a

supply of food for the journey, and an escort back to Zaila. For this he agrees to reward you well. We came as far as yonder mountain with a caravan bound for Harar, and as there is great need of haste we would start on our return at once."

This long speech the Arab likewise proclaimed aloud, and with the utmost anxiety Guy and Canaris watched its effect on the people.

They heard it in ominous silence, and the chief spoke a few words to his interpreter, who instantly turned to Guy and announced, in very imperfect English, that nothing could be done until Oko Sam was released from his captivity. He told briefly of the attack on the village, of their plan of surprising the Abyssinians at daybreak, and concluded by inviting them to dismount and await the result of the fight.

It was evident at least that nothing was suspected. So far they had played their part to perfection. But here was an unexpected hindrance. The leader refused to act without the sanction of Oko Sam, and a delay would be fatal.

"Insist on it," whispered Canaris hurriedly; "it is our only chance."

"Tell your master we cannot wait," replied Guy, in well feigned anger. "Every moment is precious, and we must hasten back to Makar Makalo. Give us the Englishmen at once or we will go away without them and tell Makar Makalo how you have treated his messengers."

This bold declaration had its effect.

The chief withdrew to a little distance and held a long conference with half a dozen of his companions.

Guy and Canaris remained calm and motionless on their camels, haughtily scanning the sea of threatening black faces that hemmed them in on all sides.

Their only ground for hope rested in the fear which Makar Makalo, by his summary dealings with these tribes, had inspired in them.

The single motive which in all probability hindered the head man from acceding at once to their demands was the dread of Oko Sam's displeasure in case that despotic monarch were rescued in the morning.

The eager confab was still going on as strenuously as ever when a tumult arose from the outskirts of the throng, and presently, amid hoarse cheering and applause, a man broke through the parted ranks of the people and limped feebly into the open space.

It was Oko Sam!

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CHAPTER XX.

BY A HAIR'S BREADTH.

A nervous shiver passed through Guy as he recognized the repulsive face of his old enemy, and instinctively he pulled his burnouse closer around his head. Oko Sam darted a curious glance at the two motionless figures on the camels and then advanced to meet the head man, who broke off the conference and greeted his newly arrived chief in a most servile manner.

"Don't despair," whispered Guy; "those infernal Abyssinians have become drunk and allowed their captive to slip away just at this critical time, but all may go well yet."

It took but a short time to make Oko Sam acquainted with the facts of the case. He strode up to the camels, and gazed long and haughtily at the two strangers. Then, apparently satisfied with his scrutiny, he addressed a few words to the weazened Arab, and, turning to his people, jabbered away volubly for two or three minutes. When he ceased, half a dozen men started off in different directions, and the interpreter proceeded to communicate the decision to Guy, who, in spite of his calm exterior, was greatly agitated.

"Oko Sam say yes," began the Arab. "He friend of Makar Makalo; he no want Makar lose Zaila; he give plenty food for journey; he give six, ten, twenty men go long, so bring back much gift from Makar. You say Makar give much, hey?"

"Yes," replied Guy, repressing with difficulty his extreme joy, "Makar will give big rewards to Oko Sam."

The Arab turned aside with a grunt of satisfaction as half a dozen natives came up, bearing leathern sacks of provisions, which were handed up, one at a time, to Guy and Canaris, and slung across the necks of their camels.

This proceeding was barely over, when, to Guy's amazement and disgust, a band of Gallas, fully armed, and bearing each a supply of food strapped on their backs, advanced into the open space.

This was Oko Sam's promised escort! Instead of two men there were twenty.

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"These good fellows here go long," said the Arab. "They no have camels; they go on foot one day's journey, then reach other tribe, where find plenty camel."

This statement relieved Guy considerably. It would not be so difficult, after all, to get rid of the troublesome escort if they were on foot.

And now came the crisis. At a signal from Oko Sam the guards about the hut flung open the entrance, and in a moment two emaciated, half starved figures were led forth, whom it was actually difficult to recognize as the pompous Sir Arthur Ashby and brave Colonel Carrington.

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They still wore their uniforms, but the cloth hung in folds about their shrunken limbs, and their faces were pitifully thin and distressed.

Guy's heart beat fast with indignation as he gazed on this melancholy sight, and then he purposely half turned his face away, lest the prisoners should recognize him and unconsciously cause the failure of the whole plan.

The people drew back as the little group reached the camels. The two Englishmen were lifted up behind the supposed Portuguese—Sir Arthur with Canaris, the colonel beside Chutney—and so weak and helpless were they that it was necessary to partially strap them in their places.

All was now ready. Guy and Canaris were prepared to start, the prisoners were in their possession, and the armed escort were exchanging farewells with their comrades.

At this supreme moment, when the fullest success seemed assured, a startling diversion occurred.

A big Arab, a new arrival evidently, pushed his way forward, and as his glance fell on the Greek he started with surprise, and exclaimed aloud, "Canaris!"

With wonderful self possession the Greek looked at him in mute ignorance; but the Arab, who had probably but just come from Harar, pressed forward, and, joining Oko Sam a few paces away, began to talk excitedly in a low voice.

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"We are lost. Chutney," whispered Canaris in tones of despair.

At the mention of this name. Guy felt the colonel's arms clasp his waist in a convulsive thrill.

"Not a sound, Colonel Carrington," he muttered under his breath, "as you value your freedom."

The tightened grasp instantly relaxed, and Guy turned his head slightly to obtain a clearer view of Oko Sam.

This action hastened the climax, for his burnous caught on the button of Colonel Carrington's coat and fell to the ground. A glaring torch passing at the moment completed the catastrophe, and the keen eyed Galla chief uttered a howl of rage and amazement as he recognized his old enemy of the market place at Berbera.

Never did Captain Chutney's quick wits do him a better service than at that moment.

In one glance he took in the whole situation, the astounded chief and his counselors, the swarthy mass of savages ready for instant action, the armed escort that stood between him and the edge of the encampment.

More speedily than words can tell it, his determination was reached. With a warning cry to Canaris, a hasty injunction to Colonel Carrington to hold fast, he snatched a short dagger from his waist and plunged it an inch or more into the flank of the Greek's camel, and then into that of his own animal.

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The frightened and agonized beasts pranced madly for a second or two and then plunged desperately forward, trampling the amazed guards right and left.

It was over in a moment; a howl from the infuriated chief, a terrific uproar from the vast throng, and then, spurred to greater efforts by the tumult in their ears, the valiant camels thundered out into the desert, heedless of the scattered rifle-fire, the volley of whizzing spears. With tremendous strides they bore their precious burdens toward safety and freedom, while the silence of the African night was rent by the venomous cries of their bloodthirsty pursuers.

For the moment they were safe, but in that long four mile race that lay ahead many perils might be encountered, and it was even within the realm of possibilities that the fleet-footed Gallas would overtake the heavily-burdened camels.

It was no time for conversation or explanation. A fervent "Thank God!" burst from Colonel Carrington's lips as he realized that he had fallen into the hands of friends, while Sir Arthur, feebly beginning to comprehend what had happened, ejaculated several times, "Bless my soul," as he clung with might and main to the Greek's waist.

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Faster and faster they sped over the plain, until the tumult behind them was lost in the muffled tramp of the camels' hoofs. They rode side by side, with arms ready for instant use, but no foe appeared in front or behind, and at last, with a glad cry, Canaris pointed to the distant gleam of the Abyssinian camp.

"We are safe now," exclaimed Guy. "The Gallas feared to pursue us any further lest their anticipated attack on the Abyssinians should be spoiled."

"Yes," replied Canaris, "either that or they have circled round, hoping to cut us off at yonder gap in the mountains where the road breaks through to the coast. And now the rock must be close by. Ha! What does that mean?"

Bang! went a rifle shot directly ahead, and a brief red flash pierced the gloom.

"It is Forbes!" cried Chutney. "He is in danger. Quick, quick, to the rescue."

A loud shout followed closely on the heels of the report, and recognizing Melton's voice, Guy, lost to all sense of prudence, cried aloud:

"Don't give in Forbes; we are coming."

An answering hail came distinctly back, followed immediately by a second shot.

The agony of suspense was brief. A moment later the rock loomed into view, and the panting camels came to a halt before the entrance to the cavern.

"Oh, you've come back safe?" exclaimed Melton coolly, as he came forward with a smoking rifle in his hand. "I've had a brush with a party of Abyssinians. They were hunting their camels, I suppose, and took me by surprise. I dropped one of the rascals, and— Look out! There they are again."

All dodged to the ground as a shower of spears fell about the rock. With a hollow groan one of the camels dropped heavily over, pierced in the throat by a short spear, and his huge bulk formed a natural barrier before the cavern. Melton's rifle cracked sharply and a howl of pain attested the accuracy of his aim.

"Into the cavern, all of you," cried Guy. "The Abyssinians are coming in force; the firing has attracted them to the spot."

Already a shadowy mass was visible some hundred yards off, and the sound of voices was distinctly heard.

The Greek hastily motioned Sir Arthur and the colonel into the cavern, and hurriedly tossed in the provisions bag by bag.

The enemy were now quite close, and as Canaris stowed away the last bag they came on with a wild rush.

From behind the dead camel Guy and Melton poured in a hot fire that checked their impetuous advance instantly, and before they could rally for another charge, both had bolted into the gloomy hole, and the stone was deftly rolled into place.

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CHAPTER XXI.

CUT OFF FROM THE OUTER WORLD.

The lamp was lit instantly, and without a moment's delay Guy led the party at full speed down the corridor until the descent was reached.

"Now hurry down, all of you," he cried. "You have a flask of powder about you, Canaris. Give it to me."

"What are you going to do, Chutney?" asked Melton in alarm.

"Put an end to all pursuit," was the stern reply; and, seizing the flask, he placed it on the ground, and pouring a little powder on a strip of linen torn from the lining of his blouse, he deftly rolled a fuse and inserted one end in the mouth of the flask.

His intentions were apparent. The roof and walls of the passage were of loose earth and stone. A blast would bring them down in an avalanche.

Canaris attempted to expostulate, but Guy drove them all down the slope and applied a match to the fuse.

It was high time, for up the passage shone the gleam of torches. The enemy had effected an entrance.

Guy joined his companions on the shore of the river, and almost instantly a terrific explosion took place. It seemed to rend the earth. A tremendous crash and rumbling noise followed, and then all was quiet.

The concussion put out the lamp, but as soon as it was lighted again Guy ran up to see the result of his attempt.

No trace of the passageway existed. In its place was a grim wall of earth.

The full significance of what he had done now flashed into Guy's mind and he gazed blankly into the faces of his comrades.

"We are buried alive," said Melton bitterly. "We are as dead to the world as though we were in our coffins."

"We have simply burned our ships behind us, that is all," replied Chutney. "Now for the river and freedom."

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They went back and sat down beside the swiftly-flowing water.

"Bless me if I know whether I am on my head or my feet," said Sir Arthur. "What on earth does this mean?"

"It means that these brave fellows have saved us from a fate worse than death," cried the colonel; "that is all I care to know at present."

"I will explain all," said Guy.

He straightway related everything that had happened from the time they were separated on the way to Harar to the discovery of the underground river and the daring plan for the rescue of the prisoners.

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The colonel could scarcely repress his astonishment as he listened to the wonderful story, and at its conclusion he embraced his rescuer warmly.

"We owe you our lives," he said fervently. "Never was a braver deed attempted, never was a rescue more marvelously carried out. Ah, I can never repay the debt. A grateful country will reward you, Captain Chutney. England shall know of your heroism."

"Yes, you are right, colonel," put in Sir Arthur, with a touch of his old pomposity; "the government shall know how its representative was delivered from the hands of these impious fiends. But bless me, I don't see that we are so much better off, after all. How are we going to get out of this beastly hole?"

"And what has become of Momba, and Captain Waller, and the Hindoos?" exclaimed Forbes, who had suddenly recollected the missing members of the party.

"Lost—all lost," replied the colonel sadly. "They were sold to a distant tribe in the interior two days after we arrived at the village. You see our condition. They have made us work from sunrise to sunset. We fell ill, and, being of use no longer, they deliberately tried to starve us to death. It was horrible, horrible!"

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"It was a diabolical outrage," interrupted Sir Arthur. "The whole civilized world will shudder when it knows that the governor of Zaila was fed on tainted meat and spoiled rice, and very little of that, too. If England fails to resent this outrage, I'll cast off my allegiance to the crown, sir, and become a citizen of some other country. I will, by Jove!"

Sir Arthur might have gone on indefinitely with the tale of his grievances, but Guy cut him short by calling general attention to their present grave situation.

The supply of provisions was at once overhauled, and the inspection proved very satisfactory.

Six large bags had been loaded on the camels. Two of these held jerked beef, probably buffalo or deer meat, one contained rice, another a peculiar kind of hard cakes made from native corn, and the two remaining were filled to the top with dates and figs.

"We are assured of food for some time to come," said Guy; "that is one consolation. I wish I could feel as certain of light. We have two lamps, and to supply these two big flasks of palm oil, not nearly enough, however, to last us on a long journey. When that is gone, I don't know what we shall do."

"When we stop, for rest we shall have to do without light," suggested Melton. "If we find any places to stop," he added.

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"It's beastly chilly in here," observed Sir Arthur, with a shiver. "Two days in a hole like this will give us all rheumatism."

"Ah," said Melton, "but I have provided for that. See, here are the trappings from the camels which I brought in while waiting for you." And he held up one by one half a dozen richly embroidered rugs and skins, which had belonged to the leaders of the Abyssinians.

This pleasing discovery put them all in better spirits, and it was presently supplemented by another, which went far to remove the most formidable obstacle to their journey, for while the canoes were being examined Guy found in a far corner of the cavern a great pile of torches, made from some highly resinous wood. These had evidently belonged to the natives who formerly dwelt here, and were used by them instead of lamps on their journeys to the coast. They were fifty or sixty in number.

"This is a fortunate discovery," said Guy. "With these and the lamps we may have sufficient light to last out our trip."

"Yes; that removes the last obstacle," rejoined Forbes; "and now I propose that we take some refreshment. We have eaten nothing for nearly two days."

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This was true. The excitement had almost banished hunger from their thoughts, but Melton's words roused their dormant appetites, and, sitting down beside the canoes, they made a hearty meal and washed it down with water from the river, which was quite fresh and cold.

"Well," said Guy, when they had all finished and the provisions were tied up and put aside, "it will do us no good to remain here any longer. The river, as you all know, is our only salvation, and the sooner we start on our cruise the better. The natives who once dwelt here are reported to have made journeys down this stream in boats. Is it not so, Canaris?"

"Yes," replied the Greek. "I have heard from the Arabs at Harar that it was their annual custom to go down to the coast in large rafts or boats with trading goods, and then return by land."

"But where does this underground river empty?" asked the colonel. "Does anyone know?"

"It is supposed to reach the Juba," replied Guy, "but whether near the mouth of that river or not I cannot say."

"Ah! but that is a very important thing," said the colonel. "I possess some acquaintance with the geography of this part of Africa. Are you aware that the river Juba is nearly eight hundred miles in length? Its source, which as yet remains undiscovered, lies only a hundred miles or more to our west, and it flows to the southeast. This stream before us appears to head in a southwesterly direction as near as I can judge. It is possible then that it joins the river Juba at a distance less than two hundred miles from here. In that event our journey does not appear so formidable."

"Pardon me, sir," said Canaris quickly, "but from what I have been able to learn this river reaches the Juba at a point, I have heard stated, midway between Bardera and the coast."

"Bardera!" cried the colonel sharply. "Why, Bardera is only two hundred miles from the sea. According to that, we have a journey before us of nearly eight hundred miles—a journey underground and on unknown waters. Who can tell what dangers lie before us?"

"We will never get out alive," groaned Sir Arthur. "Never in the world, Carrington. What a blawsted idiot I was to let the government send me to that beastly hole!"

"And is it impossible to escape by land?" asked the colonel, unheeding this interruption.

"You forget that we have destroyed our only communication with the outer world," ventured Forbes. "The river is our sole hope."

"Yes, I had forgotten it, it is true," replied the colonel.

"And were the communication now open," exclaimed Guy, "escape would still be hopeless. This river is navigable, and the existence of those canoes proves what I say. I have been in tight places like this before, and if you will trust to my guidance I will do my best to bring you through in safety. If we fail, it shall be through no fault of mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

AN UNWELCOME VISITOR.

Guy's stirring speech was just what was needed to rouse the flagging spirits of the party, for the colonel's graphic description of the contemplated journey had produced a very depressing effect.

Preparations for the start were begun at once. The two canoes were first tested and found to be absolutely seaworthy. Then the provisions, the torches, the lamps, the oil flasks, and the rugs were divided into two parts and stowed away.

It was decided that Guy should be accompanied by Forbes and Sir Arthur in the first boat, and that Canaris and the colonel should follow in the second. For economy one torch was to be used for illuminating their way, and this Sir Arthur was to hold in the rear of the canoe. Eight paddles had been found in the cavern, thus providing an extra supply in case of possible loss.

It was difficult to believe that the sun was shining brightly outside. No ray of light pierced the blackness of the cavern, and the dead silence was unbroken by the first sound, though at that very moment the Gallas and the Abyssinians were probably waging a bloody battle almost overhead. Henceforth day and night were one, all trace of time would be lost, and whether any of that imprisoned band would ever see the light of day again or breathe the free, open air, the future alone could tell.

It was a solemn and impressive moment, and Guy's voice had a touch of huskiness in it as he ordered the canoes to be carried to the water.

A last survey of the cavern was made to see that nothing was forgotten, and then all took their places in silence, the canoes swung slowly out from shore, and, caught by the current, shot off into the gloom on the first stage of the most awful journey ever made by Englishmen.

Guy sat slightly in front of the stern, keeping the canoe straight with an occasional touch of the paddle, for the velocity of the current made labor unnecessary, and close behind him was Sir Arthur, holding the flaring torch that lit up the water for a short distance ahead and served to guide the second canoe, which was only a few yards behind.

"If this current continues all the way," observed Forbes, "eight hundred miles will be nothing at all."

"Yes, if no bad rapids are encountered," replied Guy. "There are certainly none very near, or we could hear them plainly."

"I don't think we need fear that very much," called out the colonel from the rear canoe. "The altitude of this part of Africa is not so high above the sea. The valley overhead is a pretty deep

one, and this river is some distance beneath. Moreover, those natives would hardly have made an annual cruise down the river if the channel were very dangerous."

"It was their custom to start at the close of the rainy season," said the Greek, "when the river was high and swollen."

"Don't mention rapids, I beg of you," cried Sir Arthur. "It makes me nervous. I can't stand it at all."

For an hour or more they traveled on in almost unbroken silence. On either side the shore was invisible, and overhead the glare of the torch revealed only black, empty space. The same intense silence prevailed, not even the faintest murmur of the river being audible.

This peaceful monotony, however, was rudely shattered. A low humming sound was heard in the distance, which rapidly increased in volume, and left no room to doubt that a course of rapids was below. At Guy's suggestion Forbes relieved Sir Arthur of the torch, and scarcely had this change been effected when the current carried them into a swirling mass of spray.

Both canoes grated and bumped against rocks, and then, before the frightened occupants could realize that it was over, the sullen roar was fading away in the distance, and the smooth current was bearing them rapidly ahead.

This little episode considerably relieved their minds. If no more dangerous water than that lay before them, there was little cause for apprehension. A skilled eye and a strong hand would overcome the difficulty.

Presently, for the first time, rocky walls appeared, now on one side, now on the other, but they fell sheer to the water, and gave no opportunity for landing. The atmosphere of the cavern was pure and fresh, a fact not readily accounted for, since no glimmer of daylight was anywhere visible.

Guy began to grow sleepy, a sensation which was shared by his companions, for it was many hours since they had had any rest. It was impossible to tell how long or how far they had traveled. All passage of time was lost, and the periods for eating and sleeping must be regulated by their own feelings. Instinct goes wrong in such cases; yet there was little doubt that the night had come.

A sharp lookout was kept on the shores, but, as the current swept them past the same monotonous ledges without a break, it began to look as though they would be compelled to take turns at sleeping in the bottom of the canoes.

They were paddling close along the right shore when a sudden cry from Canaris, who was almost abreast of the other boat, and farther out in the current, attracted general attention, and peering out on the river they saw a dim object some yards away.

The current bore them past it, but by dint of hard paddling the canoes were headed diagonally up stream, and a few moments later a landing was made on the lower end of a small spit of white sand, ten or fifteen yards in diameter.

It sloped gently to the water's edge, and in the center was a cluster of smooth, water-worn stones.

It was a perfect haven of refuge to the weary and exhausted voyagers, and with thankful hearts they hauled the canoes upon the strip of beach and spread out the rugs in readiness for a few hours' sleep.

They ate sparingly of crackers and dates, for Guy had assumed charge of the commissary department and dispensed supplies with no liberal hand, the wisdom of which was readily acknowledged by all.

The torch had been stuck end up in the sand, and its cheerful glow threw a radiance over all the little island and caused the silvery white sand to sparkle brilliantly.

They stretched themselves out on the rugs near the center of the island, and as soon as they were arranged comfortably Guy rigorously extinguished the torch and hunted his place in the darkness.

No thought of fear entered their mind. On all sides was the deep and rapid river. Whence could an enemy come? In five minutes not a man was awake. Even Sir Arthur was snoring profoundly, dreaming perhaps of the snug quarters in the residence at Zaila, from which he had been so rudely ousted a few short weeks before.

Guy was dreaming, too, but far different were the visions that coursed through his brain. For the twentieth time he was living over again his awful experiences of the previous year. Once more he was a prisoner in the rajah's fortress, and Nana Sahib's cannons were awaiting their victim on the massive stone platform. Now he was being led out to die in the midst of his companions, the fiendish faces all about him, the Hindoos stood by the touch-holes with lighted torches. Now they were binding him, the gaping muzzle was pressing his back—

Then he woke and sat up, trembling from head to foot, the dank perspiration standing in beads on his forehead. Thank God it was only a dream. The rajah's fortress was thousands of miles away.

Suddenly a faint sound reached his ear, so indistinct that he could hardly be sure he heard anything at all. He listened a moment, but it was not repeated.

"Some of the fellows stirring in their sleep," he muttered, and giving the matter no further

thought, he lay down again.

But as soon as his head touched the sand the sound was repeated, and this time it was more definable—a steady, rustling noise, with an occasional low splash that seemed to come from the water.

It was caused by none of his companions, for they all lay on his left, while the alarming noise seemed to come from the right.

Guy was a brave man, but in his nervous condition, resulting from the recent dream, this new alarm was too much, and he felt a cold chill run down his spine.

Giving Forbes, who was next him, a gentle shake, he drew himself to his feet, and taking a match from his pocket, rubbed it with a trembling hand across the front of his trousers.

It struck fire instantly, and as the sudden flare lit up the whole extent of the island the match dropped from Guy's nerveless fingers and he started back with a cry of horror that echoed horribly through the gloomy recesses of the cavern.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

A WONDERFUL ESCAPE.

Guy had presence of mind enough to strike a second match and ignite the torch, which was fortunately within reach of his hand, and as his companions, roused from their sleep by his sharp cry of alarm, sprang excitedly to their feet, the flaming glare revealed to their astonished gaze a monstrous serpent coiled half on land, half in the water, at the edge of the island.

The flat, ugly head, with its wicked eyes, was darting angrily to and fro, and the body was as thick as a man's leg above the knee.

"Great Cæsar, it's a sea-serpent!" cried Forbes, making a dash for his rifle, while Sir Arthur, with a dismal groan, dropped down on his knees and had to be dragged forcibly away by the colonel.

The glare of the torch seemed to anger the monster, for it advanced a yard or more up the island, and spattered the water furiously with its great tail.

A general rush was made for the canoes, and it would have been no difficult matter to have slipped quickly away and left the hideous monster in undisputed possession of the island.

Unluckily Forbes was bent on resistance. He seized his rifle, made sure that it was ready for use, and started forward just as Guy hurried to his assistance.

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"Come away, Melton," he cried; "it will only make things worse if you wound it."

"But I don't intend to wound it," replied Melton. "I'm going to put a ball through that ugly head. Stand back, Chutney; stand back."

As he spoke he advanced recklessly until the muzzle of his rifle was within two feet of the serpent's head, and, taking a quick aim, pulled the trigger.

The stunning report shook the cavern; then, as Forbes turned to flee, the enraged monster, with blood streaming from a hole in his neck, threw his slimy coils forward in convulsions of agony, and, before the eyes of his horrified companions, Melton was pinned to the ground.

He struggled to his knees, fighting desperately to loosen the tightening coils, and uttering heartrending appeals for help.

Then, with a mighty hiss, the serpent flapped wildly toward the water, dragging his victim with him, and with a terrific splash and a resounding slap of the great tail on the moist sand, both disappeared in the gloom.

With a terrible cry Guy ran to the water's edge and shouted again and again.

No response came back. The black river flowed as smoothly and calmly as before.

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"Lost! Lost!" he cried hoarsely, and staggering backward he fell heavily on the sand.

The colonel ran to his assistance, and at that moment a single cry came distinctly from a point below the island.

"Listen!" exclaimed Canaris. "What is that?"

"Help! Help!" rang mournfully through the recesses of the cavern.

It was Melton's voice surely, and the familiar tones reached Guy's ears and brought him to his feet in an instant.

"It's Forbes!" he shouted wildly. "The canoe, quick," and snatching the heavy craft, he fairly threw it into the river and sprang in.

Canaris leaped after him, and seizing paddles they drove the canoe swiftly toward the distant

sound.

"We are coming, Melton; we are coming," cried Guy. "We'll save you yet."

In their haste the lighted torch had been left behind, but fortunately the Greek had matches, and in an instant another torch was lit and flaring cheerfully over the water.

"This way, Chutney," came a feeble voice below them. "Hurry up. I'm nearly exhausted."

A few rapid strokes of the paddle brought them within sight of a struggling object on the surface of the water, and as the canoe ran skilfully alongside, Guy dropped his paddle, and, leaning out, seized the drowning man by the collar. With almost superhuman strength he dragged him into the canoe without assistance.

"Thank God!" he cried, "he's safe. Speak to me, Forbes. Are you hurt?"

But Melton lay white and helpless in the bottom of the boat, too exhausted to reply.

"He's all right," said Canaris. "Don't make him talk. Take your paddle, Chutney. We'll have a struggle to make the island."

The Greek was right. Far above them shone the flickering torch, and the current was bearing them further away.

"I can't paddle and hold the torch at the same time," said Canaris. "We must be guided by the light on the island."

And they bent to the paddles with a will, shouting from time to time to encourage the colonel and Sir Arthur. It was even a harder task than they had feared—to force the canoe through that fierce rush of water. And for a time it seemed as though they were losing instead of gaining.

But at last the distant light grew brighter, and soon their friends could be seen standing on the edge of the island.

Ten minutes' more labor brought the canoe to the small eddy behind the island, and then the colonel hauled it gently upon the sand. They climbed wearily out and bore Melton tenderly up the slope. His clothes were foul and slimy from the serpent's embrace, but he did not seem to be injured.

A few drops of stimulant would have had a good effect, but as this was out of the question they did the next best thing under the circumstances. His wet clothes were stripped off and wrung out. Then he was wrapped snugly in three or four big rugs and laid in one of the canoes, which was emptied for the purpose. This heroic treatment had a speedy effect, and the patient, much to the relief of all, recovered from his prostration and insisted on sitting up.

"No, I don't think I'm hurt," he said, in response to Guy's inquiries. "It was the closest shave I ever had in my life, though. You may imagine how I felt when the monster dragged me into the river. I gave myself up for lost at once. He dived straight down, and then shot through the water like a streak. One coil was still around my body, and hard as I struggled I couldn't tear loose. My ears began to sing, and I knew I would have to drown. Then I felt the coil grow a little looser, and with one desperate struggle I tore away and came to the top. The first thing I saw was the light away up on the island, and I shouted for help as loud as I could. I was terribly afraid you would not hear me, and all the time I was growing weaker and weaker, and the current was dragging me farther and farther away. Then I saw your torch almost beside me, and that is all I remember. I would have gone to the bottom in another minute, I know. It was horrible, Chutney. It makes me faint to think of it," and Melton closed his eyes with a little shudder.

There were tears in the eyes of all as they listened to the marvelous story of his escape, and a sterner realization came to them of the unknown and unseen dangers that encompassed them.

Further sleep was out of the question, and yet they could not well leave the island until Melton's clothes were partially dry.

"Suppose we try some fishing," suggested Guy. "I have lines, and we can bait the hooks with bits of dried meat."

"That would be an agreeable change in our bill of fare," said the colonel. "I second the motion."

"Gentlemen, I beg of you, don't harass my feelings by talking of fish," protested Sir Arthur, who was gradually recovering from his severe fright. "It makes me think of white-bait dinners at Greenwich. I dined there two days before I sailed for Africa."

"And you will dine there again, many a time," replied the colonel. "Only keep up your spirits, Ashby."

"I hope so, I'm sure," groaned Sir Arthur, with a dismal shake of the head that belied his words.

Meanwhile Guy had been preparing the lines, and handing one to the Greek, they cast them in the eddy below the island. In less than five minutes Guy landed a trumpet, a fish of a deep purple color, a foot in length. Canaris hauled one out at the same time, and within an hour they had caught more than a dozen, all of the same species and of about the same length.

"We'll take them along with us," said Guy. "We may find driftwood enough to build a fire and cook them."

"And if we don't find any," cried Canaris, "we can cook them by holding them in the flame of the torch."

CHAPTER XXIV.

SIR ARTHUR WAKES AT THE RIGHT TIME.

At this point Forbes positively insisted on getting up, and, in spite of the slight dampness that still lingered about his clothes, he pulled them on and announced himself ready to start. All were glad to leave the spot which was connected with such a horrible event, and soon the island was far in the rear.

The second stage of the journey was monotonous and uneventful. A few slight rapids were encountered, but for the most part the river was swift and smooth.

The character of the shores now began to change, and instead of the sharp ledges falling sheer to the water, sandy beaches skirted the edge, and from the canoes they could make out gloomy holes and passages that pierced the sides of the cavern.

They were strongly tempted at times to stop and explore these unknown mysteries, but the reflection that every moment thus wasted would prolong their stay on this underground stream always checked the impulse.

A flat, rocky ledge served for their next resting-place. It extended back ten yards to a steep wall of rock, and here, in a hollow cavity, Canaris found a mass of driftwood that was dry enough to burn.

The fish were cooked rudely over a fire, but without salt they were unpalatable and no one cared to eat them.

The luxury of a camp fire was enjoyed while they slept, and, although no watch was kept, the night—if night it really was—passed without alarm.

Colonel Carrington had managed to retain during his captivity a small note-book and pencil. In this he kept a record of the journey, jotting down each night the incidents of the day's cruise, and a page from this diary will convey to the reader a clear idea of the uneventful manner in which the first week passed away—a week in long-to-be-remembered contrast to the dreadful period that followed.

Third stage.—Traveled all day on smooth water. Rocky shores. Camped on an island. Could find no wood and slept in the dark.

Fourth stage.—Today we passed rocky islands in great profusion. Once far overhead we saw a single gleam of light shining in from a crevice. So far our calculation is correct. Day is day, and night is night.

Fifth stage.—Nothing important. Ran a few rapids and camped on the right shore on a sandy beach.

Sixth stage.—All goes well. We are making many miles a day. The current continues strong. Camped on flat rock in midstream.

Seventh stage.—Current still good. River very wide and obstructed with rocks. Narrowly missed an upset several times.

Eighth stage.—Traveled rapidly. Camped on a big spit of sand on right shore. Vast cavern behind us. Too sleepy to explore it.

Here the peaceful monotony of the colonel's record ended. On this sloping, sandy beach began the first of that string of adventures which to their last moment will send a shudder through those who participated in them.

As the colonel stated, they were so weary from the long day's journey that no investigation was made of the vast cavern that lay behind them.

Guy advanced a few yards with his blazing torch.

"It probably terminates with a rocky wall," he said carelessly: "It's no use looking into it tonight."

Sir Arthur suggested that it would be well to make sure that no danger lurked in its darkness, but Guy handed him the torch and bade him go satisfy himself. He very promptly declined the honor.

A meager supper was eaten, for already the stock of food showed a perceptible diminution, and by common consent Guy began from that time to serve out short rations.

A quantity of driftwood had been brought in the canoes from a previous camping-place, and with this a small fire was built. In its cheerful flickering glow they fell asleep, and an hour later a faint gleam from the charred embers was all that relieved the darkness of the cavern.

When Sir Arthur Ashby turned uneasily on his rugs some time afterward, even this feeble light was gone. The ex-governor was consumed with a burning thirst. He had an undeniable craving for champagne and iced claret, but in the unavoidable absence of these drinks water would have

to do.

As he sat up, a faint noise reached his ears from the direction of the canoes, and supposing it to be Canaris, who had performed similar favors for him before, he called out loudly:

"My good fellow, fetch me a drink, will you? I'm deucedly dry."

The noise instantly ceased and was not repeated, though Sir Arthur waited breathlessly for a full minute.

Once he fancied he heard a slight rippling of water, but that, too, ceased at once.

Then Sir Arthur uttered a loud shout, which speedily wakened his companions.

"What's wrong?" cried the colonel anxiously. "Did some one call? I surely heard a noise."

"I want a drink, that's all," said Sir Arthur. "I heard someone down at the canoes and supposed it was Canaris. Was it you, Carrington?"

"No, certainly not," exclaimed the colonel, now thoroughly awake. "Here, Chutney, Forbes, pass me a match, quick. I have none about me."

They were all on their feet instantly, and Guy lost no time in lighting the torch which he kept always by his side.

Holding it over his head he led the way to the shore, and the first brief glance showed only too plainly what was the matter.

"*One canoe is missing!*" he cried despairingly.

"What, you don't mean it!" exclaimed Forbes. "How can that be possible?"

"It's gone," said Guy blankly. "No doubt of it. Here is the mark of the keel leading down to the water. That's not the worst of it, though. Half our provisions are gone with it, and one lamp and an oil-flask as well."

"By Jove, Chutney, it's that savage who has done this," cried Melton. "It can be accounted for in no other way. We forgot all about the scoundrel's presence in the cavern."

"But how could he have lived all this time without food?"

"I don't know," answered Melton. "He must have managed it in some way, though. These Gallas are tough, wiry fellows and can stand a good deal of hardship."

The circumstances all seemed to confirm Melton's supposition. Unfortunately the fact that this Galla warrior was also making the cruise of the river had been overlooked, and now, as a result of this negligence, they had lost a canoe and half of their supplies.

"We have one thing to be thankful for," said Guy. "If Sir Arthur had not wakened when he did we would undoubtedly have lost all. His shout scared the rascal, and he did not wait to make off with the other canoe."

"Yes, here is the mark of a third boat," announced the colonel, who had been making an investigation on his own account, "and footprints are visible on the sand. The scoundrel must have been here when we landed."

"I wanted you to make a search," said Sir Arthur, "but my advice was disregarded. You see the result."

"Prepare to start at once," interrupted Guy sharply. "We must pursue the thief and recover our canoe."

In less than five minutes they embarked and pushed away from the shore.

"Put out the torch," said Guy. "If the rascal sees the light he can get out of our way and we will pass him unperceived."

"But how will we capture him in the dark?" asked Melton.

"We must depend on our hearing," was the reply. "We will push ahead quietly and listen at intervals for the stroke of his paddle."

Under these circumstances the recovery of the canoe was very doubtful, but there was plainly no other course, so they proceeded to carry out Guy's plan as carefully as possible.

Five paddles were all that remained, one for each of them, and with quick, noiseless strokes they moved rapidly down the river, keeping the canoe headed with the current as far as possible, and pausing at times to listen for any trace of the thief.

Thus they journeyed for an hour or more, but no sound of any kind reached their ears, and it began to look very much as though the Galla had been passed unseen in the darkness.

"He could hardly have kept ahead of us for such a distance," said Forbes. "I'm afraid we have missed him, Chutney."

Guy made no reply. The canoe at that instant grated harshly on some obstacle, and throwing out his arms, Melton discovered that the current had carried them against one of the steep, rocky shores. He was about to shove the canoe forcibly away with his paddle when Guy whispered sharply:

"Hold tight to the rock. I hear something above us."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE JOURNEY ON THE LAKE.

In the deep silence all heard distinctly the low, steady dip of a paddle.

"Be ready with a match," whispered Guy. "When the canoe comes opposite, light the torch and I will cover the fellow with my rifle."

The sound grew louder and plainer, and Melton's finger was already trembling on the match when a terrific splash echoed over the water, followed instantly by a most awful and heartrending wail of agony, that caused every one to shudder from head to foot.

Perfect silence ensued, and the dip of the paddle was no longer heard. With nervous haste Forbes lit the torch, and the sudden light revealed an empty canoe floating bottom up a few yards out in the stream.

They paddled quickly alongside, and leaning over Guy turned the drifting boat right side up.

It was empty, of course. The contents had gone to the bottom, and near the center the frail sides, seen plainly in the torchlight, were actually crushed inward like a shattered eggshell.

Where was the occupant of a moment before? What tremendous force had wrought this havoc?

The current carried them on and on, but no one spoke; no one dared utter the thoughts that were in his mind.

At last Guy said in faltering tones, "Nothing but a serpent could have inflicted that injury to the canoe."

"That was the meaning of the splash," replied Melton. "The huge coils must have been thrown around it. The poor fellow had only time for one cry when he was dragged out."

"Then the serpent must have been following us down the river," cried the colonel. "I supposed he was dead after that bullet lodged in his neck."

"*That* serpent is dead," said Forbes solemnly, "or I should never have escaped from his coils. This is another serpent. The river must be the abode of many like them."

This alarming statement was unfortunately only too likely to be true. Sir Arthur was terribly distressed, and prophesied a speedy reappearance of the monster and a fate similar to that of the poor savage in store for them all.

His anxiety was shared by his companions, though not expressed as openly, and all possible haste was made to get away from the horrible spot.

A brief search was carried on in hopes of finding the lost provision bags, but, with the exception of a single floating paddle, nothing was picked up. The bags must have sunk with the lamp and oil-flask.

Nothing was seen of the other canoe—the one originally taken by the savage—and they came to the conclusion that it had been purposely abandoned farther up the river.

The balance of that day they traveled with a dread sense of impending danger. The terrible scene so recently witnessed had left an ineffaceable impression, and by tacit consent they paddled in silence, afraid of the sound of their own voices.

The river had suddenly become narrow, and ran with dizzy speed between two rocky walls that reflected on both sides the glow of the torch which Sir Arthur carried in the stern.

Half a dozen times they dashed through brawling rapids, but no mishap occurred, and, as their increasing drowsiness warned them that night was close at hand, they succeeded in finding a landing-place on the left shore which offered some protection until morning.

A small quantity of wood still remained, and with this a fire was kept burning all night, while they took turns at guarding the camp, for after the recent events they no longer dared to sleep unprotected and in utter darkness.

The scant amount of food now remaining was a source of great uneasiness, but Chutney infused fresh hope into the party by the confident prediction that if the present daily rate of speed were maintained the supply would last until the end of the journey.

Already the pure air of the cavern had done wonders for Sir Arthur and the colonel, and they had nearly recovered their usual health and strength. The one canoe held them all very comfortably, and they seemed to make better progress than when they had been divided into separate parties.

That night nothing occurred to cause any alarm, and they resumed the cruise in fairly good spirits. The river still continued narrow and the current swift. No dangerous water was encountered, and everything was going on satisfactorily when Guy suddenly shouted with all his might, "Back water! Quick! quick!" and looking ahead they saw a steep rocky promontory, against which the current split and swung off into two channels, one to the right, the other to the left.

In spite of their utmost efforts they continued to float down inch by inch.

Which was the proper channel? It was a puzzling problem on which perhaps hung life and death. There was no time for consideration, and under the circumstances Guy adopted the only possible course.

"Head the canoe straight for the center of the rock and let her drift," he cried. "The current shall decide for us."

This was instantly done and they drifted with perfect accuracy straight for the splitting point in the stream. 183

For a moment it looked as though they would be flung against the rocks and upset, but as the canoe reached the turning-point it trembled an instant in the balance and then darted headlong into the channel to the right.

"A good omen," cried the colonel. "The river Juba lies on our right. This must be the proper channel."

It was a very narrow channel, at all events, and a very swift one, too, for the rocky walls on either side were almost close enough to touch with the paddles, and they were moving at a dizzy rate of speed.

"There are rapids below us," said Forbes. "I can hear them dimly."

Melton's hearing was unusually acute, for as yet the rest could hear nothing, but in a few seconds the distant roar was audible to all, and it grew ominously louder with every second.

They grasped the sides of the canoe in anxious suspense—for it was useless to paddle—and the angry waters were almost in sight, when Sir Arthur dropped his torch, and instantly they were plunged in total darkness.

No time remained to strike a fresh light. The sullen crash of the waters drowned the sound of their voices, and the canoe blindly took its own course and they felt the chill spray spattering their faces. 184

"Bump, bump, bump," went the quivering boat, grinding and crashing on loose rocks, and then with one terrific lurch, that sent them sprawling on their knees, the violent tossing subsided and the choppy waves smacked the bottom of the canoe.

With some difficulty Guy lit a fresh torch, and its light revealed a strange condition of things.

No shore was visible on either side, and overhead was empty space instead of the low lying roof that always met their gaze.

"We are no longer moving," cried the colonel in astonishment.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Guy, but on putting his hand in the water all doubt was instantly removed. The canoe was stationary.

They paddled on to the right, to the left, in every direction, but the dark water lay calm and sluggish on all sides.

"We are on a lake," said Guy. "There is no doubt of it; a vast underground lake."

"There must be an outlet on the other side, though," replied Melton. "All we need do is to paddle across and find it."

"But which is the proper side?" said Canaris. "Are we headed straight now?"

"By Jove, I don't believe we are," replied Guy. "I'm afraid we are completely mixed up. We will paddle until we reach the shore, and then follow it till we come to the outlet." 185

"Yes, that will do very well," said the colonel. "The lake cannot be so very large. I wish we had time to complete a survey of it. I should like to make a report to the Royal Geographical Society."

"I wish the honorable members of the R. G. S. could change places with us," said Sir Arthur, with a groan. "I have no doubt some of those lunatics would enjoy this beastly hole. There is no accounting for taste, Carrington."

The colonel made no reply. He was keeping stroke with Chutney's paddle, sharing with him the outlook ahead. The minutes passed on, but still no signs of any shore.

"It's a pretty fair-sized lake after all," said Guy.

"And we are the first white men to navigate its waters," remarked the colonel solemnly. "This is a wonderful discovery. Our fame as great explorers will be assured if we ever get back to England."

"Land ahead!" shouted Guy suddenly, and snatching the torch from Sir Arthur, he stood erect as the canoe shot gently toward a dim object that rose from the gloom twenty yards distant. Amid breathless silence the keel nicked the sandy beach and Guy sprang out.

One brief second he held the flaming torch aloft. 186

Then he turned and tottered with trembling limbs towards the canoe. He tried to speak, but no words came, and his face was pallid and horror-stricken.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ISLE OF SKELETONS.

Believing that some terrible danger threatened, Forbes was in readiness to push the canoe back into the lake, but Guy stopped him with a wave of the hand.

"I'll be all right in a moment. My nerves went back on me; that's all."

He glanced toward the shore with a shudder, and then filled the palm of his hand with water and drank it.

"Come on," he said bravely; "don't be alarmed. It's nothing that can harm us."

His companions followed him timidly up the sandy slope. The torch threw a bright light on the scene, and every one of them shuddered as Guy stopped and pointed before him.

On a flat, rocky plateau, three or four feet above the level of the lake, lay a gleaming mass of bones, all dried and whitened by age.

"Human skeletons, by gracious!" burst from the colonel, and it was easy to see that he spoke the truth.

Human skeletons they were, but instead of being joined together, skulls, arms, and legs lay scattered about in awful confusion.

"This is horrible," said Forbes. "Who were these unfortunates, and what could have caused such mutilation?"

Guy advanced to the center of the plateau, flashing the torch around him, and turning to his companions, he cried: "This is an island; there is water all around it."

"Look here," exclaimed Canaris eagerly; "here lies a raft of logs, half buried in the sand."

This new discovery promised some light on the mystery, and they crowded hastily around the Greek, who was bending over the rude structure.

It lay half way up the beach, and over the lower extremities of the logs a thick layer of sand had been washed. Close by were half a dozen coarse sacks, which proved on inspection to contain skins of leopards and tigers, bright colored feathers, coffee, and aromatic gums. All were in fairly good condition.

"Here is something else," cried Forbes. "Arms, by Jove! Spears and axes, torches and paddles. Well, by gracious, what does this mean?"

An inkling of the truth flashed upon them simultaneously, and they stared at each other in frightened silence.

"This was the last load of natives to go down the river," said Canaris quietly. "Here is their raft, their trading goods. Yonder lie their bones. Their journey ended here."

"And why did it end here?" demanded the colonel.

"Yes, why?" echoed Chutney, and then no one spoke for a full minute.

"What was to prevent them from continuing on their way?" resumed the colonel finally. "They had a raft and paddles; the water was all around them. What caused their death?"

"Starvation," suggested the Greek.

"It was not starvation that killed them," exclaimed Guy, who had turned back to the center of the island. "Here is a bag of dates and dried meat all shriveled and moldy. They met their death in some horribly sudden fashion, that is certain. How do you account for their skeletons being torn apart and the bones flung together? Could starvation do that?"

"It was serpents," said the Greek; and that brief sentence made their blood run cold.

"Yes," continued Canaris, observing the doubt in their faces; "they must have been surprised in the night and crushed to death. That alone can account for their broken bones. But, remember, all this was thirty years ago or more."

"Yes, you are right, Canaris," said Chutney. "I believe, upon my word, what you say is true. The monstrous serpents of the cavern devoured them."

Sir Arthur beat a rapid retreat to the canoe, and the rest were not slow in following his example.

"Let us get away from this horrible spot as quickly as possible," said the colonel; "and, besides, we are losing precious time on this lake. We must seek the outlet at once and resume the journey."

They paddled gladly away from the Isle of Skeletons, as the colonel insisted on naming it, and steered as straight a course as possible.

Under the pressure of four paddles the canoe maintained a rapid speed, but in spite of this it was fully an hour, and probably much more, before they found the shore of the lake. They rested a little while beside the perpendicular wall of rock, uncertain which way to turn.

"It won't make much difference," said Guy; "either course must bring us to the outlet. Suppose we try the right."

This proposition met with favor, and off they started once more, taking care to keep the shore constantly in sight, lest they should lose their bearings again.

In less than half an hour the sound of running water was heard in the distance, and they paddled faster than ever in their intense longing to escape from the lake.

Louder and louder grew the roar of the water, until they seemed to be almost upon it, and just when they were preparing for a dash into the rapids Chutney rose in the canoe with a cry of surprise, and the torchlight showed plainly a fierce body of water running, not out of, but into the lake.

They had come back to the starting point. It was here they had entered the lake, and now all must be done over again.

"Back water," cried the colonel. "Don't get into the current. It may sweep us out and we shall lose our bearings. Turn the canoe and we will go back the way we came."

There was no help for it. It only remained to atone for the lost time by paddling as rapidly as possible.

With difficulty the canoe was snatched from the influx of the current and headed this time to the left.

"It will be a lengthy paddle," said Guy. "The lake is by no means a small one."

"I'm hungry," exclaimed Sir Arthur. "Isn't it about time for lunch?"

"Your suggestion is eminently proper, Sir Arthur," declared the colonel. "On a full stomach we shall travel faster, Chauncey. Do you concur with our views?"

Guy evidently did, for a supply of dates and crackers was forthwith produced, and while they were eating the canoe was permitted to remain stationary.

They started away in somewhat better spirits, Chutney in the bow keeping a sharp watch for danger ahead, while Sir Arthur held his torch from the stern, lighting the water for some yards around.

The dreary monotony of the journey was most trying. The shore presented an unbroken perpendicular wall of stone falling sheer to the water, damp and slimy with drippings, while overhead was empty space, a dome of vast height, to judge from the echo of their voices.

They paddled on and on, pausing occasionally to rest their weary arms, then dashing away with more vigor than ever. Not for an instant did they lose sight of the shore. It was their only guide. At last Sir Arthur's arm dropped feebly, and it was seen that he was half asleep. Canaris took the torch from his hand, and sinking into the bottom of the canoe, the ex-governor fell instantly into a deep slumber.

"I'm actually getting drowsy myself," confessed the colonel. "It must be night. Surely we ought to be halfway round the lake by this time."

Guy admitted that he, too, was beginning to grow sleepy, and as Forbes and Canaris alone professed to be as fresh as ever, it was decided that they should navigate the canoe for a time and allow the others an opportunity to rest.

Chutney and the colonel stretched themselves on the rugs and Melton paddled slowly forward, while Canaris held the torch from the stern.

Hours passed, and still they continued to follow the rocky shore amid silence, broken only by the swish of the paddle, for neither Forbes nor Canaris cared to converse.

Wrapped in their own gloomy reflections they crouched in the stern, keeping silent vigil over their sleeping companions.

An intense desire for sleep now laid hold on Melton, and with great reluctance he woke Guy and the colonel. It required a dash of cold water to bring them to their senses.

"Are we still on this horrible lake?" exclaimed Chutney. "How long have we been asleep?"

"Several hours at least," replied Melton.

"Several hours? Whew! What a lake this is! We must surely be near the outlet now. But you are sleepy and worn out, Melton, and so is Canaris. Look, he can hardly keep his eyes open. Go lie down, both of you. The colonel and I will see to the canoe, and you will wake up twenty miles down the river."

Melton handed over his paddle to Guy, and the colonel relieved the Greek of the torch.

Canaris was asleep almost instantly, and Melton was just arranging the rugs to make himself a comfortable spot, when Chutney cried gladly, "I can hear water running. I'm sure of it. Do you hear it, too, colonel?"

"Yes," said the colonel, after a pause. "I do hear something, that's a fact. We are approaching the outlet of the lake, no doubt of it."

Melton's drowsiness vanished, and he sprang up.

"It would be advisable to waken Canaris and Sir Arthur," suggested the colonel. "No one ought to sleep at a time like this. All hands may be needed."

A slight touch woke the Greek, but it required a severe shaking to rouse Sir Arthur.

"Waiter, a deviled kidney and a pint of Pommery Sec," he cried drowsily, as Chutney pulled him to a sitting position. And then opening his eyes he groaned dismally, "Bless me, I thought I was dining at Gatti's. Why didn't you let me sleep?"

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CHAPTER XXVII.

ALL HOPE VANISHES.

"We are approaching the outlet of the lake, Sir Arthur," said Guy. "It is better that all should be awake in case we encounter bad water."

"Yes, yes; very true. You want me to hold the torch, I suppose. Gad! what a dream I had! I was dining with Lord Balsover. I'd give my title and fortune to be back in London this minute."

"Hold your torch straight," said the colonel dryly, and then under the regular strokes of four paddles the canoe moved swiftly toward the distant sound of running water.

Every instant it grew louder and more distinct, and soon their voices were almost drowned in the roar.

It was a period of terrible anxiety. That it was the outlet of the lake they were approaching no one for an instant doubted. Their chief concern was for a safe passage into the river beyond, for the angry splash of the water told plainly its turbulent and dangerous nature.

"Keep a little off from the shore," cried Guy. "It won't do to make too sharp a curve or we shall upset. We must strike the current fairly in the center and keep the canoe straight as an arrow. Whatever happens, don't drop the torch," he added warningly.

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Close as they now were to the outlet, no signs of any current were yet visible. The colonel called attention to this strange fact, but Guy explained it by remarking that the current probably passed directly through the center of the lake and that dead water continued to the very edge.

"I can see a white gleam ahead," he cried suddenly; "now paddle off from shore a little more and head the canoe as I tell you."

His orders were obeyed in silence. Straight out from the shore the canoe shot deftly. A couple of quick strokes forward and backward and its bow faced the angry waters that raged and foamed thirty yards distant.

The radius of the torch cast a faint gleam on the very edge of the glistening spray. It seemed to beckon them onward.

"Now give way," cried Guy. Four paddles dipped and rose as one, the shining drops rolled from their blades like so many diamonds in the torch-glare, and then Guy sprang to his feet with a loud cry.

The paddles wavered in mid-air. "Go ahead," he shouted fiercely. "Paddle with all your strength."

Once more they dipped the water, the canoe moved slowly—with an effort, and as the paddles a second time paused in air, the canoe shot swiftly—not forward to the embrace of the angry waters, but back—*back at dizzy speed into the dark and dismal recesses of the lake.*

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Even then the awful, unspeakable horror of the situation never flashed upon them, Guy alone perhaps excepted.

"We've blundered again," cried the colonel in hollow tones. "We have returned to the starting point. In some manner we have missed the outlet, and now all must be done over again."

"Could the canoe have been turned completely about during our journey?" exclaimed Forbes.

"Impossible," said the colonel. "I can prove it instantly. When we started away from the spot where the river enters on our trip around the lake, the shore was on our right. When we arrived here just now it was still on our right, whereas, had we unconsciously turned the canoe about and reversed our course, the shore would be on our left. We have circumnavigated the lake and returned to our starting point, and in some way missed the outlet."

"No," cried Chutney in tones that chilled his hearers with horror. "We did not miss the outlet."

"What do you mean?" cried the colonel.

"I say we did not miss the outlet," continued Guy, "because there was no outlet to miss. No exit from the lake exists. We are entombed forever and ever. None of us will ever see the light of day again. We shall die here in the bowels of the earth, and the serpents will mangle us as they mangled those poor unfortunates yonder on the island. Better to know the truth now than later. It is useless to hope. I tell you we are doomed men and—"

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Here Guy's voice faltered, and sinking down into the canoe, he covered his face with his hands.

Sir Arthur uttered a heartrending cry and fell back in a faint. He lay unnoticed. The torch dropped from the Greek's nerveless hands and expired with a hiss. In darkness and silence they floated on and on until the roar of the inflowing water became fainter and fainter. Then it died out entirely and all was intensely quiet.

The darkness was grateful to their stricken hearts. They wanted time to realize the awful misfortune that had fallen so suddenly and heavily upon them.

It was impossible to grasp the truth in a moment, especially when that truth meant utter hopelessness and a terrible death. So they drifted in silence under the great vault of the cavern, living-dead in a living tomb.

Long afterward—it might have been an hour and it might have been a day, for all passage of time was lost—Chutney rose to a sitting posture.

His brain was dizzy and reeling. The aching misery lay heavy on his heart, and yet one faint spark of hope lingered amid the black despair, the natural buoyancy of his nature that refused even to submit to the decrees of the inevitable.

It was he who had first spoken the words of doom to his companions, and now he told himself he would show them the way to safety. He fumbled in his clothes for a match, and striking it deliberately, lit a fresh torch.

The pale, haggard faces that looked into each other as the bright light shone over the water were ghastly and unnatural. Abject misery and hopelessness were stamped on each one.

The colonel and Forbes faced Guy calmly. Canaris looked up with a shudder and then dropped his head again. Sir Arthur lay among the rugs as though asleep.

At that instant the canoe struck some obstacle with a slight tremor and stopped.

The colonel with a slight gesture pointed to the right, and there before them lay the *Isle of Skeletons*. A strange fatality had drifted them a second time to this awful spot.

Guy shuddered, but the colonel rose, and brushing past him stepped on shore.

Forbes followed him in silence, and then Canaris staggered blindly past.

After a brief hesitation Guy stepped out, and dragged the canoe half way up the sand. Sir Arthur never moved. He was sleeping and no one dared disturb him. They sat down in a row on the sand.

"It's as good a place as any to die," said Forbes hoarsely. "The bones will soon have company."

He paused, frightened at his own voice, and no one replied. For a while they sat in silence.

Guy stuck the torch in the sand and it blazed away with a merry light. Somehow or other the ray of hope that had animated him a little while before had vanished, leaving only a dull despair, a reluctance to face the horror of the situation.

"Is there no—no chance—for us?" he ventured to say timidly.

"Absolutely none," replied the colonel, in a firm voice. "You told us a while ago, Chutney, that our doom was sealed. I have faced the situation as calmly and clearly as possible from every conceivable aspect, and I now tell you on my own responsibility that we will never leave this cavern. The fatal error was made when we took the right-hand channel of the two, or rather when the current led us to the right. That was not our blunder, of course. We were in the hands of destiny. We are now, as you know, on the bosom of a vast lake. Water of an unknown depth is beneath us. Overhead is a vaulted dome of great height, probably the hollowed interior of a mountain; on all sides are massive and perpendicular walls of rock, impregnable and insurmountable.

"The lake is undoubtedly ten miles or more in circumference, and, as you know well, there is no surface outlet. There is an entrance, but we can no more force our way back through that entrance than we could swim up through the Falls of Niagara or ride the Nile Cataracts in a Rob Roy canoe. As long as our provisions last we shall live. When we no longer have anything to eat we shall die, and the next explorer who enters this lake will find our bones mingled with those lying behind us."

"And what will *he* do?" asked Guy.

"Perish like those before him," said the colonel. "This death trap caught many a victim and will catch many more. The light of day will never pierce this gloom."

The colonel spoke as though he were demonstrating a problem in Euclid or laying down plans for a campaign.

"I don't call myself a philosopher," he went on, "nor am I a fatalist, but I think that most men can face the inevitable with a certain calmness that is only born of absolute despair. Did you ever see a man hanged? I did once. He walked to the gallows as coolly and deliberately as though he were going to breakfast. A week before he had been defiant, blustering, terror-stricken. When he realized that he had absolutely no loophole of escape, he faced the inevitable with steady nerves. When you realize your position fully, you will be like that man. You will accept your fate."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A DESPERATE FIGHT.

The colonel rose, and going down to the canoe helped himself to a handful of crackers and some figs. He came back to his seat and began to munch them very contentedly.

"The most merciful thing we could do would be to cast our provisions into the lake," he said finally. "It would cut short the agony of waiting, but I don't suppose you would look at it in that way."

"No, no; don't do that," cried Chutney. "Who knows what may happen yet?"

"Ah! there you are again," said the colonel; "still clinging to hope of life; still unable to realize the truth. You are only making it so much the harder for yourself."

"But there is surely some outlet to this vast body of water?" said Melton.

"Yes," was the colonel's reply. "Undoubtedly, but it must be at the bottom of the lake; it certainly is not on the surface. Do you suppose those poor savages would have perished here if an outlet had existed? They, too, must have been carried by accident into the wrong channel, and no doubt they circumnavigated the lake, as we have done. Realizing that they were lost, they either slew themselves to end their sufferings or they fell victims to the serpents without much resistance."

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While Melton and the colonel were carrying on this conversation, Guy rose and went down to the water, with the intention of gathering some food, for he, too, was hungry.

The canoe was pulled partly on shore, and as it leaked a little the water had all collected in the stern, where Sir Arthur still lay in merciful sleep, thus wetting the rugs.

Guy noticed this, and with a view to making the sleeper more comfortable, he slid the canoe down until it lay flat in the water. It still retained a slight hold of an inch or two on the sand.

A sudden cry from the Greek brought him back in a hurry to the top of the island.

His companions were staring out on the lake, and Canaris was pointing with a trembling hand at some unseen object.

"What is the matter?" cried Guy. "What do you see?"

"Hush," said the colonel, holding up a warning finger. "Something is moving out on the lake. Do you hear it splashing in the water?"

As yet nothing could be seen, but the noise was very plain and distinct, a steady swish! swish! not unlike the beating of a little steamer.

A chilling fear grew on them as they listened to this strange, mysterious sound.

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"Whatever it is, it is moving in a circle round the island," said Guy, "and keeping an equal distance from the shore."

"You are right, Chutney," said the colonel, after a pause. "The sound was on our left a moment ago. Now it is on our right."

The Greek was correct. The surface of the lake was violently agitated, though not a breath of air was stirring, and a steady flow of ripples was breaking on the sandy beach like tiny ocean waves.

The unknown navigator, whatever it was, had nearly completed the circuit of the island now, and was very near the spot where they had first heard it.

"It must be a serpent," cried Guy. "Heaven grant that it doesn't approach the island."

He hurriedly picked up the torch and ran with it to the shore. The radius of light thus thrown over the water illumined a space twenty yards ahead, and revealed a long, dark object moving in graceful undulations over the surface. It was beyond doubt a huge serpent, and, as though angered by the light, the monster suddenly changed its course, and with a terrific splash headed directly for the shore. The huge head was in plain view, and the eyes flashed back fire from the reflected glare of the torch.

For an instant all seemed paralyzed with horror, and no one moved.

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Chutney was the first to recover himself.

"We must kill him before he reaches the island," he cried, staggering back a pace or two. "Get the guns. Quick! quick! or it will be too late!"

He turned to flee across the island toward the canoe, but as he gained the ridge a cry of horror broke from his lips, and as his companions hurriedly reached the spot a single glance showed them what was the matter.

The canoe was no longer on the shore. The swell caused by the approach of the serpent had washed it from its slight support, and now it was twenty yards distant, and drifting farther and farther away with every second.

"The guns! The guns!" shrieked Chutney. "They are all in the boat. We are left at the mercy of the serpent. Sir Arthur! Sir Arthur!" he shouted with all his might, but no response came from the sleeping man, and the canoe continued to recede into the gloom.

At this terrible moment it was Forbes who brought a ray of hope into their despair.

Springing forward he snatched up an armful of the native weapons, spears, and axes, and distributed them to his companions.

"We must fight the monster with these," he cried; "and while we are keeping him off, you, Canaris, run to the shore and keep on shouting to Sir Arthur. He may wake and get here in time to save us yet."

"He must be in a faint," exclaimed the colonel, "or the noise would surely have wakened him. Come on, Chutney, the serpent is halfway to the shore. We may keep him off with these arms."

The torch was hastily placed in the sand near the water's edge, and, grasping their weapons firmly, they prepared to check the advance of the monster. Fortunately the spears and axes were of hard iron and fitted with strong handles which the long storage in the cavern seemed to have toughened.

Meanwhile the air echoed with the Greek's loud cries, but at that moment none thought of Sir Arthur or of the canoe, for the serpent was within half a dozen yards of the island and his great body was undulating through the water for thirty feet behind him.

"Keep cool," said Chutney. "Aim well for the head and make every stroke tell."

The sight of the glaring eyes and the blood-red fangs was enough to appall the stoutest heart. They shrank back in uncontrollable fear, as the long neck rose four feet in air and the body sank under the water.

The monster uttered an angry hiss, but before he could spring Forbes cast a spear with all his might and the sharp point pierced the serpent's body a foot below the head.

"Back for your lives," he cried, and as they darted up the island the monster uttered a fearful sound, part hiss, part bellow, and flung half his length in contortions on the sand.

Guy sprang forward and launched another spear that entered the slimy body near the center, but neither wound was mortal and the great serpent came on unchecked.

In one respect they had the advantage of him, as Guy accidentally discovered, for the wicked eyes blinked in the torchlight and the monster's actions showed that his powers of sight were limited to darkness.

He was wonderfully quick and agile, however, for a sudden convulsive leap carried him almost to the feet of his antagonists, and again they scattered in alarm.

The serpent's whole body was now on shore, with the exception of the tail, which was lashing the water to a milky foam.

Seizing another spear Guy circled to one side, and boldly approaching the trembling coils, with one terrific blow he planted his weapon into the serpent's body so deeply that the spear pinned the monster firmly to the ground.

A cry of horror burst from his companions as the huge head swung round with awful quickness, but it missed Guy by barely an inch as he sprang aside.

The serpent's contortions were now frightful to see, as he squirmed and twisted to tear loose from the weapon. "Now let him have it," cried Guy; and in an instant the remaining spears, half a dozen in number, were driven deeply into the venomous coils.

The struggle was now at its crisis. With axes in hand they were dodging about the writhing monster, seeking a chance to reach the head, when an awful shriek echoed through the cavern, apparently from some distance out on the lake, and then the Greek's voice was raised in a loud and urgent appeal for help. What new disaster threatened?

CHAPTER XXIX.

GUY SAVES SIR ARTHUR.

This new alarm, coming just at the uncertain period of their struggle, was quite enough to strike despair to the hearts of all.

"That was Sir Arthur's voice we heard first," exclaimed Forbes. "And it is Canaris who is shouting for help. What are we going to do about it?"

"Tell him to hold out for a moment," cried Guy. "I'll wind up this affair pretty quick."

Raising the axe, he made a sudden dart forward and buried the blade deep in the serpent's head. It was a clever stroke and so forcible that the axe was jerked from his hand.

The colonel dragged him hastily back, but the danger was over. The monster was thrashing the blood-stained sand in his death agonies, powerless to do further harm.

Canaris was still calling for help, and, leaving their dying antagonist, the others plunged across the island. The Greek was running up and down the strip of sand, and far out on the lake the canoe was visible in the radius of light, with Sir Arthur standing erect in the bow.

"He won't take the paddle!" exclaimed Canaris. "He says there is something splashing in the lake beyond him. He's a dead man if he doesn't get back to the island."

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"Sir Arthur," shouted the colonel, "come back; paddle for your life. Do you hear me?"

The only response was a cry of fright. Sir Arthur was plainly too dazed to be capable of action. He had just awakened, and the horror of his situation was too much for him.

"Save me! save me!" he cried. "The serpent is coming; I can hear it splashing the water."

"Take the paddle," shouted Guy, "and steer for the island. If you don't you are lost."

This seemed to arouse the imperiled man to action. He snatched up a paddle, and, dropping to his knees, drove the canoe forward with frantic strokes.

His companions encouraged him with cheering words as he came nearer. The island was barely twenty yards distant when the paddle slipped from his grasp. He turned round, apparently to pick up another, and then threw himself with a dismal cry to the bottom of the canoe.

The cause of his new and sudden fright was readily seen. On the edge of the gloom, not many yards beyond the canoe, a violent agitation of the water was visible. There undoubtedly was another large serpent in pursuit, and at that moment it looked very much as though Sir Arthur was doomed.

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In spite of all the frantic shouts and directions of his friends he continued to utter piteous appeals for help from the bottom of the canoe. When at length he *did* recover enough self-control to take hold of another paddle, a serpent's head and body were actually in sight, approaching at a rapid speed.

Not only was Sir Arthur's life now at stake, but, in addition, guns, canoe, and all would be lost, thus leaving the rest of the party unarmed on the island, at the mercy of the ravenous serpents who appeared to swarm in the lake.

One of those sudden impulses common to his nature now flashed into Guy's mind, and, without giving himself a second for deliberation, he flung off jacket and shoes, and before anyone could raise a hand to restrain him, dived headforemost into the lake.

He came to the surface within ten yards of the canoe, which was making but feeble progress under Sir Arthur's erratic strokes.

Swimming hand over hand, Guy reached the bow and quickly drew himself over the side, just as the pursuing serpent came within seven or eight yards of the stern of the canoe.

His original intention to paddle for the island was instantly abandoned. Bidding Sir Arthur work lustily, he snatched up his rifle and took a careful aim at the approaching monster, who was snorting and hissing in a truly frightful manner.

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The sharp report came at once, producing a thousand echoes through the hollow vault of the cavern, and under cover of the drifting smoke, which for the moment concealed the result of the shot, Guy sprang to Sir Arthur's aid with another paddle.

Half a dozen of his powerful strokes brought the canoe within a yard of the shore. A terrific splashing in his rear, as well as the loud shouts of his friends, warned Guy of the imminence of danger.

Fairly pushing Sir Arthur out of the canoe into the water, waist deep, he tossed the provisions far out on the island, caught up the guns, and made a frantic leap. He landed on the edge of the sand, and was instantly caught by eager arms, and pulled far up the beach. He turned, to realize with a shudder the narrowness of his escape.

Made furious by the bullet hole which Guy had put in his spotted skin, the monster threw himself on the abandoned canoe, which they had been unable to save, and with a sickening crunch it was shattered to a shapeless mass of fragments, under the pressure of the mighty coils. Then, as the serpent flung himself on shore, they realized that it was time to act. A blazing torch in the Greek's hand lit up the scene as Guy cocked his rifle and awaited an opportunity for a shot.

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It was not slow in coming. As the long neck and head darted forward, Guy fired, and the bullet tore its way through the reptile's throat.

There was no necessity for a second shot. The death-agony began right there, and in its convulsive throes the serpent flung himself back into the water, and with a final quiver disappeared in the depths of the lake, leaving a trail of blood on the silvery white sand.

With expressions of gratitude for their escape, all hurried down to the broken canoe.

"A hundred men could never put this together again," said Guy, as he pulled a couple of floating fragments from the water.

The torches and rugs were easily procured, and laid away to dry, but the lamp and the oil-flask could not be found. They were probably at the bottom, but no one cared to dive after them.

"That was the closest shave I ever saw," said the colonel. "I gave you both up for lost, and as for that daring act of yours, Chutney, I cannot find words to express my admiration. You saved Sir Arthur's life."

Guy modestly made no reply. He calmly pulled on his jacket and shoes, and suggested that they cross the island and take a look at the other serpent.

The reptile was found to be quite dead, and little wonder, after all the spears that had entered his coils. As near as they could judge, he was between thirty and forty feet long, with a body as thick as a small keg. The skin was repulsive and slimy, of a dirty green color.

"It's a regular sea-serpent," said Melton. "What a sensation a monster of this kind would make if he were put on exhibition at the Zoo."

"And the other one was fully as large," added Guy. "That makes no less than four we have already encountered. There must be a great many in the river and lake."

One glimpse of the creature sickened Sir Arthur. He turned away and sat down on the edge of the raft.

Up to this moment the excitement had banished all else from their minds. They had fought a desperate fight for life and conquered. At the very flush of their success the shadow of certain death returned, blacker and more forbidding than ever, and in a moment their triumphant feelings were changed to deepest melancholy.

A short time before, under the influence of the colonel's philosophical words, they had felt in some manner resigned to a fate that nothing could avert. Now it was ten times more horrible and loathsome to contemplate, ten times harder to realize.

Absurd as it seemed, fresh hope sprang up in their hearts, and they tried to reason themselves into the belief that some unlooked-for chance of escape would offer itself yet.

Even the colonel's mood had changed, and it was easy to see that he was struggling with some terrible emotion.

The desire for life that was strong within him suggested to Guy a new plan; nothing, indeed, that offered any hope of escape, but merely a solution to his curiosity.

He remembered that on each occasion when their canoe had been caught by the influx of the river it had been carried direct to this island, a fact which seemed to prove the existence of a sluggish current through the center of the lake.

Did this current continue on past the island, and if so, whither did it lead?

A solution to these two problems Guy was curious to obtain.

It served to occupy his mind, to keep his thoughts from dwelling on the horrible fate that was in store for him.

It was more than likely, he told himself, that whirlpools would be found in the center of the lake. Well, drowning would be an easy death compared to the lingering tortures of starvation.

CHAPTER XXX.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

Guy's explanation of his intentions was received without comment. Presently the colonel said, "You forget that we no longer have a canoe, Chutney. We are prisoners on this island."

"But we have a raft," replied Guy, "and a good one, too. It would be much more convenient and comfortable to travel on."

"Suppose we try it," said Forbes. "Anything to get away from this place."

"We can't get into a worse hole, that's true," added the colonel. "I believe you are right about the current, Chutney, though it can only land us on the edge of some whirlpool."

Sir Arthur was as eager as the rest to get away. He had passed through so many horrors, he said, that he had become accustomed to them, and it mattered little what the future held in store for him. The raft was dug out from the sand and found to be in perfect condition. It was fastened together with twisted withes of some flexible wood. It was no easy task to get it into the water, but by all working together, and using the guns and paddles as levers, it was finally pushed into the lake and floated lightly on the surface.

The rugs, provisions, and what torches remained were carried on board, and with a final look round the island to see that nothing of importance had been forgotten, they quietly embarked, and Guy, with a shove of the paddle, sent the raft out on the lake. The object of the journey they hardly knew themselves. They were leaving behind them a spot associated with dreaded memories, and that was all they cared to know.

"Don't do that," said Guy, as Canaris picked up a paddle and began to use it vigorously. "We must drift entirely with the current."

The torch was placed securely in a crevice of the logs, and in a very short time it was proved beyond a doubt that some current did exist. The island faded slowly from view.

Still reluctant to face their situation they grouped together and discussed various things. The Greek gave a long account of his curious wanderings and adventures. Guy and Melton spoke of their thrilling experiences in Burma only the previous year, and Colonel Carrington entertained them with the tale of his participation in the bombardment of Alexandria in '82.

So the hours passed on, and still they chatted of the outside world, forgetting for the moment the hopelessness of their present situation, the living tomb that had cut them off forever from the light of day.

"This reminds me of something I read a few months ago," said Sir Arthur, who was facing the situation with surprising calmness. "Some person mailed me from London *Blackwood's Monthly* containing an installment of a story by the fellow who wrote that deucedly clever book, 'King Solomon's Wives.' Ah! what was the name now—aw, yes, Haggard—Rider Haggard——"

"Beg pardon, Sir Arthur," interrupted the colonel, "but the title was 'King Solomon's Mines,' not his wives."

"Aw, that so, Carrington? Very well; doesn't make much difference. However, the hero of the story was traveling, as we are, on a lake, only it was in the open air, and the outlet was slightly beneath the surface. The water ran under a high wall of rock, and sucked the poor fellows and the canoe under. It would be funny if this lake had the same sort of an arrangement."

"Well, it hasn't," replied the colonel. "We went all around the walls in a canoe, and if any such place as that had been in existence we would not be here now, that's all."

"No, I suppose not," said Sir Arthur. "I'm going to take a nap. Wake me if anything turns up, will you?" And making a pillow of one of the rugs, he was soon snoring.

"It will be a mercy if he never wakes," said Chutney in a husky voice. "Not much danger of that, however. We have food enough to last us a couple of weeks yet, and unless we take your suggestion, colonel, and toss it into the lake, we are good for that length of time, I suppose."

"Yes," rejoined the colonel, "unless we get sucked into a whirlpool or the serpents attack the raft in force."

After that nothing was said for an hour or more. Their fate stared them in the face with all its awful realism.

But even under these circumstances they grew drowsy, and dropped off one by one among the rugs, except Guy, who declared his intention to stay awake and be on the lookout for any danger that might threaten.

His was a solemn and lonely vigil. He envied his companions their power to sleep, as the raft drifted on through the gloom. The torch burned slowly out, and he replaced it with a fresh one. His loaded rifle lay within reach, but nothing happened to arouse his fear.

Sad and bitter were the reflections that surged into his mind. As the events of his life rose up before him with wonderful clearness time passed unheeded, and at last his brain grew weary, and rolling over on the rugs he fell instantly into a deep slumber.

Strangely enough he was the first to awake. He had slept a long while, he saw at a glance, for the torch was burnt almost to a cinder. The rest were still sleeping.

"We must have been drifting for at least twelve hours," he said half aloud. "We should be across the lake by this time."

He picked up a fresh torch and lit it from the expiring flame of the other. As he stuck it in the crevice the glare suddenly revealed a wall of rock a few yards distant, and in a very short time the raft struck the shore with a harsh rattle that proved the impulse of the current beyond a doubt.

The concussion failed to rouse the sleepers, and Guy was hesitating whether he ought to do so or not when a faint sound came indistinctly to his ear.

At first he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses. He fancied it must be a delusion, a buzzing in his ears. The strangest part of it was that the sound actually resembled running water.

He listened a while longer, and then quietly woke the Greek, who sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Canaris," he whispered, "do you hear anything?"

An interval of silence followed, inexpressibly painful to Guy, and then the Greek cried excitedly, "Yes, I hear running water. It comes from the other side of the cliff."

"Then I am not mistaken," was Guy's joyful exclamation. "We both hear it. It can be no delusion."

Then his heart sank as he thought of the wall of rock before them.

"It is the outlet of the river," he said bitterly, "only a few yards distant, and it might as well be a thousand miles."

Remembering what Sir Arthur had told them, he looked anxiously at the surface of the lake, but

the water was calm and quiet, and the raft hung motionless.

"The outlet is far beneath the surface," said Canaris. "You can tell that by the sound. If it were near the top we would be instantly sucked under."

Impelled by an irresistible impulse Guy seized the torch and held it above his head.

"Look! Look!" he cried, in a voice that trembled with excitement. "The cliff slants at an angle. There are crevices to hold one's hands and feet. Make no noise, Canaris; don't wake the rest, but help me to reach that ledge yonder and I will see where this leads."

The cliff slanted indeed, but at an almost imperceptible angle. The raft tilted slightly as Canaris pushed Guy up the face of the rock, but the latter succeeded in reaching a small ledge six feet above the water.

"All right," he whispered. "I can see plenty of places to catch hold of beyond me. Now fasten a torch to one of the paddles, Canaris, and hold it as high as you can."

This was a clever suggestion. The Greek fortunately had a bit of cord about him, and in a moment the torch was throwing a dull light far up the rugged slope of the rock.

Guy continued to climb higher and higher, keeping a cool head in spite of his excitement, and testing well each crevice or projecting ledge before trusting his weight to it, and at last, with a throb of joy that nearly took his strength away, he pulled himself out upon the flat summit of the rock.

Seventy feet below him was the raft and its occupants, glowing in the torchlight. Guy crawled forward on his hands and knees, and soon reached the verge of the rock on the other side. The running water was below him, much farther, indeed, than the level of the lake, but the roar of the torrent was loud and distinct to the ear.

He turned and crawled back.

"Canaris," he whispered down, "I have reached the top of the cliff. There is running water on the other side. Waken the rest as quickly as possible, and send some one up with a torch. I forgot to bring one with me."

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CHAPTER XXXI.

A TERRIBLE BLUNDER.

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From his gloomy perch on top of the rock Guy could see all that happened plainly.

Canaris woke his companions as speedily as possible. Their astonishment at finding Guy missing was very great, and at first they seemed scarcely able to comprehend the Greek's explanation.

Then they glanced eagerly overhead; and hailed Guy with shouts of joy.

"Here, hoist me up," cried the colonel. "I'll take him up the torch."

"No, I'll go!" exclaimed Forbes. "I'm a pretty expert climber, colonel, and won't run any risk."

"Bless me!" ejaculated Sir Arthur. "Did that young man Chutney walk up the face of that wall? Why, he's a freak."

Canaris solved the matter by picking up one of the leathern bags and tearing it open.

"Look!" he shouted up to Guy. "It was fortunate we kept these. Here are the ropes and hooks by which we scaled the walls of Harar."

"Hurrah!" cried Chutney. "Just the thing! I had forgotten about them."

"Now," continued the Greek, "both of you can go up the rock and I will remain here with Sir Arthur."

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He dragged out the four ropes, spliced two of them together to make the required length, and then, giving the end to Forbes to hold, he threw the iron hook skillfully toward Guy. It landed on top of the cliff, and Guy fastened it securely to a crevice.

"Now you can come up," he shouted down.

Placing a torch in each pocket, Forbes began the ascent, and speedily reached the top. The colonel followed with equal dexterity.

"All right?" called the Greek.

"Yes," replied Chutney; "all right. We will return as soon as possible. If anything happens fire your gun."

Guy lit a torch, and the glare revealed only the narrow ledge on which they stood. Beneath and overhead was empty space.

They paused a moment to listen to the sound of the running water.

"It is far beneath us," said the colonel; "possibly a hundred feet, but it is the outlet of the lake, I am sure. Upon my word, Chutney, I believe we will get out of this scrape yet."

"Come on," said Guy briefly; and he led the way along the narrow path.

They traveled in silence for five minutes, until the light from the raft had nearly vanished, and then Guy halted suddenly. A wall of rock, steep and smooth, prevented further advance.

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"Come, let us go back," he said; they retraced their steps until they were near the starting point.

Under foot were loose fragments of stone. Guy picked up one of these and tossed it over the edge. A faint splash was distinctly heard a few seconds later.

"The river is directly beneath us," said the colonel.

He picked up another stone, and moving off a few yards, cast it down. This time it struck something hard after the same interval.

"There must be a shore to the river," he said. "What shall we do now? Follow the top of the cliff in the other direction?"

"No," said Guy. "We must scale the precipice right here."

"Impossible!" declared Forbes. "Our ropes are not long enough."

"Canaris has two more," replied Guy; "go and get them."

Melton hurried off at once.

The raft was close at hand, and in five minutes he was back.

"Here are the ropes," he said. "Canaris tied them together and tossed up one end."

Guy skillfully made one continuous rope about eighty feet long. In breathless silence he let the hook drop over the edge, paying out the line yard by yard.

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Seventy-five feet from the top the strain slackened.

"It has reached the bottom," cried Guy joyfully.

"We had better make sure," said Forbes. "Haul up the rope again."

As the hook came over the top Melton grasped it.

"Are the ropes securely tied?" he asked.

"Yes; they won't part," replied Guy.

"All right, then. Hold the end tightly. Here goes."

He flung the hook far into the air, and the next instant Guy felt a sharp jerk.

"The hook is swinging in air," he cried in wonder.

"I was right," said Melton; "that was only a ledge it struck before. The bottom may be a hundred feet or more distant."

Guy hurriedly pulled the rope back and fastened the hook to the top of the cliff. He made a noose in the other end and placed it under his shoulders.

"Now let me down," he said coolly. "If I miss the ledge you can haul me up again."

No one made any objections.

It was perilous, of course, but some one had to do it, and why not Chutney?

They lowered him into the darkness foot by foot, and at last the strain slackened.

"All right," came the welcome cry from below. "I'm on the ledge. It's two or three feet wide. Now come down hand over hand, one of you."

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"I'll go," said Forbes. "You will have to remain here, colonel, to help us again."

Meanwhile Guy had lit a torch, and when Melton began the descent the yellow glare was visible far below.

The face of the cliff, though sheer, was full of rough projections for his feet, and in a short time he stood beside Chutney on the ledge.

Wrapping the end of the rope about his arm, Guy called loudly, "Throw the hook far into the air, colonel. Do you understand?"

"All right," was the immediate response, and in a moment, as the rope swung over their heads, a heavy sound was heard beneath.

"It reaches the bottom," cried Guy joyfully. "The rope is slack."

He hauled on it eagerly, until ten yards or more lay in coils at his feet. Then it became taut. The bottom of the cliff was fifty feet below.

The roar of the water was now loud and fierce, but it lay more to one side. Directly beneath them was solid ground.

With a trembling hand Guy pulled at the hook and secured it to the ledge. Claiming the right to go first, he let himself over the verge, and a joyful hail announced that he had reached the bottom in safety.

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Melton stuck his torch in a crevice of the rock and started after him. As his feet touched the ground Guy lit a fresh torch and the light revealed a level space of white sand, strewn with rocks.

Overhead was the glow of Melton's torch on the ledge, and far beyond on the dizzy summit of the cliff twinkled the light that the colonel held.

"We are on the bottom," shouted Guy, with all his might.

His voice echoed again and again through the cavern. A reply came back, but it was almost lost in the roar of the unseen waters.

With feelings that it would be difficult to describe they now advanced along the sand, bearing the torches high over their heads.

With each step the sound grew louder. It was not the harsh, spasmodic roar of water dashing among sunken rocks, but resembled rather the swift outpour of a torrent gliding over a smooth, unbroken bed.

"Here we are," cried Chutney. "I nearly stepped in the water without seeing it."

He held his torch out with one hand, and its glowing radius revealed a strange sight.

Twenty yards to their left a rapid, unbroken sheet of water burst with terrific force from a dark archway in the very face of the smooth cliff. It was the outlet of the lake.

In width it was about forty feet, though the opposite side of the river was shrouded in darkness. On the spot where they stood a reflux current had worn an inlet into the sandy shore, and here a stretch of comparatively calm water was circling in swirling eddies, a startling contrast to the furious sweep of the torrent beyond.

Yes, there was no doubt of it, here was the continuation of the underground river, the way that led to safety and hope.

With strange emotions they watched in silence the dark flood pouring from its natural archway in the face of the cliff. To their right the sandy shore seemed to spread away smoothly into the darkness, but before they could scrutinize their surroundings more closely a strange, sharp sound echoed through the vaulted roof of the vast cavern, succeeded by a faint shout.

"It was the report of the Greek's rifle," exclaimed Melton, in horror-stricken tones, "and it was Carrington who shouted. Some calamity has happened."

Staggering with fear, they hastened back to the edge of the cliff. Melton clutched the dangling rope.

"Stop!" cried Guy, in tones of agony. "My heavens, Melton, we are lost, doomed to the most horrible of deaths. What blind, desperate fools we were. We can never get back to the lake, and our companions can never reach us here. We could not be more widely separated were the world itself rolling between us."

"What do you mean?" cried Forbes. "Are you mad, Chutney?"

"Mad? No. I wish I were. You are blind, Melton. *How can we get that rope up the seventy feet stretch from the ledge to the summit of the cliff?*"

CHAPTER XXXII.

GOOD-BY TO THE LAKE.

Melton dropped the rope and staggered back from the cliff, his face deadly pale.

"Yes," he said hoarsely, "you—you are right, Chutney. How could we have done such a foolish thing? From that narrow width of the ledge one could not throw a rope twenty feet in air. We are hopelessly cut off from our companions."

"Hullo, down there!"

It was Carrington hailing them from the top of the cliff, and they could make out his figure dimly in the torchlight.

"What is the matter?" shouted Guy lustily, making a trumpet of his hands.

In a moment the reply came distinctly to their ears.

"Canaris hears a strange cry from the lake. You had better come up."

"We are cut off," Guy shouted back. "We cannot get the rope back to the top of the cliff. Go tell Canaris"—his voice sank to a whisper, and he dropped on the sand beside Melton.

The colonel did not answer. The torch moved off along the cliff and then stopped, no doubt directly above the raft.

"He has gone to aid Canaris," said Guy. "I would like to know what is taking place on the lake."

"Ah!" said Forbes, "here he comes back now."

The torch moved along until it was directly over their heads, and then the colonel called down:

"Come up to the ledge. I have a way to save you."

Guy and Melton sprang to their feet in amazement. They could hardly believe they had heard aright.

"What can he mean?" cried Guy.

He seized the rope and started up hand over hand, placing his feet on the rough places in the wall.

Melton joined him on the ledge a moment later. The torch he had left there was still burning, and its light showed the colonel where they were.

"Watch sharp below there," he cried, and almost instantly Guy felt something dangling before his face. He put out his hand and clutched a thin cord.

"By Jove, Melton, it's the fishing lines!" he exclaimed. "The colonel has tied them together."

No directions were needed to tell them what to do next. Guy loosened the hook and fastened the line to it securely.

"Go ahead," he shouted to the colonel, and the rope instantly began to ascend.

In less than five minutes, though it really seemed an hour, the colonel signaled down that all was ready.

It was a perilous undertaking to go up the face of the cliff with nothing but a smooth rope to hold to, but at Guy's bidding Forbes made the attempt.

A great load seemed lifted from Guy's mind when he heard his friend's voice at the top, and without a moment's hesitation he started up himself.

Had the face of the rock been perfectly smooth he could never have reached the summit, and even by the aid of the rough places he found it a terribly difficult task. Two or three times he swung helpless in mid-air, and just when he felt that he could go no farther he was pulled to the top without any effort of his own, and fell over from sheer exhaustion. He was all right in a moment or two and, hauling up the rope, they hurried back to the raft.

Canaris and Sir Arthur hailed them gladly. It was the work of a moment to attach the hook to the top of the ledge, and one by one they slid down to the raft.

Here a startling surprise awaited them. Among the rugs lay a dark-skinned savage, half naked and frightfully emaciated, while on the end of the raft rested a canoe much worn and battered.

"What on earth does this mean?" exclaimed Chutney. "Where did you get that fellow? Is he dead?"

"No, he lives," replied Canaris. "I heard a strange cry out on the lake. That was the time I fired my rifle. Then I saw this canoe drifting toward the raft, and when it came near enough for me to catch hold of I found this poor fellow lying in the bottom. Nothing else was in the canoe, not even a paddle. Just before you came I was talking to him. I know a little of the language, and he managed to tell me that he belongs to Oko Sam's tribe of Gallas. His name is Bildad, and he is the same native who was pursued into the cavern by the Abyssinians."

"But how did he get away from the serpent?" asked Forbes.

"I don't know," replied Canaris. "When he gets a little stronger I will find out. I gave him some food and he devoured it like a wild beast. He was terribly afraid we would kill him, and I could hardly make him believe otherwise."

"And what have *you* discovered?" exclaimed Sir Arthur, who was bursting with impatience. "Must we die in this horrible place or is there hope of escape?"

Chutney hurriedly related their adventures and the great discovery that had been made.

"Yes," he concluded fervently, "we have every reason to hope. If all goes well we shall resume our journey down the river in a few hours."

"Chutney," cried the colonel solemnly, "I fear you are deceiving us and yourself with false hopes. The outlet of the lake is found, it is true, and by means of this rope we can reach it, but how are we to travel on down the river? Can you carry this raft over the cliff yonder?"

"Yes," said Guy, with a confident smile. "I can take the raft over the rocks. It can be taken apart, and one by one the logs can be hauled to the top of the cliff and let down on the other side. To put it together again will prove no difficult matter."

"A splendid plan, Chutney," cried the colonel. "I retract what I said. And how about the canoe? Can we take that along also?"

"Yes," answered Guy, "we will take it with us on the raft. It may prove of use; but the raft, I think, will be safer for us to travel on. And now let us set about the task without losing any time. The transportation of the raft will be a difficult and arduous undertaking."

"The first thing in order is to get Bildad to the top of the cliff," said Canaris.

This was not accomplished without some difficulty, for the poor fellow was in a pitiable state of weakness; but finally, by putting a noosed rope under his arms, Chutney and the colonel, who

had gone up ahead, drew him in safety to the top and placed him on a couple of rugs.

Then one by one the bags of provisions, the torches, the paddles, and the arms were tied to the rope and pulled up. Sir Arthur was sent up last, and Forbes and the Greek were left alone on the empty raft. 237

After some consideration they decided on the following plan: Forbes and Canaris would take the raft apart and fasten the rope to the logs. Sir Arthur and the colonel would draw them up, pull them along the top of the cliff, and lower them gently to Chutney on the other side, who would receive them on the ledge, loosen the rope, and throw them down the remaining fifty feet to the ground, where the soft sand would receive them without injury.

Guy was speedily lowered to the ledge, where the torch was still burning. Three more stuck in the crevices served to illuminate the top of the cliff.

Down in the lake Melton and Canaris quickly severed the withes that bound the raft together, and in a short time the first log was swung gently down to Guy, who stood it endwise on the ledge, loosened the noose, and pushed it over the brink. It fell with a dull crash.

In half an hour the raft was lying at the bottom of the cliff, and then several alterations were made. Chutney exchanged places with Forbes, and Sir Arthur, who found himself unequal to the task of pulling the heavy logs to the top of the cliff and dragging them along the summit, took the Greek's place, and went down to assist Chutney with the raft. 238

Sir Arthur and Guy transferred themselves to the canoe as the raft grew smaller, and when the last log went up they noosed the rope about the center of the canoe itself and went up hand over hand and joined the others.

The canoe was pulled up with some difficulty, and lowered to Guy, who allowed it to remain on the ledge, which, though narrow, was ten or twelve yards long. The baggage was next lowered, and then, one at a time, Bildad going first, they descended to the platform where Guy was awaiting them.

Forbes was the last one down, and, with a dexterous jerk, he threw the hook loose from above, and it but narrowly missed their heads as it cleared the ledge and struck the ground. It was dragged back and hooked in place.

The final descent was not free from accident, for the canoe slipped from the noose and fell with a crash, but with no other mishap all reached the solid earth, and with the casting off of the rope from the ledge was severed the last link that connected them with the underground lake and its horrors.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A TERRIBLE RIDE.

Their first act showed the true character of these brave men.

"Let us thank God for our deliverance," said Guy solemnly, and kneeling on the wet sand—an example that was followed by all—he offered a simple and fervent prayer.

Renewed hope was visible on their faces when they rose to their feet in the dim light of the torch.

"We will put the raft together," said Guy, "and then have something to eat before we start."

It was but a short distance to the water's edge, and by all working industriously the logs were soon lying on the sandy beach, and Forbes was fastening them together as before.

Bildad, from the warmth of the rugs, watched these proceedings with a look of mute wonder on his dusky features.

As soon as the raft was ready the baggage was placed on it.

"Take the canoe along," said Forbes. "It is too badly shattered by the fall to use, but it will furnish us with torches and firewood."

There was room to spare, so the boat was placed on one end of the raft, and then sitting on the sand they made a hearty meal of crackers and figs. 240

"I don't admire the appearance of that river very much," remarked the colonel. "It comes through the cliff as though shot by a cannon. No wonder, though, when you think of the terrible pressure from above."

"We will make up for lost time by rapid traveling, then," said Forbes.

"Ah, you think so?" cried Sir Arthur. "Bless me, I hope we will. I have an engagement to dine with Lord Balsover at the Hotel Bombay at Aden on the 10th at six o'clock in the evening. He touches there on his way to India, and I can't disappoint him, you know."

"Drop him a few lines, Ashby, and postpone the engagement a couple of weeks," remarked the colonel dryly.

"Bless me! Can I do that?" ejaculated Sir Arthur.

The laugh that followed was cut short by Guy's short, decisive voice: "Get ready, it's time to start."

The raft lay partly in the water, and with a hearty shove from all it was pushed clear of the shore. Forbes and Canaris held it while it tossed up and down in the swirling eddies.

"Get on board," directed Guy, setting the example himself, and assisting Bildad.

Forbes remained on shore, holding the corner of the raft till all had passed on board. It trembled fiercely in his grasp, as though eager to be off on the journey. 241

Far overhead the abandoned torch was glowing dimly on the summit of the cliff, a patch of brightness that made the gloom round about all the blacker by contrast. For the first time a sudden realization of the unknown perils that lay before them flashed into the minds of the little party.

"Let go, Forbes," said Guy in a firm voice.

Melton sprang nimbly on board and grasped a paddle. The raft quivered a moment and then shot, swift as an arrow, toward the turbulent stretch of water beyond.

Then came a tremendous lurch, a riotous dash of spray that took away their breath, and with a dizzy speed that was simply indescribable the trembling craft was whirled down the torrent.

The first sensation was one of uncontrollable fear, and they hung with all their might to the logs, expecting every instant to be tossed into the water. Round and round spun the raft in dizzy revolutions, until their heads were dizzy and aching. Then the harsh roar subsided, and in a little while the raft became quiet and rested on the surface of the water with hardly a quiver.

And now they ventured to sit up. They appeared to be moving with the velocity of a railroad train. 242

On both sides, a few yards from the raft, smooth walls of rock were visible. Overhead was empty space.

"If this could continue," said Guy, "we should reach the end of the river in a few days."

"It won't last," said Forbes gloomily. "We'll soon run across some bad water."

His fears were shared by the rest, but as time passed on and they continued to speed smoothly between the rocky walls, they began to feel less apprehensive of danger.

"Bildad seems to be feeling quite chipper," said Guy. "Suppose you ask him how he tricked that serpent, Canaris."

"Well, I'll try him," was the reply.

The conversation commenced, and the harsh jabber which they carried on was very interesting to the rest of the party.

"Bless me; you'd think the Greek was talking in his own tongue," remarked Sir Arthur. "Reminds me of our old Greek professor at Balliol College, Oxford. He loved the language of the Athenians so much that he hated to use the English tongue at all. Worst of it was he expected all of us to be as fluent as himself. Made us all talk Greek in the class-room. I'll never forget how we got even with him. Lord Somebody or other—I can't recall the name now, but it was some celebrated man—visited the college. I don't suppose he knew Greek from Hottentot, but we made the professor believe it was a famous Greek scholar who was coming, one who had been making excavations on the site of old Troy during the past four years, and who, strangely enough, was then in England and expected on a visit to Oxford. The professor prepared an elaborate address in pure Greek, and when the visitor entered the class-room he delivered it in the most eloquent manner. 243

"'What's that fool talking about?' asked the visitor.

"'Oh,' says young Ormsby, who was sitting near me, 'he's lecturing the class on "Political Economy in Ancient Athens." He'll be through in a moment and able to receive you.'

"The visitor left the room highly insulted, and the professor, when he discovered the truth a day or two later, nearly took apoplexy."

As the laughter that greeted this little reminiscence of Sir Arthur's ceased, Canaris finished his conversation with Bildad.

"It is difficult to converse with him," he reported, "but from what I can learn he dived from the very embrace of the serpent, and succeeded in swimming to the other canoe, which he had turned adrift only a moment or two before. Without paddles or food he floated behind us into the lake." 244

"It's a miracle that he escaped the serpents," said the colonel, "floating about on the lake all the time."

"But how did he know anything about the entrance to the river?" exclaimed Guy. "Did you ask him that, Canaris?"

"Yes," said the Greek. "He says he discovered it himself a year or two ago just as the old

Englishman must have done."

"Well, it's a lucky thing for Bildad that he ran across us," was Guy's comment; and Bildad, to judge from his contented expression, seemed thoroughly to appreciate this fact.

As the river continued swift and smooth, with no signs of danger ahead, all went to sleep except Canaris and the colonel, who were intrusted with the care of the raft. Several hours later they were relieved by Chutney and Forbes, and thus all secured a fair night's rest.

A scanty share of food was doled out for breakfast, as the supply was getting very low. Some time afterward a faint roar was heard in the distance, and almost before they could prepare for danger a violent cross current struck the raft, tossing it about most perilously, and they caught a glimpse of a furious body of water issuing from a narrow passageway.

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"That was the other channel, the one we should have taken in the first place," exclaimed Guy. "We are now on the main river again."

"They travel separately for quite a distance," remarked the colonel. "The lake must be seventy or eighty miles in our rear. We are making splendid time."

Little did they imagine at that moment how great a change was close at hand. The river glided smoothly between its massive walls with scarce a murmur.

An hour later Forbes held up a warning finger. An ominous sound was heard far below that increased in volume with every second.

"Cling to the raft for your lives," shouted Chutney.

The first words were audible; the last were drowned in the mighty roar of the water, so sudden was its approach. By the torchlight they saw for an instant the billows of tossing spray. Then the raft plunged madly like a thing of life, a great wave broke over it with stunning force, and all was darkness.

None could remember clearly what happened after that. Plunging over the crests of enormous waves, whirling round and round in dizzy revolutions, drenched by icy showers of spray, grinding and crashing on countless rocks, the raft went on its way through that awful stretch of rapids, holding together by nothing short of a miracle. A full hour it lasted, though it must have seemed like days to the wretched voyagers.

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Then the wild pitching and tossing subsided, the crash of the furious water grew fainter, and all was calm and peaceful as before.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MORE MISERY.

Perceiving that the danger was over, Guy ventured to sit up. His clothes were dripping wet, but fortunately he kept his matches in a tin box, and striking one cautiously, he lit a torch which had been lying partly under his body, and was not too damp to burn.

His companions were still sprawled out on the raft, holding to the logs with all their strength. When Guy assured them that all danger was past they sat up, looking very pale and dazed.

"That was awful," said the colonel. "It's a miracle the raft lived through such a ride."

"The canoe is gone," exclaimed Forbes. "Washed clear off the deck, and— Why, hello, what's the matter, Chutney?"

Guy was looking about the raft with a ghastly and fear-stricken countenance, holding the torch over his head.

"A terrible calamity has happened," he cried in a voice that was strangely unnatural. "I fear we are lost men. Where are the provisions? Where are our torches?"

"By gracious, they are gone!" declared the colonel. "Clean gone!"

It was truly a terrible situation in which they, found themselves. The provisions and the torches had been washed off the raft. If they did not reach the open air in two or three days starvation was certain.

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"No," cried the Greek suddenly, "all hope is not gone. Look! here is a bag that was lying partly under me. It is half full of crackers."

"And I have three torches in my pocket," added Sir Arthur. "Bless me if I know how they got there but here they are, anyhow."

"That scant supply of food may last us to the journey's end, if used in moderation," said Guy solemnly. "God grant us a speedy passage to the mouth of the river."

In spite of Chutney's brave attempts to cheer them up, the spirits of the party sank very low.

That meager bag of crackers must feed six mouths until they reached the end of the cavern. That event might be in a week, and it might be in a month. The uncertainty and the suspense were terribly trying.

It was some consolation to discover that the river was still flowing very rapidly. The possibility of encountering more rapids they now dreaded but little, for it was very improbable that worse places could exist than that which the raft had navigated so stanchly.

"We must travel night and day," said Guy, "and in darkness. We have four torches left. Only when we hear the sound of rapids dare we light one of them."

He emphasized his words by putting out the torch that was burning, and instantly they were plunged in total darkness.

This marked the commencement of a period in which all trace of time was lost. Huddled together on the few remaining rugs, they drifted on and on with the current, alternately asleep and awake.

At certain intervals a torch was lit for a few moments while they ate the pitiful scraps of food that Guy distributed with rigorous impartiality.

The short periods of light were taken advantage of by the colonel to record in his diary the brief incidents of the journey.

A few extracts from it, made with his permission, will make sufficiently clear to the reader in what gloomy monotony that part of their cruise was spent which began with the departure from the lake and terminated abruptly in a misfortune remarkable for the utter despair that followed on its track:

First stage.—This is the second day since leaving the lake. We received three crackers apiece. Twice a torch was lit to aid us in passing rapids. They proved to be insignificant.

Second stage.—We slept by turns. Had three crackers apiece. All complain of hunger. Bildad clamors for food. Current still good. Plenty of small rapids.

Third stage.—We now sleep most of the time. Chutney has cut down the rations to two crackers apiece. Bildad is ill. Drinks water incessantly and demands food. We are compelled to hide the bag.

Fourth stage.—Current not so rapid. All in low spirits. We are tortured by hunger. Sir Arthur dreams of banquets in his sleep. Harrows our feelings by his accounts of them. Bildad very ill. No longer wants food.

Fifth stage.—Alas! worse and worse! Bildad and Sir Arthur ill. Chutney is a hero. He tries to cheer us all. Gave half his share of food to Sir Arthur. Thinks I don't know. Bildad raving. Had to tie him to the raft.

Sixth stage.—Bildad and Sir Arthur very weak. Today a gleam of hope. Canaris, after many trials, caught a fish a foot long. We devoured it raw with the utmost greed. Our strength is fast leaving us.

Seventh stage.—Chutney still hopeful. Bildad and Sir Arthur in a bad way. Provisions for three days still remain. We *must* reach the mouth of the river by that time. Canaris fished, but caught nothing.

Eighth stage.—The outlook is dark. I fear none will ever read these pages. The river begins to run sluggishly. Bildad shrieks and raves continually. Sir Arthur is better. They are all asleep now. Forbes and I were put on guard, but Forbes has gone to sleep, and I am afraid I shall do the same without knowing it. A dizzy weakness is coming over me, and—

At this point the writer appears to have dropped his book and pencil and fallen asleep.

Just what space of time was covered by the above quoted entries from the colonel's book is uncertain. A week would probably be a fair guess. The misery of these unfortunate voyagers during that period can hardly be imagined. They suffered continually from the pangs of hunger. They traveled in utter darkness, and, to add to the horror of it all, two sick men had to be ministered to. Under these circumstances we again take up the thread of the story.

It is not to be wondered at that Forbes and the colonel were so derelict as to fall asleep at their post of duty. To remain awake in their condition was simply impossible. It was terribly unfortunate that it should be so, as what follows will prove.

The raft encountered no rapids during the time that all were sleeping, and as far as personal danger was concerned it mattered not whether any one was on guard or not.

Forbes and Chutney awoke about the same time. As was Guy's usual habit after sleeping, he lit a torch to see how the current was running. The light woke Canaris and the colonel almost immediately, while Sir Arthur turned on his rug and asked feebly for something to eat.

The very mention of food brought a hungry glare to their eyes, and Guy turned round to reach the bag. It was not in its accustomed place, and he staggered to his feet in astonishment.

"It's gone," he cried savagely. "The bag is gone. Who has taken it?"

They glared at each other with fierce mistrust.

"Ah, look! look!" shrieked Canaris suddenly. "The black wretch!" and springing across the raft he flung himself on Bildad and grasped him with both hands savagely by the throat.

Melton and Guy tore him away by main force and there beside the African lay the bag—empty.

Bildad's lips were full of crumbs, and half a cracker was still clutched in one grimy hand.

"Kill him. Throw him in the river!" shrieked the Greek, who was fairly beside himself with rage and hunger.

"He is out of his mind," said Guy gravely. "He took them in his delirium. Not one is left;" as he shook the bag in the air.

Sir Arthur made another piteous appeal for food, and Guy took the half cracker from Bildad's hand and gave it to him.

"None left!" repeated the colonel blankly. "What are we going to do? We'll starve in two days. I feel now as if I were on fire inside."

"All our rifles are gone, too," said Guy suddenly. "Bildad has thrown them overboard. The crafty scoundrel feared we would shoot him for stealing the crackers, and he threw away the guns on purpose. There was method in his madness, after all."

"The fiend!" hissed Canaris between his teeth. "And it was I who saved his life for this. If I only had known! If I only had left him to perish in the lake!"

"Hark! I hear rapids or something ahead," said Guy at that instant.

For the moment this diverted their attention from poor Bildad, who lay in a half stupor unconscious of all that was taking place.

The sound that Guy had heard was close at hand, and in a moment the raft was flung heavily upon a sand bar and remained there motionless.

The channel made a sudden, sharp turn, and the current, being too swift to round the sharp angle, dashed with a sullen splash against the shore.

Guy grasped the torch and staggered forward on the beach. It was the first time his feet had touched land for more than a week.

"Here is shore and rocks beyond it," he exclaimed. "I see a cavern, too, in the face of the cliff."

He continued to move forward with uplifted torch. Suddenly he paused and uttered a loud cry. A terrible roar echoed from the cavern a second later, and then with a single bound a great tawny beast sprang out of the shadows, and striking Guy to the earth with one blow of his mighty paw, threw himself furiously on the prostrate body.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

BILDAD DRINKS NEW LIFE.

The stricken man had no time to utter another cry. The lion—for such it proved to be—paused a moment, with uplifted head, snarling angrily. The torch had been flung back a yard or more toward the water, and was spluttering on the damp sand.

Guy's companions were helpless with fear and dread. Forbes alone had self-possession enough to remember that he had a revolver. It was not loaded, and he trembled so much that he could scarcely draw the shells from his pocket.

"Hurry! Hurry!" whispered the colonel. "The brute may tear him apart any moment."

Meanwhile Guy lay white and motionless in the grasp of the lion. Not a muscle quivered, and his eyes were closed.

Suddenly, as Forbes was nervously ramming the shells into the revolver, the beast turned on his prey with a vicious growl and seized Guy's arm loosely in his mighty jaws. In another instant Chutney would have been dragged off, but help was to come from an unlooked-for source.

With a single bound Bildad sprang out upon the sand, brandishing a huge spear that Canaris had brought with him from the lake.

Another leap carried him within a yard or two of the lion, and the amazed spectators had a brief vision of the enraged beast quivering for a spring at the audacious African.

Then the spear flashed in the torchlight, and as Bildad sprang to one side, the lion, with a mighty roar, toppled over on the sand—dead. The spear had pierced his heart.

For an instant no one realized what had happened. The lion in his fall had cleared his victim entirely, and before any one thought of moving forward Guy pulled himself to his feet and staggered feebly toward the raft. Melton ran forward just in time to catch him in his arms.

"Thank God," he exclaimed fervently. "You are not hurt, Chutney?"

"No, I think not," was Guy's response; "only stunned and bruised a little. It was a close call."

"Close! I should say it was. It's the first time I ever saw a lion killed in that way. Bildad saved

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your life, for Melton could never have killed the brute with that toy he has there.”

A strange sound suddenly diverted their attention to Bildad.

The savage was ripping open the dead lion’s throat with a spear, and throwing himself on his knees, he lapped up greedily the red blood as it flowed from the wound.

It was a horrible and fascinating sight. He drank long and deeply, and when at length he rose from his savage feast the ferocity of the lion seemed actually to have flowed into his own veins, so horrible and demon-like was the expression on his dusky face.

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Shaking the blood-stained spear, he shouted two or three times in a frenzied manner, and then tottering to the raft, flung himself among the rugs.

“We are saved,” cried Forbes with sudden inspiration. “There lies meat in plenty.”

Melton’s words caused a speedy revulsion of feeling. The colonel shouted for very joy, and Canaris sprang toward the dead lion with drawn knife.

“Cut off as much of the meat as you can,” said Guy. “Here, give me my saber. Let me help.”

He turned to reach it, but a sudden weakness came over him, and he was compelled to lie down on the rugs. The colonel, in deep alarm, made a hasty examination to see if he had sustained any injury, but with the exception of a severe bruising and a slight laceration of the left arm, caused by the lion’s teeth, he appeared to be all right.

Melton and Canaris were just on the point of cutting into the dead lion with their sabers, the only weapons that remained to them, when a fierce roar echoed through the cavern, repeated two or three times in rapid succession, and in the gloom they could see a pair of shining eyes.

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“Run for the raft,” cried the Greek; and, as they reached the shore, a superb lioness bounded forward and stood by the body of her mate.

“See!” cried the colonel, pointing a trembling finger. “Two more lions coming out of the cavern. Push the raft into the water at once or we shall be devoured.”

The danger was indeed imminent, and yet, in their starving condition, it was hard to leave all that meat behind. Forbes, impelled by some mad impulse, pointed his revolver at the angry lioness, but Guy grasped his arm before he could pull the trigger. Two more lions were now in plain view, stalking slowly out of the shadows.

“The pistol is useless,” said Guy. “We dare not resist. We must get away as silently as possible.”

The raft had been tossed but lightly upon the beach, and with but little effort it was pushed free of the shore and trembled on the water.

A loud roar close at hand caused them to fall on board in frantic haste, and as the swift current whirled them away the three lions trotted down to the water’s edge and howled in concert.

“We may be thankful we got away with whole skins,” said Chutney. “It was a great misfortune to have to abandon all that meat, but a delay or an attempt at resistance would have cost us our lives.”

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“It means starvation,” said Melton bitterly. “Those lions came down from the open air to drink. That hole in the rocks led out of the cavern, I have no doubt, and we could have followed it up and perhaps found food, or we might even have abandoned the cavern entirely and finished our journey on top of ground. We must be close to the coast now.”

This statement of what “might have been” sent their spirits down to the lowest ebb. They realized that Melton was undoubtedly right. Safety had actually been within their grasp, but the lions had driven them off, and now they were doomed to almost certain death by starvation. Even had they chosen to go back and risk the chances it was too late, for the current had taken them far from the spot, and the sandy shores had given way to perpendicular walls of rock.

The torch continued to burn brightly, a piece of extravagance that called forth no rebuke.

The journey continued amid unbroken silence. Sir Arthur and Bildad were both asleep, though it was no peaceful slumber, to judge from their restless tossings.

Sir Arthur’s illness had now lasted a week. It was more of a nervous attack than anything else, but without food it was hopeless to look for recovery. He was extremely weak, and lay most of the time in a stupor.

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The painful bruises Guy had sustained kept him awake much longer than the rest, but at last he too fell asleep.

Thus several hours passed away, and they awoke in utter darkness. The torch had burnt out during the night, but Guy recklessly lit another.

The river was flowing rapidly among scattered rocks, and as the raft approached a jagged ledge that cropped up from the water, a dark object was seen clinging to it.

“Why, it is our lost canoe,” said Forbes as they drew near. “Help me catch it, Chutney. We will pass close to it.”

The raft struck the edge of the rocks, and as it swung round with the current they grasped the end of the canoe and pulled it on board.

“It will do for firewood,” said Guy. “We won’t have to travel in the dark any more.”

“Yes, yes; build a fire,” said Sir Arthur feebly, sitting up among the rugs. “I’m cold, Chutney; icy

cold. Have we come to the end of the cavern yet?"

"He seems a little better," whispered the colonel, coming close up to Guy. "Do you know, Chutney, I've been thinking for the last hour that we must surely be near the end of the river. Since first we entered this cavern we have traveled eight hundred miles. Calculate the rate of speed at which the current flows, and you must see that I am right. Moreover, we cannot be very far beneath the surface of the earth. Those lions do not dwell in the cavern. They only came down for water."

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"I believe you are right," said Guy. "Two more days will tell. If we don't reach the open air in that time—well, it won't matter after that whether we reach it or not. I can hardly stand on my feet, and as for the torments of hunger, I need not speak of that. You know them yourself."

"Yes, I do indeed know what it is," said the colonel bitterly, "but we must endure it a while longer. For myself I do not care so much, but Sir Arthur is in a bad way, and as for Bildad, we may have to bind him hand and foot. He sleeps now, but no one can tell what he may do when he awakes."

"We will watch him closely," said Guy. "Canaris is splitting up the canoe for firewood, and it will no longer be necessary to travel in darkness."

"See!" cried the Greek, pausing with uplifted axe. "The shores have disappeared. Has the river become wide or is this another lake?"

"There is still a strong current," said Guy. "The channel has suddenly become broad. That is all."

A cheerful fire was soon blazing, and the ruddy reflection stained the water far and near, as the raft drifted on with the current. Sir Arthur fell asleep again, and Bildad lay among the rugs as one dead, gluttoned with his savage feast, and his lips and hands still red with clotted blood.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BILDAD TURNS CANNIBAL.

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All through that day—for such we shall call it—they floated on without a single glimpse of the shores, though a good current still existed.

Their sufferings had now reached a point that was almost unendurable. The emptiness at the stomach and the pangs of hunger had given way to the fierce pains and the appalling weakness that come to those perishing of starvation.

For two days, it must be remembered, they had eaten nothing, and for a week previous three dry crackers apiece had been their daily allowance.

Chutney, with marvelous endurance, retained his strength and affected a hopefulness he was far from feeling, though, if the truth were known, a share of his food for a week past had been secretly given to Sir Arthur, whose illness had roused his compassion.

The colonel was almost too weak to stand—for his previous captivity had undermined his constitution, while Melton and the Greek made no efforts to conceal their sufferings.

Bildad, instead of becoming violent, woke up very weak, and lay helpless on his rug.

It was pitiful to see how they all turned their pockets inside out and drove their fingers into the crannies of the logs, hoping to discover a stray crumb. It was useless to fish, for they had nothing to put on the hook.

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After nightfall, as near as Guy could guess, the river became very narrow and the current increased perceptibly in speed. The steep and rocky shores seemed scarcely ten yards apart, and overhead hung masses of stalactite almost close enough to strike with the paddle.

"We are near the end," said Guy, making an effort to speak calmly in spite of his sufferings. "Hold out a little longer. I feel sure that we shall be saved."

"Yes, we are near the end," said the colonel, "very near, Chutney. Our sufferings will soon be over. You deserve a better fate. I wish——"

"No, no, don't talk that way," cried Guy. "You will live to see the sunlight again—I am sure of it."

The colonel turned over on his side without making a reply.

"If we don't reach the mouth of the cavern in twenty-four hours, I for one will never see the light of day," said Melton huskily. "I'd hate to die in this place. It wouldn't be so hard out under the open sky."

"Water! water!" moaned Sir Arthur feebly, and crawling to the edge of the raft Guy filled his helmet and put it to the sick man's lips. He drank deeply and sank back on the rugs.

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Guy crept cautiously forward to the front of the raft again—for every motion was a torture—and

resumed his watch ahead, straining his eyes to catch the first glimpse of light that he felt sure must come before long.

Faster and faster ran the current now and the shores flitted past like dim specters. The channel became more turbulent and rocky, and the raft tossed and trembled as it swept over brawling rapids and grated over unseen obstructions.

When Guy turned toward his companions again they seemed to be all sleeping, and he envied them their merciful oblivion.

Bildad was muttering excitedly in his own tongue, and as Guy watched him he tossed his arms and sat bolt upright. The ugly face was frightfully distorted and the fever-stricken eyes shone with a baleful light. With an apprehension that he took no pains to disguise Guy watched him sharply. There was no telling what this savage might do in the delirium of illness—a delirium aggravated tenfold by the tortures of hunger.

Guy noted with secret uneasiness that no weapon was lying anywhere near. Melton alone had a revolver, and he was half inclined to waken him and ask him for it.

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Bildad, however, made no attempt to leave his place on the rugs. He kept on talking to himself at intervals, his eyes staring vacantly out on the river.

A dingy leopard skin was still bound around his loins, and suddenly seizing the end of it he began to chew it greedily.

Then he noticed the blood still sticking to his fingers, and placing his hand in his mouth he sucked it with a hollow noise that made Guy sick.

Suddenly his eyes became fixed and glaring, his hands dropped to his side, trembling nervously, and his lips parted in a wolfish expression, that displayed two rows of glistening teeth.

A thrill of horror ran through Guy from head to foot as he saw what had unmistakably fascinated Bildad's gaze. Two yards distant, facing the savage, lay Sir Arthur, propped up slightly among the rugs. His head was thrown back, and in the perspiration, caused probably by his slight fever, he had torn loose the fore part of his flannel shirt, so that the throat and part of the breast were fully exposed, and shone clearly in the soft glow from the fire.

To Chutney Bildad's wolfish gaze admitted of no misconstruction. The sight of the white flesh had roused the savage's fiercest instincts. *At that moment Bildad was a cannibal at heart!*

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No words can describe Guy's feelings as he realized the awful truth.

At first a deadly faintness threatened to deprive him of all consciousness. Then came a thrill of strength, and his quick mind sought some plan of action. There was no weapon within reach. He must waken the Greek.

"Canaris," he muttered in a low voice, but the word stuck in his throat and died away in a whisper.

The sound, slight as it was, drew Bildad's attention. A glance at Guy's frightened countenance told him his horrible design was discovered. His thick lips parted in a glare of ferocious hatred—the blind fury of a madman.

He thrust his hand to his side, drew out a long, gleaming knife, and with a demoniacal laugh sprang at Sir Arthur, brandishing his weapon.

At the first flash of the steel Guy uttered a shout that might have wakened the seven sleepers, and threw himself across the raft. He fell short of the African, and staggered to his knees with another wild cry.

The glittering blade wavered a second in mid-air, not ten inches from Sir Arthur's heart, and then, his eyes flashing and his face distorted with passion, Bildad turned and threw himself on the man who had thwarted him.

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Guy staggered to his feet in time to meet the shock, and they fell together with a crash, the madman on top. As he blindly threw out his arms in self protection he grasped Bildad's wrist, arresting the course of the descending knife. Before the fiend could snatch the knife with the other hand he twisted the brawny wrist till the bone cracked. The knife dropped from the nerveless fingers, and Bildad shrieked with rage and agony. Guy tried to shout, but the savage's uninjured arm clutched his throat, and he felt himself jerked violently along the raft. He struggled and kicked in vain. A mist swam before his eyes, and he felt the agonies of suffocation. With both hands he tore at the brawny arm, but the grip only seemed to tighten, and then he realized that he was on the edge of the raft. He was powerless. He wondered vaguely why the rest did not come to his assistance. He felt his head and shoulders slip over the edge, and then opening his eyes he saw the madman's leering face, flushed with rage and triumph, staring into his own. His eyes closed with a shudder as he seemed to feel the icy waters close over him. Then the grasp on his throat suddenly relaxed, and he knew nothing more.

When Guy opened his eyes some minutes later, and saw with wonder the familiar faces of his friends bending over him, he felt as a man might who had come back from the grave. He tried to rise, but a firm hand pushed him gently back, and the colonel's voice said softly, "No; lie down. Not a word until you are better."

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Gradually memory came back as he rested, and he knew why his throat felt so queer. In the

firelight he saw Bildad lying motionless across the logs. The ugly face was smeared with blood, and Forbes and Canaris were binding the brawny arms and legs.

And there lay the knife, flashing back the light from its polished steel.

"You came as near to death, Chutney, as any man can come," said the colonel a little later, when Guy was able to sit up and lean against the fragments of the canoe. "Forbes saved you on this occasion. He got awake just in time, and crawling over the logs—for he was unable to walk—he brought down the butt of the revolver on the fiend's head. He first tried to shoot, but his weapon missed fire."

"Is he dead?" asked Guy.

"No," replied the colonel; "more's the pity. He seems to be only stunned. We've tied him up securely, so he can't do any more harm. But what started him, anyhow?"

Guy, with many a shudder, related the events that led to the attack, and his audience were horror-stricken at the terrible tale. The strangest part of it was that Sir Arthur had slept through it all and was still sleeping.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE END OF THE CAVERN.

After that Guy himself fell asleep—a deep, heavy slumber that caused his friends some uneasiness as they listened to his labored breathing and saw the red flush that mounted over his pallid face.

Later on he struggled back to a wretched consciousness of his misery. He made an effort to rise, but such keen pains darted through his body that his head dropped back on the rug. The least movement was an agony, and his head was aching with a fierce intensity that he had never known before.

"I *will* rise," he muttered between his clinched teeth, and summoning all the power of his iron will he sat up.

The remaining half of the canoe was just behind him, and dragging his body a foot or more over the raft he fell back against it with a groan of agony.

The glowing embers of the fire shed a dim light over the scene. On his right lay Sir Arthur, white and motionless. On the left was Bildad, his arms and legs drawn up about his body in the throes of suffering. Near the front of the raft lay the colonel, face downward on the logs, and close by was the Greek, his white features turned toward the firelight.

One alone showed any signs of life. Melton was leaning over the edge apparently drinking, and presently he raised his head and crawled feebly toward the fire.

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"How long have I slept?" asked Guy in a hoarse whisper.

Melton turned in astonishment as though frightened by the sound of a human voice.

"I don't know," he said, speaking with a great effort. "Hours, Chutney, hours. A day and a night must have passed since I cracked that fellow there on the head. I hoped you would never wake. This is like dying a thousand times over. It won't last long now. A few hours at the most—and then—"

"But tell me," interrupted Guy, "the rest, are they—are they—"

"Dead?" said Melton. "No, I think not. Very near the end, though. They can't move. They can't even reach the edge of the raft to drink. Water has kept me up a little."

Crawling inch by inch, he drew himself beside Guy and propped his back against the canoe. They sat side by side, too exhausted to speak, mercifully indifferent to their fate.

It is doubtful if they realized their position. The last stages of starvation had blunted their sensibilities, thrown a veil over their reasoning faculties.

Presently Guy observed that the raft had entered upon a most turbulent stretch of water. At frequent intervals he heard dimly the hoarse roar of rapids and felt the logs quiver and tremble as they struck the rocks. The shores appeared almost close enough to touch as they whirled past with a speed that made him close his eyes with dizziness, and the jagged roof seemed about to fall and crush him.

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He saw these things as a man sees in a dream. He could no longer reason over them or draw conclusions from the facts. The increasing roar of the water, the cumulative force of the current, told him dimly that a crisis was approaching.

So they drifted on, lost to all passage of time. Presently the last embers of the fire expired with a hiss as a dash of spray was flung on them, and all was dark.

Guy whispered Melton's name, but a feeble groan was the only response. He reached out a trembling arm and found that his friend had slipped down from the canoe and was lying prostrate on the rugs. He alone retained consciousness, such as it was.

Bildad was jabbering in delirium, and Guy could catch broken sentences muttered at intervals by Carrington or the Greek.

He felt that his own reason was fast going, and he conceived a sudden horror of dying in darkness.

A torch was lying under his hand and he had matches.

The effort of striking the light was a prodigious one, but at last he succeeded and the torch flared up brightly over the raft and its occupants. 273

The sudden transition from darkness to light had a startling effect on the very man whom Guy supposed to be past all feeling. Sir Arthur suddenly sat straight up, his white face lit with a ghastly light.

"Ha, ha!" he shouted, waving his shrunken hands. "The light, the light! We are saved! Do you see it, Carrington; do you see it?"

Then the wild gleam faded from his eyes, and in a quavering voice—a mere ghost of his old pompous manner—he exclaimed:

"To the Guards' Club, Waterloo Place! Do it in twenty minutes, driver, and the half sovereign is yours. Go by way of Piccadilly; it's the near cut."

A moment later he added: "I'll be late. What beastly luck!"

Then a swift change passed over his face.

"Ha! ha! There's the light again," he cried exultantly. "Look, Carrington, look——" His lips trembled over the unfinished sentence, and without another word he dropped back on the logs and lay there perfectly motionless.

This was the last thing that Guy remembered.

The torch still burned beside him, and the raft plunged on its dizzy course, but his mind was wandering far away, and the past was being lived over again. 274

He was riding through London streets, dining with his old friends at the club, pulling a skiff over the placid current of the Thames, shooting quail on his brother's estate, dancing at a ball at Government House, Calcutta, marching through Indian jungles at the head of his men, plotting the capture of the Rajah, Nana Sahib, in far-away Burma—thus the merciful past stole his mind away from the horrors of the present, and he alternately smiled or shuddered as he recalled some pleasant association or stern reminiscence of peril.

So the hours passed on. The torch faded and dimmed, burned to a charred ember, and then went out.

The water hissed and boiled, crashing on rocks and shoals, beating its fury against the barren shores, and rushing down the narrow channel at an angle that was frightful and appalling.

Guided by an unseen power, the frail raft rose and fell with the current, whirling round and round like an eggshell, creaking, groaning, and straining at its bonds, like a fettered giant; but the wretched castaways, sprawled in careless attitude across the logs, heard nothing, knew nothing—simply lay with their pallid faces turned toward the blackness and the gloom overhead.

Ah, how pitiful! If they could only have known what was close at hand, fresh life would have flowed into their wasted veins. They would have gone mad with joy. 275

The roar of the water had now become softened and less violent. The rocks had disappeared, the river slipped like an avalanche through the fast narrowing channel, and at such a prodigious speed that a cold blast of air whistled about the raft.

Chutney, still propped against the canoe, caught its full effect on his face. It stirred up the flickering spark of life within him and he opened his eyes; he thought he saw a faint gleam of daylight.

Like the fabled giant that sprang from an uncorked phial, the gray streak expanded with marvelous celerity, growing longer and wider and brighter until it shone like burnished silver on the hurrying tide of the river.

Guy saw it and that was all. It dazzled his eyes and he closed them. When he looked again the raft was trembling on the edge of the silvery sheet, and then, swift as the lightning flash, a flood of brightness sprang up and around it.

He closed his eyes, but the fierce glare seemed to be burning into his very brain. He could not shut it out, though he thrust a trembling arm across his closed eyes.

The next instant something rough and pliable struck his face with stinging force, and he felt the warm blood trickle down his cheeks. Instantly there came a second shock. The canoe was whirled forcibly from under him, and a heavy blow from some unseen object struck him with stunning violence to the hard logs. 276

An icy wave dashed over the raft, and then another and another. Smarting with pain, the blood dripping from his lacerated face and hands, he staggered to his knees.

He opened his eyes. At first he could see nothing for the dazzling light that was all around him.

Then the blindness passed suddenly away, and he saw clearly.

The glorious, entrancing light of day was shining on the raft, on the sparkling water, on his motionless companions—everywhere.

The raft was dancing on the bosom of a vast and mighty stream that rolled in the blessed sunlight between shores of sparkling green. He saw sloping hillsides and mangrove jungles, wind-tossed patches of reeds and waving palm trees, mountains shooting their rugged peaks heavenward, and billows of forest land rolling off into the distant horizon, while overhead was the deep blue vault of the sky, that perfect sky that had haunted his memory in many a dream—the sky that he had never hoped to see again. The air was redolent with perfume and melodious with the sweet notes of countless birds.

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Flushed and trembling, Guy staggered, with new-found strength, to his feet.

“Saved! Saved! Saved!” he cried aloud. “Thank God! Melton! Canaris! Do you hear? The blessed sunlight is shining around us. Why don’t you answer? Why don’t you shout for joy?”

But no response came, and the five ghastly figures on the raft remained as stiff and motionless as before.

A swift change passed over Guy’s face.

“Merciful heavens!” he cried. “Can it be? All dead!”

He gasped for breath, beating the air with stiffened fingers, and then dropped like a log.

The warm sunlight still played on the raft, and the yellow tide of the river lapped the roughened logs with a soft and musical murmur.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CAPTAIN BECKER LOSES A WAGER.

“No, no, gentlemen. I respectfully beg leave to differ with you. Africa never gives up her white slaves.”

Captain Lucius Becker emphasized his words by bringing his fist down heavily on the frail table before him, and replacing his meerschaum between his lips, he glared defiantly at his two companions.

It was a hot and sultry afternoon in March—such a March as only tropical Africa knows—and the place was the German military station of New Potsdam, on the left bank of the river Juba, a few miles from its mouth, in eastern Africa.

On the broad bosom of the river the sun was beating fiercely, and the mangrove jungles and lofty palm trees drooped motionless in the dead calm. Upon the flat roof of the little station, however, the refining touches of civilization had done much to mitigate the severity and discomfort of the heat. An awning of snowy canvas, shaded by the projecting clusters of a group of palms, made a cool and grateful shelter, and under this the three officers had been dining.

Captain Lucius Becker continued to blow out great clouds of white smoke as though he had completely squelched all further argument on the subject under discussion.

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The silence was broken at last by Dr. Moebius Goldbeck.

“My dear captain,” he said, in slow, measured tones, as he adjusted his eyeglass, “I cannot agree with you. Africa has passed through many changes of late years. These men will surely be heard from again, and may even be freed eventually.”

“Yes, yes, you are right, doctor; your views are eminently sound,” said Lieutenant Carl von Leyden.

Captain Becker removed his meerschaum from his lips, and shook himself in his chair until his sword clanked on the floor.

“Now listen,” he cried. “These men of whom we speak, the governor of Zaila, the English colonel, the captain of the Aden steamer, and the other two unfortunate Englishmen, not one of these men will ever come out of Africa alive, I will wager a hundred thalers.”

“Done!” cried Lieutenant von Leyden.

“Done!” echoed Dr. Goldbeck.

Hardly had the echoes of their voices died away when the sentry wheeled about hastily and said: “Captain, something comes down the river. It has just rounded the bend. It looks too large for a boat.”

Captain Becker rushed down below, hurried back with a pair of glasses, and took a long survey.

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"It is a raft," he cried, turning to his companions. "Men are lying on it; whether dead or alive I cannot tell. Man a boat at once. The current runs swift, and we will have barely time to reach it."

The boat was ready almost as soon as they reached the ground, and under the steady movement of four pairs of oars they shot swiftly out on the yellow tide of the Juba.

In silence they approached the drifting object, the boat's prow cutting sharply the opposing waves.

Now it was twenty yards away—ten yards—five-yards—then the boat bumped gently on the logs and Dr. Goldbeck boarded the raft, followed quickly by his two companions.

"*Meln himmel!*" he cried. "What can this mean? Six dead bodies! Horrible! horrible!"

He turned pale for a moment. Then, as his professional instinct asserted itself, he knelt beside the motionless forms, and one by one tore the breast covering away and applied his hand to the heart.

"Ach!" he cried joyfully, rising to his feet, "they still live; there still remains a spark of life! To the shore, quick! lose no time, or all will die!"

A rope was speedily hitched to the raft, and the men began to pull lustily for the bank.

"Captain Becker," exclaimed Lieutenant von Leyden, suddenly smacking his knee, "you are two hundred thalers out of pocket. There lie the lost men now. That is Sir Arthur Ashby with the sandy beard, and the others are no doubt his companions."

"*Tausend donner!* that is true!" cried the doctor. "You are right, Carl. It is miraculous!"

Captain Becker smiled grimly, but said nothing.

A severe pull of ten minutes brought the raft to the little wharf, and in the strong arms of the German soldiers the rescued men were borne tenderly into the garrison-house and placed on cots that had been made up in readiness for them.

Never did Dr. Goldbeck have a more arduous task, but with medicine chest at his side, and two able assistants to carry out his instructions, he toiled unceasingly for hours.

Then success crowned his efforts, and the patients came slowly back to consciousness. For nearly a week they hovered between life and death, but finally all were pronounced out of danger except Bildad, who was struggling in a high fever.

At first they knew nothing, could remember nothing, but gradually memory returned, and they realized the full measure of their wonderful escape.

Guy was the first to rally, and Sir Arthur was the last, but ten days after their rescue all were able to sit up, and after that they gained strength rapidly.

The marvelous tale of their adventures was discussed over and over with their new friends—for most of the Englishmen could speak German—and from Captain Becker they learned the latest news from Zaila, which was to the effect that the place had been retaken by the English after a brief but desperate struggle. This information had been brought to the station by a German gunboat six weeks before.

Guy was very curious to know how far they had drifted down the Juba before they were rescued, but of course it was impossible to tell.

"It's my opinion," said Captain Becker, "that the exit from that underground river is somewhere in the vicinity of the big falls, fifty miles above here. I have heard that there are caverns along the bank from which the water pours furiously."

"That is probably the place, then," returned Guy, "for the bushes hung so low that they dragged the canoe from the raft and tore the skin from my face. I have a dim recollection of all that, but I remember nothing more."

Guy's companions, however, could not remember even this. The struggle with Bildad was the last tangible recollection. After that all was a blank. Although they had regained a fair share of strength, the awful experiences of the cruise down the underground river had left indelible traces of suffering. Colonel Carrington's hair had turned white, and even Chutney and Forbes had gray locks sprinkled through their dark ones. Their faces were hollow, their bodies lean and emaciated, and, in fact, they were changed beyond all power of recognition. Contrary to expectation, Bildad was now also convalescent.

As soon as their recovery was assured, Captain Becker had very courteously sent to the chief station on the Durnford River, some miles south of the Juba, to obtain, if possible, a steamer; and one morning, four weeks after their arrival at New Potsdam, a noble vessel steamed up the river and anchored before the station.

It was the German steamer Rhine Castle, and was at the disposal of Sir Arthur, who had assumed the expense of chartering it on behalf of his government.

The commander of the vessel, Captain Wassman, brought a piece of news that made Sir Arthur desperately anxious to get back to Zaila, and very considerably stirred up the rest of the party.

A certain Portuguese, he said, was in high favor at Zaila on account of services rendered in retaking the town from the Arabs and Somalis, and it was rumored that the government intended to bestow upon him an influential post.

"That must be Manuel Torres," remarked Sir Arthur to Chutney. "Bless me, we'll make it hot for the scoundrel!"

With many regrets they parted from Captain Becker and his friends, and a few hours after the German flag on the garrison house faded from view the Rhine Castle was beating swiftly up the eastern coast of Africa on her two-thousand-mile trip.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

On a warm, sultry evening in the latter part of May the Arabs and Somalis who hovered about the outskirts of Zaila, keeping well out of reach of the newly-erected fortifications which bristled with guns and British soldiery, heard the sweet strains of "Rule Britannia" and "God Save the Queen" floating over the desert.

It was the regimental band of the Ninth Lancers playing in the square of the town on the occasion of the installation of the new governor of Zaila—Colonel Conyers Gordon.

It was Colonel Gordon who had conducted the assault on the town some weeks previous, and in recognition of his valor—for the enemy had made a desperate stand—he was now the newly commissioned governor.

The official documents had arrived that day, and the town was *en fete*, if we may use the expression; for, in addition to the native population and the soldiery, a number of visitors had come across from Aden to do honor to the brave commandant.

As the band ceased playing, Colonel Gordon appeared on the steps of the residency and briefly addressed the expectant people in a few well-chosen words.

"The tragedy of a few months ago," he concluded, "is still fresh in our minds. I had the honor to know Sir Arthur Ashby, an honor which many of you likewise enjoyed, and the sad fate of that brave man and his companions comes vividly to our minds tonight. I trust that I shall be enabled to discharge the duties of my office with the same unswerving fidelity."

Colonel Gordon sat down, and the band played "Rule Britannia."

At that moment the Rhine Castle was dropping anchor in the harbor.

As the band ceased Colonel Gordon rose again, and the people instantly became quiet. By his side was a short, thickset man with dark, sallow features.

"I beg to call your attention," began the colonel, "to one who has played an important part in our recent struggle—Mr. Manuel Torres, a Portuguese, of whom I can say nothing better than that he deserves to be an Englishman. At the risk of his own life he tried to save Sir Arthur Ashby, and after suffering much at the hands of the enemy, he finally escaped in time to do us valuable service in retaking the town. As a recognition of his aid, I propose to appoint him Assistant Political Resident."

Mr. Torres bowed profoundly, and as the people evinced a decided desire to hear from him, he cleared his throat and began to speak in sleek, oily tones.

He related, with many gestures, a thrilling tale of his captivity among the Arabs, the desperate attempts he had made to save Sir Arthur and the Englishmen from slavery, and how finally he had effected his own marvelous escape.

At this point a sudden commotion on the outskirts of the crowd temporarily interrupted the speaker.

"It grieves me deeply," he went on, "to reflect on the sad destiny of my dear friend, Sir Arthur Ashby, and of those brave men, for whom I had the highest honor and regard. I risked my life to save them. I interceded with the Arab leader, Makar Makalo, but in vain. He was obdurate. To bring them back from slavery I would willingly lay down my life this minute. I would gladly—"

What else Mr. Manuel Torres was willing to do no one ever knew or will know. He ceased speaking abruptly, and his sallow face assumed a ghastly look.

Through the opening ranks of the people advanced a group of pale and haggard men, led by a ghastly figure with sandy side whiskers in a faded uniform that hung about his shrunken limbs.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed this odd-looking stranger. "It's that rascally Portuguese, Manuel Torres!"

A great silence fell on the people. For one second the Portuguese trembled like a leaf, then he turned and bolted through the residency door, shoving Colonel Gordon roughly aside in his mad haste.

"Stop him! Stop him!" roared the stranger. "A thousand pounds to the man who takes him alive. He's the ringleader of the insurrection!"

Colonel Gordon hurried down the steps in bewildered amazement.

"What does this mean?" he demanded. "Who are you?"

"Who am I?" shouted he of the sandy whiskers. "Why, blast your impudence, I'm Sir Arthur Ashby, the governor of Zaila. Who the deuce are you?"

The scene that followed baffles all description. The air rang with frenzied shouts and cheers, soldiers, natives, and visitors surged madly round the little band, and the musicians, quick to grasp the situation, struck up the inspiring strains of "Lo, the Conquering Hero Comes!"

Sir Arthur shook himself loose from the embrace of his enthusiastic friends.

"The Portuguese!" he roared. "The rascal will escape. Pursue him! Capture him!"

Now the people comprehended for the first time. A furious rush was made for the residency, the door was jammed in an instant with a struggling crowd of troops and civilians, and then they swept on through the broad hallway in pursuit of the wretched fugitive.

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In five minutes the town was in an indescribable uproar. The vessels in the harbor fired showers of rockets, and the alarm guns boomed hoarsely from the fortifications.

Manuel Torres, however, overthrown at the very moment of his greatest triumph, made good his escape. He bolted through the back door of the residency, evaded the sentries at the town wall, and fled to the desert.

That same night, after a sumptuous repast, Guy Chutney, at Sir Arthur's request, modestly related the story of their adventures to the most interested audience that ever graced the walls of the residency. A breathless silence greeted the speaker as he showed the damnable proofs of Manuel Torres' guilt and treachery, and described with thrilling effect the awful journey through the bowels of the earth. When he concluded the tale that made him a hero in spite of himself, a burst of applause fairly made the residency tremble.

Then Sir Arthur rose to his feet.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a voice which quivered with emotion, "I deem this to be a fitting time to express my—to express *our*—admiration of my young countryman. All my comrades. I am glad to say, displayed a heroism, during our days of trial and suffering, which has never been surpassed by any men in any clime. But, if one man is worthy of special mention for cool bravery, for dogged perseverance, for unflinching, unwavering fortitude and unselfishness, that man is Guy Chutney. Gentlemen," he continued, raising his glass, "I ask you to drink with me to the health of the bravest man I ever met—Guy Chutney."

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Again a frantic outburst of applause shook the building, and the toast was drunk with indescribable enthusiasm. But Guy strove to make himself heard above the uproar.

"It is unfair," he said earnestly, when quiet had been partially restored, "of Sir Arthur to credit me with what I am aware is far more than my just due. Truthfully, it should be said that no one of us surpassed his fellows in displaying the qualities Sir Arthur has just enumerated. Such an experience is enough for a lifetime, but if I am ever again called upon to face such perils as we encountered while under Africa, may God grant that I have for comrades such true-hearted, loyal friends as these."

Carrington, Forbes, and Canaris each spoke briefly in turn; and Bildad, under the undue excitement of some wine he had managed to secure, attempted to perform a Galla war-dance on the table, and was promptly relegated to the guard-house to sober up.

At midnight a steamer left Zaila for Aden with the glad news, and twenty-four hours later the streets of London were blocked with crowds of people reading the amazing telegram that the newspapers had posted on their bulletin boards.

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Colonel Conyers Gordon, of course, was not governor of Zaila at all, and though it must have been a sore disappointment to the brave old soldier, he readily and gladly installed Sir Arthur in the residency and assumed his former command of the troops.

Sir Arthur, However, had very different views. "Do you mean to say, Gordon," he demanded, "that the government actually gave me up for lost, and had no intention of sending an expedition after me at all?"

Colonel Gordon hesitatingly admitted that such was the case.

"Then," cried Sir Arthur, "I wash my hands of such a government. I will go home to England, and may the infernal Arabs hang, draw, and quarter me if I ever set foot on African soil again."

"I trust, Sir Arthur," argued Colonel Gordon, "you will not act hastily in this matter. You will admit that the government was somewhat justified in believing your case a hopeless one. The fate of you and your brave companions was thought by everybody to have been nothing short of death. I am sure, had the authorities had the slightest idea that you were living, an expedition would have been sent out. No stone would have been left unturned to rescue you."

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"Well," said Sir Arthur, somewhat mollified, "I cannot deny that things pointed to our demise. We expected to see you again as little as you expected to see us, probably."

"I am glad," said Colonel Gordon, "that you have decided to take a more reasonable view of the matter. Will you not reconsider your determination of resigning your post? Let no consideration for me stop you, I beg of you. I should, of course, be glad to accept the position, but yours is undoubtedly the prior right, and your previous experience has amply proven your ability."

"Colonel," Sir Arthur replied solemnly, "I'm going back to England. I'm sick of Africa. I've had a little more than a genteel sufficiency during the past few months, and I'm pining for a sight of dear old England. I'm going home."

Sir Arthur kept his word. On the same day he mailed his resignation, and handed the reins of office to Colonel Gordon.

After careful consideration, Colonel Carrington decided to accept the post of Assistant Political Resident that Gordon offered him, subject, of course, to the wishes of the Foreign Office.

Chutney had at first intended going on to India, but letters from home informing him of the serious illness of his brother decided his return to England, and he sailed from Aden a week later, in company with Sir Arthur and Melton Forbes, who had been recalled by his paper as soon as they learned of his wonderful journey. 293

Canaris accompanied them as far as Port Said, where he changed to a vessel bound for Rhodes. He was eager to see Greece after his long captivity among the Somalis, and at last accounts he was the proprietor of a celebrated cafe at Athens, having inherited a tidy sum of money from a deceased relative.

Bildad expressed a desire to go back to the Galla country, and Colonel Gordon finally succeeded in obtaining safe passage for him with a caravan bound for the interior.

Manuel Torres met the fate his treachery duly merited. Two days after his escape from Zaila he fell into the hands of a party of prowling Arabs, and was conveyed by them to Makar Makolo, who determined that he should receive fitting punishment for his renegade conduct. Accordingly he sent him under strong escort to Harar, and Rao Khan very obligingly carried out his friend Makar's wishes by cooking the wretched Portuguese in a caldron of boiling oil.

A remarkable thing occurred in the fourth month of Governor Gordon's rulership at Zaila. 294

A bronzed Englishman arrived one day with a caravan from the interior.

He was speedily recognized as Captain Waller, and he told a strange story of his adventures.

Mombagolo, the burman, who, in company with the captain and the Hindoos, had been taken into slavery by a tribe of Gallas who dwelt far to the west, had been chosen chief of this tribe on the death of its king, probably on account of his stature and strength.

His first royal act was to effect the deliverance of Captain Waller by sending him to the coast. The Hindoos had chosen to remain where they were. Captain Waller eventually returned to England, and Forbes was deeply grieved to learn that he would never see Momba again, though it was some consolation to know that, instead of a slave, he was an African monarch.

Guy reached England barely in time to see his brother before he died. As Sir Lucius Chutney was unmarried, Guy succeeded to the titles and estates.

As a landed proprietor, his duties very plainly lay at home, so he resigned his commission and settled down on the Hampshire estate.

He spends much of his time in London. He and Sir Arthur Ashby are members of the same club, and the two baronets invariably dine together. 295

"Chutney," Sir Arthur said one day, as he lit his cigar after dinner, "have you ever felt any desire to leave England and resume an adventurous life?"

Chutney puffed a moment in silence.

"Sometimes," he said finally. "Sometimes I feel as though I should enjoy laying aside home comforts, and, gun in hand, enter the trackless forests once more. Somehow civilization palls on a man after years of campaigning. Don't you find it so, Ashby?"

"That," replied Sir Arthur, "is just what I was getting at. Generally I feel a placid contentment with things in general, but once in a while a sort of fever stirs my blood, and I long to get out and rough it somewhere. I tell you, a wild life has a certain charm about it that dies out reluctantly when the fever once gets into a man's blood. Some day I really believe I'll return to Africa, or some other wild land, for big game. I should enjoy it."

Chutney grasped his hand.

"When you do, old fellow, I'm with you," he said. But so far they have not decided on any definite arrangements. They talk it over frequently, but continue to dine at the club.

Sometimes Forbes drops in, and then from soup to the wine the conversation is sure to cling with unwavering fidelity to that topic of deepest interest—the strange and thrilling things that befell them when they were under Africa. 296

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes

1. This text appeared under several titles:
 - as "Under Africa; or, The Strange Manuscript of the White Slave" *The Argosy* No. 398-411, 19 Jul-18 Oct, 1890
 - as "The River of Darkness." *The Argosy*, May-Nov, 1897

- as "The Underground River. A Tale of Wonderful Adventure in Africa," n.d. (c. 1900). London: James Henderson, "Budget" Story Books No. 603.
 - as "The River of Darkness; or, Under Africa" Chicago: Thompson & Thomas, 1902
 - as "Guy in the Jungle; or, A Boy's Adventure in the Wilds of Africa," Chicago: M.A. Donohue & Co., n.d. (c. 1903)
2. This etext derived from 1902 Thompson and Thomas edition.
 3. Table of Contents was not present in original edition.
 4. Corrections to the text:
 - p. 36: accident -> accident (delayed by an accident)
 - p. 42: demnostration -> demonstration (hostile demonstration)
 - p. 46: appearedover -> appeared over (suddenly appeared over the sand-hills)
 - p. 55: layind -> laying (laying hold of Sir Arthur)
 - p. 106: "out of reach of these fiends, ages." -> "out of reach of these fiends."
 - p. 113: Arican -> African (The African sun)
 - p. 134: "Must we starve then" -> "Must we starve then?"
 - p. 141: "it seffect" -> "its effect" (declaration had its effect)
 - p. 220: canoe -> raft (raft drifted on through the gloom)
 - p. 226: hurried -> hurried (hurried off at once.)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RIVER OF DARKNESS; OR, UNDER AFRICA ***

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