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Author: Frank Worthington

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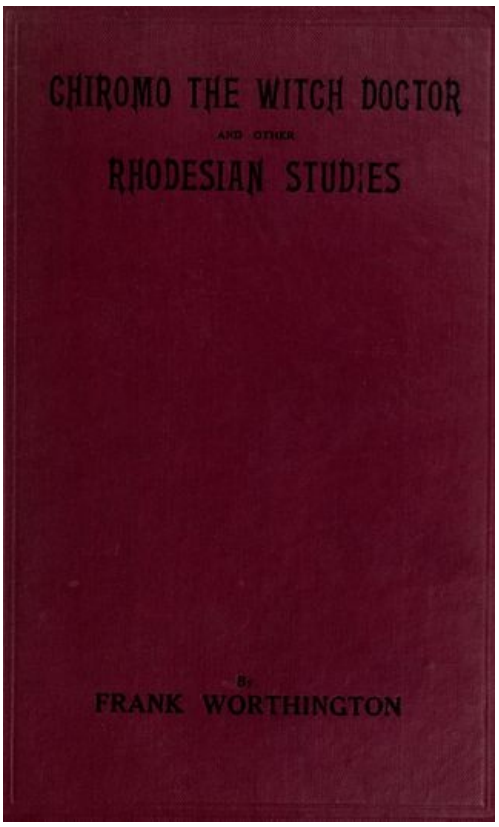
Transcriber's note

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. Spelling has not been standardized (e.g. wagon/waggon) or corrected (beginnng). Close quotes have not been added at the end of paragraphs followed by more dialogue. The title on the cover of the book begins with "Chiromo" unlike on the title page.



THE WITCH DOCTOR AND OTHER RHODESIAN STUDIES.

BY

FRANK WORTHINGTON, C.B.E.

(*Lately Secretary for Native Affairs, Northern Rhodesia*).

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To
MY WIFE.

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I.

The Native Commissioner's Court had, with a very brief interval for luncheon, sat throughout the day. The weather was very hot and thundery, for the breaking of the rains was imminent. A number of cases had been disposed of, and the last was now drawing to a close. Having listened to the arguments of both sides, the Commissioner summed up, gave judgment, and dismissed the litigants, whereupon the native clerk began to collect the papers and put things away.

The official lighted a cigarette, put on his hat, and walked towards the door. He was met by his head messenger.

"Another case, Morena,"[A] said the messenger, pointing to a middle-aged native squatting in the courtyard softly clapping his hands. The hard-worked white man paused; he had thoughts of tea

awaiting him in his bungalow a hundred yards away.

"Tell the man to come to-morrow," he said, and walked off in the direction of his house.

The head messenger turned to the man sitting in the yard and said: "The Morena won't hear you to-day; you must sleep in the compound for to-night; to-morrow he will listen." [Pg 4]

"But my case is a big one," replied the stranger. "The father of his people will surely hear my case."

The messenger pointed to the compound: "All cases are heavy in the hands of those who bring them; the compound is there."

The man was evidently distressed. Raising his voice in the hope that the Commissioner would hear him, he shouted shrilly: "Ma-we! Ma-we! But mine is a big case, it is one of killing—of killing of people; the father of his people must hear me. Oh! Morena, I have a case, a big case, a case of killing."

But the Native Commissioner had reached his house and was out of sight, the native clerk had locked the office door and, heedless of the man's wailing, walked away. If he thought at all, it was that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; evil meaning work to him.

"Come, father," said the head messenger, "I go now to the compound, and you with me; to-morrow the Morena will hear your case before any other. I, Mokorongo, will see to it."

But the man was not to be consoled. "No," said he, "my case is a big one, of people killed by witchcraft; I, too, will die to-night. Take me to the Morena, my father; do not refuse and so kill me."

The messenger felt uncomfortable. For some reason, best known to himself, his master disapproved of the killing of people, and also set his face against witchcraft. No witch doctor could practise for long in his district, for was not his medicine stronger than that of any witch doctor? Did not the doctors know it, and had they not all moved to a safer place? Who, then, could have done this killing by witchcraft? Yes, it was a big case, and he would take the man to his master; but he must break in upon the great man's rest with care, or there would be trouble. [Pg 5]

Telling the stranger to come with him, he strode towards the house, pulling down his uniform in front and behind and settling his fez smartly on his head—evidence of some nervousness. Arriving at the door, he peered in. The hall was cool and dark, and, coming from the glare, for a moment he could see nothing; the next, he was aware of the Commissioner's eye upon him, and started violently at his master's sharp "Well, Mokorongo, what is it?"

He began well: "Morena, here is a man who has killed another, and wants to tell of the matter before the sun sets, when he, too, will die."

"Let the man come to the door."

For Mokorongo the worst was over. He had with impunity disturbed the great man; the rest would be easy. He fitly marshalled the stranger to the mat just inside the hall door, drew himself up to his full height, and stood by to obey immediately such orders as his master might be pleased to give.

The Commissioner, who was a good linguist, addressed the seated man direct:

"So you have killed a man?"

"No, Morena."

"And you will yourself die to-night?"

"No, Morena."

Mokorongo's uneasiness returned; he shifted slightly and gazed at the ceiling.

"Tell me your story."

"Morena, my case is a big one; it is of killing—the killing of people, of my son—by witchcraft. Yesterday at sunset he died, and I, too, shall die to-night unless the Morena, father of his people, makes a stronger medicine, stronger than that of the witch doctor——" Here the wretched fellow paused. [Pg 6]

The Commissioner looked thoughtfully at the man in front of him; it was evident that the native dared not mention the witch doctor's name. Presently he rose, took from a side-table a decanter, poured himself out some whisky, and added soda from a sparklet bottle. Returning to his seat, he drank deeply of the bubbling liquid.

The native was much impressed. Boiling water alone, so far as he knew, bubbled like that; he knew of the ordeal by boiling water, and had, no doubt, seen more than once the test applied. But this white man drank the boiling mixture with evident pleasure. Here, then, was the chief of all witch doctors.

He finished his sentence: "—Chiromo."

"Where does he live?"

He explained in detail.

"Of what do you accuse Chiromo?"

"Of killing my son by witchcraft."

"Go on with your story."

"I have some goats. My son herded them by day and put them in the village at night. My son had a black-and-white dog which followed him to the lands each day. Two days ago the dog stole a skin from Chiromo's bed. Chiromo saw the dog eating the skin, and killed him with his axe. Chiromo is an angry man: he was angry with my son because his dog had eaten his skin. He knew the dog was my son's dog. He went to my son and said: 'I have killed your dog because your dog has eaten my skin.'

"My son was very much afraid and said: 'Yes, sir.'

"Then Chiromo took hold of my son's leg just above the knee, like this, and said: 'Do you feel pain here?' My son said: 'No.' [Pg 7]

"Then Chiromo said: 'You will to-morrow.'

"Then Chiromo took hold of my son's other knee and said: 'Do you feel pain here?' My son said 'No.'

"Then Chiromo took hold of my son's arm at the elbow and said: 'Do you feel pain here?' My son said: 'No.'

"Then Chiromo touched his other arm and asked my son if he felt pain there. My son said he did not. He also touched him on the back of the neck, asking him if he felt any pain there. My son said he felt no pain.

"Then Chiromo said: 'In your two legs and your two arms and in your neck you will feel much pain to-morrow.'

"Then Chiromo went back to his own hut and my son, who was very frightened, came and told me what Chiromo had said to him and I also was frightened, for Chiromo is a great doctor. Then I went to my hut to sleep and my son went to his hut.

"In the morning when I rose the goats were still in the village, and I was angry with my son because he had not taken them to the lands. I called to him, but he did not answer. I went to his hut, and found him very stiff. He told me that Chiromo had killed him; that he had much pain in his arms and legs and neck, and that he could not move. I tried to lift him, but he cried out with pain. At sunset he died. Oh, Morena, Chiromo has killed my son. My son who herded my goats. And to-night I myself shall die. Chiromo is indeed a great doctor. My case is a big one. A case of killing people by witchcraft. I, too, will——"

The Native Commissioner interrupted the man. "Enough, now you may go to the compound, where you will sleep to-night; you will not die, because I must talk with you again." [Pg 8]

The man clapped his hands, bowed his forehead several times to the floor, patted his chest, rose and withdrew, praising the Native Commissioner as the custom is:

"Great Chief."

"Father of his people."

"The very great doctor."

"Sir, my best thanks."

"The Chief of our country."

"The lion, the great elephant, the Chief."

The head messenger was about to go too, but the Commissioner stopped him.

"Mokorongo, you will have to go out and arrest Chiromo."

"To-morrow?"

"To-night."

"His village is far and the sun is setting."

"You will get there before morning and will bring Chiromo back with you."

"How many go with me?"

"You go alone."

The messenger was very much afraid. He licked his lips, which had become dry, he shuffled with his feet, his gaze wandered from ceiling to floor and round the hall in which the Commissioner sat.

"Mokorongo."

"Morena."

"You are afraid."

"I am afraid, Morena."

"Very much afraid."

"Morena."

"Why?"

"Is not Chiromo a doctor?" [Pg 9]

"What of that?"

"I am but a man, your servant."

"Yes, my servant. Why, then, are you afraid?"

"Morena."

Again the wretched man's eyes looked in any direction but in that of his master.

"Mokorongo."

"Morena."

"Are you ready to start? It is getting late."

"Yes, it is late, for the sun sets."

"Are you ready?"

Mokorongo made no reply: he was now quite frightened. In the ordinary way this simple native was full of courage, he would follow his master anywhere; they had been in a tight corner together more than once and he had shown up splendidly. But then his master, in whom he had implicit faith, had been there. To go alone to arrest a witch doctor was quite another matter. Had not the doctor killed the boy in a strange way? No, it was too much to ask a man to do alone, and at night.

The Commissioner walked to his writing table and took from it a heavy paperweight, which he handed to Mokorongo.

"Take this with you, it will protect you against Chiromo, for it is mine."

The messenger was satisfied; he put the weight inside his tunic and turned to go.

"Stop," said the Commissioner, "what are your plans?"

Mokorongo had a quick mind: he unfolded his plan without hesitation.

"I will talk awhile with the stranger, who will tell me of Chiromo; whether he has a beard or has no beard; whether he is very old or not so old; if he is fat or thin; what his loin cloth is like, or if [Pg 10] he wears a skin."

"Good, and then?"

"I will travel to the village, which I shall reach before morning. In the bush I will hide my uniform. Near the village I will lie in wait. In the morning Chiromo will come out of his hut. All day I will watch and when the people have eaten and sleep I will arrest Chiromo."

"How?"

"I will go to his hut and call to him, saying that I am a traveller from Sijoba on my way to Katora. That the sun has set and I ask for shelter. I shall tell him that I have some meat of a buck which I found dead near the path. Then Chiromo will open the door of his hut and I shall tie him. And he will come with me because of my uniform and the people will not hinder me because of my uniform."

"Good, take the handcuffs. But there is one thing you have forgotten. You must bring in a basket all Chiromo's medicine."

"I will bring the medicine," replied the messenger, clutching at the paperweight which bulged under his tunic.

"Go safely," said the master.

"Rest in peace," replied the man.

The Commissioner watched the retreating figure. The swinging stride showed self-confidence and courage. Mokorongo would do successfully what was required of him.

II.

The dawn was breaking. It had rained all night and the ground was very wet. When the first rain

falls the earth is slow in absorbing it. Little puddles form everywhere and little streams, [Pg 11] increasing in volume as they join others, make small lakes or rushing torrents, according to the lie of the land.

Mokorongo was not comfortable. He had travelled far in the night and had stumbled many times in the darkness. Moreover, he was drenched to the skin and very cold. The paperweight consoled him, as it had kept up his courage throughout his long journey. He remembered now the cry of a hyena close to the path at midnight, which had sent his hand clutching at the paperweight. Then some large, dark object stirred beside him and bounded away, crashing through the bush. Mokorongo's heart had thumped in time to the heavy hoof-beats.

However, the dawn had come and his talisman had proved itself a sure shield and protection.

The messenger took off his sodden tunic and drew it over his shoulders as a cloak against the wind which always heralds the coming day. He replaced the paperweight inside his shirt, and buckling on his belt again sat down on his heels to watch the village.

Presently smoke arose from the yard of one of the huts, then from another. A man came out of a low doorway, stretched and yawned. A dog barked, the cattle began to low and fowls to cluck—the day had come.

He had chosen his observation post well. In front of him lay the village in a hollow. Behind him, a patch of thick bush. To his left ran the path to the cultivated lands and to the next village. On his right was a stretch of rough country, good only for baboons and other beasts: it was unlikely that he would be disturbed from that or any other quarter.

The village soon showed signs of full life. When the sun came out Mokorongo stripped and spread out his tunic, shirt and loin cloth to dry, placing the paperweight and handcuffs on a little tuft of [Pg 12] short grass which was comparatively dry.

As the sun crept up the sky, Mokorongo's back was warmed and he felt more comfortable. He watched the coming and going of men, women and children until midday. He had easily recognised Chiromo. The father of the dead boy had described the witch doctor minutely, but even without that description he would have picked him out. He was fat and looked prosperous; some half-dozen inflated gall bladders of small mammals were tied to tufts of his hair. He wore chillies in the lobes of his ears, a sure sign that he had killed a lion—or a man.

His hut, too, was larger than the rest and stood slightly apart. Yes, this surely was Chiromo; did he not wear, suspended from a string round his waist, the skin of a black tsipa cat? And had not the case-bearer of yesterday said: "Chiromo has the skin of a black tsipa?"

Yes, Mokorongo was sure of his man, and as the sun was now hot he gathered together his belongings and carried them into the shade of the thicket, where he settled himself for a sleep.

At sunset he awoke. He felt hungry and thirsty, but as there were no means of satisfying either he turned his mind to the work immediately ahead.

He crept back to his original post. The cattle were being kraaled; the goats were already settled for the night; women were preparing the evening meal.

Mokorongo slipped on his tunic shirt and loin cloth and buckled his belt. He put on his fez and tucked the paperweight inside his tunic. He then made sure that the handcuffs snapped as they should and that no amount of tugging would open them; having reset them he put the key in the [Pg 13] small pouch attached to his belt.

There is little twilight in Africa. Soon after the sun sets it is dark. He could see Chiromo's fire and, in the glow of it, Chiromo sitting on a low stool.

Presently the night sounds began. Someone was beating a drum at a distant village. A jackal barked far down the valley. Something rustled in a bush near by. The frogs set up their shrill chorus. A dog in the village began to howl, but stopped with a yelp as some woman threw a stick at it.

After a while the fires burnt down; there was silence, and Mokorongo judged that the time for action had arrived.

He came down from the high ground and skirted the village until he came to the path from Sijoba. Then he turned and walked boldly towards the cluster of huts. The dogs began to bark loudly but it didn't matter now: was he not a stranger travelling from Sijoba to Katora?

He made his way to Chiromo's hut. The door was closed. Mokorongo knocked.

"Who is it?"

"A stranger travelling from Sijoba to Katora."

"It is late, what do you want?"

"Yes, it is late. I ask for shelter for the night. I am in luck, for I have found meat and I ask shelter of a friend."

There was a stir in the hut and the word meat was repeated several times.

Mokorongo stood ready with the open handcuffs. Would the man never come out? Meanwhile the occupants of adjacent huts were also astir and doors were being opened. There would be many witnesses to the arrest of Chiromo. [Pg 14]

At length the door of the hut slid aside, a hand grasped either door post and a woolly head appeared. Quick as lightning Mokorongo seized Chiromo's right wrist and snapped the lock of the handcuff. Grasping the black head, he pulled the startled Chiromo out of the doorway, and before the witch doctor had recovered from his surprise, also secured his left hand.

Mokorongo stepped back and surveyed his captive.

Chiromo said nothing, but the look in his eye made Mokorongo's hand fly to the paperweight. The village was astir, and men came running, but, seeing the uniform of authority, stood still.

Mokorongo was himself again. "What is this?" demanded Chiromo.

"The Morena calls you."

"What for?"

"How should I know the Morena's thoughts?"

"Loose my hands or ill-luck will come to you."

Mokorongo said nothing.

"Listen," said Chiromo.

Mokorongo listened and heard the laugh of a hyena.

"That," said Chiromo, "is a spirit."

Mokorongo clutched his paperweight: "It is a beast, and my master's medicine is strong."

Chiromo looked round at the circle of fellow villagers; he could not see their eyes, but felt that no help might be expected from them; they would not come between him and a Government man.

Chiromo tried again.

"In my hut I have much white man's money and a gun—all are yours if you will untie my hands; moreover, the iron hurts me and the Morena's orders are that no man be hurt." [Pg 15]

The mention of the money and the gun reminded Mokorongo of the medicine.

"Go in," he said, pushing Chiromo before him.

It is well that Mokorongo had the paperweight to support his courage.

III.

A fire smouldered in a circular hearth in the middle of the floor, but the light from it was so dim that nothing more was visible. Mokorongo, kneeling deftly, drew together the unburnt sticks and blew upon the pile; the suddenness with which it burst into flame startled him. Then he rose and looked round the hut.

Chiromo had walked over to his bed; he now sat watching.

The blackened walls were profusely decorated with rude drawings, done in light clay, of men and beasts, with here and there a pattern such as one sees on primitive earthenware vessels. From the roof, suspended by a length of plaited bark, dangled the skull of a human being. Mokorongo had seen many human skulls in his time, but, in such a place, this ghastly human relic unnerved him a little. The skull spun slightly with the air current which entered the open door, and ghostly eyes seemed to peer from the empty sockets, first at one man, then at the other, as if the lifeless thing were taking a lively interest in the situation.

Mokorongo pretended to scratch himself; what he really did was to shift the paperweight until it rested under his left arm. In that position he could press it to him without being noticed. The relief it brought was great and lasting. [Pg 16]

From a peg in the wall hung a mummified mass of what looked suspiciously like entrails; whether human or not the messenger did not pause to consider. The fleshless forearm and hand of a child protruded from the thatch; the fingers were spread out as in the act of grasping. A pile of mouldering skins lay on the floor, and beside it a little heap of dead chameleons; one, more lately killed than the rest, contributed generously to the evil smell which pervaded the hut. Just above this carrion was a cluster of black and red weevils as large as mice; they hung from a porcupine quill, each tied to it by a thin strand of twisted sinew. The aimless movements of legs showed that some of the insects were still alive. Here and there, propped against the wall, were gourds and pots filled, no doubt, with strange nauseous mixtures brewed by the witch doctor for his evil purposes.

Well-worn clothing and filthy rags hung from pegs thrust into the thatch where the roof of the hut rested on the mud wall. The bleeding head and slimy skin of a freshly killed goat lay on the floor at the foot of the bed. Just beyond it was a large basket covered loosely with a leopard skin;

Mokorongo made a mental note of this.

If Chiromo expected his guard to show any sign of fear, he was disappointed. Mokorongo drew a small stool towards him, and sat down; with the exception of the bed, it was the only furniture in the hut.

The witch doctor was the first to speak:

"The gun is yours, father, and the money, when you untie my hands so that I may get them for you."

"I have two guns in my village," replied the messenger, "and I also have much money, for as I am a servant of the Government, I pay no tax." [Pg 17]

"Can a man have too much money or too many guns?"

"I cannot say; but, as for me, I have enough."

"How many wives have you?" asked Chiromo.

The messenger did not answer. Such talk did not trouble him. He was a simple African, whose one desire was to please his master; he was proof against bribery in any form.

Chiromo tried other tactics.

"Yesterday, they say, I killed a man by charms. It is said also that many men have died by poison. People fall sick, some say, when I think of them in anger. It well may be that your master has fallen sick, for my anger is strong towards him, and is rising against his servant, who has tied me."

Mokorongo hugged the talisman, but did not reply. He glanced at the skull which at that moment swung towards him, then at the hand which, in the flicker of the firelight, seemed to reach out to grasp at him. He looked at the chameleons, and spat on the floor as he became aware of the stench arising from them; next, the aimless waving of the weevils' legs attracted his attention, and then his glance rested on the basket covered with the leopard skin.

Chiromo was about to speak again, but Mokorongo, springing to his feet, interrupted him. His master had said: "Bring Chiromo back with you, and bring his medicines." The basket must hold those medicines; moreover, the prospect of listening to Chiromo until the morning, seated in the midst of his evil properties, was unthinkable. He would feel more at his ease walking through the night, although it was so dark and cold.

He went to the door and called. There was no reply. The village was full of people, but they had a very real fear of what the witch doctor might do. All had crept back to their huts. He called again, [Pg 18] and in the name of the Government, but still none came.

He shouted, that the whole village might hear: "I take Chiromo to our Chief. Bring a rope, that I may tie him and lead him through the night."

Presently a woman appeared, bringing in her hand a stout rope such as all natives use for trapping antelope. She handed it to Mokorongo, volunteering the information that it was her son whom Chiromo had killed. She did not actually say that he had been killed, neither did she mention Chiromo's name—she dared not do this—but she did say that before sunrise her son had been buried.

Mokorongo tied a slip-knot in the rope and passed it over Chiromo's head. A sharp tug, accompanied by a peremptory "Stand, you!" brought Chiromo quickly to his feet.

Indicating successively the horrors hanging from the roof and walls, he said: "Put that, and this, and those into the basket."

Chiromo hesitated, but only for a moment; a tightening rope round one's neck has an unpleasant feeling. With his manacled hands he picked up each repulsive thing and thrust it into the basket.

"Bring the basket," Mokorongo commanded, moving towards the door. Outside in the black night, and conscious of the paperweight under his arm, the messenger's full courage and sense of authority returned to him.

"Let all witnesses to this big case follow quickly to the Court; it is the order of the Chief and the law of the Government."

Then, helping Chiromo to encircle the basket with his arms, he strode off down the path leading from the village, his captive, securely handcuffed and led by the rope round his neck, following [Pg 19] tamely enough.

IV.

The witnesses were many—of all ages and of both sexes. The case promised to be a famous one, so relations and friends had come from the villages round about to attend. The people had travelled slowly, consequently it was late in the afternoon when they arrived.

The Native Commissioner had decided to take evidence on the morrow; the people were

therefore directed to camp by the river for the night. Chiromo was to remain in the cell to which he had been conducted earlier in the day by the messenger.

Mokorongo was very happy. He had presented himself to his master on arrival, returned the paperweight, reported the arrest of Chiromo, and had handed over the basket of medicines. He would have told his story then and there, but the Commissioner, who was busy, dismissed him with "Good, now go and eat and sleep. You can return at sundown and tell me everything. I will listen to the witnesses to-morrow."

But, of course, Mokorongo did not sleep. He felt a hero, and was so regarded by his fellow messengers and others. He told the story of his adventures to all who cared to hear, and they were many. Little work was done that day by any native on the Station.

With much telling the story improved almost beyond recognition. For instance, his seventh audience was thrilled by the recitation of the threatening words which the skull had addressed to him; knots of woolly hair rose when the efforts of the fleshless hand to grasp the master's talisman were described; the brave words which Mokorongo had addressed to the basket of [Pg 20] medicines when it had shown an inclination to escape by the door drew grunts of admiration; a shudder ran through his hearers when he repeated what the dead chameleons had related to him —how they had once been men, until transformed and killed by the very bad man now under arrest.

The narrative was interrupted by one of the house-boys: "You are called," was the curt command, meaning that his master wished to see Mokorongo.

Under the stimulus of the great admiration of his fellows, generously expressed, Mokorongo had given free play to his imagination. His narrative had become thrilling; but now, under the cold eye of the master, fancy fled, and the messenger's account of himself conformed to the court formula—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

How Chiromo passed the night cannot, of course, be told. He might have spent the time preparing his defence; it is much more likely that he simply slept.

V.

Everything was ready for the hearing of the case. On the veranda of the Court House the Commissioner's table had been placed. Conspicuous upon it was the paperweight. On the ground in front of it lay the witch doctor's basket with its leopard skin covering. On the right sat Chiromo; he was still handcuffed, but without the rope round his neck. By his side stood Mokorongo. Immediately behind them were ranged the rest of the messengers attached to the Station. They, with the Court House, formed two sides of a square: the figure was completed by the crowd of witnesses seated on the ground.

Presently the Commissioner was seen approaching along the path which led from his house. The [Pg 21] people began to clap their hands, which, in certain parts of Africa, is the native way of showing respect. As the Commissioner appeared on the verandah, the messengers saluted him by raising their right hands above their heads and ejaculating "Morena."

The Commissioner nodded by way of acknowledgment, the people ceased to clap; there was dead silence.

The white man looked across his table at the witch doctor. For a time he said nothing. Chiromo blinked and looked away. Glancing up and finding that unpleasantly steady gaze upon him still, he again looked quickly away.

"Unlock those handcuffs," said the Commissioner. Mokorongo produced the key from the pouch on his belt and freed the witch doctor's hands.

Addressing Chiromo, the official asked: "Is it true that you are the killer of people?"

"It is not true," replied Chiromo.

"Can you kill people by means of charms and medicines?"

Chiromo said he could not.

"Is that your basket?"

"Yes, it is my basket."

"What is in the basket?"

"I do not know."

"Are not the things in the basket yours?"

"No, they are your messenger's; he put them in my basket."

Mokorongo was indignant at the lie. The witnesses, too, were amazed at Chiromo's effrontery. But none spoke.

"Take the things out of the basket one by one and place them on the ground in front of you." [Pg 22]

The witch doctor without hesitation began to do as he was bid. The skull, the arm, the weevils as large as mice, the chameleons, the stale offal: these Mokorongo had seen in the hut, but there were other things he had not seen. A necklet of human teeth, another of small antelope horns, yet another of rats' skulls. These were followed by the shell of a very small tortoise, a bush buck's horn containing a reddish-coloured paste, four discs of ivory strangely carved, commonly known as "witch doctor's bones," a small piece of looking-glass, a dozen or more little bundles of something tied up in scraps of rag, a piece of red clay, a length of snake's skin, several cartridge cases plugged with pieces of wood, the sun-dried paw of a monkey, the beaks of several birds, a feather ball or two, another set of "bones," a small knife with a wooden sheath, a little gourd covered with beads, some charms of various sizes and shapes to wear round the neck or wrist. There were many other bits of rubbish which, at a sign from his master, Mokorongo emptied out on the ground.

Under the direction of the Commissioner, Chiromo's possessions were separated into two heaps. The skull, the arm, the offal, and anything else of which there was only a single specimen, made one heap. The chameleons, and anything of which there were more than one, were carefully divided, half placed on one heap and the remainder on the other.

"None of these things are yours?" asked the Commissioner.

"None, save the leopard skin," said Chiromo.

"Those I shall want later on," said the Commissioner, pointing to the larger heap, "the rest you shall burn."

The witch doctor collected some dry grass, and some twigs and some larger sticks. The [Pg 23] Commissioner produced a box of matches. Mokorongo lit the grass. The twigs crackled, the sticks caught fire and burned brightly.

"Put those things on the fire," said the Commissioner, pointing to the smaller of the two heaps.

Chiromo paused and looked round at the witnesses in a strange manner. As his eyes sought out those of each witness ranged against him, his personality made itself felt. Men quailed, women covered their faces, and children cried lustily. The witch doctor pointed suddenly to the sky, then at the ground, and then at the witnesses. Picking up a chameleon he dangled it over the flame; he did not drop it in the fire, but looked round again with a malignant grin. This was more than the witnesses could stand; they bolted as fast as their legs could carry them. Something dreadful was about to happen. When doctors engaged in a trial of strength, ordinary men were better out of the way. The messengers alone stood fast. They kept their eyes on Mokorongo who, in turn, watched the Commissioner.

"Bring back the headman," thundered the Commissioner; "two of you will do," as all the messengers started off.

The headman of the village in which Chiromo lived was quickly brought back, and stood, covering his eyes with his hands.

"Now go on with the burning," ordered the Commissioner.

The tone of authority was unmistakable, so Chiromo complied without further ado.

One by one the medicines, necklets, charms and other rubbish were dropped into the fire. After a while, the headman removed his hands from his face. It was evident that the white man was the [Pg 24] stronger doctor of the two. Chiromo had looked very bad, it was true, but he had been able to do nothing. One by one the witnesses crept back and took their seats.

The Commissioner then sent for one of his house-boys and gave him an order in an undertone. The boy presently returned, carrying a carpet slipper.

"Hold Chiromo face downwards on the ground," said the Commissioner. The messengers obeyed. "Now, Mokorongo, beat him."

And Mokorongo did so, in the manner of a mother chastising her child—but rather harder.

Chiromo squealed, promising loudly never to offend again. Then someone laughed, then another and another; presently all were laughing—with the exception of Chiromo—even the Commissioner smiled: Mokorongo stopped beating and laughed too.

The messengers released their hold on Chiromo, who got up rubbing a certain portion of his anatomy. Everybody laughed again.

Laughter at a man kills faith in him. The spell was broken. From that day forward this witch doctor, once powerful in hypnotic suggestion, was as other men.

"And now," said the Commissioner, "we will hear the evidence."

The preliminary examination in the case of Rex v. Chiromo then began.

THE RIDDLE OF LIFE AND DEATH. [Pg 25]

Of the many curios which I acquired during my twenty-five years' residence in Africa, there is one which I value above all others. I bought it a few weeks before I left the country. It is a round wooden pot with a lid to it. On the lid is the seated figure of a little old man with his shoulders hunched up, his chin resting in his two hands, his elbows on his knees. There is a mildly amused expression on the rudely carved face; whether this is there by accident or design I cannot say. On one side of the pot is a snake in relief; on the other, a tortoise.

I bought this pot from a very old native. So old was he that his scanty knots of hair were quite white and his eyes were very dim. He must have been a fine enough man once, but now his dull, greyish-black skin clung in folds about his gaunt frame. I paid the old man the modest price he named, and asked him the meaning of the figures on the lid and sides of the pot.

The following is his explanation, given in short, jerky sentences, done into English as literally as our language will permit:

"Yes, it was a long time ago. So long ago was it that no white man had then come to this country. It was before my father's day. Before that even of his father. Both died old men. Yes, so long ago [Pg 26] was it, that only the old people now speak of those past times. It was when men did not grow old and die. There was no death then; all men lived on, and happily.

"One day all this was changed. God became angry—that is God on the lid of the pot. What foolish things men did to make God angry, I do not know. He must have been very angry. In his anger God sent His messenger of death to men. He sent His messenger, the snake. Then people began to die—that is the snake on the side of the pot.

"So many people died that all became frightened. They thought all would soon be dead. In their fear they cried to God. They said they were sorry for their foolish act, whatever that might have been. They promised they would anger Him no more. They begged Him to recall His messenger, the snake.

"After a while God agreed. He said He would recall His messenger, the snake. He would send another messenger—that is the second messenger on the other side of the pot. God sent the tortoise to recall the snake."

The old man paused and mused for a little while, and then resumed:

"When I was a young man I thought to myself, perhaps the tortoise will overtake the snake; that some day he will deliver God's message. I am an old man now. I do not think the tortoise will ever overtake the snake—at least, not in my time."

He said all this without a trace of emotion. He was too much of a philosopher, it seemed, to indulge in anything so profitless as self-pity.

"Do you kill snakes when you see them?" I asked.

"No," said he. "Why should I? But I do kill tortoises. The tortoise is very lazy. He runs with his [Pg 27] message so slowly. Moreover, a tortoise is good meat."

Having told his story and pouched the price of his pot, the old man rose painfully and hobbled away. Just outside my compound gate he paused and made a vicious stab at something in a patch of grass.

Shouldering his assegai, he passed on his way, a writhing tortoise impaled upon the blade.

FLATTERY. [Pg 28]

I.

Robert Gregory was proud of his house. A Colonial Bishop, passing through on his way to England, stayed with Gregory; in his bread-and-butter letter he wrote:

"... I think your house the most beautiful and unique in Central Africa...."

Unique perhaps it was, but scarcely beautiful.

When all is said and done, it was merely the ordinary bungalow of which one finds examples all over Africa. In size it was very modest, having only a hall, with a dining-room on one side and a bedroom on the other. There were in addition various excrescences, termed locally "lean-to's." One of these was a pantry, another a storeroom, a third a bathroom, and so on. No, it must have been to the interior decorations that the Bishop referred.

Gregory hoped to marry when next he went to England. During his last visit to the old country, on leave, he became engaged.

The woman of his choice had once remarked to him: "I do hope you have heaps and heaps of

curios." [Pg 29]

On his return to Africa Gregory began to collect curios, and now he had indeed "heaps and heaps" of them. You see, he had his excuses.

On the walls of the hall were trophies of assegais and shields. These trophies were arranged in the approved armoury manner; that is to say, a shield in the centre with assegai blades radiating from it in all directions.

Flanking each of the principal trophies were lesser ones, composed of battle-axes in groups of two or three. These battle-axes were murderous-looking things. The heads of some were crescent-shaped, others were merely wedges of metal.

In the intervening spaces were a variety of knives remarkable chiefly for their sheaths, which were curiously shaped and carved. There was a dado, too, round the wall, made of arrows arranged head downwards towards the floor. These were surmounted by bows fixed horizontally to the wall; they completed the dado, as it were.

On the other two sides ancient guns of various makes and ages took the place of the arrows. There were flint locks, Tower muskets, Portuguese, French and German smooth-bore rifles, gaily decorated by native owners with bands of highly polished copper round the barrel and brass-headed nails driven into the stock.

On a shelf, which ran round the hall a few feet from the ceiling, were specimens of native pottery. Some were highly coloured, others dull red. All had curious patterns scratched on them, done before baking, and most of them bore fire marks and other evidence that their makers were somewhat lacking in the potter's skill. The shapes, however, were pleasing. [Pg 30]

The dining-room held a miscellaneous collection. The principal objects were musical instruments, chiefly of the harmonica variety, strips of hard wood suspended over gourds of different sizes. In the bad old days human skulls were used in place of gourds. But there were many others, both string and wind instruments, and some rattles.

In this room was also a collection of snuff boxes; nearly all of them were minute gourds, differing one from another in decoration. Some were completely covered with gaily coloured beads affixed cunningly and in pleasing patterns. Some were banded with beads, which gave them the appearance of small school globes. Others, again, were simply carved in relief, whilst a few were decorated with plaited brass, copper, or iron wire. All were very neatly made.

Occupying a space between a window and a door was a unique collection of snuff spoons. These were nearly all made of bright metal. Not only do the natives use them for taking snuff, but also for preparing to take snuff and for recovering after snuffing. To be quite plain, they use them as our snuff-taking ancestors used their bandannas. They have yet a third use, namely, scraping the skin on a hot day.

The only reason why Gregory had so many of these nasty little implements was that they were so neatly made and in such diversity of pattern.

In the spaces usually occupied by pictures were specimens of the native weavers' art, very highly coloured cloths of coarse texture. On shelves over the doors and windows of his dining-room were pots, mugs, bowls, and platters of carved wood. The patterns were curiously like those one finds on early pottery dug up in such quantities and in so many spots along the shores of the Mediterranean. A kaross or skin blanket was thrown over the back of almost every chair and [Pg 31] covered the one settee.

There was hardly anything of European manufacture in the hall and dining-room. Even the tables and chairs were native made and of country timber. In place of carpets, the floors were covered with rush and reed mats ornamented with strange patterns done in brightly dyed bark and fibre.

The bedroom alone held nothing but European furniture.

The collection was certainly a remarkable one—I have not attempted a complete inventory—and Gregory had taken great pains to arrange it, as some would say, artistically.

One day five natives arrived carrying a letter addressed to Gregory. It was from a woman, Chief in her own right. It ran as follows:

APRIL.

MY FRIEND,

I send to you my servant Siadiadiadi with four others. As I cannot come to you myself I send my five people. I have heard much of your fine house and wish to see it. As I am old I send my people that they may see it and bring me word of it. I ask you to let them see it for three days, and on the fourth they shall return to me.

I am well and all my people are well, but the cattle have a disease. I hope you are well.

I must close my letter now with greetings.

Your faithful friend,

MOVANA.

Written by interpreter Jacob Mazuni.

I believe Gregory was pleased: at any rate he permitted the messengers to see his house. For the full three days they stayed. He often found them agape in the hall or in the dining room, taking mental notes. It was clear that the five natives were much impressed. Whenever Gregory entered the house, they saluted him and crept silently out. There was no reason to guard against theft; [Pg 32] uncivilised natives do not steal.

On the fourth day Siadiadiadi and his companions thanked Gregory in the name of their mistress and went away.

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see oorsel's as ithers see us!
It wad frae monie a blunder free us
And foolish notion.

II.

Some six months later Gregory, travelling to the extreme limit of his district, found himself within easy distance of the village occupied by the Chieftainess who had been so curious about his house. He felt inclined to go out of his way to see her. When he was resting at midday a native brought him a letter which helped him to make up his mind to do so.

My Friend,

I hear that you have arrived near to my village. Please come and see my house. I think you will like it. Hoping you are well, with greetings.

Your faithful friend,

Movana.

Written by interpreter Jacob Mazuni. I, too, send greetings.

So Gregory went to see the house.

Outside the village he was met by the usual gathering of elderly headmen, polite and dignified, who led him to the door of their Chief's house.

The house was barnlike, with a high, well-thatched roof.

At the entrance stood the owner. She was very stout and wore a print dress. A red shawl was thrown over her shoulders, and she had a very small straw hat perched on her large, woolly head. Gregory noticed that the hat was very much on one side. Her feet were bare. [Pg 33]

After unusually hearty greetings she led the white man into her house.

When Gregory stepped over the threshold he stopped and stood looking from wall to wall aghast. The old black woman interpreted his open mouth to indicate admiration, wonder. This is what he saw.

On a deal table a complete toilet set. Complete to the extent that it included two of those very intimate pieces of domestic furniture seldom seen outside the shops where toilet ware is sold, and surely never before exhibited with pride by the owner. Hanging awkwardly from a nail in the wall, a slop pail of enamelled iron. This was supported on the one side by a dustpan and brush, on the other by a pair of elastic-sided boots. On each side of this remarkable trophy were pinned two very ordinary coloured pocket handkerchiefs.

On a small corner shelf was a large brown earthenware teapot with the words "Advance Australia" done in raised letters. Four enamelled ware egg cups were its companions.

One wall was devoted exclusively to kitchen utensils; new tin kettles predominated, but almost everything was represented.

Opposite this bright array the wall was literally covered with bedding. The centre piece was a mattress; sheets on one side, blankets on the other, pillows above, bolsters below.

But what shocked Gregory more than anything else was a regular trousseau of feminine underclothing, ranged round the door through which he had entered. He blushed hotly and with difficulty suppressed an impulse to bolt without ceremony.

"What do you think of my house, my friend?" [Pg 34]

"I think it—er—beautiful, the most wonderful in all the world."

"Yes, I thought you would like it. Do you not like the things my people use? For myself, I like the things the white people use. You put the black man's things in your house. I put the white man's things in my house. We are two friends who have the same thoughts. You buy from the people. I buy from the traders. The traders have promised to bring me many more things. My house is not finished yet. After the rains it will be finished, then you must come and see it again."

When Gregory reached his bungalow after his journey he stripped his walls and packed all his curios in boxes. These he despatched to his father in England, who was very pleased with them.

He replaced his curios by the Hundred Best Pictures, framed suitably in fumed oak.

"LIZIZI."

[Pg 35]

I.

The Native Commissioner was hurrying home. It was nearly midday and getting hot. Moreover, he had been on a long journey and was anxious to get back to his bungalow which, for him, meant a measure of civilisation. His garden, his books, prints on the wall, white ducks, fair cooking and no more tinned food for a while, a cool verandah and occasional converse with his fellow officials. At daylight he had left his caravan to follow whilst he pushed on ahead.

His sturdy horse also had thoughts of home for, in spite of the heat, he cantered briskly along the dusty road without any encouragement from his master. Half a mile from the house a short cut skirted a patch of young gum trees and led through the servants' compound to the back door of the bungalow.

The horse, without hesitation and not waiting for direction, took the short cut. As a general rule the Commissioner chose the longer way. He preferred entering his own house by the front door; he had designed and built his home himself and had given much thought to its face and approach, for, who could tell, might he not some day lead an English bride up the winding drive?

[Pg 36]

The Commissioner let the beast have his way: he was amused and, leaning forward, patted his horse's neck.

As he clattered through the compound he caught sight of some of his servants conversing with a stranger. There was nothing remarkable in that, but two things he noticed. One, that his people did not see or hear him until he was almost abreast of them, and secondly, that the stranger, a native from the river district, let him pass without the usual salute.

He rode on and dismounted at the back of the house. A groom took his horse. A small boy opened the door for him and led him through to the front hall. The Commissioner dropped into a chair and, after a short rest, busied himself with getting comfortable.

A shave, followed by a hot bath, a change into "slacks," a light luncheon, and a pipe. Then he attacked his accumulated mail. He had scarcely sorted his home from his official letters—the latter could well wait—when his head house boy came in rather breathless.

"Morena," he said, "what is to-day?"

"What do you mean, the day of the month or of the week, and why do you ask?"

"Oh no," said the boy, "but what is the number of the day?"

"Tuesday the sixth. Why?"

"It is only that I wanted to know, for has not the Morena been absent for a great many days?"

"Well, it's the sixth, Tuesday the sixth of September."

"Thank you, Morena."

The boy withdrew.

The Native Commissioner turned to his letters again. His mother had written pages telling him of his sister's engagement to his oldest friend; his sister wrote more pages about her happiness; his father referred to his younger brother at Oxford, to the engagement just announced, and described the latest strike at some length.

[Pg 37]

Presently he got up and went out to the verandah to stretch his legs. He admired his garden and mentally praised his own cunning in setting it out. The rains had not yet broken but some of the trees were already in new leaf. What a blaze of colour there would be in a few weeks!

"Morena, what day is it to-day?"

Turning, he met the gaze of a garden labourer who, spade in hand, was standing slightly in advance of some half a dozen of his fellows.

"The sixth. But why do you ask?"

"It is because black people do not know how to count, and one day with us is as another."

All returned to their work. A few minutes later the dog boy came with a litter born during his master's absence. They were a likely looking lot and the native took personally the remarks passed upon his charge: he appeared to assume responsibility for their colour, shape and sex.

"Morena, what day is it to-day?"

"Why?"

"See, Morena, I mark each day on a stick; the dogs were born ten days ago."

"Well, it's the sixth."

"Thank you, Morena."

At sundown the cattle came in. The herdsman came up to the house to report that the two calves born whilst his master was away on his journey were heifers, and received a few shillings as a reward for his good management. When bull calves came the cattle herd made many excuses and [Pg 38] neither expected nor received any reward.

"You have done well."

"Thank you, Morena," said the boy, tying the silver in a corner of his loin cloth. "What is the number of the day to-day?"

Now this was the fourth time the question had been asked. What did it mean? Could it mean anything of importance and, if so, what?

But the Commissioner decided in his own mind that his people had some trivial dispute and were appealing to him to settle a knotty point. Still, he felt a little curious as to what that point might be, but knowing natives well, concluded that he would hear about it all in good time.

He asked no question this time but replied simply: "The sixth."

The news of his return spread quickly and several officials dropped in for a "sundowner." Headquarters news, dull and trivial as it usually is, was quickly disposed of. The Browns had gone home on leave, Jones had just come back, and Robinson had passed the law exam very well. A lion had been heard outside the township, and a mad cur had run amok through the compounds and, as a result, several good dogs had been shot and half a dozen natives sent south for treatment.

What sport had the Commissioner had?

On the whole, bad; he had missed a black-maned lion in a patch of bush near the river, and as the beast slipped through to the main forest he didn't bother to follow. He had, however, bagged a small leopard and two full-grown cheetahs. There were plenty of birds and buck about and, oh, yes, he had killed a bad old buffalo bull who nearly turned the tables on him. After listening to [Pg 39] the details of the adventure, the visitors rose to leave.

No, he would not join them at the Club later, he felt tired and was looking forward to a comfortable bed for a change.

The Commissioner dined alone and turned in early.

In the morning he woke with a start. It was late, nearly eight o'clock; what the deuce were his people about?

He jumped out of bed and went to the bath-room. The bath was not set ready. He called to his boy. There was no answer. He slipped on a dressing gown and went to the kitchen. It was empty, the fire was not even lighted. He went back to the house for a pair of slippers and a hat and walked across to the native compound. By this time he was very angry.

To his amazement, the compound was quite empty. On his way back he looked in at the stable. His horses whinnied: they had not been fed, nor had the stable been cleaned. He fed the horses himself and then walked over to the cattle kraal. His half-dozen cows had not been milked.

At that moment the Magistrate came up.

"What's the matter with the natives?"

"I don't know, why?"

"Not a black soul in the township will do a hand's turn."

"Mine aren't here."

"Is there going to be a rising?"

"Certainly not. You people who live in camp are always expecting risings."

"Well, you know best, of course, but the boys refuse to work. They say Lizizi has told them not to."

"Who's Lizizi?" [Pg 40]

"How should I know? I came to ask you that."

"Never heard of him."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know yet. Send some of your people down to me, mine have made themselves scarce."

"Right, but what are you going to do to them?"

"Nothing, of course, except question them."

"I'll send my two house boys down."

"Send your cook as well."

"Why my cook?"

"Because I haven't had my breakfast yet."

"Well, neither have I for that matter."

"Then you had better come with them, we'll have breakfast all right."

The Magistrate went away and the Commissioner returned to his house to dress.

He hated having no bath; he disliked, too, going without breakfast. Discomfort on a journey he thought nothing of, but discomfort in his own home was ridiculous.

When the Commissioner emerged from his room, dressed but unshaven, and in a very bad temper, he found his head native in the hall and the rest of the servants standing on the verandah.

"We wish to speak with you," said the boy.

"I, too, have something to say."

"We cannot work to-day. To-morrow we will work."

"You will work to-day and now."

"No, Morena, we cannot work to-day, to-morrow we will work well."

"Why can't you work to-day?"

"Because Lizizi says we may not work to-day."

"Who's Lizizi?"

"A great doctor." [Pg 41]

"Where is he?" said the Commissioner, looking round.

"No, he is not here, Morena, he lives on the Zambesi. He sent his man with a message yesterday."

"Was that the messenger I saw in the compound?"

"Yes, Morena."

"Where is he?"

"He has gone."

"Where?"

"He did not say where he was going. He told us he must carry the master's messages."

"What are the messages?"

"No man may work for his master to-day."

"What are the others?"

"That is all he said to us."

"Have you eaten this morning?"

"Yes, Morena."

"Then bring breakfast for the Magistrate and me, and quickly."

"But, Morena—"

"Well?"

"I may not work to-day."

"Breakfast is food, not work. Bring it."

"Yes, Morena."

The boy went out. The Commissioner turned to the rest of his servants.

"You won't work to-day?"

The cattle herd answered: "We may not, it is forbidden."

"Who forbids you?"

"Lizizi."

"Who is Lizizi?"

"The great doctor."

"Great?" [Pg 42]

"Yes, Morena. Does he not jump into the river and come out alive on the third day?"

"I should say not, but where does he live?"

"At Minanga, on the Zambesi."

"Go to your work. I will visit this Lizizi. There is some mistake. The messenger is a foolish fellow, he had forgotten his master's words. I will see to it. Tell all the people that I go on a visit to Lizizi. He who does not work now and at once and well will meet with misfortune."

The servants dispersed to their various occupations. Slowly at first, and with evident reluctance; but, hearing that the head boy was busy getting his master's breakfast, they, too, set about their various duties.

When the Magistrate arrived he found everything normal. He had breakfast with the Commissioner. When the meal was over he found his own servants had gone back to his compound. The word had spread abroad that the Commissioner would visit Lizizi and put matters right.

"How did you do it?"

"Just talked to them a little."

"No violence, I hope?"

"Unnecessary."

"What was it all about?"

"I know no more than you, but intend to find out."

In a few hours the Commissioner was on his way to Minanga, on the Zambesi, the home of Lizizi, the great doctor.

II.

All next day, and for several days following, natives might be seen passing south in the direction of Minanga. The curious thing about these flocks of travellers was that they were chiefly [Pg 43] composed of children—little children, from infants in arms to boys and girls of nine or ten, none older. When questioned, the parents would reply simply: "We are called. We are called to Minanga by Lizizi—by Lizizi, the great doctor."

The native servants who worked in the houses of the officials could, or would, give no fuller explanation. "Yes, they are called by Lizizi," was the only answer to all questioning.

In the Club, speculation as to what the Commissioner would do monopolised the conversation. Nearly all the officials wagered on a native rising. The Commandant of Police went about to prepare systematically for an event of this kind.

III.

The Commissioner travelled light and quickly. He, too, passed hordes of natives, mostly children. He, too, learnt that Lizizi called—that Lizizi had apparently mustered all the children of the district. He was now doubly certain that this was no native rebellion, or the children would have been conspicuously absent. He grudged Lizizi this implicit obedience. Two could not run the same country.

At length he approached Minanga. The neighbouring villages were thronged with children. In Minanga itself there were many hundreds. The Commissioner rode to the centre of the village and demanded to be shown Lizizi's hut. He was led up the hill to a single small hut built half-way up the slope. In front of it grew a huge tamarind tree.

"There is Lizizi," said his guide, pointing to an old man sitting on a stool in front of the hut.

The Commissioner watched. A strange performance was going on. A long queue of children was [Pg 44] moving slowly past the seated figure, and as each child was marshalled forward—screaming with fright, for the most part—the old man put his hands on its head.

The Commissioner rode up to the hut. The old man touched the head of the child in front of him with his crossed thumbs; that was all, and the child passed hurriedly on to join a throng, already large, of others who had passed through the ordeal, or whatever it was.

On seeing the Commissioner the old man rose and seated himself on the ground, clapping his hands by way of greeting.

This curious native wore a large pair of spectacles, which gave him a benevolent air. His feet were bare—so, too, was his head—but he was otherwise clothed to the extent of a patched and very dirty shirt and an aged pair of trousers.

"Are you Lizizi?" asked the Commissioner.

"Morena, I am his slave."

"Where is Lizizi?"

"He walked on the water. Then he went to the bottom of the river and stayed there. After three days he came out alive and well. Some people said so who saw him."

"Where is he now?"

"Who can tell?"

"Did you send that message to the servants of the white men, saying that they were not to work?"

"I sent my master's message."

"What are you doing to these children?"

"My master said they must come."

"What for?"

"I put my hands on them, as my master said. Lizizi said: 'Let the children come, the little children, and do not stop them.' And Lizizi said: 'You must work for six days, and on the seventh day you must not do anything.'" [Pg 45]

So that was the explanation. It came to the Commissioner in a flash.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name is Sinyoro."

"You have worked for a white man?"

"Yes, I was with the Mission."

"I thought as much."

"Lizizi" was the nearest this native could get to Jesus. The poor old man was, it transpired, a little mad. He had lived with the missionaries for many years, and had recently asked permission to visit friends on the Zambesi. The head missionary had let him go. As he afterwards explained, he knew the man was a little mad, but quite harmless. They had christened him James—James Sinyoro.

However, James, it seemed, had been trying his prentice hand at missionary work, and had given orders based on the little he remembered of the Mission Bible teaching.

James Sinyoro returned to the Mission Station, and the district to its normal tranquillity.

MIRONDA—A WOMAN. [Pg 46]

The Paramount Chief had many wives. A newly arrived missionary, determined to convert the great man, opened his attack by asking why he had so many wives. The answer was disconcerting: "For political reasons." This matter of the Chief's was a rock upon which all missionary endeavours foundered. The Chief must discard all his wives, save one. The Chief was determined to keep them all.

To another reformer he said: "Leave me alone. Do what you will with the children and young people. Leave me to myself. You have shown me that my beliefs are foolish. You have not proved to me that yours are any wiser."

A third good man, about to transfer his activities to other fields, offered to present the Chief with his bright brass bedstead provided he became a Christian.

"Let me see it," said the old heathen. The bed was produced. "I have a better one. I paid a trader ten head of cattle for it." So no bargain was struck.

I think there must have been some grounds for saying that he clung to his many wives "for political reasons," because they, or at any rate some of them, were more trouble to the Chief than they were perhaps worth. [Pg 47]

There was Mavevana, for instance, who was large and fat and therefore very beautiful from a native point of view, but whose tongue was a constant source of strife without and within the

harem.

I should explain that each wife had her own group of huts. These groups—there were seventeen of them—were surrounded by a high reed fence, strengthened by sharply-pointed poles. The harem was a village within a village. Outside the fence the common people lived.

Each woman had her slaves. A strong guard of fully-armed men patrolled the harem at night. Old Sikoro, the keeper of the harem, was about day and night.

Then there was Mironda. Poor Mironda, who later paid, as women do, be they white, black or yellow.

Mironda was rather nearer to yellow than to black. I think she had some European blood in her. One does not often see a native woman with hazel eyes nor with freckles; and besides, she was very tall and slim.

As a special mark of his good will the Chief once took me through his harem. That is how I first came to see Mironda.

The woman aroused my interest. When we entered her compound she glared at her lord and master as a caged beast does upon free men. She did not for a moment take her eyes off him. She never so much as glanced in my direction. Her eyes caught the light once and reflected it as do those of a cat, a tiger. Yes, that was it, she put me in mind of a caged tiger.

She clasped her hands continuously during our short stay. The click, click, click of her ivory bangles drew my attention to her hands. Her hands and her wrists were very small, her finger nails long and sharp. I noticed her hands particularly because she had solid ivory bangles on each [Pg 48] arm from wrist to elbow. These bangles were very small and, as they were solid, could only pass over very small hands.

I saw this curious woman twice only: the second time was some years later.

As I have said before, old Sikoro was the keeper of the harem. I hated him instinctively the moment I first set eyes on him: I hated him more when I heard the whole story.

Sikoro had only one eye. In his youth he had had smallpox, which pitted his face remorselessly and destroyed one eye. He wore a soldier's red tunic, the colour dimmed with age and dirt. Perched on his head was a tall cone-shaped fur cap which he plucked off whenever he met a superior. He was always plucking it off, not because he was really inferior in the black man's social scale to all he so saluted; on the contrary, in view of his office, he was an important person; he was over polite because he chose to appear humble.

The man knew his power well: his occupation gave him the ear of the Chief. All realized this and were ready to show him the respect which was justly his due: Sikoro was before them in showing respect, which was unnecessary. Men did not understand this humbleness of his and feared him. Sikoro loved their fear.

The woman, Mironda, alone had no fear of him. She despised the man and did not try to hide it. She often refused to see him. It was only utter boredom that induced her to admit him to her compound at all. The truth is he was a great gossip and was the link between the harem and the outer world. Sikoro knew everything, was an authority on everything, and the first to hear all news.

Now this is what befell Mironda. I don't blame her; no one could. I consider her a victim of [Pg 49] circumstances. The old, old story. A young and impulsive woman, an elderly, much married lord, a well-favoured young man. The long and the short of it is that Mironda was in the end divorced; but the manner of that divorce enrages me whenever I think of it.

One morning she was sitting on a mat in the shade thrown by the overhanging thatch of her hut. She was singing in a low voice and threading beads picked with the point of her needle from a wooden bowl held by a small girl slave.

> The father of Mbututu
> Was killed on the sand bank
> Wei ye-i, wei i-ye,
> Wei ye-i, wei i-ye,
> The father of Mbututu
> Was killed on the sand bank
> Wei ye-i, etc.

The monotonous chant in a minor key was interrupted by someone scratching on the reed fence.

"Go," said Mironda to the child, "see who it is."

The child put down the bowl of beads and ran to the fold in the fence which formed the gate. She looked out. A glance was sufficient. She ran back past her mistress and into a far hut, muttering as she went "Ma—we! Ma—we! It is Sikoro!"

Mironda moved uneasily on her mat, then fell to fumbling nervously with the brightly-dyed bark patterns which ornamented it.

Sikoro slouched into the compound, removing his fur cap as he came. Just inside he knelt down

and sat on his heels, placing his cap on the ground beside him. He arranged his voluminous skirts carefully round him and then clapped his hands very respectfully. [Pg 50]

Mironda did not look at him. After a short interval Sikoro broke the silence.

"Good day to you, Morena."

"Yes, good day."

"And has the Chief's wife slept well?"

"She has."

"And the slaves of her house, have they slept well?"

"They have."

"And is the Chief's wife pleased with the new shawl chosen by Sikoro as a gift from the Chief to his wife?"

"It is all right."

Sikoro relapsed into silence and Mironda did not speak. Presently the man got up and, in a crouching attitude, shuffled nearer and sat down as close as possible to the edge of the woman's mat without actually touching it. To touch the mat of the Chief's wife would have been an offence, to come so near to it was studied insolence.

Mironda looked up angrily, met the bloodshot eye of Sikoro and opened her mouth as if to speak. Instead of doing so, however, she looked away and examined the work upon which she had been engaged when the man arrived.

Sikoro grinned and, detaching from his belt a small gourd, emptied some snuff into the palm of his hand.

This was a deliberate insult to the Chief's wife and conclusive evidence to her, if indeed she needed it, that she might now expect the worst.

Sikoro blew his nose unpleasantly and loudly sniffed up the snuff from the palm of his hand. Then, clearing his throat, he said: "Someone has stolen one of the Chief's heifers."

"Eh." [Pg 51]

"A yellow one which the Chief might well have sold to a Jew."

"So."

"It is no great loss to the Chief, as the heifer is barren."

Mironda's eyes blazed with fury; she had no child.

"The thief has been caught."

"What will be done with him?"

Ah! he had aroused her interest at last. Sikoro smiled pleasantly as he said: "He will, of course, be strangled."

"Will not the Missionaries prevent it?"

"The Missionaries? They do not know and may not know for many days, and anyhow, what could they do?"

"The white man's Government will prevent the killing of people."

"No doubt the white man's Government will do many foolish things, but the Magistrate has not yet come."

"He is coming soon."

"But they strangle Miyobo to-day, now."

No name had been mentioned before: indeed it was not necessary even now; Mironda had known Sikoro's errand from the manner of entry into her compound.

The abominable man leant forward and repeated: "Now, now, now," then put his hand to his ear. The woman listened, too, and heard distinctly the shriek and gurgle of a dying man: then silence save for the pattering of slaves' feet and their shrill inquiries and conjectures. Miyobo had been strangled just outside the compound in which the woman sat.

Mironda looked at Sikoro with wide eyes of fear. He, of course, enjoyed the situation. Did he not hate this woman for her overbearing pride? Had not she and Miyobo fooled him more than once, and had it not been the merest chance which had delivered them into his hand? [Pg 52]

His one eye contracted with merriment, a cruel smile lifted his lip and disclosed a row of sharply-filed teeth—the tribal mark of a subject race; he was a freed slave.

Pointing to the bangles on the woman's arm, Sikoro asked: "What are you doing with the Chief's

ivory?"

One by one Mironda took her bangles off and placed them on the mat before her.

"Is not that the Chief's new shawl?"

The wretched woman took the garment from her shoulders and laid it on the mat beside the bangles.

"And why," said Sikoro, "do you sit on the Chief's mat?"

Mironda slowly rose to her feet.

"And is not this the Chief's hut?"

This was the last word, the full sentence of divorce; she, now a common woman, had no right to stand where she stood. She looked hastily round the compound and then walked silently to the gate and so out.

The man gathered up the ivory bangles and tied them in the shawl. He rolled up the mat upon which Mironda had been sitting and tucked it under his arm. Then, spitting contemptuously on the ground, he followed.

Some years later I saw Mironda, clothed in the rags of a slave woman, begging food at the Mission station.

When the wife of the Chief is divorced, her fall is gradual. For a space she becomes the wife of a head man, who presently passes her on to someone lower in the social scale, and so from hand to hand she passes until she becomes the consort of a slave. [Pg 53]

In Mironda's case she first became the wife of Sikoro; surely a no more cruel punishment could have been devised for her. [Pg 54]

MAN AND BEAST. [Pg 55]

[Pg 56]

PROTECTIVE COLOURING. [Pg 57]

Mobita had views on protective colouring. Who is Mobita? Oh, an elephant hunter, a black man; a very good fellow—as black men go. Mobita used to say that elephants, and big and small game generally, could not see black and white. Black they could and white they could, but not a judicious combination of the two. His usual hunting kit was a black hat with a white feather in it, a black waistcoat over a white shirt, a black and white striped loin cloth. His thin arms and legs were dull ebony. There you have Mobita.

Mobita's theory worked very well for a time, but as he had missed an essential he paid the penalty in the end. A zebra is black and white—more or less—and in the bush is practically invisible so long as it stands still. That, then, is the essential adjunct to protective colouring—you must keep still.

This is what happened to Mobita.

Just before the war I was hunting on the edge of the Great Swamp. Early one afternoon, when the day was at its hottest, I heard a shot fired. Later, I met a freshly-wounded tusker and dropped him. I went up to have a look at him, and found dry blood on his ground tusk and a hole behind his near shoulder; someone had just missed his heart. My shot took him in the ear. [Pg 58]

I left some of my men to cut out his tusks, and, out of curiosity, went back along his spoor. I had not far to go. Sitting round a pile of green branches I found a dozen of Mobita's people, looking very glum.

They told me their yarn, which I did not believe until I had had a look round for myself. The spoor told me their story was true enough.

It appears that Mobita had followed the bull since early morning. He got in a moderate shot; the bull saw him and gave chase. The ground was unbroken, with no large ant-hills or big trees to dodge behind. Here and there they went, this way and that, but the tusker kept his eye on Mobita—on his protective colouring, I should think. Then somehow Mobita tripped and fell, and the game was up. The elephant stamped on him, knelt on him, put his tusk through him. Then—and here is the strange part of it all—went from tree to tree picking green branches and piling them up on what was left of Mobita.

Then he moved off and shortly met me.

Did I bury Mobita? Why, no. People came around presently—as natives will when meat is about—and I made them pile stones on him; quite a hill they made. I paid them for their trouble with elephant meat, and handed the tusks to Mobita's men, as the custom is.

Protective colouring is all right, no doubt—if you keep still.

DARWIN—A BIRD.

[Pg 59]

When the railway construction reached to within reasonable distance of my camp, I realised how tired I was of living in a mud hut, and acquired sufficient material from the contractor for a small house. I also asked him to spare one of his carpenters to erect it for me.

The man sent to me was a German named Fritz Kunst. He was not only a carpenter, but a mason, bricklayer, plumber, and painter as well. He was an excellent workman, a member of no union, and intent only on finishing his job quickly and well. I hasten to explain that this was many years before the war.

In build he was very short, almost deformed. His head was abnormally large; so, too, were his hands and feet, especially his feet. He looked upon his feet as his salvation. He was flat-footed, and on that account had never served in the German army. He referred to his feet as, "My goot luck, isn't it?"

I had but one fault to find with him. He was rough with his native servant. The boy sometimes complained to me, and when I remonstrated with Kunst or threatened him with the law he would burst into a flood of tears and offer to pay cash for his lapse. One day the boy complained to me [Pg 60] that Kunst had beaten him severely and without cause. He could, however, show no mark, but I sent for his master and demanded an explanation. Kunst was evidently very angry with the boy, for he shook his fist in his face and bellowed in his coarse, guttural voice: "Zo, you make er tam vool of me, eh? I will your head break. You spoil my money. Gott tam you!"

In broken English, but with considerable fluency and force, Kunst told me the source of his indignation. It appeared that from time to time he commissioned his boy to make small purchases for him—eggs, fowls, milk, fish, and the like. On the previous evening the boy produced a very large egg for which he said he had paid sixpence. As eggs were then never more than sixpence a dozen in that country, Kunst charged him with cheating. The boy explained that the egg was a very large one. It was large—huge, in fact—for a hen's egg, so Kunst did not press the charge, but went to bed, telling the boy to boil it for breakfast next morning.

On the breakfast-table the egg looked larger than ever. It couldn't sit in the tin egg-cup, so lay on the table beside it.

Now Kunst was a greedy man and attacked the egg in the best of good spirits. He tried to crack it in the usual way with a spoon, but without success. He banged it on the table. The shell did crack then, but, to Kunst's indignation, the egg proved to be hard set. Whether he thought parts of it might be good I cannot say, but the German broke open the egg and examined it more closely. He then became very angry indeed, for what he found satisfied him that the egg was not a hen's egg at all. The creature upon which he gazed was three-parts beak and most of the rest was made up [Pg 61] of feet. Kunst had never seen anything like it. In a rage of disappointment he beat the boy. He had so looked forward to eating that very large egg which the boy assured him was a hen's egg. Had not his trusted servant declared that the egg had cost sixpence?

I soothed Kunst's ruffled feelings, and persuaded him to go to his work and forgive the boy.

When I had settled the little differences between the German and the native, I cross-questioned the latter. It transpired that the giant egg was that of a marabout stork which had nested in a tree a few miles away. As one egg still remained in the nest, I told the boy to let a week or two go by, and if by then the egg had hatched out to bring the chick to me.

In due course Darwin arrived. I did not call him Darwin for several weeks; the name occurred to me later. Darwin was the queerest of objects. He was a large ball of fluff based on two very long legs, and surmounted by a huge beak protruding from a bald head. He was wise from birth; it was when I had fully realised how very wise he was that I christened him Darwin.

When he first came to me he made no proper use of his legs. He could not stand erect, but sat awkwardly with his bird equivalent to knees protruding behind and his large feet, with toes spread out, in front. He resembled a downy globe on rails. He crawled about my bungalow almost from the first day I had him. This he managed by sliding first his right hand rail along the floor and then his left, clapping his huge beak after each movement. I suppose I subconsciously accepted this beak clapping as the crooning of a baby bird, for I soon found myself indulging in baby talk with him. [Pg 62]

His appetite was amazing; moreover, he was omnivorous.

When it was neither his meal time nor mine, he would sit on the floor in front of me blinking up at me with wisdom in his eyes. He winked. There is no doubt about it. It was as if he had just remarked: "What you and I don't know isn't worth knowing." I soon dropped the baby talk with

Darwin, and discussed with him Affairs of State.

He grew rapidly. One day I detected a feather. By degrees feathers replaced the down, but the most important sign of Darwin's growing up was when he took his first step. One morning without warning he heaved himself up, and, by using his beak as a third leg, actually stood on his feet. For the space of a full minute he remained in this position, then, suddenly lifting his head, he was erect. For one moment only; then, overbalancing backwards, he fell with a crash full length on the floor. He appeared stunned at first. I picked him up and placed him on his rails again, and there he sat, thinking the matter over. Presently he repeated the manœuvre, but with no better success, falling this time on his "front" as a child would say. Again I gathered him up, and apparently, after mature consideration, he decided that his time for walking had not yet come, for he made no more attempts that day.

About a week later, as if the idea had struck him for the first time, he got up quite suddenly, and coolly walked out of the back door into the yard; he stood there sunning himself, and chattering to and at everybody and everything in sight.

Darwin never looked back. He quickly developed a curiosity as insatiable as his appetite. He became playful, too. He made friends with the dogs, and romped with them. He noticed that the doctor paid a daily visit to the compound, and hid behind the fence in wait for him. As the doctor [Pg 63] sped past on his bicycle, Darwin would shoot out his heavy beak at him. So sure a marksman did the bird become—he always narrowly missed the saddle, but hit the doctor—that the good man complained, and approached the compound by the long way round.

The day arrived when certain puppies had to lose their tails. Darwin took a proper interest in the operation, and gobbled up each tail as it fell. He appeared to like dogs' tails, and went in search of more. He found a nice long one which he tried to swallow, but it happened to be still attached to an elderly greyhound. Poor Darwin met with his first serious rebuff in life; he came to me for sympathy with a large puncture in his beak. The mark of the dog's displeasure was permanent.

When natives came, as they did in hundreds, to sell the produce of their gardens, woods, and streams, Darwin inspected their wares. With a twist of his beak he would filch a pinch of meal from a bowl to see, so the natives declared, whether it was of uniform whiteness throughout. Eggs had to be protected with outstretched arms, so, too, had baskets of little fishes, for he was very partial to them both, and only a very full sample would satisfy him. The natives declared him possessed. Judging by the way he first abused and then assaulted any one of them bold enough to resist his inspection, I think they were right.

I have already mentioned his curiosity. He permitted this defect in his character to carry him too far when he became a common thief. A traveller stayed with me for a few days. In spite of warning, he left the door of his hut open when he came across to the mess hut for breakfast. Darwin entered to inspect. It is surmised that he swallowed my guest's shaving brush and tooth [Pg 64] brush, for they have never been found. It is only surmise, but there was circumstantial evidence to support the charge in the form of the stick of shaving soap which was found on the floor with marks on it which might have been made by the beak of a large bird.

Again, the contents of two boxes of cigars were found scattered far and wide; each cigar had been nipped in half. Darwin was questioned; he looked wise but said nothing. A native witness swore he had seen the accused walking in the yard with the white man's pipe in his mouth. This was a wicked slander, for the white man had that pipe in his pocket, and it was his only one.

The case was not proven, but Darwin left the court without a shred of character.

I have referred to his appetite. One day the cook missed a piece of lamb's neck, weighing probably half a dozen pounds. He couldn't blame the cat, because there wasn't one, so he pointed the finger of accusation at Darwin. The evil bird was sent for. I felt he was guilty, and, although he winked at me for sympathy, I had to say so. Besides, he had not been sufficiently careful to hide the loot; even a professional detective could have recognised the meat by the very large, irregular bulge in the bird's pouch. In places the mutton bones threatened to pierce the thin disguise.

Darwin certainly had his uses. No nasty-smelling scrap could lie undetected for long. His scent was keen and his eye sharp. I never found a snake in the house after Darwin grew up, nor were there many rats about the place.

Once a huge swarm of locusts fell upon us, and all hands turned out to destroy them. Darwin [Pg 65] joined in the fray, and soon we retired and left him to finish the job, as he disposed of thousands to our joint hundreds. His method was simplicity itself. He dashed here, there, and everywhere with his huge beak wide open. Only now and then, and for a moment, did he close it to gulp down what had fallen in.

The doctor, who lived a mile away, did not like Darwin; partly because of his stupid trick of pecking at him as he cycled by, but chiefly because he seemed to know what was going on in the hospital. If an operation was being performed, Darwin could be heard tramping about impatiently on the corrugated iron roof of the building. As the marabout stork mainly lives on carrion scraps, there was, the doctor considered, questionable taste in Darwin's visits.

Alas! Darwin met with a violent death in his early prime.

Like all others of his kind, he grew those beautiful downy feathers so highly prized by women

who dress well. There was a demand throughout the country for the feathers, and many of these delightful and useful birds died at the hands of the natives in consequence.

An operation was going on at the hospital, and Darwin was hurrying thither on foot, as I had recently cut the feathers of one of his wings. In the road he met a strange native, who despatched him with his assegai, stripped him of his feathers, and walked on.

The spoiler soon came up with two of my servants who, on hearing of the man's good luck, as he put it, took him back to the scene of the outrage.

Yes, it was "Da-wi-ni"; was not that the hole in his beak which the angry greyhound made? [Pg 66]

My servants decided that Darwin had been most foully murdered, and acted according to their lights.

It was well that the doctor knew his job. After six anxious weeks the native was so far recovered from the beating as to be pronounced out of danger.

THE LION'S SKIN. [Pg 67]

In the year 1898 Sergeant Johnson, the one with the bright red beard, was sent up country to establish and to remain in charge of the new out-station of Likonga. Likonga, a little-known spot in Central Africa, was, and still is, miles away from civilisation. Sergeant Johnson's command was cut to small dimensions by malaria at headquarters. He had but a corporal and two men. Likonga in those days consisted of nothing but a name on the map, and nothing at all in the way of buildings or anything else to show you when you had got there. The Commandant of Police had dotted vaguely the imperfect sketch map with his pencil, and had instructed Sergeant Johnson to go there. The Sergeant had glanced at the map as it lay on the office table, and had said, "Yes, sir."

"You will take with you Corporal Merton and Privates Hay and Hare. I cannot spare more."

Again the Sergeant said, "Yes, sir."

"You will take rations for ninety days, the small buck waggon, and the black span of oxen."

For the third time Sergeant Johnson said, "Yes, sir."

Now, this man with the bright red beard had been a soldier elsewhere before he became a policeman in the middle of Africa. His old training had not encouraged questions, so he never asked any now. When, therefore, the Commandant of Police glanced up from the map, the Sergeant saluted, turned about, and left the office. [Pg 68]

He wasted no time. He took Corporal Merton, Privates Hay and Hare, the small waggon, ninety days' rations, a span of fourteen black oxen, the Zulu Jacob to drive, and the Kaffir boy "Nine-thirty" to lead.

Just before sundown he pulled out of camp. It is hardly necessary, perhaps, to say that the leader of a waggon is the native who walks in front of the oxen, but it is necessary to explain that a leader of oxen in Africa answers to any name flung at him. This particular one was called "Nine-thirty" because, without any apparent effort, he stood and walked with his feet splayed at what should have been an impossible angle to his legs. If his right big toe pointed east, his left one pointed west, whilst he himself faced north or south, as the case might be.

For seven days the party travelled in a northeasterly direction, Sergeant Johnson spending most of the time on his back on the waggon, Corporal Merton tramping immediately behind, whilst Privates Hay and Hare followed at any distance ranging between a hundred yards and half a mile.

The party was not a cheery one; it might have travelled for yet another day, or even more, had not the Sergeant dropped his looking glass off the tail end of the waggon. He was devoted to his big red beard. While lying on the waggon he spent his time fondling and trimming this beard, smearing vaseline on it and admiring it in his little lead-framed looking glass. [Pg 69]

When, therefore, he dropped his glass, he said: "Damn," and then, more loudly, "This is Likonga; outspan, Jacob!"

The driver shouted "Ah, now!" to the oxen, and the outfit came to a halt.

As a camping place, the spot so casually chosen was not a bad one. There was wood and there was water, good grazing for the cattle, and obviously some game about. Moreover, there were some granite boulders on the left, set round in the form of a rude circle. Under the Sergeant's direction all were soon roughly housed. The cattle had been made secure at night by a skilful reinforcement of the circle of boulders, here a thorn bush and there a few poles. Patrol tents, protected by a straggling fence, satisfied the Sergeant and his men. Jacob spent the day in the

lee of his waggon and the night under it. "Nine-thirty" slept on the other side of the cattle kraal, under the propped-up roof of an abandoned native hut; during the day he herded the cattle. The making of this very primitive out-station occupied less than a couple of days, and then the question, "What the devil shall we do now?" fell upon the party like a blight.

But, as is so often the case, the devil decided.

All had turned in for the night. The Sergeant had taken a last look at his beard. Corporal Merton had read something of Kipling's. Private Hay, after a long-winded argument with Private Hare, in which neither seemed to gain advantage, had told his adversary to go to hell. Private Hare had found satisfaction in saying, "Ditto, brother." Jacob had retired under his waggon, and, like most natives, fell asleep immediately, with his head well covered by his blanket.

The leader with the silly name, alone of all the party, remained awake in his solitude on the other side of the cattle kraal. His evening meal of maize porridge was bubbling in his small cooking pot, perched on a handful of embers. He was playing a minute native "piano," a trumpery, tinkling thing, made of half a gourd, a strip of hard wood, with a few tongues of metal affixed to it. [Pg 70]

The tinkle, tinkle, tink, tink; tinkle, tinkle, tink, tink, sounded very plaintive and lonely in Africa's wide expanse. The boy was singing, too—if his wail could be called singing.

The crocodile,
Floating near the bank,
Sleeps in the river.
Tinkle, tinkle, tink, tink.
The fish,
Floating on the water,
Sleeps in the river.
Tinkle, tinkle, tink, tink.
The hippopotamus,
Floating in mid-stream,
Sleeps in the river.
Tinkle, tinkle,...

The music stopped. Africa was deadly still, save for the croaking of a frog.

"Nine-thirty" sat motionless, looking straight before him, out beyond his little fire. Immediately opposite stood a large, black-maned lion. The pair faced each other, a yard or so apart. The only movement was the lion's tail, which switched from side to side. The huge beast looked steadily at "Nine-thirty," who, full of fear, stared back at the lion.

Where life and death are concerned, things happen very suddenly. The lion took one step forward and seized "Nine-thirty" by the knee. The boy reached for his assegai and plunged it into the lion's ribs.

The Sergeant heard the cry and a roar of pain in his sleep, and woke up to fumble with his beard. Corporal Merton, from an interrupted dream, cried out: "Halt! Who goes there?" Private Hay, if awake, said nothing, whilst his companion in arms muttered: "What's up?" Jacob answered from under his blanket: "It's a lion, master, and he has killed my leader." At any rate, it was certain something serious had happened. A lion, uncomfortably close, was making such a din that the leaves of the trees near by seemed to flutter, and "Nine-thirty" was moaning on the other side of the cattle kraal. [Pg 71]

"Stand to arms!" commanded the Sergeant.

All tumbled out of their blankets, rifle in hand, shirttails flapping in the night wind. They were not cowards, neither were they fools. The four listened to the sound of a lion growling and retreating as he growled. The moaning came from one place, so it was evident that Nine-thirty was for the moment safe. Then, hastily lighting a lantern, the policemen picked their way round the cattle kraal to Nine-thirty's little fire. The Sergeant knew something of first aid. He lifted the mauled native carefully and carried him back to the waggon. The boy's knee was in a bad state—the joint was crushed. A "tot" of brandy, a thorough wash of the wound, a bandage, a blanket or two, and a bed of grass near the camp fire made Nine-thirty as comfortable as possible. After making up the fire, all turned in again.

At daylight the Sergeant mustered his men, and thus addressed them:

"We will now go and blot out this accursed lion. Load, and remember no one fires until I give the word. Put on your boots, don't bother about your bags."

The four lined up.

"March!" [Pg 72]

They hadn't far to go—barely a couple of hundred yards. The lion raised his head and growled. Nine-thirty's assegai, broken off short, still protruded from the beast's ribs.

"Fire!" commanded the Sergeant. Four shots rang out as one, and the lion's head sank upon his paws. The men reloaded, and approached with caution, but the marauder was dead.

The Sergeant instructed Jacob to skin the beast, and the four returned to camp for breakfast and to think out the problem which had arisen out of the killing of this lion.

All things being equal in sport, and rank apart, and as man to man, to whom belonged the skin? Someone had missed, because there were only three holes in the skin. Someone had made a rotten bad shot, because there was a bullet hole in the lion's rump. Someone had killed the beast outright, because a bullet had passed through the lion's brain. Someone had done for him, because another shot had taken him behind the shoulder.

All claimed the head shot.

Well, Jacob was out of it anyway. So, too, was poor Nine-thirty. Neither had fired a shot.

When I arrived I found Nine-thirty well on the way to recovery, but the policemen still "man to man." A deputation presented me with the skull and asked me to decide about the skin. I declared Nine-thirty the owner by all the rules of hunting; he had drawn first blood, and had stopped the lion.

I suggested, however, that as Nine-thirty did not want the skin, the four who fired at the lion should have a five shilling sweepstake for it, Nine-thirty to have the pound and the winner the skin.

Sergeant Johnson drew the prize. [Pg 73]

But Jacob, being a Zulu, collected the lion's fat, melted it into tins, bottles, and small gourds, and sold it for many pounds to his friends when he went home a year later. All Zulus know that lion's fat smeared on the head, face, or beard makes a man brave in battle.

THE REVEREND MR. BUMPUS. [Pg 74]

Some missionaries I like very much, they are good fellows; others I am not so sure about; others, again, I admit I cordially dislike. I place the Rev. Mr. Bumpus in the third category. I met him once going down the road from the Zambesi as I was going up. He, lucky beggar, was travelling to rail-head in his ox-waggon, going on leave. I was trekking north in my waggon, having just exhausted my home leave. All his fun was to come; mine was over for a period. I felt, when I met him, like a boy who, having eaten his own plum cake, must now watch another boy devour his.

The Rev. Bumpus had a wife. Poor soul, she was cooped up with him in the waggon, and had been for three weeks. They had come about two hundred miles from their mission station in that time. Think of it, cooped up for three solid weeks with the Rev. Mr. Bumpus. How I pitied her!

What a change there was in the little woman. Three years earlier, I remember, she had gone north with Bumpus, newly married, and with a look in her eyes of a brave soldier of the faith, rosy cheeked, well favoured and plump. And now! What a battle she must have had! And I'm sure [Pg 75] she didn't find a good ally in the man of her choice. She was thin and drawn, had a sad, discouraged eye, and looked more than twice her age.

Almost the first question she asked was: "Oh, have you any tobacco? Any you can spare, I mean?" I produced my pouch, and said I had plenty in my waggon coming on behind.

The Rev. Bumpus slipped off the waggon, took a handful, crammed his pipe, and put the remainder in his alpaca coat pocket. Then he lit up, took a puff or two, and said—nothing! It was she who thanked me, adding:

"Fred has been impossible for the last five days; he's had no tobacco. I didn't pack enough. Perhaps his temper will be better now." And this poor little lady cast a beseeching look at her lord and master.

As for the reverend gentleman, he climbed back into the waggon, sat down with a grunt of contentment, and puffed vigorously at his pipe.

"I'm so glad we've met you," continued the woman. "We've been followed for days by some lions. Last night they took my riding donkey."

"They'll have you next," interjected her gallant spouse with a grin. "They like donkey-meat."

The fellow was a brute. His wife was scared, and even if he couldn't encourage her he needn't have tried to frighten her more. But there he sat, grinning down from his perch in the waggon, and showing his big, yellow teeth. Yes, certainly, I disliked the Rev. Mr. Bumpus. I did my best to reassure the lady, advised the man to put out lighted lanterns at night to keep off the lions, and said good-bye.

I did a short trek that evening, and outspanned early. I couldn't help thinking of the callous man and the frightened woman. I knew that if the lions came round Bumpus was no man to cope with [Pg 76] them, or, for that matter, to take sensible precautions. For myself, I had some poles out, tied lighted lanterns to them, and set them up some distance ahead, behind, and on either side of my waggon. In addition, I had a good fire lit beyond the leading oxen and an extra large one in front of my patrol tent by the side of the waggon.

I had been sitting by the fire for a little while after dinner, smoking, when I was startled by a rifle shot, and then another. I judged by the direction that they must have been fired by the Rev. Bumpus or his driver, and, by the sound, that we were not camped very far apart. I took a couple of boys, my rifle, and a lantern, and hurried along the road to see what had happened. The missionary's waggon was further away than I expected. When I got there the Rev. Bumpus was on the roof of the waggon, on the top of the tent, in his nightshirt. I hadn't seen a nightshirt on a man for years. His wife was inside the waggon. The driver—it was he who had fired the shots—was, with his leader, crouching under the waggon. The oxen were very restless.

It was quite dark, and there would be no moon all night. The missionary's fire had died down, and I couldn't see a yard beyond the ring of light shed by the lantern in my hand. My first concern, therefore, was to shake the unburnt logs together and get the fire going again. Then, with my lantern in one hand and my rifle in the other, I walked along the line of oxen, talking to them as I went, with the object of settling them down. I counted the cattle as I passed and found the span intact.

Then, under my direction, my boys collected as much wood as we could find handy, and lighted another fire, ahead of the oxen. Then I went back to the waggon to question the missionary. [Pg 77]

Had he seen a lion?

"Yes, a large one."

"Where?"

"Close to the leading oxen."

Had she seen any?

"No, nothing," said his wife.

Had the driver seen the lion?

"Ja, baas, two."

At that moment I nearly jumped out of my skin. The driver, from under the waggon, fired again; his bullet must have missed my legs by inches only. I had to use un-Sunday School language before I could make the Rev. Bumpus stop his din from the top of the waggon; he was terrified, and showed it without shame or reserve. I took the rifle from the driver. Lions at night are bad enough, but the additional risk of a scared native armed with a Martini is a little too much.

"What the devil did you let fly for?"

"At the lion, baas."

"Where?"

"Over there, baas."

"Over there," indeed, a few yards from the waggon, it was as black as ink, but I argued, natives have good eyesight, and a lion's eyes have a way of reflecting the light of a distant fire. He might have seen a lion.

Well, there was nothing for it, more fires must be built.

The missionary had only one lantern, and that I lighted. It was too dark to find a pole, so I dug a hole in the sandy soil, planted the waggon whip in it, and slung the lantern to the whip-stick. [Pg 78]

Then began a night of toil and anxiety; I have no wish to live through such a night again. My boys were frightened now. Frightened does not describe the condition of the Rev. Mr. Bumpus. There he was, a weird figure, perched on the top of the waggon-tent, ghostly in his white nightshirt, chattering with alarm. Mrs. Bumpus sat, fully dressed, inside the waggon, quite still and silent. The missionary's driver, leader, and my boys stood huddled round the largest fire at the tail end of the waggon, their eyes looking unusually large and white as they peered into the thick darkness.

"There he is, baas!"

"Where?"

"There!"

"Where's there, you fool?"

"Listen!"

I listened, and sure enough I heard the shush, shush of something moving in the dead leaves and dry grass a little distance away. The oxen nearest the waggon showed signs of nervousness. I would have given much for a dog that night. The movement stopped. We all listened. The Rev. Bumpus began to mumble something from his perch aloft.

"For goodness sake shut up! How can I hear anything while you're making all that noise!"

He stopped.

"There he is, baas!"

"Where?"

"There!"

I listened, but could hear nothing. I listened for quite a long time. We all listened—we could hear nothing. The nearest ox lay down with a grunt, which meant that he, at any rate, was not much alarmed.

The Rev. Bumpus asked whether I thought he could come down, as on the top of the waggon-tent it was very cold. I was just about to say he could when again that shush, shush! I heard it myself distinctly this time. At once the chorus again of "There he is," in as many languages as there were natives huddled round me. [Pg 79]

I decided that we must do something, make a sortie and get more wood; the fires had burnt low.

Presently we had four fires blazing away, the one in front of the leading oxen, one on either side of the waggon, and one at the tail-end of it. My boys' courage rose as the circle of light grew. They dashed here and there—strictly within the circle of light formed by the fires—collecting dry wood. After a while you could have roasted the proverbial ox at any one of the fires.

While we were busy the Rev. Bumpus had crept down from his place of vantage and had gone to bed. His wife, the better man of the two, made us some strong coffee. The missionary's driver and leader joined in the scramble for wood.

The lion had evidently drawn off, so we had some coffee and stood warming ourselves by the fire.

"There he is, baas!"

I grabbed my rifle. "Where?"

"There, I can hear him now."

"Listen! Silence, all of you!"

Shush, shush; shush, shush.

From over there! No, from there! Where the devil is he?

And this sort of thing went on the whole night through. Quiet for a while. Fires die down. Shush, shush; shush, shush. Hurried collection of wood. Fires blaze up. Silence. The shush, shush just beyond the limit of light. "There, he is, baas!" "Where?" "There!" and so on. [Pg 80]

Then dawn. How slowly it came! Intense desire to murder that lion or lions. A little lighter now.

I set out, with the natives following, to look for the spoor.

Shush, shush; I heard it quite plainly. Good heavens! where is that lion? Broad daylight now. Is the thing a ghost?

No. There it is—a scrubby, little, scaly anteater! Still grubbing in the fallen leaves. Shush, shush; shush, shush.

We stood looking at it, tired-eyed and weary.

"Why don't you kill the wretched rat?"

It was the Rev. Mr. Bumpus who spoke.

Talking of rats, I could have killed that man there and then.

When I got back to my own waggon I found lion spoor on the sandy road. It was not difficult to read from their tracks—there were three lions—that they had followed the missionary's waggon until they came to a turn in the road and saw my lanterns. From that point the spoor led down to the river bed, across it, and into the thick bush on the other side. They hadn't come near the waggons.

THE SALVATION ARMY CAPTAIN. [Pg 81]

To-day you may book your passage with Cook's, in Ludgate Circus, to the Victoria Falls and back, and travel in comfort all the way. In 1897 it was different. There was no road to the Victoria Falls then, let alone a railway. I won't bother you with an account of our journey out by waggon as far as Panda-Ma-Tenga, or of how we rode across country from the edge of the Kalahari Desert to the Falls, guided by the column of spray arising from them, or, where the land dipped, by a sense

of direction.

At length we got there, or, more correctly, within a hundred yards of the tumbling waters. Their roar was deafening. It was a wonderful sound and a more wonderful sight. Imagine the hum of London traffic increased ten thousand fold. Imagine a forest of palm, fern, black-trunked trees, all within a hothouse of immense proportions, and a tepid, tropical rain soaking you to the skin. We cut through the distance which separated us from the lip of the Falls. Thick, tough creeper and undergrowth, maidenhair fern waist high; it seemed a sin to trample it underfoot. From time to time up to the thigh in watery mud when, unluckily, one stepped in the pit-like spoor of a [Pg 82] hippopotamus which had passed in the night. Monkeys chattering from overhead. I think I caught sight of a buffalo.

What a difference to-day! You might see a monkey in the trees now and then, but a fire has since passed through that jungle at the end of a dry season, and a century will not repair the damage. Moreover, there are gravel paths leading from the new hotel to every "view" now, but we, who saw the Victoria Falls twenty-four years ago, have something to remember and to brag about.

We spent half a day looking and looking and looking. We were drenched by the spray, dried by the sun, deafened by the roar of the waters, and struck dumb by the beauty of it all.

At about one o'clock we felt hungry, and went in search of our pack-horses. We had off-saddled outside the thicket and turned our beasts loose. We found our saddles easily enough, and the horses, too, for that matter; the grass was so luscious and plentiful that no horse would desire to stray far after several weeks in the dry Kalahari. We had lunch and a little rest, and then set out again to do more exploring. We hadn't gone far before we came upon the track of a waggon. Robinson Crusoe, when he found the footprint of the man Friday, could not have been more amazed than we.

So far as we knew, no other expedition had come to the Falls ahead of us. Who, then, was the intruder?

We followed the track, and presently, in a small clearing, we saw a waggon. Whoever he was, this traveller deserved full credit for what he had done. We had ridden to the Falls, and were proud of it, but here was a man who had got a waggon through. Stout fellow. And there, seated on a skin near his oxen, was the man. He had a matted beard, and didn't look too clean. Under one arm he [Pg 83] hugged a huge calabash, from which he was eating honey with a stick. The honey was old and granulated. There were many flies in it, too, evidence that the neck of the calabash had been left uncovered at times. He didn't move when he saw us, but, holding out his stick, said: "Have some."

We told him we had just fed, but thanked him all the same.

"Sit down," said he, "sit on this skin," but he made no room for us. "I shot it yesterday at the Falls. This is the cub; the lioness went off."

"How long have you been here?"

"A couple of days."

"How did you get through?"

"Cut my way."

"Lose any cattle in the thirst country?"

"Didn't come that way; took a bee line from Bulawayo."

This was a good performance indeed. All the old hands had said it couldn't be done.

"What did you come for?"

"What did you?"

The man who asked the question first was travelling north to take over the administration of a tract of country as big as France. He explained his business.

"Oh, so you're the magistrate, are you?"

"Yes, that's about it. And you?"

"I'm a captain in the Salvation Army down south, but I've brought a fellow up to prospect for mineral on the other side of the Zambesi. He crossed yesterday, and moved up country on foot this morning."

I looked at this queer fellow with interest. His cap of calling lay on the ground beside him. Throughout the conversation he went on eating the honey. The Zambesi in those days was about [Pg 84] the last place I should have expected to find a Salvation Army man. Looking round I caught sight of the familiar red jersey with the yellow letters. It was hanging on a bush, evidently drying. The captain had followed my gaze, and volunteered: "Had a bit of a washing day, first on this trip." From the look of him I concluded that his own turn was yet to come.

"Well, tell us about the lion cub."

I think he told the truth. I can't, of course, vouch for it, but he was sitting on the skin of a newly-killed cub. Before we left the Falls the vultures told us where to find the lioness. But this is his story:

"I was walking along in the rain-forest with my rifle, looking for a pig or a palla or anything else eatable. I hadn't gone far when I nearly fell over this cub. He snarled at me, so I shot him. While he lay kicking on his back up comes his mother, so I reloaded my old Martini and gave her one for herself. Not being a first-class shot, I didn't do for her right off. She looked so angry and seemed to be coming on that I stepped back a pace or two, but keeping my eye on her. I tried to reload, but the empty cartridge case jammed. I broke off a stick from a handy bush and plugged it down the muzzle. I must have pushed too hard, for the stick broke off short."

The captain stopped, got up, and fetched his rifle from the wagon. The stick was still in the barrel, evidently stuck fast in the cartridge, which, in its turn, was firmly fixed in the breech. We had a look at the rifle and then at the captain. He simply said: "Can either of you gentlemen fix this up for me?" We both said we could, and both asked: "But what about the lioness?" [Pg 85]

"Oh, the lioness. Why, there she was and there I was. She with a very ugly look, and growling, and I with my rifle put out of action. I felt it was time to do something, so I backed out of the bush singing a hymn in a loud voice."

THE SPORT OF KINGS. [Pg 86]

The days have gone by when the Paramount Chiefs of the Barotse embarked annually upon a large-scale Lechwe drive. I believe the last big hunt took place in 1899. I, at any rate, have heard of no such happening since.

It is just as well that these drives have come to an end. The African natives' idea of sport does not altogether tally with that of the white man; no sportsman likes to see animals slaughtered *en masse*.

In those days the Lechwe antelope were strictly preserved for the pleasure of the Paramount Chief and his entourage. No native was permitted to disturb them in their natural haunts—the wide, open plains—and no man could kill one under pain of heavy penalty. The only exception to this rule was when a few head strayed into the vicinity of Lealni, the principal native village of the Barotse valley. Then the people were allowed to hunt them with dogs, but not to shoot them.

The time chosen for these drives was after the rains had ceased to fall, but while the Zambesi had still more water to carry off than its banks could contain. The overflow was such that for a space [Pg 87] the Barotse Valley became a vast lake, varying in depth from a few inches to a dozen feet.

The same may be said with equal truth of the Luena river, an important tributary which, flowing from the East, made its junction with the Zambesi not far from Lealni. It was in the Luena basin that the drives took place.

For two months before the time of hunting preparations for the drive began. Those long, heavy casting assegais, peculiar, I believe, to that part of Africa, were cleaned and sharpened. Narrow hunting canoes were collected, repaired and caulked. Four foot long pikes, sharpened at one end —which was hardened by burning—with a stout blade fixed in the other, were prepared in great numbers by the Batotela, a slave tribe cunning in the manufacture of iron. The blades of these pikes were short and flat and had the rounded point of an oyster-knife.

I was invited by the Chief to be present at the drive in 1899, and I went.

It took two days to reach the hunting ground. We travelled in shallow-draught, dug-out canoes. The first night we slept in elaborate grass shelters prepared for us beforehand.

Next morning we resumed our journey at daylight. The Chief went first in a very small and narrow canoe. He was accompanied by one man only. They stood up in the canoe and punted with long, red-wood poles. All European clothes had been discarded by the natives. The Chief wore a woollen nightcap and a long, white shirt. Round his waist, but under his shirt, he had a highly-coloured, fringed tablecloth. His legs and feet were bare; so, too, were his arms to the elbow. [Pg 88]

My canoe started immediately after that of the Chief, but I did not retain that position long. It was more comfortable and, therefore, much heavier and slower. It carried a crew of seven.

I suppose there must have been several thousand canoe loads of men. Two of the Chief's wives accompanied the party. All etiquette was abandoned. It became a race to follow the Chief, and although the waterway was several miles wide, collisions were frequent. Everyone was good-humoured, including one of the Chief's wives, whose canoe was capsized in the scurry. She was rescued amid much laughter and joking, in which she joined.

En route we passed many canoes loaded down to the gunwale with pikes. To these everyone gave a wide berth for fear of swamping them, for the pikes were necessary to the sport.

In the afternoon of the second day we arrived at the spot selected, or, to be more precise, at a

large camping ground within easy reach of it.

Here we found even more elaborate grass huts ready for us. The Chief gave me a hut quite near to his own, a compliment which I did not appreciate at its intended value, because his band played and women sang throughout the night and robbed me of all sleep.

The moment we arrived the Chief started off in his fast canoe to inspect the ground over which the Lechwe were to be driven next day. On his return he told me that the place had been well chosen and that the country was alive with Lechwe. He also said he had found a high ant-hill for me to stand upon and watch the drive.

At daylight we set out again and reached my ant-hill in about an hour. The Chief took me to the top of it, pointed out the direction from which the antelope would come, and explained the plans for the day's sport. [Pg 89]

Looking through my field-glasses I saw two faint lines which, beginning more than a mile away in the open plain, converged, forming a funnel. The narrow end of the funnel terminated within a quarter of a mile from my ant-heap and in a line with it.

The faint lines were really thin strips of dry palmleaf tape, which shone white in the bright sunlight. Every few yards a bight was taken round a bunch of tall, growing grass, which lent support to it and gave the impression that a one-strand fence or a barrier of some sort had been erected.

The Chief referred to the two thin lines as walls, and assured me that the antelope, if properly driven, would not break through them.

He then drew my attention to the apparent opening at the narrow end of the funnel, and asked me if I saw anything to prevent the Lechwe from escaping in that direction.

I said I could see no bar. He replied that the Lechwe couldn't either, so, when pressed, would dash for the opening.

"It is then that the sport will begin," he added.

At this I looked more carefully and saw innumerable pikes had been driven into the ground with their iron points sloping forward towards the wire end of the funnel. The grass had been carefully rearranged.

This, then, was the general plan: to drive the Lechwe into the funnel, down it, and on to the pikes at the narrow end.

In reply to my questions, he said that many thousands of beaters, drawn from the slave tribes, had been wading through the swamps for two days collecting small herds of antelope and driving them slowly forward towards the mouth of the funnel. [Pg 90]

He drew a diagram with his stick on the side of the ant-heap to show how the beaters were disposed. He had adopted the well-known African method of envelopment—the crescent, with the horns well forward. The men who formed the horns had already reached the extremities of the funnel and were passing slowly down outside the line. The antelope, he told me, were contained in the arc of men coming forward.

As yet I could see no antelope, nor could I see the men who formed the arc; they were still too far away.

In the meantime, all the men who had come in small hunting canoes had taken their places outside, but close to, the two thin lines or walls. The moment they reached their stations they sat down and were lost to view in the long grass. The Chief explained that these men remained hidden until the Lechwe had passed them, when their business was to stand up and frighten the antelope forward with shouts and gesticulations. Should any Lechwe attempt to break through the sides of the funnel, the canoemen had to drive them back or assegai them.

I now knew what to expect.

The Chief presently left me, as he, too, had to take up his station. He begged me to keep myself hidden, as a premature exposure might easily spoil the entire drive.

I lay flat on the ant-heap, looking through a small gap which I made in the tall grass which crowned it. I could see admirably, but could not be seen.

It was a long time before I could discern any movement, even at the mouth of the funnel. I could hear the cries of the beaters as they approached, faintly at first, then a hum, then a roar. [Pg 91]

Presently I saw a single reed-buck ram pacing very slowly towards the concealed assegais. From time to time he stopped, stamped, sniffed and whistled, scenting danger. What became of him, I don't know. I lost sight of him.

Looking through my glasses towards the entrance of the funnel again, I saw a sight which made me gasp. Although the most distant beaters had not yet appeared, a huge herd of Lechwe seemed literally to block the funnel and were trotting steadily down it. Half way they stopped. A fine ram turned and walked towards the left-hand wall. A man stood up and the antelope turned in the direction of the opposite wall; he went at a trot again and the immense herd followed him. When

within twenty yards of the palmleaf tape, some dozen men stood up. All the antelope but the ram stopped. He, fine fellow that he was, made a bold bid for liberty. He dashed on, gathered himself together, and cleared the fence. One of the men in a canoe made a movement. It was too far off to see anything clearly, but as the Lechwe landed in a heap, I realised that he had been transfixed in mid-air by one of those heavy hunting assegais.

The herd was not leaderless for long. Another ram forged ahead and trotted straight towards the narrow end of the funnel. Immediately every man sat down. It was clear that these hunters had been very well drilled.

After moving rapidly for a hundred yards the Lechwe came to a halt. They were not as yet frightened, but highly suspicious.

First, they turned at a walk towards the right-hand wall: a man stood up. They moved across to the left: the first man sat down and his opposite number stood up. The antelope broke into a trot. After heading to the right again for a little way, some hundreds broke back, and this, I think, is [Pg 92] where the mistake was made, for, instead of leaving them to the beaters, who were approaching, driving many more herds of Lechwe before them, man after man stood up, shouting and waving their arms wildly.

This had the effect of breaking up the whole of the antelope formation. They dashed here and there, thoroughly frightened; some broke through the wall, some cleared it, some dashed right back, and others came on towards the trap.

I watched these last. There were several hundred of them. They came along at a very fast trot, the rams with their heads forward, noses up, and horns lying along their backs. A ram led. He struck one of the hidden pikes full with his chest and gave a mighty leap into the air, bleeding from a terrible wound in the brisket. He landed on the point of another pike and bounded up from it, his entrails dragging behind him. Much weakened, he leaped and leaped again until, completely disembowelled, he fell and lay still.

There was no escape, the pikes were set so closely together: not a foot apart. They reached right across the gap in the funnel and to the depth of forty or fifty yards. I do not think a single one of this part of the large herd escaped. For the space of two minutes they were dashing past me and on to the hidden pikes. Every one was disembowelled before it fell dead—rams, ewes, and young alike. It was a disgusting sight.

The natives were in a frenzy of excitement. No doubt their one idea was to drive the Lechwe to the trap and in that they succeeded; but they also drove a considerable part of the herd back upon the beaters, who were pressing other herds before them. The confusion was complete. [Pg 93] Lechwe were dashing in all directions. Men were shouting and hurling their assegais. A deafening roar rose from the beaters, now close in. From time to time a score or so Lechwe dashed upon the pikes and added to the slaughter.

I saw a Setutunga approach the pikes leisurely out of the confusion. He lifted his feet high at every step, a habit bred of life in the papyrus swamps. A native appeared from nowhere in particular and running him down killed him with a club.

The drive was over.

That evening when I met the Chief he was still furious. Someone had blundered and most of the Lechwe had escaped. Moreover, a man in a small canoe, hurling his heavy assegai at a Lechwe, had missed the beast and killed his brother. The Chief's own cook and several of his companions had been mauled out in the plain by a leopard. No, the drive had not been a success by any means.

I wondered what the bag would have been if all had gone well with the Chief's plans. I had personally counted three hundred mutilated carcasses, but, feeling sick, had given up the tally and returned to camp.

THE LIONS OF MAKULULUMI. [Pg 94]

How hot it was! September, 1897. I had not shot my first lion then, and many, many months were to pass before my luck came. Dame Fortune doesn't often condescend to glance my way. She smiled broadly once when, with three tickets, I won first, second, and third prize in a sweep on the Grand National; but then I have never drawn a prize in a sweep since.

However, to return to September, 1897. Yes, by Jingo, it was hot. Not a breath of air; not a leaf on any tree. The rains were almost due, but not a shower had fallen. The only shade was in the shadow of the wagon.

But it was not the blazing sun alone with which we had to contend. There thrives in the Kalahari Desert a pestiferous little winged insect called the Mopani bee, named after the hardwood tree in which it sets its hive. It would seem that this creature must have moisture, moisture of any kind—it isn't at all particular. And to think that I used to eat the stuff they call Mopani honey until, one day, I saw a bunch of them lapping up the moisture from a perspiring native runner. Ugh!

These bees will congregate in dozens at the corners of your eyes, try to burrow into them and then collect the tears which the discomfort of their burrowing produces. They will crowd at the corners of your mouth; when you open it to blow the little plagues away, they rush in. Thank Heaven, the Mopani bee doesn't sting. [Pg 95]

We were struggling up to the Zambesi from Bulawayo. Our waggons were overloaded, for the Kalahari had taken heavy toll of our cattle and our spans were therefore many oxen short.

We had reached and covered the first ten miles of the thirty-five which separate Makululumi from Kasibi. All those who knew the old Hunter's road will remember that stretch. The first ten miles are not bad going, but the next seven are the heaviest and loosest sand that oxen were ever asked to drag a waggon through.

Between Makululumi and Kasibi there is no water, so the Major who commanded our little party thought it wise to send the oxen back from the ten-mile point to have the best part of a couple of days' rest at Makululumi before calling upon them to tackle the next stage of the journey.

During the afternoon of the second day, by following my chief's example, I got the better of those bees. It is true I was slowly suffocating, but that was better than being tormented. I was lying on my back under the waggon, with my head covered with a blanket, perspiring immoderately. At least three more hours of this before the cattle returned and we resumed our journey.

Presently I heard a conversation going on in Dutch between the Major and one of his boys. I looked out and saw one of the drivers who should have been with the cattle. [Pg 96]

"What are you doing here?" the Major asked.

"Lions, baas."

"Where? How many? When?"

"Last night at Makululumi. Yes, many of them, baas."

"Any cattle dead?"

"Four, baas."

"Tell me about it."

The driver told his story. It appeared that the night before, as soon as it was dark, the boys had collected the cattle together and had driven them up to the camp fires. The oxen stood about for a little while and then settled down. Seeing this, the boys had turned in. When the moon set, the cattle moved off to the water holes again to drink and graze.

Presently there was a great commotion at the water, oxen bellowing and stampeding. The boys got up and ran down with lights and a rifle. There they found three of the oxen lying dead within a hundred yards of each other, and a fourth, also dead, some little distance on. Each ox had his neck broken, but was otherwise unmarked. One of the boys thought he heard a lion in the grass, so fired his rifle off.

Collecting the cattle again, they drove them up to the camp fires and kept a strict watch for the remainder of the night.

At daylight they went back to the scene of the killing, and found that the lions had returned to the carcasses and made a heavy meal off two of them, the third was half eaten, the fourth untouched.

This was indeed a disaster; we simply couldn't spare these four oxen.

"Where are the cattle now?"

"At the water holes with the other boys."

"What did you tell the other boys to do?" [Pg 97]

"Let the cattle graze until sundown, then water them and bring them along."

"Good. Now let's get busy."

During this conversation I had got out from under the waggon and was now listening.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Go back and blot out some of those lions."

"May I come, too?"

"Have you ever shot a lion?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen one?"

"Not outside the Zoo, but I should like to."

"Well, you may come on one condition."

"What's that?"

"Don't shoot unless and until I tell you to."

I promised. Here was adventure indeed!

The Major took an axe and a length of cord. He handed me a billy-can, two cups and some coffee. He selected a double .303 from his battery. I took the only rifle I possessed, namely, a single Martini Metford.

Without more ado we set off to cover the ten miles back to Makululumi. There was no path, of course, merely the overgrown waggon track through the forest. The traffic on that road was insufficient to cope with the suckers which had sprung up round the stump of every tree felled in the cutting of this so-called road. The men who originally made the road had not troubled to stump it. The going was tiresome, and, lightly loaded as I was, I soon found the little I had to carry an increasing burden to me.

About a mile from our destination we met the rest of our natives driving the cattle along. We stopped for a few minutes to question them. They had kept the vultures off the fourth ox, which was still intact, but the birds had eaten up the other three almost entirely. A bushman had [Pg 98] arrived shortly before they came away, attracted by the circling vultures. They made him stand guard over the yet untouched ox in case we came back for the lion.

All this was satisfactory, so, telling the boys to inspan the waggons when they reached them, and make as long a trek as they could through the heavy sand, we pushed on.

We had no difficulty in finding the spot where the oxen had been killed. Hundreds of vultures, gorged with meat, sat on the upper branches of a clump of trees. A little further on an unusually tall bushman stood up as we approached.

The Major examined the lie of the land with an experienced eye, and quickly made his plans.

The Makululumi water holes are really a series of pools strung out along the otherwise dry bed of a small river. Of three of the slaughtered oxen little remained but the bones and hide; they had been killed in the bed of the river. The fourth lay on the far bank, where the river made a very sharp hairpin bend and narrowed to not more than a dozen feet.

The Major selected a point as near as possible to the bank and immediately opposite the dead ox. He didn't waste much time in explanation, but, taking the axe, told me to follow him. The sun was just beginning to set. He hurried to the nearest clump of small trees and felled them rapidly, trimming off the branches and cutting them into poles about six feet long.

My part of the work was to carry the poles to the hairpin bend. Twenty in all were cut, varying in thickness from two to five inches in diameter. Then we built our moral support, for it was no more. I held the tops of three poles while the Major tied them together with the piece of cord [Pg 99] which he had brought from the waggon. Then, standing them on end, he spread them to form a tripod. This he reinforced with additional poles, which he made fast with strips of bark. The finished shelter looked like a skeleton bell-tent. It had neither strength nor stability, for we had no time to sink the ends of the poles in the sun-baked ground.

By that time the sun had set, and the bushman, who had been watching us silently all this time, said something in that strange clicking language of his and hurried off, presumably to a place of safety.

The Major thought a meal would do us good, and, going back along the river until we came to a dry place where the banks were high, he lit a fire. At the sight of a blaze I realised that I was cold. We did not think of our coats in the heat of the midday sun. However, there was nothing for it but to see the matter through.

I felt quite comfortable after some bully-beef and bread, washed down with two or three cups of hot coffee.

At eight o'clock we returned to our fort as quietly as possible, surprising on the way a hyena in the act of dragging off the hide of one of the oxen. We had to crawl very carefully into our shelter for fear of disturbing a pole and bringing the whole thing down about our ears.

Once inside, I had ample time for reflection. We sat within three yards of the bank of the river, which was but four yards wide at this point. A yard from the opposite bank lay the dead ox; beyond the ox, for about a hundred yards, the grass had been burnt short; beyond that again was [Pg 100] long grass and thick bush.

The moon, which was three-quarter full, would not set for another five hours; everything was almost as clear as daylight between the river and the thick bush; we could see up and down the river bed. The ox, much distended by a day's exposure to the blazing African sun, was too near to be pleasant, and, being on a level with us, blotted out much of the landscape on the other side of the river. We could distinctly hear the hyenas, jackals, and the lesser scavengers quarrelling over the scraps of bone, hide, and offal left by the lions and the vultures.

We sat facing the ox. The Major thought that if the lions came at all it would be from the thick bush ahead, for immediately behind us was open country for a considerable distance.

Strangely enough, I felt extremely sleepy. We held a short whispered consultation, and it was

agreed that I should sleep while I could. The Major promised to wake me if things became interesting. He wasn't sleepy.

I lay down with my rifle by my side, my head touching one pole and my feet another. I slept almost immediately, in spite of the cold and the hardness of the ground. Not only was the air at night cold by contrast with the hot day, but the evaporation from the water holes lowered the temperature.

The sound of my companion's rifle woke me. Sitting up, I saw a lion in the air, descending upon us. The Major fired again, and the lion fell into the water-course, literally at our feet. I could see his rump and tail quite plainly. His rage was terrific as he tried to reach us. His bellowing must have been heard for miles around, and doubtless many a bushman and many a beast quaked at the sound of it. [Pg 101]

I remember shouting at the top of my voice: "I can see his rump. Shall I shoot?"

The reply, I must admit, disconcerted me: "Rump's the wrong end, but if he shows his head shoot it off."

I watched the struggling beast so intently that I did not see that a second lion had approached. He made his presence known to me by a roar which sounded loud and clear above the thunder of his wounded fellow. He was standing broadside on to us, just behind the ox. The Major fired and the lion sprang forward. The noise was deafening. A chorus of two wounded lions is something not often heard.

I now watched the second lion. He dashed off towards the bush, changed his mind and charged us. He came in great leaps, roaring as he came, then thought better of it, for he stopped sharply, throwing up clouds of dust as he did so, and pulled up almost on the ox. All I could see was his head, and that very indistinctly because of the dust which now enveloped both the lion and the dead ox.

Again a steadying warning: "Don't shoot until you can see more of him than that."

As the Major spoke the lion veered off and trotted back towards the bush, grunting savagely as he went.

"Here he comes again!" And so he did, bounding along as before and bellowing so that I wondered whether our home of poles could stand the vibration of sound.

Again the lion hesitated, again he sheered off, this time entering the bush. We heard him crashing through it until there was silence once more, for the first lion had now ceased to show any signs of life. [Pg 102]

I must admit to feeling decidedly uncomfortable then. My heart thumped like a sledge hammer. I longed to get out and stretch my legs. A great deal of action had been compressed into a short space of time, probably not more than ten minutes. To the Major's suggestion that we should have a look at the dead fellow I responded with alacrity—too much alacrity—my foot catching in one of the poles, the whole structure came crashing down upon his head.

After extricating himself he climbed down into the river bed and stood looking at the lion. I followed him.

I don't know why I did it—some sudden impulse for which I cannot account—but I stepped forward and raising the lion's head in my two hands, looked into his eyes.

I certainly heard the Major talking, and I distinctly heard what he said.

"What the devil are you doing, you damned young fool? Drop that head and come away. How do you know he's dead?"

I took no notice. I couldn't. I was terrified, hypnotised. I could do nothing but stare and stare.

No doubt the lion was dead, but the light in his eyes was not. It was dying, not dead. It was a blazing, vivid, blinding light—as it were, the light of an untamed spirit reluctantly taking leave of a mighty body.

When at length I let that rugged head fall, the light had faded; I stood shivering, feeling little and mean, as one who had looked upon something not meant for him to see.

WHITE MEN AND BLACK. [Pg 103]

[Pg 104]

WHITE MEN AT PLAY. [Pg 105]

The white man is superior to the black and must show it in his manners and deportment.

This is an unwritten law, observed in the early days of any of our African settlements.

For the man who breaks this law the punishment is swift and severe: he is shunned by his caste and colour.

It is said, but it is nevertheless generally true, that as the settlement prospers, so does this excellent law fall into abeyance. Men without manners arrive and are soon in the majority.

But in the beginnng, the white man watches himself very carefully. He knows all eyes are upon him. He must not permit himself to unbend. In the observance of the law, a man is very self-conscious and is apt to seem stiff and unsympathetic.

In the very, very early days of Kazungula the natives of the place watched some white men relax, and the spectacle afforded them as much pleasurable interest as the knowledge that they had been seen caused pain to the white men.

For many a day the natives of Kazungula commanded a ready audience anywhere in the country, for had not they, and they alone, seen white men at play? [Pg 106]

It came about in this way.

A solitary white man stood on the north bank of the Zambesi river, looking across to the other side.

It was Knight, the Native Commissioner, who had for the last fortnight expected daily the arrival of some waggons which carried his year's provisions and other stores. He had little of anything left. No sugar, very little tea, and a single bottle of gin represented his cellar.

He longed each night for the usual "sundowner," but had determined not to open his one remaining bottle, in case of accident. Just what he meant by accident he could not have said. In answer to a direct question he might have replied: "Oh, anything might happen, one never knows."

To-night, for some reason unknown to himself, he was more impatient of the sluggard waggons than usual. Would the darned things never come?

The sun was setting and small flights of duck were going down stream to the marshy feeding grounds. A goose passed in the same direction.

The reed birds, in large noisy flocks, were choosing their roosting place for the night. It seemed that they could not make up their minds. No sooner had they settled in one patch of reeds than they started up with much twittering in search of a better place. They had done this at least a dozen times, and their indecision irritated the man.

A plump kingfisher, sitting on a log almost at his feet, dived from time to time into the shallow water and returned to his perch again. Knight noticed that the busy bird usually returned with a tiny silver fish in his bill, and mentally commended him for his good fishing. [Pg 107]

Well, the waggons hadn't come, and wouldn't come to-night. The sun had set and it was growing dark. A chill wind sprang up and the reed birds had become silent. The watcher turned slowly and walked in the direction of his camp.

He had not gone far when he stopped, for he had caught sight of a queer-looking man hobbling towards him along the path which ran by the river side. In the dying light he saw that the stranger was a white man accompanied by a single native, that he wore a long blonde beard, that he was unusually tall, that his trousers were cut off above the knee, that he had no boots, that he was very lame and had his feet bandaged in rags. In short, he saw a fellow white man in distress.

He forgot his own little troubles and hastened towards the newcomer.

He gave the usual greeting of "Hulloa."

"Hulloa," was the reply.

"Going a bit short, I see."

"Yes, about done in."

"Let me give you a hand to my camp."

"Thanks; I heard I should find you here."

"Come far to-day?"

"Yes, from the Falls."

"A good forty-five miles, by Jove!"

"Yes, quite that, I should think."

The two men relapsed into silence; the taller one because he was very exhausted and felt it acutely now that he had reached his journey's end; the shorter, because he realised his companion's condition and did not wish to bother him with questions which could very well wait.

On reaching the camp Knight shouted to his body servant: "Hot bath and be quick!" Turning to

his companion, he said: "You'd like a hot bath, wouldn't you?" [Pg 108]

"There is only one thing on earth I should like better, but no doubt you can give me both."

"Oh, I know; you want a drink, of course. I'll get you one in a second. Sit down."

"Curse those waggons," muttered Knight, as he hurried off to get his last bottle of gin. His second impulse was to thank goodness that the bottle was a "baby," that is, one of the largest size.

Returning with his precious "baby," he saw his guest's face clearly for the first time. The natives had lit the camp fire, and the light of it fell upon the strong features of the stranger.

"Good Lord! It's Lindsay!"

"Yes, why not? Didn't you recognise me at once?"

"No. Will you have water or a sparklet with your gin?" asked Knight, pouring out about half a glass of the spirit—a quantity known to travellers as a "three-finger tot."

"I'll chase it," said Lindsay, who, having gulped down the gin, held out his glass for some water.

"Bath ready, Morena," a black boy called from an adjoining hut.

"Have another?" said his host.

"No, thanks. I can face your hot bath now."

The tired man entered the hut, followed by the native who had reached the camp with him.

Knight called his cook and took stock. What was there for dinner? Soup. Oh, yes, there was always soup, made by boiling down bones and meat, throwing in a few dried vegetables and thickening with peaflour.

Fish? Good man; so he had caught some that very evening? Then there was that cold bush-pig's [Pg 109] head. Yes, they would like that. What else was there? Remembering the leathery thing his cook called an omelette, he discouraged a suggestion of eggs.

To be sure, there were chickens. They had just gone to roost, and were now quiet after a noisy bed-going. Yes, two very young ones spatchcocked, and with plenty of black pepper and a little salt. And there was one tinned plum pudding in the store; they would have that.

This plum pudding had been suggested daily by the cook, and always rejected because it might be wanted. It was wanted now. Yes, they would have the plum pudding.

And then there was the gin. Well, they wouldn't do so badly after all. Soup, fish, chickens, the cold pig's head and a hot plum pudding; what more could two men want?

By this time Lindsay had splashed to his heart's content, and the generous qualities of the gin were having their effect. He felt a new man.

"Are you out of your bath?"

"Yes; can you give me some clean kit?"

"Certainly, but will it fit you?"

"Oh, near enough. It will be clean, which is the main thing."

Much chaff ensued as Lindsay, who stood six feet three in his socks, got into some of his host's clothes, for Knight was the shorter of the two by some six inches, but fortunately broad in the shoulders.

"Can't do you in boots."

"Oh, that's all right. Give me some limbo[B] to tie up my feet." [Pg 110]

During the bandaging the camp dogs began to bark loudly, and both men paused to listen.

"By the way," said Lindsay, "that must be Hobday. I walked on ahead of him; he is so deuced slow. Do you know Hobday? He's 'pills' to our expedition. Not a bad fellow, as doctors go."

"No, I don't know him and you haven't told me what the expedition is or anything about anything yet."

"Well, we've walked across country from Zanzibar, or rather Mombasa, looking for minerals."

"Found anything?"

"No."

"Well, I'd better go and look out for—what did you say his name was?"

"Hobday, quite a little fellow."

Knight went out of the hut and, as he passed the kitchen, ordered another bath and told the cook that as a second white man was arriving he must kill another chicken.

Almost immediately Hobday arrived. He was a short, precise little man, inclined to tubbiness.

"How do you do? My name is Mr. Hobday. I am the medical man attached to an important expedition headed by Mr. J.G. Lindsay, who may not be unknown to you."

To this long-winded greeting Knight replied: "Well, come along and have a drink and a hot bath and a change, and by that time dinner will be ready. Lindsay's here."

"I do not often indulge in alcoholic beverages and never in the daytime, but after a very tiring day ——"

"Say when. Will you have a sparklet with it or do you prefer water?"

"Er, thanks, a sparklet if you please. I am of opinion that the sparklet is a very useful invention. [Pg 111] What would not that great traveller and hunter, Gordon Cumming, have given for what amounts to a portable soda-water factory? Ah, thank you, that is ample. And, as I always tell my patients, if they must drink alcohol, they will find in gin its least harmful form."

"What a queer little devil," thought Knight.

"I am greatly obliged to you for this stimulant, and now I shall be further and deeply indebted to you if I may have a bath. I always say that a hot bath, when one is tired, revives one more quickly and effectually than anything else."

Knight found it difficult to reply suitably to this, and was relieved when the bath was announced and the doctor disappeared into the hut.

Lindsay looked extremely funny in Knight's clothes. The old shooting jacket was a little short in the skirt and sleeves. The trousers reached half way down the tall man's shins, but he felt clean and comfortable and appearances didn't matter.

"Have another?"

"Thanks."

The two men sat and talked whilst the third bathed.

The rest of the expedition had remained at the Victoria Falls. There were a dozen white men altogether, and about a hundred and fifty natives. Lindsay heard that Knight was at Kazungula and came on to see him. The pair had been through the Matabele rebellion together, and had had other experiences in common. Hobday had insisted on coming too. His devotion to "The Head of the Expedition" rather embarrassed Lindsay. He was not a bad fellow on the whole, and a very capable doctor. The rest of the men with the exception of Gray—Knight knew Gray—were [Pg 112] professional prospectors, good enough men at their particular job but a troublesome lot on an expedition.

No, they hadn't found anything really worth while, Lindsay thought, but some indications of oil might turn out a big thing.

Yes, they were going straight home from the Falls by way of Bulawayo, Salisbury and Beira, and if any of them came back to have another look, it would be this way and not in from Mombasa.

The question "Have another?" had been asked and satisfactorily answered before Hobday reappeared. He looked quite as funny in his host's clothes as Lindsay did. The only difference was that the coat and trousers supplied to him were as much too big for him as they were too small for Lindsay.

Hobday began to apologise for his appearance, but the announcement that dinner was ready cut short the unnecessary speech.

All three were hungry, the two visitors especially so.

If, during dinner, Hobday noticed that a native replenished his glass whenever it was empty, he made no protest.

The conversation almost at once turned to England, to London, and what each man had seen and done when last there. Towards the end of the meal dancing was the topic. These new dances, the jazz, the hesitation, the two-step, the fox-trot, and the rest; all agreed that they were impossible, that there was little difference, if any, between them and the average Kaffir dance. Hobday became quite eloquent on the subject, and, as they moved to chairs set ready for them round a camp fire, gravely stepped a measure which he was pleased to call the stately waltz, and then [Pg 113] proceeded to contrast it with what he termed the ridiculous prancings of the present day.

Although the uncomplimentary terms which he applied to modern dancing could with equal justice have been applied to the waltz as danced by him, his companions agreed and fell to talking again of dances they had been to when last at home.

Suddenly Lindsay said: "Why shouldn't we have a dance? One could hum the tune while the other two dance. We can take it turn and turn about to him. You and Hobday dance first and I'll hum. Why not?"

And thus began the dance which is talked of to this day by the natives who saw it.

Lindsay hummed the "Eton Boating Song" whilst Knight and Hobday waltzed round and round the fire. Although he bobbed about in an unnecessarily energetic manner, it was clear to Knight that Hobday had been inside a ballroom.

Then Knight sat down and hummed the "Blue Danube," but very badly, and with many notes strange to the tune, for Lindsay was six foot three and Hobday only five foot four!

Then Knight and Lindsay danced to the "Merry Widow," hummed by Hobday. They really got on very well together in spite of Lindsay's bandaged feet, for both, in civilisation, were adjudged good dancing men.

After that they each had some light refreshment in the shape of another tot of gin, and it was then that Hobday showed himself to be a man of imagination.

"Let's all dance now," he said. "Let's dance the Lancers."

"How?" said Lindsay, "we are only three and there should be at least eight for the Lancers." [Pg 114]

"That don't matter," replied Hobday, "you two fellows take sides, I'll do top and bottom; our partners—well, they're in England, don't you see?"

And so it came about that in the heart of Africa, under the star-lit sky, three sane and more or less sober Englishmen danced right through the Lancers from beginning to end, one taking top and bottom, the other two the sides, whilst their partners were present only in the mind of each.

After the dance they stood silently round the dying fire, gazing into the embers.

Who can say what fair forms and faces they saw there?

It was Knight who kicked the logs of the fire together and so brought about a sudden blaze.

"What's that?" asked Lindsay, peering into the darkness.

All looked and saw the whites of innumerable black men's eyes reflecting the camp firelight. Then there was a patter of many feet as the silent witnesses to the dance hurried away.

ON THE BUILDING OF BRIDGES. [Pg 115]

If, in the course of conversation, a Rhodesian referred to "the Old Man," his fellow Rhodesians knew that Cecil John Rhodes was meant.

No one who knew him personally spoke of that great man as Rhodes; in Rhodesia such familiarity was impertinence.

If anyone in the Bulawayo Club said: "Rhodes told me ..." we turned our backs, as we knew the fellow was about to lie.

No, it must be "Mr. Rhodes" or "the Old Man."

I, personally, never got beyond "Mr. Rhodes" in his lifetime, and I don't see why I should now that he is dead.

As I was about to remark, the best piece of imaginative work that Mr. Rhodes ever did was to plan the Cape to Cairo Railway. It has not been carried out yet, but that doesn't matter; one day we shall see it, unless flying kills the train.

The corner-stone to this imaginative piece of work is, without a doubt, the bridge over the Victoria Falls.

I watched that bridge being built, not girder by girder, of course, but generally speaking. Old Mkuni watched it girder by girder. [Pg 116]

Mkuni was a fine old savage, who had, in his far off younger days, carved out a little kingdom for himself. He possessed the left bank of a little river called the Maramba, some square miles of rock, a few acres of good land, and—the Victoria Falls.

A man who could establish his claim to the Falls has a right to be regarded as of some importance.

Within the memory of man a large herd of elephants went over the Falls and whirled in the Boiling Pot below—a noble offering to the spirits who dwell there. Anyone who denies that the Falls are the abode of spirits is a fool, be he white man or black.

Old Mkuni looked after the Falls and ministered in divers ways to the wants of the spirits who inhabited the place. He it was who, in fair and fierce battle, took this precious spot from old Sekute, the wall-eyed ruffian who used to live on the north bank of the Zambesi.

To hide his defeat from the eyes of passing natives, old Sekute set up a noble avenue of poles

from the river to his village. On every pole he placed a human skull; these, he vowed, were the headpieces of Mkuni's men. Mkuni could afford to laugh, for did not he and all the world know that some of the grim trophies were the heads of Sekute's own followers, slain by Mkuni's men and added to at the expense of half a hundred of Sekute's own slaves? All this was before Livingstone discovered the Falls.

So you see, when all is said and done, Mkuni was a man worthy of respect. He always had mine, and we were fast friends.

It fell to my lot to tell him of the bridge which would stand astride the tumbling waters. He was interested, and gave his consent without reserve.

When he asked me how it was going to be done, I had to confess I did not know; engineering feats are not in my line. [Pg 117]

"Are you going to build it, Morena?"

"No."

"Who then will build this bridge?"

"The people of the Great Man."

"The King of all the white men?"

"No, not he himself, but one of his greatest men."

"If the King would build it, I should believe, or," he added most politely, "if you would build it, I should agree that it can be done, but what do others know of bridges?"

This was a little difficult to answer, so I told him to watch.

Mkuni took my words literally; he did watch. He could be seen daily perched upon a rock overlooking the work, surrounded by a large number of his own people.

From time to time strangers from inland added to the watchers. To all Mkuni held forth:

"Am not I an old man now? Have I not killed many in battle? Did I not take the thundering smoke from a certain person? Who then knows so much of the building of bridges as I?"

With this inconsequent line of argument the crowd of watchers would murmur full agreement.

"When a man builds a small hut, is a pole from the ground to the roof necessary?"

"No," from his audience.

"That is true, but if a man builds a hut as high as Heaven, is not a pole necessary?"

All agreed that it was so.

"But see now these white men, who build a bridge across the thundering smoke. It is not the King of the white men who builds, nor he who collects from us the Hut Tax, but strangers. They build this bridge from the north bank and from the south, but where is the pole to hold up the roof of the bridge?" [Pg 118]

From day to day Mkuni's supporters increased in number.

"Come and see the white man's bridge fall into the tumbling waters," was his daily invitation, and many came.

"I am sorry for these white men, for they work to no profit."

And Mkuni's adherents increased.

But, in spite of all, the work progressed. The thin steel arms flung out from either bank crept nearer daily towards the clasping of hands, and yet the bridge did not fall.

Poor old Mkuni, firm in his belief, found it hard to stomach the thinning in the number of his fellow watchers. He became highly indignant. In vain he talked—piled unanswerable argument upon argument unanswerable. Someone put it about that there was nothing the white man could not do. Many agreed with this, and went home.

At last the engineer who built the Victoria Falls Bridge saw his work complete.

Mkuni, too, saw that the work was finished—all but the pole in the middle to keep it from tumbling down.

Under all his anxiety the poor old man had shrunk visibly; so, too, had the number of those who believed in him, and had come at his invitation to watch with him the disaster which he assured them must overtake that bridge.

Poor old Mkuni!

It must be admitted that there is something of the gentleman about the raw, untutored savage, for when the first train had crossed safely over the Victoria Falls Bridge, Mkuni stood alone on his rock. No one remained as witness to his discomfiture. [Pg 119]

He climbed slowly down to his village. Everyone in it was busy with his or her ordinary daily occupation; all strangers had quietly gone their several ways.

THE COMPLEAT ANGLER.

[Pg 120]

R. E. Baker was engaged as conductor of our waggons on one of our journeys from Bulawayo to the Zambesi, and a more capable cattle-man than he did not, I am sure, exist between the Cape and Cairo.

If an ox wouldn't pull, he made it. If an ox went sick, he cured it with amazing rapidity.

Baker, though English by descent, was a Cape Dutchman through and through. A bad-natured ox he named "Englishman," and flogged the wretched beast into a better frame of mind.

On the other hand, he would walk miles to find good grazing for his cattle, and to see Baker caress an ox was a thing to remember. Not being a cattle-man myself, I thought our conductor was gouging out the eye of an ox. It certainly looked uncommonly like it. He was forcing his fist with a rotary movement into the beast's eye.

In answer to my questioning, he explained that he was caressing the ox, that cattle appreciated the attention; you had to be vigorous or you tickled the poor thing, and oxen didn't like being tickled.

[Pg 121]

He was obviously right, for each ox, as Baker approached, seemed to know what to expect and tamely submitted.

A few days out from Bulawayo Baker came back from the water carrying fish. He had caught them, he said, in the large water-hole. It never occurred to me that there would be any fish in the almost dried-up rivers which we crossed from time to time. Baker assured me that where there was water there were fish, but you must know how to catch them.

A day or two later we outspanned close to some water-holes. Baker said he was going to catch some fish, and asked me whether I would like to come too. I said I should, and began unpacking a rod and some tackle which I had bought in London with the intention of fishing for tiger-fish in the Zambesi.

Baker watched me unpack and make my selection. He seemed much amused. Presently he drew from his pocket his own tackle, which appeared to me to be a confused mass of tangled string and hooks.

We set out. Baker stopped at a small deep hole containing clear water. It was my turn to smile. The pool he was going to fish in was a little larger than a water-butt.

I went on, and found a fairly long pool. The water was rather muddy, and I found little depth anywhere. However, I hoped for the best, and fished just clear of the bottom. I used as bait a small piece of meat from a wild pigeon's breast, recommended by Baker.

I have a certain amount of patience, but not, I fancy, quite sufficient to entitle me to describe myself as a fisherman. After about two hours of this fiddling, I gave it up and went in search of Baker.

To my amazement, he had quite a score of fish on the grass by his side.

"Did you catch all those?" I asked.

[Pg 122]

"Yes."

"In that hole?"

"Why, yes."

"How on earth do you do it?"

By way of reply he asked me how many I had caught. I said, "None."

"Ah," said Baker, "you shouldn't fish, you should angle. Watch me."

I sat down and watched.

Baker had a short, thick stick in his hand. From the end of the stick hung a thick piece of whipcord. On the end of the cord he had a stone with a hole in it, what we, as children, used to call a lucky stone. Just above the stone he had tied a skinned pigeon—the whole bird. Hooks radiated in every direction from the bird; hooks set at every conceivable angle—dozens of hooks. From time to time Baker threw a few breadcrumbs at his bait. I could plainly see the small fish cluster round. Now and then he struck sharply. Nearly every time he fouled a small fish, mostly under the jaw or in the belly. Each time he hooked a fish he repeated: "My lad, you shouldn't fish; you should angle."

When we reached the Gwai River, Baker produced a long hand-line with an immense hook on the end of it. The bait he used was a lump of washing soap. I didn't go with him because I wasn't

ready and he was impatient to begin.

"We shall catch big barbles here," said Baker.

I followed him, and saw him throw his lump of soap well out into the river. I stood on the bank above and watched.

Baker lit his pipe, looked up and down the river, and at his line. Then he shifted the line to his left hand, which he lifted to his left ear. With his right he made a winding movement close to his head, and said: "'Ullo! Exchange; put me on to Mr. Barble, please, miss." [Pg 123]

To my intense amusement, and to Baker's obvious surprise, there was a sharp tug at the line. He remained for a while with his hand suspended near his right ear as though still on the handle of the old-fashioned telephone instrument. Then he gave a violent strike. But the barble—if indeed it was a barble—had had time to spit out the piece of soap and so escape.

Baker, still unaware of my presence, said: "Damn the fellow!" He shifted the line to his right hand, and went through the pantomime of getting on to the Exchange again, this time ringing with his left hand.

"'Ullo! Is that you, Exchange? Put me on to Mr. Barble again, please, miss."

No response from the fish.

"'Ullo! Exchange! What? No answer from Mr. Barble? Gone to lunch, eh?"

I moved off quietly up the river, and in course of time succeeded in catching a mud-fish weighing forty-eight pounds. I came back a couple of hours later, and found Baker had landed two immense fish of the same kind; one weighed fifty-three pounds and the other fifty-nine. He had also caught a poisonous looking eel. How he had landed these monsters he would not tell me; he contented himself with repeating: "My lad, you mustn't fish; you must angle."

When we reached the Zambesi, Baker almost neglected his cattle. He had never seen this grand river before. He at once got out a line and went "angling."

Coming down the river bank, I saw Baker standing on a rock a few yards from the bank. [Pg 124]

Sitting on the bank was an old man, watching him.

"Any luck?" said I.

"No."

"Been here long?"

"Not very long, but that old man talks too much to please me."

I looked down at the old man. He looked up at me. He greeted me in the local language. In his language I replied. Whereupon he calmly said: "I have been telling that white man that from the rock on which he stands a crocodile took a woman yesterday."

I hurriedly translated. Baker did no more angling that day! He thought the old man had been saying "How do you do?" to him.

In the end we converted Baker to our way of fishing, so that he became an expert spinner and killed many a noble tiger-fish. But he had a mishap the first day he used a rod which almost decided him not to use one again. He was fishing from the bank for bream, which run large in that part of the river. He used a float for the first time. Presently his float disappeared. Baker struck upwards, using both hands. He pulled his fish out of the water, but with such force that it flew over his head and fell with a splash into a pond behind—free.

I think we just saved him from an immediate return to "angling" by pretending not to have seen his discomfiture.

THE SONG OF THE GREAT OCCASION. [Pg 125]

The news spread quickly that the "Great Man," his wife and some friends were coming north of the Zambesi to shoot. Williams, the Native Commissioner, heard it from the boy who looked after his fowls a full week before he received official warning from Headquarters.

How the chicken-boy heard of it remains a mystery. He who can tell you how news travels so rapidly in Africa can no doubt explain; but in answer to questioning, the boy replied: "People say so."

Thanks to this advance notice, Williams had time to make his plans at leisure. He had experience of native rumours of this kind, and, invariably acting upon them, gained a reputation for good organising.

No doubt the Sovereign's representative would want to shoot lion, buffalo, eland, sable, and, in addition, at least a specimen of each of the lesser inhabitants of the plain and forest. Well, he

would do this and that and the other, and it would not be Williams's fault if a thoroughly representative bag were not made.

Like all sportsmen in official positions, living far from Headquarters and having a large district to control, Williams knew exactly where the game was most plentiful. He kept the information to himself as a general rule, for he well knew that if he did not do so his special reserves would soon cease to exist. [Pg 126]

But for the direct representative of the King nothing was too good.

Williams made his plans, built a camp and awaited the arrival of his visitors.

Two days before the "Great Man" was due to arrive, old Garamapingwe, the musician, passed that way. He stopped to pay his respects to Williams.

"Good day, my father."

"Good day to you, Garamapingwe."

"What are the news, my Chief?"

"I look to you for news."

"Oh, there is nothing but the coming of the 'Great Man.'"

"Yes, he is coming."

"I should like to see the 'Great Man.'"

"You shall, Garamapingwe."

"Much thanks to you, my Chief."

An idea occurred to Williams. No doubt the sport which he had planned to provide would be excellent, but what about the evenings spent round the camp fire after dinner?

It might happen that his guests did not want to play bridge. He himself detested the game—most unnatural of him, but there it was. He disliked "shop" out of hours, and one could have too much talk of personal experiences. He must provide for a possible gap.

How many men in a thousand had heard native African music? Not the stuff you can hear any day from the boys' compound at the back of the house, but music, worthy of the name of music, made by men like Garamapingwe? Very few. [Pg 127]

So Williams added to his plan.

It was Friday. The Great Man had been shooting for three days. The first two were decidedly promising. Nothing very wonderful had been shot, but very fair heads of eland, buffalo, roan and waterbuck had been secured by various members of the party.

The Great Man had done fairly well, but he was perhaps more at home with a shot gun.

But Friday had been a bad day. At the Great Man's request Williams had gone with him to look for Sable antelope. So far no one had shot a Sable. Well, they came across Sable, and in this manner.

At daylight all had gone their several ways.

The Great Man and Williams had gone east. Good luck, Sable spoor and quite fresh. Williams was a fair tracker: he had picked up something of the art from the bushmen down south. They followed it, Williams leading, carefully. The report of a rifle in the distance! The Great Man stopped. Williams felt savage. Who was this poaching? Who had left his beat and jumped their claim? He motioned the Great Man to sit down.

They waited.

They waited for ten minutes and then the snapping of a twig, somewhere to the left, attracted Williams's attention.

By Jingo, there they were, the Sable.

Led by a cow, a noble herd of Sable antelope came slowly through the forest.

The Great Man looked at Williams, who grinned and commanded quiet by lifting his hand.

On they came, cows, cows and more cows. Where was the bull? Surely a big bull accompanied such a herd of cows? [Pg 128]

More cows and young bulls, but as yet no big, black, outstanding bull.

Williams was puzzled.

The Great Man became restive under inaction: to him there was no apparent difference between

a cow and a bull. He had never seen Sable antelope before.

The huge herd filed past within forty yards.

Still no bull.

The Great Man looked at Williams and his expression was none too pleasant.

Williams felt desperate. He began to think it best after all to let the Great Man kill a good cow and have done with it when, looking to the left, he saw the bull. It was the bull! Black as ink, with a snow-white belly. Horns seemed above the average.

A great spasm of joy gripped Williams's heart. Here was a bull worthy of the Great Man, the direct representative of the Sovereign.

In response to a sign from Williams, the Great Man looked, saw, raised his rifle and—Williams checked him. Good Heavens, what was the matter with that bull? Seemed to be going short, off fore. It couldn't be.

Then he motioned to the Great Man to take his shot. The next moment the noble bull crashed to the ground and the cows filed on at a gallop and so out of sight.

"A good shot and a good bull, Sir," said Williams, but he was conscious of a sickening sense of dread.

They hurried up. The bull lay stone dead with a bullet exactly placed behind the shoulder.

"Shall I mark out the head skin for you, Sir? You'll want to keep this head?"

"Yes, please." [Pg 129]

Williams worked like a man possessed. He cut the sleek, black skin from the withers to the brisket as the bull lay. Without moving the carcass he made a slit up the mane to the base of the skull. Here he stopped and listened. He heard something. Footsteps approaching. With a gasp of despair he dropped his hunting knife and faced the way the bull had come.

Curse the fellow! There he was; the Great Man's A.D.C., babbling like the fool he was. He was talking in English to the native who accompanied him. "Are you sure you are on the right track?" The native said nothing because he didn't understand one word of any language but his own. The A.D.C. headed straight for the Great Man's bull. Presently he looked up and walked forward smiling.

"Hullo, Soames, what are you doing here in my patch of country?"

"I hit a Sable bull about two miles back and followed him."

"You hit a bull?"

"Yes, Sir."

"So I have killed your bull for you, have I?"

"Oh no, Sir. It's your bull, of course."

"My dear boy, I know the laws of shooting. Mr. Williams, was this bull hit before I killed him?"

"I'll look, Sir," said Williams, feeling like a detected thief.

Fancy having to say "yes" to the question! There was the bullet hole in the off fore fetlock. What a shot!

The party dined under a sense of restraint that night. The Great Man congratulated his A.D.C. on having secured a fine bull, but that didn't improve matters. [Pg 130]

After dinner it was a silent party round the camp fire.

Williams spoke.

"Would you like to hear some African music, Sir?"

"Very much indeed. Do you play?"

"No, Sir, but I have a man here."

"By all means let us hear him."

Garamapingwe was sent for.

The old musician came, followed by two other natives. He himself carried two curious looking musical instruments, one of the men carried another; the third man, led by a little native boy, was blind and empty handed.

The three natives greeted the Great Man suitably who as suitably replied.

They then sat down on the other side of the fire and Garamapingwe struck a few bold chords. No common musician he.

Williams said something in the vernacular to Garamapingwe, who replied.

"What did he say?" asked the Great Man.

"I asked him what he was going to sing," replied Williams, "and he said: 'The Song of the Great Occasion.'"

"Will you please ask him what this great occasion is of which he is going to sing?"

The question was put and the reply translated. "The great occasion is the visit paid to our poor country by the Great Man who represents the King of the white men."

"How very interesting! Please tell him to proceed."

Garamapingwe sang and played vigorously. He played an instrument with either hand. His companion played one with both his hands. The blind man droned in chorus to Garamapingwe's recitative. It was a very fine performance. The Great Man had an ear for music. Williams was delighted, for the Great Man seemed both pleased and interested. [Pg 131]

The second verse was ended and the third began, when suddenly the blind man leaped into the air, interrupting the harmony with a piercing shriek.

All but Williams and the natives thought this part of the performance. They were not left long in doubt. Clutching wildly at his clothing, the blind man moaned and moaned and moaned. He stripped himself and turned to the fire to be inspected by his fellows. The Great Man's wife fled to her tent. Williams had the musicians hustled away.

A large scorpion had crept up and stung the blind man as he sat.

Thus the song of the Great Occasion ended abruptly.

THE DESCENT OF MAN.

[Pg 132]

Randall was skinning a monkey. He had shot two monkeys during the morning and had already skinned one of them. He collected monkeys and had done so steadily for years.

Randall was District Commissioner and Magistrate of a large tract of British Africa. One of the many men who live and die unheard of by the British public; men who quietly but efficiently "administer" England's African possessions.

Some day, perhaps, England may realise what a debt it owes to these unknown men.

I was Randall's assistant. I had served for four years; that is to say, one year beyond the probationary period. I had made good to the extent of getting on the Establishment, and held the rank of Assistant Native Commissioner.

Randall had been in the Service for twenty-three years. In his dealings with the natives he was firm and just. He had a deep sympathy for the people entrusted to his care, but he successfully concealed it from them. He used to say to me "Play the game with your people but don't slobber over them, they don't understand that sort of thing."

It has often been said that all men who have spent more than ten years in the heart of Africa are mad. I have known few saner men than Randall, but I cannot deny that he had one peculiarity: he collected monkeys. [Pg 133]

I could never understand why he shot the wretched things, or why he skinned them in such a peculiar way. Let me explain.

Randall only shot one kind of monkey, and only the mature male of that kind. Having bagged his monkey, he would consult a shabby little black pocket-book, make an entry in it, and then set to work to skin the beast.

From watching him I gathered this much: he kept only the head and shoulders and one arm of each monkey. Sometimes it was the right arm, sometimes the left, never both. Some kind of calculation in the pocket-book appeared to be necessary before he could determine which arm he wanted.

I also observed that he carefully cleaned all particles of flesh from the skull and arm bones and, having put some preservative on the skin, wrapped it round the skull and bones, making a neat little parcel of the whole. After labelling the specimen, he packed it away in a box which was carried, wherever he travelled, by his body servant, Monga.

On reaching the Station, after a journey in the District, Monga and his master would repack the contents of the box in a large tin-lined case. Randall had three such cases. Two of them were quite full, the third nearly so.

I never questioned Randall about his hobby. Once I shot a monkey and gave it to Monga, thinking

his master would skin it; but he did not; he simply told his man to throw it away. As he said nothing to me about it, I let the matter drop and made no more advances. [Pg 134]

As I said before, on this particular morning Randall had shot two monkeys. He decided to keep the left arm in each case. Monga was squatting on the ground in front of him, holding the body of the dead monkey whilst his master skinned it. The pair were silent; from long practice Monga knew exactly what was required of him and needed no instructions. Presently Randall said "This is the last one, Monga: no more monkeys after this one."

Monga accepted the statement without comment, but it set me speculating afresh upon the object of Randall's quaint hobby. However, as my Chief offered no explanation, I did not ask for one.

When the skinning was all but done, Monga permitted himself to remark, "Monkeys were men like me once, Morena."

Randall paused and looked gravely at Monga for a moment; then, bending to his task once more, he said, "Monga, I believe you, tell me more."

Now, if Monga resembled anything, it was a monkey. His eyes were set close together, his nose was very small, his lower jaw protruded slightly, and his forehead was very low and much puckered. I saw the humour of the conversation and wanted to laugh, but to have done so would, I felt, have lowered me in the estimation of my Chief. Randall had once said to me: "Blackmore, in spite of your ridiculous name, you should get on in the Native Department. Had your name been Whitelaw, or even Smith, you would not have been handicapped. You have a stupid name to live down, for this is a black man's country. However, always remember this: never laugh with a native, and only laugh at him if he is deserving of punishment and you wish to punish him. Only a fool beats a native; ridicule is a cleaner form of punishment, and not as brutalising." [Pg 135]

I suppressed my desire to laugh, and Monga resumed.

"Yes, Morena, monkeys were men once just the same as we are. They lived in their own villages in nice huts; they had their own chiefs, and spoke like people do.

"But they became lazy—lazy to hoe their fields and to weed them; lazy to build their huts and to plaster them. So they said to each other: 'It is a bad thing to work; let us go to the forest and live there, and we will find fruits in the forest to eat.' So they went to the forest and lived there.

"One day one said: 'Are we not tired of making clothes? Let us grow hair on our bodies that we may be warm always.' And all agreed and grew hair on their bodies.

"When the autumn came, and the grain in the lands was ripe, the lazy ones came to steal from the men's gardens. The men tried to watch their gardens, but the thieves were too clever.

"The monkeys had their servants, and when they wanted food they sent their servants on to see if there were any men in the lands. If there were no men there they would steal corn and pumpkins and melons and calabashes, and carry them away to the forest.

"And if they found a sleeping man watching the fields they passed by him gently; and when they had finished stealing they would cut some twigs and beat him severely. And when the man woke up and began to run away, they would laugh at him and mock him.

"When the monkeys returned to the forest with the foods which they had stolen, they lit fires and cooked them. Then the people, seeing the smoke, came with sticks and assegais, and beat some monkeys and killed others. [Pg 136]

"Then the monkeys said: 'It is not good to have fire, for the men see it and come and kill us.' So now the monkeys steal when the men are not looking, and eat the food uncooked in the trees at night."

Randall made only one comment. He asked Monga where the monkeys got their tails from. But Monga admitted that he did not know.

Randall had now finished his skinning, and had made the usual neat little parcels; Monga brought the box and carefully packed them in with the rest.

The travelling box was quite full!

A few days later Randall developed black-water fever and died. We carried his body back to the Station and buried him at the foot of a large baobab tree. The natives for many miles round attended.

When all was over, and Randall's successor was on his way to take charge of the district, Monga came to me and reminded me that there were some monkey skins in the travelling box to be packed away in the large tin-lined case. As he knew more of his master's strange hobby than I did, he did the packing whilst I looked on.

When the last skin had been transferred I realised that the case was quite full, and would not have held another one. This, I remember, struck me as being uncanny. Between us we soldered

up the tin lining and nailed on the lid of the case.

Then Monga looked at me for instructions. This set me thinking. Why on earth did Randall collect monkeys? I examined the lids of the cases and found his name and home address neatly painted on each. Clearly, therefore, he had intended to take them home. But this did not explain why he [Pg 137] had collected them. I thought of the shabby little black note-book, so went into the house and looked through it. All I could gather was that Randall had collected three hundred and eighty right-armed and one hundred and twenty left-armed skins. Five hundred wretched monkeys—and what for? And why not two hundred and fifty right arms and two hundred and fifty left; or why not all right or all left?

I went back to where Monga stood by the cases, and asked him why his master had collected the monkeys. He seemed surprised at my question; it apparently never occurred to him to inquire into the why and the wherefore of any of his master's acts. He seems to have accepted all his master did or said as a matter of course.

The whole thing was monstrous. I could not send the wretched things to his people at home. They would think him mad, as perhaps he was as regards his hobby, but no saner man ever lived so far as anything else was concerned.

Then I had an inspiration. I ordered a large hole to be dug at the foot of another tree, which stood about a hundred yards from that under which Randall's grave lay. Into this hole I had the three cases carried, and the earth shovelled back. Monga didn't disapprove, or, if he did, he made no protest. I think he took the whole thing as a matter of course, as was his way.

I never found out, nor can I imagine, why Randall collected the heads and shoulders of five hundred monkeys—three hundred and eighty with right arms and one hundred and twenty with left arms attached.

Someone reading this story may guess or may know. For myself, I frankly admit defeat.

THE RAILWAY CONTRACTOR. [Pg 138]

Bositi had returned to his village after six years' absence. Most of the time he had spent on the railway construction, where the work was heavy and the pay light. In physique he was improved almost beyond recognition.

The large blue-and-yellow tin box which he carried on his head contained the miscellaneous goods upon which he had spent some of his wages. Much of his money had gone in drink, more in gambling.

After Bositi had been away two years the headman and elders presumed his death. So, too, did his wife; she married again, and had presented her new husband with two children.

Bositi was unreasonable about it. On being told that he was supposed to be dead, he insulted the headman and beat the woman who was once his wife. When her husband protested, he beat him too.

After he had thus relieved his feelings he opened his box, and took from it many strings of pink and white beads; these he gave to the mothers of the pretty marriageable girls of the village. In return he received much strong beer. The beer made him drunk—too drunk to beat or insult anyone else, but not too drunk to grasp securely in a moist hand the key of his precious box. [Pg 139]

Next morning he made his peace with the headman by giving him a hat, but he rudely rebuffed his late wife, whose cupidity was excited by the size of that blue-and-yellow tin box.

He also made friends with the men of the village—not excluding him who had married his wife—by distributing pieces of strong twist tobacco.

After a few days' rest he made certain selections from the treasure in his box and set out for the Chief's village. When there he showed off. He wore his best clothes, and spoke bad English fluently and loudly in the traders' stores. While his money lasted the traders suffered him; when it was spent he was told not to come again.

The Chief soon heard of him and sent for him.

Bositi had never been presented at Court before. He was immensely impressed. He squatted in the sand, one of a long row of strangers to the capital, with his gifts neatly folded before him. Immediately in front of him was a long thatched building. Three sides of it were closed in with reed mats, the fourth was open to the public. This, a lounger told him, was the National Council House, or Khotla.

The Chief had not yet arrived, but his orchestra was playing idly. It consisted of three gigantic harmonicas and a number of drums. The instrumentalists showed their utter contempt of all common people by talking loudly as they strummed and thumped.

The Court Fool was aping birds. He had a bunch of feathers in his hair and a few stuck in his waist-belt behind; this was the extent of his make-up. For the moment he was imitating a crested

crane. The bird is beautiful, the Fool was hideous; yet such was his art of mimicry that all recognised the bird he had chosen to represent. [Pg 140]

The Town Crier paused for a moment to bawl something unintelligibly, and then passed on his way.

Some oxen straying by stopped to sniff at some rubbish. The armed guards drove them off with a few cuts of their raw hide whips.

Bositi had brought as a present to the Chief a large blanket with a realistic lion printed on it, a highly-coloured pocket handkerchief, and a new brass tinder box. He mentally contrasted his gifts with those brought by other men—mostly to the disadvantage of the others.

One old man was about to offer two goodly tusks of ivory. By the fuss the hangers-on made of this old man it was very evident that a possessor of ivory commanded very much respect.

Bositi had smuggled an old Tower musket across the border and knew where to get powder. He promised himself an elephant with larger tusks than those displayed by his rival.

Presently there was a stir. The Chief was coming! The orchestra struck up energetically; the Fool twirled rapidly round on one foot; the hangers-on crouched and shaded their faces as from the rising sun; the long row of visitors bent forward until their foreheads touched the sand; the guards fell upon one knee and all clapped their hands.

Bositi literally buried his face in the sand; a little got into his right eye and annoyed him for days to come.

The Chief moved towards the Council House, preceded by a number of body servants, one of whom pointed with a long stick to imaginary stumps and stones over which his lord and master, if not warned, might trip. [Pg 141]

Another carried the Chief's chair. This chair was strongly made on the European pattern. The seat of it was covered with the hide of a Sable antelope, from which constant use had worn much of the hair. A rude face was carved on the bar which supports the sitter's back. To this face men do reverence when the Chief is not in his chair.

A third man beat with two small drum-sticks upon a large harmonica, which was suspended by a bark rope from his neck.

Another carried a green umbrella, not open, because the Chief himself had a smaller one in his own hand.

The sight of the Chief filled Bositi with awe. He paid no attention to the crowd of councillors following in the footsteps of the august personage. He felt that his own finery, which had been much admired by the common herd, was really very mean.

For the Chief had on a grey top hat with a wide black band to it. He wore a long magenta dressing gown, which fell open as he strode forward, disclosing a pair of pepper and salt trousers. On his feet he had a magnificent—in Bositi's eyes—pair of new bright yellow boots. In his free hand he carried an eland's tail fitted as a fly-whisk, with an ivory and ebony handle.

In spite of his absurd clothes the Chief had a certain air of dignity. He was heavily built and stooped slightly at the shoulders with age; his small beard was tinged with grey.

He stepped along firmly, however, and Bositi noticed with jealousy that his eyes lit up as they rested for a moment on the two great tusks of ivory brought by the old man. [Pg 142]

The Chief entered the Council House and sat down. Immediately all present raised their hands and shouted a salutation with such good will that the orchestra was not heard for a space. The Court Fool hopped round with renewed energy. The official Praiser shouted:

> The great lion!
> The bull elephant!
> The thunderer!
> The greatest of all lions!

The salutations died down and the orchestra came to its own again.

There is no hurry in a native Council House. The band played out its selection and the Court Fool continued to gyrate. One by one the Councillors took their seats in the Chamber. This was a lengthy business: each man in turn seated himself on the ground before the Chief and clapped his hands and bowed several times; then, collecting his skirts round him, he moved in a crouching position to his accustomed seat.

At length quiet prevailed. One by one the visitors were marshalled forward to present their gifts and state their case—if they had one to state.

Many trivial matters were discussed and trumpery gifts bestowed upon the Chief, when it came to the turn of the old man with the ivory.

"Who is this who brings ivory?" asked the Chief.

"It is Moyo of the Rivoswe country," someone volunteered.

"Oh, the man who is said to have broken our laws. See, he brings two tusks and they are large ones."

"Yes, the tusks he brings are large ones," remarked several of those in the Council House. [Pg 143]

"Who accuses this man of law-breaking?" demanded the Chief.

There was no reply. All knew their master's weakness for ivory.

The Chief addressed Moyo: "Tell me, old man, what mischief was in your heart when last you left my village?"

Moyo pointed to the tusks. "I went to hunt elephants for the Chief. For long I hunted before I killed. When I had killed, I brought my ivory to my Chief. I am no law-breaker. Is it against the law for the Chief's slave to hunt elephants for the Chief?"

"If," answered the Chief, "to bring me ivory is to break the law, let many break it. Who accused this man?"

As no answer was forthcoming, the Chief accepted the ivory.

As a matter of fact this old man Moyo had been very troublesome in days gone by. He had refused to pay the annual tribute of honey, corn and skins, and had driven away the tax-gatherers sent to collect. Now, realising that he was getting on in years, he thought it wise to make his peace. No one ventured to remind the Chief of these things in view of the offering of two goodly tusks. Moyo was permitted to go to his home in peace; it was, however, plainly hinted to him that ivory would not save his skin if again he thought fit to defy the Chief's authority.

At length Bositi's turn came. "Who is this slave?" asked the Chief.

Someone spoke for him. "He comes with a small gift. He has been working for many years for the white man."

"Is this the fellow who has been making the white man's stemala?" [Pg 144]

(By "stemala" the Chief meant railway, probably an attempt at the word "steamers.")

"Yes, Chief," said Bositi, "I have been making stemalas."

"Can you make good stemalas?"

"Yes, Chief, I can make them. I have been helping the white man to make them for many years."

"What does the white man use stemalas for?"

"To carry goods too heavy for a man to carry, and to travel distances more quickly and greater than a man can travel."

"Could you build a stemala for me?"

Without hesitation Bositi declared he could build a railway for the Chief if he were provided with the necessary men to help him and a few axes and adzes for felling and shaping the timber.

"Is not the stemala made of iron?" inquired the Chief.

"Yes, the white man uses iron from his country where it is found in pieces as long and as straight as a palm tree. He has no big trees in his country. In the Chief's country iron is only found in little pieces, but the trees are large and long."

"If you make a good stemala for me you shall be the headman of your village and the induna of your district. The axes and the adzes shall be given to you. Go and make a stemala for me; go quickly and make the stemala quickly."

"I will go, but the Chief must know that a stemala is a big thing to make. Many men and many days are wanted for its making."

"It is well; I understand," said the Chief. Then turning to one of his principal advisers, he directed him to see that Bositi had all the men and all the tools he required. [Pg 145]

That night much fuss was made over Bositi who was to become the headman of his village and the induna of his district—when he had made a railway for his Chief.

As for Bositi, he talked big things and adopted the manner of a big man, bearing himself as if his railway were already built and he installed in his high position.

In due course were settled such small details as where the railway was to be built, how many men were required, and what tools would be wanted from the Chief's store.

At length the party set out. Bositi was the most important member of it. Next, and with authority in some respects even greater than his, was the Chief's representative. This man had power to requisition slave labour in the Chief's name and free food from the villages near to the seat of operations.

The spot chosen for the railway was some two hundred miles from the Chief's village. This was fortunate for Bositi, for the distance freed him from too much tiresome supervision. It was on the

main river where free navigation is interrupted by a waterfall of considerable size and a series of formidable rapids. For centuries travellers had been content to drag their canoes overland round these obstacles. The going was very heavy as the soil was loose and sandy. The railway was to save this labour. Canoes were to be put on the rails above the falls and so transported to the quiet water below. A more useful railway, from the natives' point of view, could not have been planned.

I was shown over the works by Bositi himself in the early days of construction, before those difficult problems arose which sooner or later confront all who "bite off more than they can chew." [Pg 146]

If Bositi had paid strict attention to business and had attached that importance to details which details have a way of demanding, I think his railway would have been a success. But this is too much to expect of any native.

He began well.

I found firmly fixed to the ground by means of stout wooden pegs half a dozen well-made wooden rails. Much labour had been expended on these, for they were cut from large trees. They were perfectly straight and set in true parallel. Resting on the rails were two pairs of wheels: each pair was linked together by a heavy axle bar, rounded at either extremity to permit the wheels to turn freely, but squared between the wheels. The wheels, which were secured to the axle by wooden pins, were shaped like cotton reels: that is, they were doubly flanged in order to keep them from slipping off the rails.

Bositi ordered his men to put a long, heavy log across the axle of the two pairs of wheels and proudly pushed it backwards and forwards along the short length of line, some sixty feet.

He explained that when the work was finished it would be necessary only to place a canoe, fully loaded, across the axles and push it along.

I asked him how many months he had been at work on the construction. He said six. I pointed out that as the distance to be covered by the rails was some three miles, it would be forty years and more before the railway was ready for use. In the meantime, what about the ravages of the white ant?

Bositi appeared hurt but not discouraged. I think he put my criticism down to the natural jealousy which a white man would feel upon finding that a native is not incapable of great things. [Pg 147]

He explained that the work had required some planning out, that the local people had been slow to respond to the calls made upon them by the Chief's representative for food and labour, and that the rains had hindered progress.

I admitted that these were difficulties which required time to overcome, and asked to be shown his working camp.

Bositi led me some distance into the forest. Here I saw a number of men busy with tiny native adzes upon some felled trees, shaping them into wooden rails. In very few instances were the rails in the making as straight as those already laid. It was clear to me that the wheels would somehow have to negotiate very awkward turns and twists in the line, and I wondered how they would do it.

By no amount of questioning and patient explanation could I get Bositi to see the difficulty which lay ahead of him, so I presently continued my journey, encouraged by the promise that when next I passed that way with my canoes I should enjoy a ride on the wooden railway.

That section of the Cape to Cairo railway was never finished. I inspected the abandoned line many months later and found, as I had expected, that the white ants had eaten the rails almost as quickly as they were laid. I also saw that less trouble had been taken in making them. The trees from which they were cut were crooked, so here the rails widened, there they narrowed. Here there was a hump, there a depression.

I made it my business to find out what had become of Bositi. He had not been made a headman of his village nor an induna of his district; but, having failed in his undertaking and squandered all his substance, he had gone south again to live the careless life of the railway camp, where, under the hand of the white man, difficulties seem to disappear as quickly as the morning mist before the rising sun. [Pg 148]

THE LICENSED VICTUALLER. [Pg 149]

John Smith was an up-country caterer in a remote part of Africa. We called him Joseph, after other shining lights in the trade.

I don't think I ever saw him quite sober, but, on the other hand, never heard of his being drunk.

He was not good to look at, being fat, bald and red-faced.

A stranger once called him Joe. Our host was indignant at the familiarity, and snapped: "I'm Joe to me pals, John Smith to me acquaintances, Mr. Smith to you, damn you!" Coming across to my table, he winked heavily, and said in a hoarse stage-whisper: "P'raps you've 'eard a bloke say that afore?"

I admitted I had.

"Come in nice and 'andy, tho'," said Joe.

Joe's place of business was a frame house with walls of canvas. He had named it the "Duke of York's Restuarant." The spelling was his; so, too, was the sign-writing.

He was a man of uncertain temper. One day a hungry guest asked for more beef. Joe thought this unreasonable, and thus addressed the man: [Pg 150]

"Yore twist do give yer nerve. 'Ere, tike the bloomin' lot!" With that he hurled the round of beef full at the hungry man's head; it missed him and passed out through the canvas wall. Joe glared at his damaged property for a space, and then in a loud voice made it known to the rest of us that "Beef's off."

On another occasion a boarder declined to partake of a doubtful-looking meat concoction which Joe declared was "frickerdells."

"Wot, yer don't like 'em, don't yer?"

"No."

"Won't eat 'em, won't yer?"

"No."

We all held our breath, wondering what manner of assault Joe would select for this reckless fellow.

But Joe grinned, actually grinned, and replied: "I don't blame yer; I wot makes 'em wouldn't touch 'em; no, not for a fortune."

One Saturday afternoon I happened to be passing through the yard when Joe was discussing with his handy-man, Sammy, the Sunday lunch. (Sammy was an Indian, and in Africa all Indians are "Sammy" to all men.)

"'Ow many dead chickens are there, Sammy?"

"Fourteen, Boss."

"'Ell! 'Ow many died yesterday and 'ow many did yer find dead this mornin'?"

"Eight yesterday and six to-day, Boss."

"Well, we'll curry the eight and roast the six."

On Sunday I refused curry and roast fowl. Joe asked why. I told him.

"Blokes wot 'ang around the cook-'ouse door 'ears things an' sees things o' times wot puts 'em off their grub. 'Ave some bully?" [Pg 151]

I did.

Joe seldom had enough waiters, and what he had were mostly black men, quite untrained. I remember one white waiter who answered to the name of William. In our eyes he had many faults —in Joe's, but one. He would talk to the customers, stand and talk instead of attending to wants.

Joe warned him repeatedly, but his warnings were lost on William.

One day Joe lost his temper. "Look 'ere, you snip, wot 'ave I told yer? Wot 'ave I kep' on tellin' yer? You'd talk the 'ind leg off a mule! You'r hat it agen. 'Ere, quit. Sling yer 'ook out o' this. I'm bloomin' well fed up with yer."

William blinked at Joe during this harangue, and then quietly asked: "Do I understand you to mean, Joe, that I'm sacked?"

"Yes," said Joe, "I sack yer. Come to the till for yer pay."

"Do you mean," pursued William, "that I am a free man?"

"You are," said Joe.

William turned and looked up and down the crowded tables. He then walked quietly to an empty seat and sat down, bawling:

"Joe, bring me a plate o' beef; look sharp, I'm in a hurry."

As Joe's business grew (and it did grow in spite of Joe), the waiting became too much for him. He had so many guests that he couldn't get them served quickly enough to please himself, or them.

This man wanted one thing, that another, and a third something else; all called their wants loudly and together.

Joe's remedy was, I believe, original. Sharp at one o'clock he had each place set round with generous helpings of all the dishes for the day. You would find a plate piled with roast beef, greens and potatoes; a second equally full of cold pork, potatoes and spring onions; a third with hashed mutton and potatoes; a fourth with hot suet pudding plentifully smeared with treacle; half a loaf of bread on a fifth, and so on. To one arriving a little late, this spectacle was far from appetising. One knife and fork and one spoon had to do duty for the lot. [Pg 152]

Most people ate what they wanted and left the rest. Once a guest protested that he could not eat everything set before him. Joe was hurt. "'Oo the 'ell arst yer to?" he thundered savagely. "It won't cost yer no more, nor no less, either way."

Just inside the "restuarant" door there stood what Joe described as a "wash-and-brush-up-nice-and-'andy." It was his claim that he catered for the "better clarse." The "wash-and-brush-up" consisted of a tin basin on an empty upturned whisky case. The water was usually dirty; the towel, suspended from a roller, was always so; the soap was a long bar of "blue mottled." Dangling from a piece of string, tied to a nail driven into the wooden framework of the wall, was a tooth-brush. Heaven knows where Joe got it from; it was by no means new. He had never used one himself. When I questioned him on the subject of this "fitting," he said: "Some people uses 'em. Like as not I should be arst for one quick enough if I didn't have one. Best to tie it to the 'ouse, or some bloke 'ud lift it."

Someone once asked for a table napkin. Joe was puzzled, and looked searchingly at the man. He suspected a "leg-pull."

"What for?" he demanded. [Pg 153]

The man explained.

"Oh, it's a servy-yet yer want, is it? Ain't got any! You wait till the railway comes, then we'll get all manner o' things—servy-yets, toothpicks, and suchlike. Don't be unreasonable; you ain't in a drawin'-room now, yer know."

When the railway did come, Joe sold his business for much money and went North. The sight of a starched collar and a tie in his "restuarant" was a sign for him that civilisation had reached his very door. Joe didn't like civilisation, and hated "torfs." He had been known to remark: "The sight of a bloke in a boiled shirt makes me sick."

On the spot once occupied by Joe's eating house now stands a large hotel built of stone, with a bathroom leading out of every bedroom.

THE JOHNNIE-COME-LATELY.

[Pg 154]

William Blake walked quietly into the bar of the Tantani Hotel. It was obvious to all that he had not been out from England long, because his clothes were so new and clean. Besides, he bore the self-conscious air which is an unmistakeable sign.

All the men who crowded the bar wore reach-me-downs; or, if their clothes had been made in England, it was very, very long ago.

William knew the barman, who had been at Eton with his elder brother. Men find strange jobs in Africa in the process of reaching their proper level. I must add that in course of time that same barman bought the bar—and many other things besides—and ultimately represented his district on the Legislative Council.

At the moment of William's entry the barman was busy, so the youngster edged his way in between the wall and the brawny back of a corduroyed transport-rider, intending to wait quietly until he could catch the barman's eye.

The place was thick with the fumes of strong drink and tobacco smoke—Boer tobacco smoke. Of all the unlovely habits which men acquire, that of smoking Boer tobacco is the most trying to other people. I know, because I used to smoke it once, and I have seen it empty an Underground railway carriage at every station. [Pg 155]

But William did not smoke, neither did he drink strong drink; he merely wanted to have a talk to the man his brother fagged for. But, on reaching the bar, he unintentionally jogged the transport-rider's arm and spilt some of his liquor.

"Who the hell are you shovin'?"

"Sorry."

"Sorry, are you? Yer bloomin' tailor's model."

The barman's chief asset was a quick ear and a keen sense of rising trouble. He was at the end of the counter in a moment.

"Hullo, Bill. Upset Rogers' drink, have you? Well, both have a drink at my expense. This boy is a friend of mine, Rogers."

"Well, Jimmy, as he's a friend of yours I'll overlook the accident—and I will. Mine's a gin and tonic; what's the boy goin' to drink?"

Before William could explain that he didn't drink, the barman said: "I know his poison, don't I, Bill?" following this up with a heavy wink.

"Mr. John Rogers—Mr. William Blake."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Blake. Put it here."

The pair shook hands.

The barman pushed two glasses forward—one, containing gin, towards Rogers, and the other, lime-juice, for Blake. He took something out a bottle under the counter for himself, gave Rogers a small tonic, and split a small soda with William.

"Here's fun," said Rogers.

"Chin, chin," said Jimmy the barman.

The boy nodded gravely at each. They drank. [Pg 156]

"Come on, let's have another," said Rogers. "Same as before for me, but not quite so much of your bloomin' tonic, Jimmy. Spoils the gin."

No sooner were the drinks poured out than the barman hurried away to attend to the calls at the other end of the counter, so the two were left to themselves.

"What are you drinkin', might I ask?"

"Lime-juice and soda," said William.

"Just what I thought. Now, my young friend, it won't do. Didn't you see the train come in to-day?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"I don't understand."

"Don't you? Well, isn't this the very first train to get here from the South?"

"Yes."

"Well, ain't you goin' to get drunk on it?"

"Certainly not."

Rogers stepped back and looked the boy up and down. Then——

"What will you bet?"

William didn't answer. The transport-rider knocked over the lime-juice and placed his gin in front of the boy.

"Drink that."

"No, I won't."

"Yer won't?"

"No."

"I'll give you three chances and no more."

With that Rogers drew a heavy revolver from his coat pocket.

"Drink! One!"

"No."

"Drink! Two!"

"No." [Pg 157]

"Drink! Three!"

"No, I won't drink it."

Rogers stared at the boy for a moment and then put the revolver back in his pocket again.

"I like you. You've got grit. Drink rot-gut if you like, it ain't any business of mine. Here, take these."

"These" were a bundle of Standard Bank notes tied up with a piece of string. William edged close to the wall.

"Here, you take 'em; they're fivers. Got paid for a job to-day, but I like you, so you've got to have 'em."

"I don't want your money."

"Neither do I. Take 'em."

"No."

"What? You don't drink and you won't take good money?"

"No."

"I'll give you three chances, and this time I'll shoot."

"Take 'em! One!"

"No."

"Take 'em! Two!"

"No."

"Take 'em before I say three!"

"No."

"Well then, no one shall have 'em." And with that Rogers flung the bundle out of the door into the darkness. Then he bent his head upon his crossed arms and sobbed.

Jimmy seemed to be watching, for he lifted a flap in the bar counter, went outside the door, and returned almost immediately, stuffing the bundle into his pocket. [Pg 158]

"Don't mind him, William."

Then to Rogers, "What about your drink?"

The transport-rider stood up.

"Did you see the train, Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"Ain't nobody drunk?"

"Not very."

"The train's in and nobody drunk? I'll get drunk. I will get drunk."

And with that he danced round and round the bar waving his glass. "The train! The train! The train!" ... Crash!

Everyone turned round. John Rogers, transport-rider of Tantani, had fallen, and lay on the floor insensible.

"Rogers drunk?" came in a chorus of incredulity from all quarters. No one stooped to examine him; perhaps because few besides William and the barman felt it quite safe to stoop. Then several of his fellows pushed him under a seat with their feet, and turned to the bar again.

"Poor old Rogers," they said, "who would have thought it? Must be breaking up. Used to keep goin' for days together without turnin' a hair. Poor old blighter. Train's taken his transport-ridin' away from him. Yes, that's what's upset him."

But William met Rogers next morning, quite himself again.

"Morning, boy."

"Good morning."

"Jimmy gave me my money back."

"Of course."

"Have you got a job?"

"No."

"Looking for one?" [Pg 159]

"Yes."

"Well, come my next journey with me. I'll go on the strict t.t. I'll show you some good shooting, too, and I want a hefty young man to help me with my cattle. Jimmy told me he thought you'd come. I want you to come."

William went, and a partnership sprang up which resulted in profit to both.

Rogers and Blake own that large cattle ranch just beyond Belingwe. Rogers must be nearly seventy now, and is still hale and hearty.

THE LOST RUBIES.

[Pg 160]

If you asked a South African mining man, no doubt he would tell you that there are no rubies in Africa. He would be wrong.

To my knowledge two very large ones have been found. One of them I have seen. The other I have heard about. Take my word for it, there are many rubies in Africa. I will go so far as to tell you where. I hope you will go and look for them, and, what is more, find them.

The rubies of which I write are to be found on the banks of the Zambesi, somewhere below the Victoria Falls. If I could give more exact details, I wouldn't do it: I should go and look for them myself.

As I said before, I know they are there, because I have actually held one in my hand. The man who showed it to me told me it was a ruby. I believed him, of course. I had reason to. But just to make sure, I placed it between two half-crowns, put the precious sandwich on a flat slab of granite, and gave it a severe twisting under my heel.

My silver suffered. I did manage to pass those half-crowns off on someone, but I felt a criminal.

[Pg 161]

Now this old man who showed the ruby to me looked a very old man indeed. He was a Scotsman. His long beard was only slightly red, otherwise it was white. To be quite accurate, I suppose I should say he had a long white beard tinged with pink. At least, so it seemed to me the first time I saw it and him.

It is just twenty-five years ago that the old man came to my camp on the Zambesi, some forty-five miles above the Victoria Falls.

Quite apart from his beard he was obviously old. His legs were thin. He hobbled from rheumatism. His cheeks were hollow, and how very thin his ears were! I remember his ears quite well, they were almost transparent and his hands—well, they were just claws.

This poor old man came to me for three things.

One. Could I mend a shot-gun? I had a look at the dingy old weapon and admitted that it was quite beyond me. It was a double-barrelled shot-gun with four good inches gone from the right barrel, one from the left, and the rib of metal which should join the two was curled back for a good ten inches.

He explained that he had tried to shoot a king-fisher and his gun exploded. He suggested that a mouse must have crept up the barrel during the night.

Perhaps one had.

I, personally, should have said that the gun was suffering from the same complaint as its owner—old age.

Well, I couldn't help him in the matter of the gun, so what was the next thing?

Had I a drop of good Scotch? Yes, by Jingo, I had, and very welcome the poor old fellow was to it.

[Pg 162]

I gave him a good dose of his native medicine, which seemed to put back the clock of time for him at least a couple of dozen years.

And the third thing?

Oh, yes, the third thing. He began:—

"You see, I am an old man. I'm an honest man, oh yes, quite honest. I don't lie like the others."

He paused and looked out of the door of my tent.

"The other two are bad."

I don't attempt to reproduce his accent or the queer, querulous way he had of talking, because I can't. He was an old Scotsman, so you may fill in the local colour for yourself.

"I want to tell you something."

"Yes."

"You won't give me away?"

"No, of course not."

"You won't tell the other two?"

"Certainly not, but who are the other two?"

The old man looked out of the tent again and quickly back at me. He placed his finger alongside his nose and winked. Then he said in a loud voice: "I must be going. Thanks for the drink. No, I won't have another. It's getting late and my pals will be anxious."

Through his talk I heard an approaching footstep.

The old man backed out of my tent and I followed him. Within a few yards of us was another man approaching hurriedly. He looked anxiously from me to the old Scotsman and back again.

He stopped and, addressing the old, old man, said: "What are you doing here?"

This annoyed me. I was on the point of asking very sharply what he wanted, anyway, when the expression of both made me pause.

On the old man's face, fear; on the newcomer's, anger, suspicion, greed, cruelty—a bad face of a bad man. [Pg 163]

My curiosity was aroused; I answered the question.

"Your friend has been having a drink with me. Won't you have one?"

"No, I will not." Then, by way of an afterthought: "No, thank you very much." And the fellow smiled with his ugly mouth, but not with his eyes.

The intruder, as I now regarded him, seemed in a hurry to be gone.

"The canoe boys are waiting for us and we must go. Come along, Macdonald."

The old man turned his face towards me and, as he said good-bye, I saw a great fear in his eyes.

Ignoring the other, I begged him to stay the night and promised to try my best to mend his gun. He shook his head and turned slowly away.

The ugly man hurried him along towards the bank of the river and helped him into the canoe. I felt there was something wrong but didn't see how I could interfere.

As the pair pushed off from the bank, the other man turned round and shot a searching look at me. What could the mystery be? That thick-set, black-haired little devil was up to no good. He looked as if could murder the old man, me, or anyone else, if necessary.

I saw nothing of them next day, but my natives told me that there were three white men with a waggon camped on the other side. I sent a boy across to spy out the land, but he came back with no information of any real importance.

On the third day I felt so uneasy about the old man that I half made up my mind to cross the river to see him. I was prevented from doing so by the arrival at my camp of the veriest pair of ruffians I ever clapped eyes on. [Pg 164]

As they walked up from the river I had time to study them. And a pair of arrant scoundrels they looked.

The man who had already paid me one visit was talking rapidly to a fat, unhealthy-looking fellow who seemed to feel mere walking an excessive exertion, for he puffed, stooped, and walked awkwardly.

The stranger wore a waistcoat but no coat. His braces, which were red, hung untidily on either side; he had forgotten to slip them over his shoulders when putting on his waistcoat.

When they reached my tent I offered them chairs. The fat man sank into one, his thick-set companion stood.

It was the latter who talked. The other mopped his perspiring forehead with a blue cotton handkerchief, and seemed capable only of saying: "That is so; yes, yes," in support of his companion's rapid talk.

It soon became obvious that this precious pair wanted to know exactly what the old man had told me three days before. As he had told me nothing, it was easy to answer them.

"How did I find the old man?"

"Just that he seemed very old, much too old to be at the Zambesi at his time of life."

"Didn't I find him lightheaded?"

"On the contrary, quite normal."

"Hadn't he spun me some queer yarns?"

"No; just told me of his gun and his accident with it."

"Well, as a matter of fact, he was off his head, and I really mustn't believe all he said. Oh dear, he had kept them both in fits of laughter on the road up with his queer notions. Stories of gold mines and suchlike nonsense. Hadn't he talked of that kind of thing?" [Pg 165]

"No."

"Well, he was now in bed with a go of fever and talking queerer than usual. Yes, if I could spare it, they'd like some quinine for him; but they had better be going, for it wasn't playing the game to leave an old man for long who had the fever on him."

The pair got up to go.

I disliked them both, especially the fat one, who looked to me like a city-bred parasite—a barman, bookmaker, tobacconist's assistant, or something of that sort. They glanced round them and hesitated, evidently expecting to be asked to drink with me. I would sooner have gone "three out" of a bottle of beer with a couple of hogs.

Presently they went off, evidently much relieved to find I knew nothing.

I was now determined to know all, and quickly; but how to get hold of the old man alone again was the difficulty.

As I sat in my chair thinking, I recollected a remark let fall by the boy I sent to spy upon them: "The fat one drank much Kaffir beer, which he bought from the natives who lived on the north bank of the river."

I sent a messenger to the headman of the village with an order to make much beer, pots and pots of it, and take it new and half-fermented to the white men on the other side. I instructed the headman to sell it cheaply, and said that I would make up the difference.

In due course I had my reward. The old Scotsman came over and told me one of his companions was in great pain and the other was trying to ease the pain by rubbing fat on his belly, that he himself had got away unnoticed, and now wanted to tell me all about "it." [Pg 166]

I was naturally all anxiety to hear what "it" was all about, and made the old man sit down.

Now why is it, I wonder, that old men can't come quickly to the point? Much to my annoyance, he wasted a good half an hour telling me what scamps the other two were; how he felt sure that, given half a chance, they would "do him in" but not until they had got from him his secret. Tell them? Not on your life!

But he would tell me; oh yes, he would tell me. Ever seen a ruby? No, not out of a ring? Well, I should see one now and hold it in my hand. A large one, fit for a king. And he would tell me where to find more. Hundreds of them. The other two had brought him up to the Zambesi just to find out where the rubies were. But he wasn't going to tell them, not he. They were too darned stingy with the whisky bottle; besides, they wouldn't sign a paper on it. A man who wouldn't sign a paper on a deal was up to no good—didn't intend to play fair. Now what did I think they should pay him for showing them where the ruby mine was? Would a couple of hundred be a fair thing?

And so on, and on, and on.

I gave him the best advice I could, which amounted to a warning not to trust his companions.

Then he showed me the ruby, which he carried in a small blue medicine bottle marked "fever mixture."

I knew precious little about rubies, and told him so. It was then that I tried it between the two half-crowns.

Having satisfied myself that it was a very hard stone, even if it weren't a ruby, I gave it back to him, and he returned it to its bottle.

He then told me that, many years before, he had been travelling in company with a Jesuit Father [Pg 167] along the banks of the Zambesi. That just below the village of a native, whose name for the moment he could not remember, he had found the rubies. One he had kept and the other he had given to the priest, who told him he was going home to France shortly and would find out whether the stone was worth anything or not. If it had value, he would sell it and go halves.

They went down south together, and parted company at Grahamstown. A year later he was sent for by the manager of the Bank and told that £480 had been remitted to him by the Reverend Father.

The money came in handy, and for one reason or another he didn't bother about going all the way up to the Zambesi to get more rubies. He also got married and settled down in Bechuanaland on a farm.

But his wife had lately died. His two daughters were married, and his son was killed in the Matabeleland rebellion. Then he lost all his cattle by rinderpest.

So he left the farm and went to Bulawayo. He didn't know anyone there, but took up with his two companions, met them in a bar, told them about the ruby and showed it to them. A Jew had assured them that the stone was a ruby right enough, and had, he believed, put up some cash for their outfit and journey.

But they wouldn't sign a paper, and were up to no good. He had come up to the Zambesi—felt he had to. It was hard to make money nowadays.

"But I'll tell you all about it," he said, "and where the mine is, so that, if these fellows do me in, you can get the stones. They shan't have them. You know where the Gwai River runs into the

Zambesi?"

"Yes." [Pg 168]

"Well, it's not quite so far down—Listen! Did you hear that?"

"No, what?"

"That calling for help. There it is again."

We went to the tent door and looked towards the river. In midstream we could see a canoe bottom up. One white man was sitting astride at one end, and there was a native at the other. A second white man was swimming for the bank.

I ran down to the landing stage, calling my canoe boys as I went. For the moment I forgot all about my visitor. There was a white man in the water and, scamp though he undoubtedly was, I couldn't let him drown.

My boys and I got him ashore. It was the thickset one. His fat, unhealthy-looking companion was floating down the river astride the upturned canoe.

After landing the one, I sent my boys back for the other. They had had a thorough wetting and the city-bred fellow was very much scared.

I had their clothes dried and then sent them back to their camp in my own canoe. It appears that an angry hippopotamus attacked them.

All this time I had little time to think about old Macdonald. I asked my people about him and they told me that he had slipped away and crossed in a canoe to the white man's camp whilst the other men's clothes were being dried.

Not a word was said about the Kaffir beer. If the pair of villains were coming across the river to me for assistance or medicine when the accident happened, they forgot to mention the fact in the excitement of the moment and after.

Next day they were gone—all three of them, ruby and all. And I never saw any of them again. But I did see in a Bulawayo paper, which reached me later, the following announcement: [Pg 169]

> "At the Memorial Hospital, Bulawayo, John Macdonald, died of blackwater fever. Funeral (Hendrix and Sons) starting from the Hospital at 3.30 this afternoon."

So I repeat there are rubies in Africa, somewhere on the banks of the Zambesi, below the Falls, but north of where the Gwai river makes its junction. If you decide to go and look for them, good luck to you!

THE CATTLE KING. [Pg 170]

Schiller was a cattle trader by profession, and he made a lot of money.

He was incidentally a Jew by birth, an Austrian by accident, a hairdresser by training, and a soldier of fortune when occasion offered. He was quite illiterate.

Although he could neither read nor write he yet kept accurate enough accounts of all his many transactions with the natives. He once showed me his accounts. They consisted of notches on tally sticks. I couldn't make head or tail of them, but Schiller knew to a shilling how much each ox had cost him and how many cattle he had.

One Sunday morning he came over to my bungalow and told me all the gossip of the country-side. Incidentally he remarked that my hair wanted cutting, and asked if he might have the pleasure of operating.

I thanked him and sat down.

To my amazement he produced from a little black bag all the implements of the trade, including a pink print sheet which he proceeded to tuck in round my neck.

His touch was unmistakable.

"Aren't you a professional?" [Pg 171]

"Yes, sir, from —— of Bond Street."

From that day on, twice a month if I was at home, this man who was worth at least twenty thousand pounds cut my hair for sixpence.

He called himself the "Cattle King."

I first met him when he made application for a cattle trading licence at my office: this was many years ago.

As, in those days, we could issue or withhold a licence at discretion, I questioned Schiller closely.

He didn't look like the ordinary Jew. By that I mean he hadn't a pronounced nose: on the contrary, it was small and snubby. He told me he was a Jew, I should not have guessed it.

He wore a long row of medal ribbons and, in support of his claim to them, produced discharge papers from every irregular force raised in Africa during the last twenty years.

I read the papers carefully and could but conclude that the little man who applied for a licence was a confirmed fire-eater and a very gallant soldier.

No camp follower he. His medals were earned and at the cost of not a few wounds. I later saw these honourable scars.

I gave him his licence and asked him to sign an undertaking designed to control certain undesirable activities in which it was just possible he might wish to indulge.

He couldn't write his name. A large X with a few unnecessary blots thrown in adorned the record of his promise. He never broke his word: in fact that man's word was his bond in the truest sense.

I have always found that an illiterate man is a much more rapid learner than one who keeps a note book. The one relies upon his memory and so strengthens it; the other discourages it by admitting its limitations. [Pg 172]

He learnt the local dialect rapidly, and his pronunciation was quite good. This gave him advantage over his rival traders.

Natives like to hear their language spoken by a white man, and, as Schiller was a fluent talker, his company was much sought after.

He was a trading genius. Anything he had for sale soon became the rage with the large native population. He got to know most of the great ladies of the land. Knowing that great ladies, be they white or black, set the fashions, he persuaded them to patronise his store and accept long credit.

If this particular pattern of print did not generally commend itself to the community, one of the important dames would shortly appear draped in yards of it. If that coloured bead did not sell freely, a personage in the Chief's household would soon be seen wearing string after string of it.

But it was cattle he wanted, and cattle he got. So large did his herd of fine beasts become that the Chief himself grew jealous, and issued a warning to his people not to sell too freely.

Still the herd increased. The man dealt more fairly with the people than the other traders, and, moreover, did not make the mistake of getting upon too familiar terms with his customers.

During my absence on a tour of inspection a crisis arose. The Chief forbade his people to have any further dealings with the Cattle King.

Schiller counted his gains, branded his cattle, and sent them south to the rail-head for sale. Then he closed his store.

Just at this time a number of waggons arrived bearing many cases and bales of new goods for him. These were off-loaded, unpacked, and disappeared into the closed store. [Pg 173]

Then Schiller made a hatch in the store door not unlike that of a railway booking-office. He left the shutter ajar, but piled up goods in front of all the windows. Black noses in plenty gathered against the panes, but goods—goods everywhere—blocked a view of the interior of the store.

Through the hatch Schiller could be seen mysteriously occupied. He had a chequered board in front of him with many little discs of wood upon it. He sat with eyes fixed on the board, and from time to time moved a disc.

He told all inquirers that his store had been closed by orders of the Chief, and that he himself was very busy.

News of the trader's preoccupation spread about. Was he making medicine with which to harm the people? Surely not; he was a kind little man.

Was he communicating in some strange way with the absent Commissioner? That might be; better make sure.

The Chief became uneasy. At last he sent his principal headman to inquire.

This headman had received some education at the Mission school, so he wrote a polite letter to warn the trader of his coming.

> SIR,
>
> My greetings to the honest man the merchant. I hope you have slept well I am telling you that I have not seen you for a long time and it is my intention of coming to see how you get on. I am well and my wife is well. Now I must close my letter.
>
> Your friend,
>
> GONYE.

The envelope bore the address:

Mr. Shiler, Esq.,
The Merchant.

The letter was duly delivered at the hatch. Schiller pretended to read it and said there was no answer. [Pg 174]

As a rule he brought his letters to be read by my native clerk, but I had taken him with me on my tour.

If the Cattle King was surprised when the headman pushed open the hatch shutter and looked in, he did not show it.

He glanced up from his draught-board impatiently, frowned at the interruption, and turned to the game again. He was playing self versus self, and self was giving self no end of a tussle.

"Good-day to you, Merchant."

"Good-day, Gonye."

"I hope you have slept well?"

"Yes, and you?"

"Oh, yes, I have slept very well, thank you, Merchant."

Silence fell upon the pair, and the game of self *v.* self proceeded.

"Huff you for not taking me here," muttered Schiller.

"Crown me, please," replied Schiller.

"What are you doing, honest man?" asked Gonye.

"Yes," replied the merchant abstractedly.

"You do not trade now, Merchant."

"No, your Chief has closed my store."

"Will you tell the Commissioner?"

"Of course."

"What will he do?"

"The Chief and you will know what he will do when he does it."

"What are you doing now, honest man?" asked Gonye, and added—"May I come in?"

"Yes, if you don't talk or touch the goods." [Pg 175]

The trader got up and let the native in, but returned to his game without ceremony.

Gonye walked round the piled-up counters and inspected the well-filled shelves. Here were goods indeed. Goods worth many head of cattle. Blankets, coloured print, calico, brass wire, beads, shirts, hats, coats, sugar, jam, tobacco, pipes, knives, looking-glasses, mouth organs, and goodness knows what besides.

Seeing all these nice new things created many wants in the headman's heart. But the Chief had closed the store.

Gonye wandered back to where the trader sat and watched him.

With a shout of triumph, self beat self by two kings. Schiller rearranged the board for another contest.

"Is it a game?" asked Gonye.

"Yes, it's a game."

"Is it a very hard game?"

"Very hard."

"Did it take you long to learn?"

"Years and years."

"Could I learn it?"

The trader sat back in his chair and looked fixedly at the native. "You might," he said.

"Will you teach me?"

"I will try to; bring up that chair and sit down."

The rest of the afternoon was spent by Schiller initiating Gonye into the mysteries of draughts.

Next day the native came again.

"I think I can play now, Merchant."

"Do you? Well, you take black and I will play with white."

Schiller won, with a loss of scarcely a man.

"Try again, Gonye." [Pg 176]

Schiller played a cunning game, so the native made a slightly better showing next time. The third game he did better still. The fourth game he won.

That was the only game of draughts he ever did win against the trader. In his triumph the headman persuaded the Chief to declare the store reopened. The merchant was a good man. He was indeed an honest man. His cattle kraal was empty. What would they say to the Commissioner on his return? The trader would of course complain. Moreover, the store was full of very nice goods.

The next morning the store was opened and the natives flocked to it with their cattle. Schiller did a great trade, and bought more cattle in a week than all the other traders combined had done in three months.

Gonye felt rather sore as the merchant declared that he was now too busy trading to play draughts. However, Schiller, who was no fool, made his position of Cattle King secure by presenting the board and men to Gonye.

The last I heard of Schiller was at the outbreak of the Great War. He had joined the Force which set out to take German South-West Africa.

PARTNERS. [Pg 177]

Jack Fernie and William Black became partners in the usually pleasant business of seeing something of the world.

What the two men had in common was little enough so far as I could discover. They appeared to meet on the common ground of boots—uncommon boots.

Fernie hated wet feet. He argued that if water got in over the top of the boot, the foot remained damp all day, which was bad for you. So he punched holes through the leather of the uppers, all round, just where it bends in to meet the soles. He explained that since water must find its own level, it will run out of your boots as readily as it will run in, if given a fair chance.

Black went in constant dread of developing an ingrowing toenail, so he wore boots with two compartments inside, one for the big toe and the other for the rest. They were very ugly, clumsy boots, but Black declared that they were a sure preventive and very comfortable.

These two strange creatures were never tired of discussing each other's boots. [Pg 178]

Now Fernie had been second officer on board a liner. On the way home from India he had said unrepeatable things to a parson. When he arrived in London his directors sent for him, scolded him severely, and dismissed him from their service.

When I got to know Fernie well, I asked him what all the trouble had been about. He was not very communicative; he merely said that he could no more abide a black coat than he could a black cat. With that he changed the subject, and I had to be content.

Black had slaved as a clerk in the City for thirty-five years and doubtless would have remained one for the rest of his natural life had not an old lady, no relation of his, left him in her will a sum of money which provided him with an income of between six and seven hundred a year. There was no mention of the why and the wherefore in the will, and Black declared that he couldn't imagine why she did him this good turn.

It appears that Fernie and Black first met in Bulawayo. How, exactly, I don't know. They had bought a donkey-waggon and set out for the Zambesi river, which they crossed at a place called Kazungula, some forty-five miles above the Victoria Falls.

Their introduction to me was a curious one. Fernie walked into my camp one day, followed by Black. He said: "Are you the magistrate of these parts?"

"Yes."

"Well, will you sell us up?"

"What do you mean?"

"You see, we're partners, Black and I. We don't get on as such and want to dissolve. Isn't that so, Black?"

"Yes."

"So we want you to sell us up; sell our outfit as it stands—waggon, donkeys, and everything else we've got. Don't we, Black?" [Pg 179]

"Yes."

"But," I said, "who do you expect to buy in a place like this? There isn't a white man within a couple of hundred miles. I'm not buying donkeys, and the natives can't."

"That's all right," said Fernie. "I will do all the bidding, and you can divide the proceeds between us."

"Yes," said Black, "that's what we want you to do."

Of course, I agreed to help and asked them to set out the things for sale.

When everything was ready, Black handed to me a list, neatly written and ruled with two money columns, one headed "Cost Price" and the other "Sale Price."

I had never acted as auctioneer before, but that didn't matter; entering into the spirit of the thing, I began.

"Gentlemen, I have here as fine a span of donkeys and as sound a waggon as ever came north of the Zambesi——"

But Fernie cut me short with: "A hundred and sixty pounds."

I looked at the list. In the cost-price column, against the item "span of donkeys and a waggon" was set £160.

I got no fun out of the sale at all. Fernie bought everything, bidding cost price for everything. The total, I think, came to just three hundred pounds.

"Black, I owe you a hundred and fifty, and here you are."

Black took the bundle of notes, counted them with practised finger and thumb, nodded, and handed a receipt to Fernie. The queer pair then shook hands, grinned at each other sheepishly, and thanked me for settling their little difference. [Pg 180]

The three of us had lunch together, and during the meal Fernie told me as much of their story as he thought fit.

It appears that on their way up to the Zambesi friction arose between them; nothing serious, but just enough to make them feel a little tired of one another's company. Fernie considered that he should boss the outfit; Black wanted a say in matters, too. In Black's opinion Fernie was too dictatorial. Fernie thought that Black butted in too much and always unnecessarily—fatuously. So they sat down one day and discussed the situation calmly and decided that Fernie should buy Black's share and that Black should become a passenger, paying Fernie so much weekly.

This arrangement was so simple and complete that I wondered why it was necessary to bring me into the matter at all. I suspect it was the ex-clerk's passion for regularity and record, for immediately after the sale he had drawn up a formal statement of dissolution of partnership. When he and Fernie had signed this document, they asked me to countersign it.

After luncheon we sat for a while discussing guns and rifles. By we, I mean Fernie and I, for Black possessed no firearms of any sort and appeared to take little interest in them.

Fernie set so much store by the Martini-Henry rifle and the old hammer shot-gun that I correctly guessed these made up his battery. Presently he produced the weapons for my opinion.

The shot-gun had been a good one in its far-off day, but the spring of the right-hand lock had gone, so only the left barrel was serviceable. The Martini was so old and the rifling so worn that I wondered how Fernie ever hit anything at which he aimed. But he did. He said he had got to know the old gas-pipe. [Pg 181]

That evening the pair left me and went North.

From time to time I came across these men; now and again one or the other wrote to me; later, their waggon boys told me much; I gathered more from the natives of the district in which they aimlessly wandered; finally, Black's sister entrusted her brother's diary to me. The entries in this book were made in shorthand. I had the whole transcribed. I told her I had lost the book; I lied. I have the book still. She died peacefully without an inkling of its contents.

From these various sources of information I have put together a few yarns, which I now tell for the first time. For instance, there was a curious adventure with a lion.

Fernie had been out shooting most of the day: shooting for the pot, as the party had been without meat for some time. Black, as usual, remained in camp writing up his diary. He also mended a boot.

He concluded that Fernie was having very good sport because of the number of shots he fired during the afternoon. With an inexperienced man like Fernie, armed with a rifle such as his, it was not wise to jump at conclusions.

Late in the evening Fernie came back to camp very hot and tired. He was evidently in a bad

temper, for when Black asked him if he would like some tea, he rudely said: "Tea, you bloomin' grandmother," and opened a bottle of whisky.

Then he called the driver and said he wanted a couple of donkeys to bring in the meat of a hartebeest which he had killed. The driver brought two and followed Fernie into the bush. They [Pg 182] didn't return until eleven o'clock at night. Black had become anxious as time went on. He heard Fernie shooting again at about ten o'clock and wondered how he could see to take aim in the dark. He had, of course, never heard of the common practice of firing a shot in the air if you are not quite sure of your whereabouts and then listening for a guiding shot from the camp.

It wouldn't have helped much if he had known, for he had never fired a gun in his life. It did not occur to the second waggon boy, who had also remained in camp, to ask Black why he didn't reply to the signals of distress; he very naturally concluded that Black did not do so for reasons of his own, not through ignorance or inability.

It is only fair to Black to say that Fernie had not previously heard of this manner of signalling either. The waggon boy put him up to it when they thought they were lost.

At eleven o'clock the wanderers found their way back to camp. Fernie was in a worse temper than ever.

"Why the hell didn't you answer my shots?"

"Your shots?"

"Is the fellow deaf as well as a brainless idiot?"

"I did hear you shooting, but I thought you had come across some more hartebeest."

"How the devil do you suppose I could see to shoot in this pitch darkness?"

"I don't know; I wondered."

"Oh, so you wondered, did you?"

"Well, what did you want me to do?"

"Sing, or any damn thing. But how could an ex-ink-slinger be expected to have any horse-sense to do anything requiring a glimmer of intelligence? Oh, don't talk; of course, it's not your fault, it's [Pg 183] your Maker's."

Black felt keenly the coarse injustice of this attack and sat silently looking into the fire. The truth of the matter was that Fernie had lost his way. He couldn't find the dead hartebeest. He cursed the waggon boy for a fool, which he wasn't; and beat him, which he didn't deserve.

"Off-load those chunks of meat near the fire and get to hell out of this," said Fernie roughly to the waggon boy. The fellow relieved the donkeys of their load and slouched away.

Black looked up. "You're tired, Fernie. Won't you have some supper?"

Fernie, who was making a pile of the hartebeest meat, turned with an angry jerk towards the speaker. Something in Black's attitude brought him sharply to his senses and saved him from adding fresh insult to those already thrown at his friend.

Instead, he said: "I'm sorry, Black old man. I'm a beast and we both know it. I take back all I said; please forget it. And I must give that driver fellow a tot of whisky; I hit him, which was a rotten thing to do, because he can't hit me back, and I, not he, was wrong."

It certainly was a rotten thing to do. Fernie was a big-boned, powerful man, with a fist like a leg of mutton in size. He hardly knew his strength, but many a troublesome seaman could have testified to it in the old liner days.

However, the tot of neat whisky put matters more or less right with the boy.

Black pressed Fernie to have a good square meal, but he wouldn't. He drank half a glass of raw whisky, followed by about a gallon of water. Then he put down his blankets and turned in, his [Pg 184] head towards the pile of meat and his feet to the fire. Completely exhausted, he fell asleep immediately.

It had become a habit with Fernie to place his loaded shot-gun by his side when he went to sleep, and he invariably had a large spanner handy. He did not forget to make these preparations now, tired though he was. He made them mechanically.

Black, who remained by the fire, put on his spectacles and wrote up his diary. Then he too put down his blankets, close to where Fernie lay.

He didn't go to sleep at once. In spite of his apology, Fernie's words had left a sting. This had been his worst outbreak so far. He had never used the contemptuous epithet "ex-ink-slinger" before. Because of its truth it hurt.

So Black lay on his back watching the sparks rise from the fire at his feet. He was indeed seeing the world, but he began to doubt whether he had chosen exactly the best parts of it or the most pleasant way of seeing them.

No unkind thought of Fernie ever entered his mind. I think I can safely say this, for his very full diary contains no hint of such. On the contrary, a strong thread of deep admiration and affection for his friend can be traced without a break through every page of that strange book.

Presently there was a slight movement behind the pile of meat. Black turned slowly over on his side and looked. To his great alarm he saw a large lion smelling the meat. He put out his hand and touched Fernie, who woke at once, sat up, and looked. However uncertain the sailor's temper might be, his nerve was still good. He snatched up his gun. As he did so, the lion made a short backward jump and glared at the men, growling. Fernie put the gun to his shoulder and pressed [Pg 185] the trigger. There was no report! He had forgotten the broken spring. Why he did not fire the left barrel remains a mystery. Instead, he gripped the gun about the trigger guard with his left hand, pressed the stock firmly to his shoulder, and aimed a sharp blow at the hammer with his spanner. He missed the hammer, but hit his thumb.

"Gentle, jumping Johnson!" he hissed through his clenched teeth. "The devil take the blighted thing and chew it!"

With that he flung the spanner at the beast, and disregarding the blood spurting from his crushed thumb, fired the left barrel after the lion, which had bounded away into the darkness.

It was many days before that thumb healed.

I don't suppose that at the beginning of their partnership Fernie knew much or any more about firearms than Black did. It is probable that both were equally ignorant. This does not appear from the diary, but then allowance must be made for Black's deep admiration of Fernie and all he did.

Of course, Fernie had travelled much and, thanks to his training at sea, took more quickly to strange conditions and new things than Black. By dint of perseverance and the expenditure of much ammunition, he managed to keep the camp supplied with meat, but in those days game was thick upon the ground.

It is probable that if the job of keeping the larder full had been handed over to the driver of the donkey waggon, all would have fared better.

It is on record that under Fernie's tuition Black once tried his hand at shooting at a target. I say once advisedly, for he tried but once. [Pg 186]

The rifle he used was, of course, Fernie's old Martini. The target was the bleached skull of an ox that they found by the roadside.

After showing his pupil how to hold the rifle, how to aim, and the use of sights, Fernie gave Black a handful of cartridges and walked off to set up the target.

Black was bubbling over with suppressed excitement. His heart beat rapidly. His mouth felt unaccountably dry. He almost made up his mind to borrow the rifle that very afternoon and go out and look for a buck. He pictured himself soon taking turn and turn about with Fernie in keeping the pot going.

With an effort he ceased building castles, pulled himself together, and mentally repeated Fernie's instruction on the rifle. He determined to acquit himself creditably.

Fernie had meanwhile set up the target about fifty yards away, and had moved to what he considered a safe distance. He now shouted to Black to have a shot, adding: "Don't be afraid of the darned thing, it won't hurt you. Besides, it doesn't matter if you do miss the first shot or two."

Black clenched his teeth, put the rifle to his shoulder, and aimed at the skull.

The rifle wobbled.

He was most anxious to make a good beginning.

The rifle went on wobbling.

He held his breath.

The rifle wobbled more.

He held his breath until his lungs nearly burst. Then, I'm afraid, he shut his eyes and pulled the trigger in desperation. [Pg 187]

Goodness knows where the bullet went to. Fernie declared that it passed just over his head.

But Black? He threw the rifle on the ground and rubbed his collar-bone and chin. His spectacles fell off. From where Fernie stood it looked as if he might be swearing.

"What's the matter? Have another shot," shouted Fernie, as he walked towards his friend.

"Nothing much the matter, but I don't want another shot. It hurts too much, and you said it wouldn't."

"Hurt? Nonsense! Slip in another cartridge."

"I won't."

Fernie picked up the rifle and began to wipe off the dust with his hand. "Hulloa! What on earth

have you done to the thing?"

"Done to it?"

"Why yes; this bulge in the barrel."

"Did I do that?"

"Well, it wasn't like that before."

"Wasn't it?"

"Why no. And where's my plug?"

"Your what?"

"The plug of wood I had in the barrel. Good Heavens! You don't mean to say that you fired the thing off with the plug in it?"

"I don't know anything about plugs. You gave me the rifle to fire and I fired it. My neck hurts, and I'm going back to the waggon."

There must have been good metal in that old rifle, or it would surely have exploded. About an inch from the end of the barrel was a bulge as large as a hen's egg.

One adventure is fully recorded in the diary.

Fernie shot a reedbuck. Rain had fallen during the afternoon, so, following the example of the waggon boys, the white men had taken the roof from a deserted native hut, propped it up with a pole, and had made their beds under it. [Pg 188]

Fernie put the reedbuck meat on the raised eaves of the hut roof to be out of the reach of stray night marauders, such as hyenas, jackals, or native dogs.

After his experience with the lion, he had discarded the damaged shot-gun in favour of the more serviceable rifle as a means of protection by night.

In due course the two men went to bed and both fell asleep.

Their awakening was as sudden as it was unusual. Something fell heavily on Fernie's chest. Still half-asleep, he hit out instinctively. His fist came in violent contact with hairy ribs. A beast grunted and scrambled away.

Meanwhile Black had received a leg of the reedbuck on his head and was pushing the clammy thing from him.

It appears that a hyena had crept up between the sleeping men, had sprung at the meat piled on the upturned roof, had misjudged the distance, and had fallen back in a heap upon Fernie. In its ineffectual attempt to carry off the meat it had dislodged a piece, which fell upon Black.

The friends re-made their beds, replenished the fire, and Black turned in again. Fernie, determined to get a shot at the hyena, should it return, sat up, rifle in hand, and watched for some time.

After a while he got tired of sitting up, so got back into his blankets again.

For perhaps an hour he lay on his back, holding his rifle in his hand, the butt resting on his chest and the barrel pointing straight up into the sky. It was in those positions that Black remembered seeing man and weapon just before he slipped off to sleep. [Pg 189]

How long it was before Fernie went to sleep neither had means of knowing, but both awoke to the sound of Fernie's rifle.

"What's up?" asked Black.

"Blest if I know quite."

"Did you see the hyena?"

"I think so, I thought I did."

"Do you think you hit him?"

"I really don't know. I think I must have been dreaming. I believe I let off the rifle in my sleep and then dropped it. My jaw hurts, so does my shin—damnably."

"Do you mean to say you fired the thing into the air?"

"I expect so; why?"

Black didn't wait to talk. He jumped up, pulled on his boots and bolted. As he ran he shouted: "Look out for the bullet!"

"Come back, you silly ass!" called Fernie after him. But there was no reply.

For a little while he could hear the shuffle of Black's unlaced boots as he hurried away, but not for long, as there was a wind blowing in the direction which Black had taken.

From time to time Fernie called, but there was no reply. He became alarmed for his pal's safety, so got up and dressed. With a lantern in his hand he wandered here and there, hullooing.

When it became light enough he called the waggon boys, and all went in search of Black.

They hadn't very far to go. They saw him perched in a tree quite half-a-mile away. Fernie had to climb up and bring the poor fellow down as he was stiff with cold. He pick-a-backed him to the [Pg 190] camp. A vigorous rubbing, a hot blanket, and a hotter whisky and water soon restored the patient.

He had a curious story to tell.

When he realised that Fernie had fired his rifle straight up into the air, he concluded that the bullet would sooner or later come straight down again. It might fall on him. Why run unnecessary risk? So he ran away. He thought he had time to pull on his boots, but no more. He intended to give the bullet ten minutes and then come back.

He heard Fernie call to him, but he also heard a sound which made him run faster and still faster. It was the movement of some invisible wild beast trotting parallel and very close to him. He stopped once. It stopped. Scared out of his senses, he ran on, and so did It. By a stroke of good fortune he collided in his flight with a tree; instinct made him clamber up; he did it awkwardly.

"It" jumped up at him as he climbed. Black, on the verge of exhaustion, continued to struggle frantically up the tree. He heard the crash of teeth as It's jaws came together within an inch of his leg. He felt It's hot breath on his flesh and a shiver ran down his spine.

He drew up his leg as the beast jumped again. He felt the heel of his boot seized in the creature's jaws; felt the full weight of the thing at his hip-joint as his leg swung with the spring of the beast. He clung to the tree for dear life. Something gave way. He wondered how much of his leg had gone.

Fortunately his loss was not so very serious; his boot had been wrenched from his foot—one of his patent two-compartment boots, and with it much skin from his toes. [Pg 191]

The waggon boys, who examined the spoor under the tree, declared it to be that of a hyena, probably the hyena which had tried to steal the meat.

The boot was not recovered.

Fernie really knew very little about shooting—of dangerous game he knew nothing. I don't suppose it would have made very much difference, because he was a reckless fellow, quite without fear.

One afternoon he shot at a skulking beast and hit her in the stomach. This beast was a female leopard, three-quarters grown. She charged him. Fernie hadn't time to load again, so hit her with his fist. His heavy blow stopped her for a moment, but no more. She sprang again, and as she sprang she struck at him, half-scalping him, and scoring deep wounds in his stomach and thighs.

Fernie roared like a mad thing. Dropping his rifle he grappled with her. She fought with the weapons Nature had given her; he, like savage man before the days of weapons. He spoke no word; the sounds he made came from the throat, not from the tongue—the raucous cries of a wild beast fighting for its life.

Presently Fernie tripped and fell. They rolled over and over in the dust; he, half-blinded, searching for her throat; she, biting and tearing at his flesh. He lay on her and pressed her to the ground; thus he got his grip upon her throat and held on until the end.

The end?

Fernie had killed the leopard with his hands, had strangled her. But what of the man?

A blinded, shredded thing, covered with blood and dust; his scalp hanging like a coarse fringe from his forehead to his chin; his clothes in tatters; gaping, welling wounds everywhere. This ruin of a strong man stood up, gave one long, loud roar of victory, and fell insensible. [Pg 192]

The waggon boys had heard the shot, they also heard that cry. Thinking their master had killed an antelope, they went towards the spot from whence they judged the cry had come. They found Fernie and the leopard lying side by side, and thought at first that both were dead. It would have been better so.

But Fernie wasn't dead. His hold on life was much loosened, but not yet lost. For a day or two he lingered, and then he died. His agony was awful. He couldn't move; blood-poisoning set in; he knew he had to die, and hour by hour he begged his friend to shoot him.

"Shoot me, Black. For the love of Heaven shoot. My God, I cannot stand it. Kill me, Black! Oh, do be quick, Black!"

Hour after hour Black sat near his dying friend. He did little more than keep the flies away. He was helpless. He didn't know what to do. He had scarcely heard of first aid, and they possessed no medicines.

One of the waggon boys searched me out and found me. I travelled day and night, but Fernie was dead when I arrived.

After we had buried Fernie, I think Black was the most alone man in the whole world. For him there was nothing left. He had aged much during the few days of his friend's hopeless lingering. Whenever he looked at me the tears welled up and trickled from under the lower rim of his spectacles. He couldn't stop them, he no longer seemed to try.

A man crying is not a thing for a man to see. I began to avoid him. I pleaded official duties, and hated myself for it. His obvious agony of grief became a burden to me. His whole being seemed to [Pg 193] plead for help, and I didn't know how to give it; no one could give it.

Just at that time the South African War broke out. I had official notice of it and told Black. His manner changed, changed with strange rapidity; I couldn't understand why. It did not occur to me that this helpless creature saw opportunity in that war; but he did, and he seized it.

Next day Black said good-bye to me. He was almost cheerful. He was not the old Black. He seemed resolute, more a man, he moved briskly.

I never saw him again. I learnt much of what happened from his diary, which his sister sent me; the rest from a chance acquaintance in Cape Town.

He went south to Bulawayo; from there he travelled to Beira and shipped to Durban. In Durban he volunteered for active service, and was, of course, rejected by every recruiting officer.

In the end, an enterprising newspaper man engaged him. He risked nothing, because Black asked for no pay. Black went to the front immediately, as an accredited war correspondent. What his articles would have been like I cannot imagine, but he didn't write any. His luck was in. The very day he arrived at Headquarters a stray bullet hit him in the forehead and dropped him dead.

How strange it all was! A shot, fired from no one knows where and for no obvious reason, found its mark in the brain of a man who longed for death; probably the only man in South Africa at that moment who did long for death.

THE LETTER HOME. [Pg 194]

I.

"I and my people will pay the Government's tax, we have our money here, we pay willingly and in full; but the Barushu will not pay, they will fight the Government."

Wrenshaw eyed the speaker angrily and replied: "The Barushu will pay. All will pay the Government tax and all will pay willingly and in full. Who are you to speak of fighting? Take your receipts and go. Tell all you meet by the way that the Barushu are paying the Government tax willingly and in full."

"I will tell them, Morena," said the old native Chief as he rose to go. But there was no conviction in his tone, though his attitude towards the white man was respectful.

Wrenshaw felt anxious. He had heard vague rumours that the Barushu, a large tribe living some twenty miles to the North, would refuse to pay the native tax. This would be awkward. It would have a bad effect on the rest of the tribes. He had been charged with preparing his district for the imposition of the tax. For two years he had worked hard and had then reported that all was in readiness to collect the tax for the first time. This was quite true of all the tribes of which he had [Pg 195] control, save, perhaps, of the Barushu. They were a truculent people who had always threatened trouble, although they had never actually given any.

His two Native Commissioners, who were busy receiving tax-money from another Chief, were puzzled to find that there were many more people in this particular community than the census papers showed.

It was Wrenshaw who discovered the curious fraud which was being perpetrated by the Chief. It appeared that having met all demands of him, he deliberately invented names. When asked how it was that all these people had failed to have their names recorded on the census, he suggested that they must have been away from home at the time.

At last the truth came out.

"I pay willingly," said the old man; "willingly and in full, Morena. I have paid all the money I have to the Government because the Government asks for money. I am not a Barushu to refuse to pay. What does it matter how many people I have; does not the Government want money, and is it not right that I should give all I have to the Government?"

"Old man," said Wrenshaw kindly, "take back your money. The Barushu will certainly pay. If, when all have paid, the Government still wants money, I will ask you for it. For this time you have done enough; you have paid willingly and well."

Then, turning to his assistants, he directed them to cross out all the new and obviously fictitious names which they had just entered in the register and return the money paid in excess of the amount due. Later, and at their leisure, they could check the census, and if they found that any of [Pg 196]

the people really did exist, they could, of course, accept the money.

As he was speaking a cattle-trader hurried up, panting. "There is a rising!" he shouted; "the Barushu are up. They have killed my partner and taken my cattle. They have beaten the police and will soon be here. Quick! Form a laager and let's get into it!"

"Stop that, and go in there!" said Wrenshaw, pointing to his tent. To the officials who had been receiving the tax-money and issuing receipts he gave instructions to carry on.

Entering the tent Wrenshaw asked: "What's your name?"

"Wilkie."

"Have they killed your partner?"

"Yes."

"What did they kill him with?"

"I don't know; assegais, I suppose."

"Then you didn't see them kill him?"

"No."

"Is he dead?"

"I have told you that the Barushu are up, that they——"

Wrenshaw interrupted the man: "Did you see his dead body?"

"No."

"Then you don't know that he is dead. You say they have taken your cattle; how many?"

"A hundred and fifty head."

"Did they threaten to kill you?"

"No."

"Did you do anything to prevent the Barushu from taking your cattle?"

"How could I? I wasn't there." [Pg 197]

"Who was in charge of the cattle?"

"My partner, Jones."

"One more question: who told you that the Barushu had beaten the police?"

"A native."

"Did he also tell you that the Barushu had risen?"

"Yes."

"And that your partner had been killed and your cattle taken away?"

"Well, not exactly; but——"

"You're a silly scaremonger, spreading a yarn like this, and a cur to boot for deserting your partner! Get out of my camp; get out quickly; go South, go anywhere. I don't care where you go so long as you do go!"

The man expostulated and threatened to report to Headquarters Wrenshaw's unmannered treatment of him. As the Commissioner took no more notice of him, he went off.

But Wrenshaw was scanning the road which led towards the seat of the alleged trouble. Presently he stepped back into his tent, picked up his field-glasses and, returning, focussed them on a distant point of the road.

What he saw perturbed him; he returned the glasses to his case and walked impatiently up and down before his tent. A runner was approaching, a Government messenger, he could tell that by his uniform. In his hand he bore a split reed with a letter slipped in it. His long Arab shirt was gathered up and tucked into his belt to give greater freedom in running.

The messenger came along at that steady jog trot which enables the native to cover such surprising distances in Africa. On nearing Wrenshaw he dropped into a walk, approached the white man, saluted and handed him the letter. [Pg 198]

The envelope was addressed to the Commandant of the Police Force at Headquarters. Without hesitation the Commissioner tore it open and read as follows:

C.A.R. Police, Mora Station.
"Monday, 26th June, 19—.

Sir,

I have the honour to report that there is a native rising. This p.m. I met a large crowd of them who behaved in such a queer way that I thought it best to go back to camp, seeing that I had only two police boys with me and they having no rifles and me only a few rounds.

On the way back to camp I fell in with the trader Jones with a mob of cattle, whose partner Wilkie has been killed by the natives and he anxious to come into laager.

I am putting the camp in a state of defence with the help of the said Jones and await orders.

Your obedient servant,

JOSEPH WILSON,
Sergeant in Charge.

So there was something in it after all. Wrenshaw went into his tent and wrote a reply to the Sergeant of Police:

To SERGEANT JOSEPH WILSON,

I have read your letter to the Commandant and will deal with it. Do not worry overmuch about the rising, I will attend to that too. Remain in camp or you might miss me, I am coming your way.

RICHARD WRENSHAW.

After a short consultation with his juniors Wrenshaw issued his orders.

He sent for his horse, told the interpreter to get his pony, and also to saddle-up and load a pack mule. The two Native Commissioners were to carry on as usual, accepting the tax from those who came to pay.

It was nearly midday. He had to cover twenty miles by sundown. This was easy enough for himself and his interpreter, but he would also take his gunbearer and his cook. He believed in being comfortable, and saw no reason for roughing it now. The two on foot would have to hurry. [Pg 199]

II.

It was after sundown when the party reached their destination. The cook had stubbed his toe against a root in the path.

Taking advantage of the remaining light, Wrenshaw helped the interpreter to pitch the patrol tent. The cook collected wood for an all-night fire and then fetched water from the nearest stream half-a-mile away. The gunbearer cut coarse grass for bedding for the horses. Each servant had his job, which he performed with the precision born of long practice.

The camping ground was well-chosen. In front was a level plain, probably a mile wide. After the first quarter of a mile it was very swampy; a single path led across it to the high ground which flanked the river beyond. Wrenshaw knew this path, he was probably the only living white man who did. The high ground was thickly covered with palm trees; behind the spot chosen for the camp was mile upon mile of thin forest.

When bringing in his last load of grass the gunbearer stumbled over a native lying face downwards on the ground.

He stirred him with his foot. "Now then, you, what do you want?"

As he could get no satisfactory reply he brought the fellow to Wrenshaw, who asked who he was.

"One of Nanzela's men, Morena."

"Nanzela the Barushu?"

"He is."

"Where is he now?"

"On the river bank." [Pg 200]

"With his people?"

"With his people."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was on my way to join him when you arrived. I was afraid, and hid myself."

"You may go to Nanzela and give him a message. Say that I have come. That I come because I hear Nanzela boasts. He says he will not pay the Government tax. That he asks for war. Tell him that if by sunrise to-morrow he does not come to me with tax-money in his hands, I shall come to him with a gun in mine."

Whilst Wrenshaw had been speaking the native's eyes had wandered. He was making a mental

note of the white man's forces. There was the white man himself—an unknown quantity—an alien black man in clothes who interpreted the white man's words, a native of a neighbouring tribe attending to two horses, and a half-caste busy with some cooking-pots at the fire. So far as he could see there were no more than these. He looked again at the white man and wondered what his real strength might be. However, it didn't matter, as by this time Nanzela had posted scouts on every path, and the police camp, some miles away, was being watched. The white man, too, would be watched.

The sun had set, and it was now quite dark save for the camp fire which the cook had made. A mile away, on the high ground by the river, little points of light appeared. The Barushu were lighting their fires and preparing for the night. Judging by the distance on either hand to which these fires extended, the natives had assembled in some force.

Presently the sound of a drum, then of another, then of many, reached the white man's ear. [Pg 201]

"What is that sound?"

"I do not know, Morena."

"Are they not drums?"

"They are drums."

"War drums?"

"I do not know."

"What is their message?"

"I do not know."

The man, of course, lied; he could read their message as well as any other native of his tribe within earshot.

"Go, give my message to Nanzela."

The man turned to go, bidding the white man rest in peace.

"Go safely," was the reply.

Presently the cook announced "Dinner ready, sir," and Wrenshaw moved to the small camp table. The moment he sat down he felt he could not eat. He had decided on his lonely journey in the heat of the moment—of the midday sun, as it were; now that it was dark and cold, he wished he had brought one of his assistants with him.

On second thoughts he was very glad he had come alone. If there was going to be trouble—and it looked uncommonly like it—a life might have been needlessly sacrificed.

His cook aroused him from his mooning by: "Soup's cold, sir."

"Well, take it away and bring something else! What is there?"

"Guinea-fowl and some native peas, sir."

"All right, and give me a drink."

"Whisky or gin, sir?"

"Whisky to-night; not much, just a little." [Pg 202]

After a drink Wrenshaw felt more settled and attacked the guinea-fowl.

Presently he started up and walked a few paces from his camp and listened.

His message must have reached Nanzela: a roar of distant laughter, followed by a hum of voices, arose from the encamped Barushu. Then the drums began again, but this time they beat to a song well known to Wrenshaw, a song to which natives dance.

> Stop the pig and see where he will pass;
> Stop him! Stop him! Stop him!

That Nanzela should see in his message a huge joke slightly annoyed Wrenshaw, but he reflected that people with a sense of humour were more easily dealt with than those in a sullen mood. Yes, it was, perhaps, a ridiculous thing for him to have come alone on such an errand.

He went back to his table and attacked the guinea-fowl once more, this time with vigour.

After dinner he lit his pipe and ordered a large billy-can of coffee made very strong. He had a long night in front of him.

He made no attempt to sleep; he wouldn't risk it. The Barushu had, in days gone by, a nasty habit of making a night attack. He didn't expect them to attack him, especially after their laughter; but he intended to take no risks.

He had the fire piled up and saw that a plentiful supply of wood had been collected and placed handy. He told his natives to turn in, and walked across to where the horses were tethered. The

animals seemed comfortable: one was lying down and the other standing with drooping head, dozing. He satisfied himself that their blankets were secure and that they had emptied their nosebags. [Pg 203]

Next he loaded his rifle and tied it lightly to the tent pole; he also loaded a double-barrelled horse-pistol, a twenty-bore, shooting large, leaden slugs; very handy for close quarters.

Then he sat down and listened. The camp fires over the way were for the most part dying down. Wrenshaw had no illusions: he knew that he was being watched; by how many, he could not tell. It might be the intention of the Barushu to make a sudden end of him during the night. If he had brought a dog with him it would have given him timely warning; but, then, no dog can travel comfortably for twenty miles in the heat of the day without water.

And supposing they did wipe him out, what then? His mind flew back to England. Would she care? He supposed she would; hoped she would. Well, no, not exactly hoped; that was hardly the word. But did she care? Did she care enough to make her home with him in this rough country?

She certainly seemed sorry when he left England a few months before. Her letters, too, were a source of encouragement to him, for she dwelt upon the good times they had had together when he was on leave.

He took her last letter from his pocket. "Dear Mr. Wrenshaw." How bald it looked to be sure. If only she had written "Dear Dick," or "My dear Dick," or.... However, she hadn't; but she did sign herself "Your friend." Into this simple signature Wrenshaw read a whole world of meaning, which, of course, might not have been intended; again, it might.

By Jove! Why not write to her? It might be his last chance. Those fools on the high ground over the way might blot him out. He had his writing gear with him. He would write. [Pg 204]

He must, however, be careful what he wrote. No pathetic sort of last letter. No heroics of the penny novelette type. If he did go under, well, she would have the satisfaction of knowing that just before the event he had thought of her.

Wrenshaw got some paper and an indelible pencil and began:

> My Friend ...

At this he stuck for a long time; what on earth could he write about? There were ten thousand things he wanted to say. Most of them he had no right to say because they were not engaged; there was not even an understanding between them. The remainder would give the show away; she would see that he was in danger, or, at any rate, in a tight place. He must write in some sort of general terms.

This is what he wrote:

> My Friend,
>
> I am on one of my journeys through the country; at this moment am sitting by the light of my camp fire, writing.
>
> I do not feel very sleepy to-night, some strong coffee which I drank after dinner is keeping me awake.
>
> The natives in the distance are beating their drums, which adds to the mystery of the night. Their booming may mean a message sent by the African equivalent to the telegraph or it may be that a cheery dance is in progress miles away. Do you remember our last dance?
>
> We are quite a small party here, only a couple of horses, a mule, and three natives. I like to travel light in this way sometimes, it gives one a sense of greater freedom, of independence.
>
> To-morrow I continue my journey; until morning comes I shall not know exactly in which direction I am to travel. All depends upon an interesting meeting to which I have called the members of a curious tribe. They may have arranged my journey for me.

Wrenshaw read through what he had written and mentally condemned it for a stupid letter, a poor effort. What more was there to say? Plenty he wanted to say, but what more could he say? [Pg 205] He couldn't add that he felt sleepy now and must go to bed, it would look so silly with that opening reference to the strong coffee. How should he end it?

He settled the matter by saying that he would tell her all about his plans in the morning, and signed himself: "Your sincerest friend, D.W." He then addressed the envelope.

Rising, he split a thin stick a few inches down its length, inserted the envelope, and made it fast with a twist of bark. Then he pressed the stick into the ground. The letter in its holder resembled a miniature notice board. If the natives did dispose of him, they wouldn't destroy the letter. The written message is sacred in Africa: some native would deliver it to some white man. In due course it would reach her, shortly after the news of his death, perhaps. If she cared, she would understand. If she didn't, she would vote it a dull letter.

Rather ashamed of his weakness, Wrenshaw poured himself out another large mug of strong

black coffee and returned to his lonely vigil.

His three companions were sound asleep, snoring loudly. Of the three, the interpreter had most cause for concern, because he should have had some inkling of the position, but even he slept. The half-caste was a brainless fellow, albeit a good cook. The gunbearer didn't bother his head about matters which didn't appear to disturb his master.

In the far distance a lion was roaring. A large green beetle hurried past Wrenshaw's feet in the direction of the fire. He picked it up and threw it far into the darkness; the insect somehow reminded him of himself. [Pg 206]

III.

Just before dawn the gunbearer woke up feeling cold. He crept out of his blanket and to the fire, which had died down and was nearly out. On reaching the fire he saw his master sleeping in his chair without other covering than the clothes he had ridden in throughout the afternoon. The man quietly got his own blanket and gently spread it over his master's knees.

Wrenshaw was wide awake in an instant. His hand shot out to his pistol, but, recognising his gunbearer, the movement was arrested. He accepted the attention; to have refused the grimy blanket would have been ungracious and have hurt the man; besides, he was chilled to the bone. He told the gunbearer to rake the fire together and throw on some more wood. There was still some coffee in the pot, and this he heated and drank.

Feeling warmer, he got up and paced about to restore his circulation and get rid off his stiffness.

So after all he had slept; well, he was glad he had, for now he felt rested and refreshed.

He woke the interpreter and told him to feed the horses. The cook got up and took charge of the fire.

Looking towards the other side of the plain he saw signs that the Barushu were also astir. The points of light twinkled at him across the intervening space.

The sky in the east was becoming tinged with red. The silence was broken only by the sound of his animals munching their corn. This, slight as it was, woke a flock of guinea fowl roosting in some trees not far away; they began to exchange shrill greetings.

As it became lighter he could see a thin ribbon of white mist suspended over the swamp. This did not interfere with his view of the high ground on which the Barushu had camped during the [Pg 207] night, but he could distinguish nothing but the dark shadow of the palm trees and undergrowth. The light of the first was becoming rapidly paler as the day dawned.

The gunbearer, who had the usual eyesight of uncivilised man, was the first to notice movement on the other side.

"The Barushu are coming, Morena."

"Good, many of them?"

"Yes, many."

Wrenshaw took his glasses and scanned the further edge of the swamp. Yes, there they came, in single file. He smiled as he noted the twistings of the secret path which they followed. On they came, a thin black stream fed constantly from the palm tree forest. Soon the head of the column disappeared in the stratum of mist which obscured the greater part of the swamp, but the stream of natives from the palm trees did not cease.

Wrenshaw untied his rifle from the tent pole and put it and the horse pistol on his camp table. Then he pushed the table into the patrol tent and, placing his chair in the entrance, sat down. In this position he had only to stretch out his hand to reach his weapons if the necessity arose; in the meantime they were out of sight.

Although he had been expecting for some time to see the first Barushu emerge from the mist, he was a little startled when he realised that the van of the oncoming column was within three hundred yards of him. The natives had left the secret path, but still moved in single file.

By this time it was quite light.

Wrenshaw took up his glasses again and examined his visitors. They were an ugly looking lot and quite naked. He presently became aware that there was something strange about them; what was [Pg 208] it? Oh, of course, contrary to their custom, they carried no assegais. Well, that, at any rate, was a good sign.

Then again, they were walking extraordinarily slowly. Marking time, obviously, until their fellows had crossed the swamp. On second thoughts Wrenshaw rejected that explanation. He kept his glasses fixed on the foremost man. The fellow appeared to be lame, lame in the right leg. He shifted his glasses. By Jingo, the whole lot were lame, all lame or stiff in the right leg.

It was the gunbearer who solved the mystery.

"Morena."

"Well?"

"Why do the Barushu carry their assegais in their toes to-day?"

"Why, indeed?"

So the devils meant trouble after all. Stalking him, were they? He would make some of 'em smart for this.

The white man took some cartridges from his pocket and placed them handy on the table. He glanced at his letter, which stood erect in its holder like a miniature notice-board.

He looked at the dull-brained cook and felt sorry for him. His interpreter, who was standing, appeared to be feeling faint. The gunbearer was quite unperturbed.

Close to a large dead tree, which stood alone in the plain about a hundred yards from where Wrenshaw was sitting, the leader halted and the Barushu began to bunch into knots, talking quietly. Wrenshaw didn't like the look of things. Something must be done, and done quickly. He must make the first move, and lose no time about it. [Pg 209]

"Go," he said to the interpreter, "and tell the Barushu that they may pile their assegais against that tree, and after that they may come forward and talk to me."

"Morena, I am afraid."

"So it seems, but what's the matter with your hands, with your coat?"

The interpreter was terrified, and, which was worse, showed it. He fiddled with the buttons of his coat, doing them up, undoing them, and again doing them up. His pale, yellow face had become greenish, his eyes were rolling, and he seemed unable to stand still.

This would never do. Even if the Barushu meant no mischief, such an exhibition of fear wasn't good for them.

"Pick up that log," said Wrenshaw, pointing to a huge piece of wood collected overnight for the fire, "and hold it in your arms."

The frightened man obeyed, he held the log as a woman does a baby.

Wrenshaw turned to the gunbearer, "You go and tell them to stack their assegais and come forward to talk. Don't go too near them, shout from halfway. I have my rifle ready."

If the Barushu made to kill his man he would open fire at once and get in a few shots before the end came.

The gunbearer stepped forward. The Barushu watched his approach. A single man and unarmed. They could see that the white man was alone save for a Government servant in clothes; he, at any rate, was of no account. Then there was the half-caste at the fire; well, after all, what could two men do against so many? What was the trap? No, let this fellow come forward, they would wait and see what he was going to do. [Pg 210]

Halfway the gunbearer stopped and delivered his message in a loud voice that all could hear. Then he repeated it. No one heard his voice the third time, although he shouted lustily, for the Barushu broke into peals of laughter. "Oh, this white man, how cunning he is; so he has found us out and has spoilt our very good joke. Well, well, better do as we are told, put our assegais against the tree and hear what he is going to say to us. But it would have been very funny."

Each man lifted his right foot, and removing his assegai from between his toes placed it against the dead tree.

At length all the Barushu were seated, marshalled to their places by the imperturbable gunbearer. At a signal from Nanzela, who sat slightly in advance of his followers, a good two thousand men clapped their hands in greeting to the chief official of the District.

So far, so good. Normal relations had been established. The usual formal inquiries concerning the well-being of each were put and answered.

"Come nearer, Nanzela, and sit here," said Wrenshaw. "I wish to speak to you."

Nanzela walked to the spot pointed out to him and sat down.

"The time has come when all men pay the tax to the Government. Have you had warning of it?"

"I have."

"All the people are paying the tax willingly and well."

Nanzela made no reply, but gazed at the speaker with an expression of indifference.

Wrenshaw put his hand carelessly on the butt of his rifle and resumed. [Pg 211]

"There are but two paths for a man to travel, the one is towards peace, and the other to trouble, war."

Nanzela blinked. He had not been able to see the white man's rifle from where he sat until called

to come closer, nor had he noticed it before Wrenshaw's careless gesture drew his attention to it. His arms and those of his people were piled against the tree, and so, for the moment, out of reach. The white man's hand was on his rifle. All white men were good shots, and Wrenshaw had a reputation for being better than most. If he chose the wrong path now he would be the first to suffer. It would not be wise to run risks.

"It is only a foolish man who seeks trouble."

"Exactly," said Wrenshaw, "that is why all men are paying willingly and in full. I see you have your purse on your arm and have come to pay your tax." And again his hand caressed the butt of his rifle.

Nanzela unbuckled an armlet which held his money.

Turning to the interpreter Wrenshaw told him to put down the log, which he was still nursing, and get a book of tax receipt forms from the pack-saddle.

Nanzela shook half-a-sovereign from his purse.

The official made out a receipt for ten shillings, which he gave in exchange for the money. Then, raising his voice, he said: "Every man who has paid the tax must carry his tax-paper in a stick so that all may see that he has paid willingly and in full."

The gunbearer cut a reed, slit it a few inches down its length, and offered it to Nanzela. The Chief slipped his tax-paper into the slit and bound the top with a shred of bark.

How simple it all was! Now man after man came forward, paid his tax, and received in exchange a small square of coloured paper, which he slipped into a split reed, making it fast with a shred of bark. Their Chief had paid, they naturally followed his example. [Pg 212]

Wrenshaw had only one book of receipts with him; he had thrown it into the pack-saddle at the last moment. The book held one hundred forms, and these he had now used.

Some of the men had no money with them, which was not to be wondered at, since they had come out looking for trouble and certainly with no intention of paying tax. He seized upon this as an excuse for collecting no more tax that day, and informed Nanzela that he would accompany him and his people back to the village and encamp there, so that each man might bring his money from his hut. He made no reference to the night spent on the high land near the river.

The animals were saddled up and the interpreter sent back on his pony with a note calling upon the Native Commissioners to follow to Nanzela's village with all possible speed, bringing their census books, tax receipt forms, and the rest of their travelling office.

A strange procession now formed. First walked the Chief with his assegai—recovered from the tree—in one hand and the tax-paper in the other. Then a body-guard of fully-armed men, some with and some without tax-papers. In the midst of these rode Wrenshaw, with his rifle gripped between his saddle and his thigh. Then followed the gunbearer leading the mule; the cook slouched along behind.

The rear was brought up by the remainder of Nanzela's men, a few of whom had tax-papers, which they carried well in the air, much to the envy of those who had not yet paid. The little papers in the sticks appealed to the child-like fancy of these savages; taxpaying had become a game, a receipt in a stick, a toy. [Pg 213]

To say that Wrenshaw was much relieved is not to overstate the case. As he looked round him upon this mob of armed men eager to pay their tax and receive in exchange a piece of coloured paper, he realised better than anyone else could how tight a corner he had been in.

His thoughts were disturbed by a commotion as the ranks parted and a man ran up to him with a letter in a stick; as the native held it up it resembled a miniature notice-board.

Good heavens! It was his letter home; in the excitement of starting he had forgotten it. The man who brought it was one of Nanzela's people who had gone back to pick up anything which the white man or his servants might have left behind. He hoped, no doubt, to find a stray cartridge or two in the grass, or perhaps a spoon or a table knife.

Wrenshaw did not remove the letter from the stick, but carried it as the natives did their tax-papers. The simple people became impatient to pay their tax; was not the white man also playing this new game?

The letter home was never sent. In place of it Wrenshaw despatched a brief account of his adventure, told in a very matter-of-fact way.

Over the mantelpiece of his den hangs a frame; in place of a picture it contains a letter in a stick which, at a short distance, looks like a miniature notice-board.

THE DOCTOR.

[Pg 214]

Those who go in search of trouble usually find it. They deserve no sympathy and seldom get any.

The well-meaning man frequently meets with trouble too, although it is the one thing he doesn't want. When he is in difficulties, people pity him; they give him that pity which is akin to contempt, not to love.

But Harry Warner was lucky. He most certainly went in search of trouble; he also meant well. His reward was unusual and quite out of proportion to the little good he did. He achieved immortal, if only local, fame.

It was the natives who dubbed him "doctor." He wasn't one, he had no medical qualifications and little knowledge of medicine.

But what do black people know or care about qualifications? Wasn't Warner always accessible? Did he not give medicine to all who asked for it, no matter what the disease might be? Did not some of those to whom he gave medicine recover? Had he ever asked anyone for payment?

What a doctor!

[Pg 215]

So the natives declared, and do still declare, that there never has been, never will be, never could be so great a doctor in their country as he.

Now if Warner possessed no medical knowledge, he had the "goods." The goods consisted of a miscellaneous collection of superfluous drugs, plasters and pills, all a little stale, packed in an old whisky case and presented to him by a hospital orderly of his acquaintance.

Warner watched the packing and asked questions.

"Iodine, what's that for?"

"Oh, sore throat, water on the knee, to stop vomiting, for fixing a gumboil, chilblains, and a host of other things. It's made from seaweed."

"Do you drink it?"

"Not in every case, not with housemaid's knee or sore throat, anyway. You paint it in the throat or on the knee. Here, we'd better put you in a camel's hairbrush."

"Good. And what's nitrate of potash for?"

"Well, if you have an inflamed eye, put a spot or two in this eye-cup, fill it up with water and blink into it—like this."

"Thanks. And what do you use chlorodyne for?"

"Bad pains in the stomach."

"I see. And quinine is good for fever, of course."

"Yes, that's right. Cover a sixpence with the powder, mix it with a little whisky, add a little water, and toss it off."

"And corrosive sublimate?"

"Oh, that's good stuff for washing wounds with, jolly good. Don't make it too strong or you'll burn the bottom out of the pot you mix it in, not to mention the wounded part. About one in ten thousand makes a useful solution if the water you use isn't too dirty."

[Pg 216]

"I understand. And what is in this funny little box marked 'Sovereign Remedy'?"

"Dash it all! That box belongs to my set of conjuring tricks. Can't think how it's got mixed up with this lot. But you may as well take it along; you might want to surprise the natives and you'll certainly do it with that."

"How do you use it?"

"It's all on the box, full directions."

"And what's in all these pill boxes? Pills?"

"Yes, pills."

"But what are they all for?"

"Bless the man! I haven't time to wade through the lot. Besides, you must know in a general way what pills are for. All the boxes have the dose on them. Now let's get a move on. Give a hand with the packing. I'm on duty in half an hour."

And now we know just as much about doctoring as Warner did on the threshhold of his short medical career. Even a real doctor has much to learn before he reaches Harley Street; he picks up many wrinkles on the way and much improves with practice.

The Sovereign Remedy.

Warner had travelled many miles from civilisation before his first patient came to him. The precious box of medicines had all along been kept handy on the waggon. From time to time he got it down, unpacked it, examined the labels, shook the bottles, and carefully repacked them. But, like a real doctor, he did not advertise. It isn't done. [Pg 217]

Somehow it did get about at last that he had a box of medicines. How, it doesn't really matter. The fact remains that a native came to the waggon one morning with a strip of bark tied tightly round his forehead, another round his chest, and a third round his belly.

Warner, recognising a case, asked the native what the matter was.

The boy replied: "I have much pain here and here and here," touching the bands of bark in downward succession.

Warner, pleased at getting a patient at last, took the box of medicines from the waggon, opened it, took out the bottles one by one, and examined the labels with the eye of a master.

"Iodine? No, that's for housemaid's knee, gumboils and that sort of thing. Corrosive sublimate? Wounds. Nitrate of potash? No, eyes. Why not a pill? Yes, a pill."

But there were boxes and boxes of them. He picked up one after the other, but met with a check. Each box had on its label the name of its pill contents, followed by the words: "From one to three as ordered by the physician." In some cases: "From two to six." There was nothing about the complaint for which the pill might be used.

Just a little difficult. Doctoring was not such an easy job after all.

"What's this?"

The gaudy label on a small box read:

> Sovereign Remedy. Trick No. 10.
>
> Never known to fail. Surprising in its effects.
>
> *Directions:*—Borrow a sovereign. Request the lender to take a seat. Ask him how he feels. Tell him he is looking off-colour. Suggest headache. Say you will brighten him up, that you will make his head glow pleasantly, etc. Palm the sovereign in your left hand. [Pg 218] Empty contents of box into your right. Rub the powder well into gent's head, which will become golden (metallic). Then proceed as in Trick No. 6.

The directions seemed clear enough.

"Sit down," said Warner.

The native obeyed, squatting on the ground and spreading his loin cloth over his knees like an apron.

"I am going to take away your pains."

"Thank you, sir."

It suddenly occurred to Warner that, though the native might have a shilling, he certainly would not possess a sovereign, so he took one from his own pocket, wishing he had thought of this before.

"You see this?" said Warner, holding up the coin.

"Yes sir, much money."

Now Warner didn't know how to palm a coin. He had seen it done, of course, but had never yet tried to palm or to do anything else in the nature of a conjuring trick. To guard against possible accident, he turned his back upon the boy and very cautiously opened the box.

It was full of some bright yellow metallic powder. He read the directions again and wondered what Trick No. 6 might be. He wished he had risked a pill.

However, he had not the courage to go back now. The native might suspect his ignorance if he selected another box. It was hardly playing the game perhaps to trick a poor confiding black, but Warner consoled himself with the thought that it is said of even real doctors that when in doubt they sometimes give their patients bread pills.

So, emptying the contents of the box into his right hand, he turned again and began to rub the golden powder into the native's woolly head. The sovereign he held in his left hand. [Pg 219]

The more he rubbed, the brighter grew his patient's head. It scintillated.

The trick pleased Warner, who soon forgot his misgivings; he forgot the sovereign too, and

rubbed the powder in with both hands.

The coin fell into the patient's lap. Warner was busy and didn't notice the accident at once, but the native did. He picked up the money and quietly slipped it into the rawhide pouch attached to his belt.

At length Warner stepped back and surveyed his handiwork. The boy's head shone like a brass knob. He glanced at his own hands. They looked as if they had been gilded. Both hands! Where the devil had that sovereign gone to?

He looked on the ground. He felt in all his pockets. He looked at the boy, who said nothing. He therefore dismissed the patient without mentioning his loss.

Whilst washing the greasy gold stuff off his hands, Warner was conscious of a hum of excitement rising from the spot where his natives had made their midday shelter. Trick No. 10 was evidently a success. The hospital orderly was right; he had surprised the natives.

That night all his boys, and a score of strange natives besides, came to Warner complaining of pains. Each one had a strip of bark tied tightly round his forehead, a second round his chest, and a third round his stomach. They lingered as if dissatisfied when he gave pills to each—one or more as ordered by the physician—taken at random from his many little pill boxes.

IODINE.

Warner was sitting under a tree on the south bank of the Zambesi, watching the local natives floating his waggon across the stream. He was wondering how long, at the present rate of progression, it would take to get the whole of his stuff across. Two days, three, perhaps more. [Pg 220]

"Sir, my felicitations upon the indefectibility of the climatology."

The startled Warner looked round and saw a black man very stout and short, in European clothes and perspiring freely. He carried his large elastic-sided boots in his hand and a black alpaca coat over his arm.

As Warner turned towards him, this strange creature politely lifted his ridiculously small sun helmet. It could not be said that he bowed to the white man, but the braces which he wore over his waistcoat sagged slightly in front and became taut behind, whilst the crease which represented the highest contour of his stomach deepened a little. Warner gaped stupidly at the man. He made mental note of the large gold spectacles astride the fat, flat nose; the collar, once white and starched, now grubby and collapsed; the heavy brass watchchain stretched tightly across the ample space between pocket and pocket; the badly creased loud check trousers, and the dirty white socks; the large green umbrella which, held to shield the back, framed face and form.

Warner forgot the man's ridiculous speech in his more ridiculous appearance.

"As I ventured to remark, sir, although the orb of day smiles down with radiance from the firmament, the temperamental calidity is not unendurable."

"Yes," said Warner vaguely, "but who are you?"

"Sir, if you will pardon the expression I may say I am a kind of a wandering refugee hailing from Jamaica with a mission to carry the apprehensions of civilisation to the unspeakably incomprehending aboriginal inhabitants of this beatific equatorial region who are doubtless immersed in the chaotic complexity of irreligious heathenism and incondite boorishness." [Pg 221]

Warner eyed the speaker with astonishment, feeling tired, somehow, and out of breath.

The black man saw, with obvious pleasure, the effect which his speeches had produced.

He had spoken fluently, continuously, without pause or effort. Without expression or inflexion the long unbroken flow of chosen words had rumbled off his tongue.

He cleared his throat as if about to speak again, but Warner hastily interposed.

"What is your name?"

"Joseph Johnson, sir."

"You are obviously a man of some education."

"Sir, if I may presume to express an opinion upon Your Honour's personality I would hazard the conclusion that Your Excellency is a gentleman of kindly but penetrating discernment for I received my education at the hands of the Reverend Westinghouse Wilberforce of Kingston Jamaica alas now dead of whom as the classical writer has it *de mort nil ni bum* I repeat sir *de mort nil ni bum*."

Warner abruptly turned his back, snatched out his handkerchief, and held it tightly to his nose.

Joseph Johnson, mistaking for emotion the queer little sounds which Warner did not entirely succeed in smothering with his handkerchief, sniffed and blinked his small eyes sympathetically, murmuring "*de-mort-nil-ni-bum*."

When Warner had regained his self-control he asked the black man what he wanted. [Pg 222]

"Sir, I am credibly informed that you are a distinguished member of a profession which has my humble but unqualified admiration and regard for what can be nobler than the unselfish alleviation in others of the ills to which this weak flesh of ours is heir need I say the medical profession?"

"What then?"

"I suffer your honour from a slight but painful derangement of the vocal chords which hinders my fluency of enunciation and so disturbs my mental process as to detract from the strength of my disputations and dissertations."

"You mean you have a sore throat?"

"Sir, you grasp my meaning."

"You want some medicine for it?"

"Sir, if I might so far encroach upon your generosity...."

Warner rose hastily and walked to his goods piled up on the bank awaiting transportation, leaving Johnson to rumble on and on.

Here, then, was another patient. He must be careful. The man might know something and question his treatment. That would be most awkward.

"Corrosive sublimate? Wounds, the orderly had said, and had warned him about burning out the bottom of the pot used when mixing the stuff. Better look through the rest before deciding.

"Pills? Might do the objectionable fellow some general good.

"Iodine? Yes, that's the stuff for him. Iodine for housemaid's knee or sore throat. Well, the man said he had a sore throat and he should know, so iodine let it be. Where's the brush?"

Warner opened the bottle. The cork was a little soft and inclined to crumble. He dipped the tip of the large camel's hair brush into the dark brown liquid and called Joseph Johnson to him. [Pg 223]

"I am going to paint your throat. It also wants a thorough rest, so you must not talk more than is absolutely necessary."

"Thank you, sir."

"Now open."

The black man's mouth was immense. Warner had never seen such a cavern, nor, for that matter, had he ever seen such a perfect, strong, clean set of teeth. He gave little dabs here and there, this side and that, and then withdrew the brush.

"That's enough for this morning. Come again at sunset, and remember, don't talk."

This admonition he repeated in self-defence. He rather dreaded the man's brook of words.

His patient bent forward slightly, put on his sun helmet and walked away, his eyes watering a little.

The man was most obedient. Punctually at sunset he again appeared. He smiled pleasantly at Warner, but did not announce himself with any long-winded speech.

Warner looked at the throat and remarked that he thought it was better, that one or two applications would set it right. He then painted as before.

This time Johnson coughed and large tears rolled slowly down his cheeks.

Then it occurred to Warner that he himself, when a child, had had his throat painted, more than once. He recollected that the operation was not a pleasant one. He had coughed a great deal, and his eyes had watered very much. Clearly he was underdoing it. No matter, he would put that right to-morrow.

Warner was pleasantly surprised when, in the morning, the local natives came to tell him that they were about to cross the river with the last of his goods, after which they would take him if he was ready to go. He had expected the job to take at least another day. [Pg 224]

He kept back the bottle of iodine and the camel's hair brush, and sat down on a camp stool to wait for Johnson.

In about a quarter of an hour the patient arrived.

"How are you this morning?" asked Warner pleasantly.

"Much better, I thank you, sir."

"Let's have a look. Capital, capital. Now don't move, I'll just touch it up."

Warner, remembering his overnight decision, plunged the brush deeply into the bottle and withdrew it fully charged and dripping.

He began to dab the throat here and there as before. A gurgling sound came from Joseph Johnson's mouth. Warner recognised the warning. He knew his time was distinctly limited. He felt that, if he did not hurry, much of the enormous cavern would remain unpainted. With a rapid movement, like one stirring porridge to save it from burning, he finished the job and stepped back.

Joseph Johnson seemed to explode. Tears forced their way through his tightly closed eyelids. A roar boomed from the painted throat. The patient's condition quite alarmed the doctor. Surely the fool wasn't going to die?

Looking round for inspiration, Warner saw that the native canoe had returned to ferry him across the river. He didn't actually run away, but quickly corking his bottle of iodine he walked briskly to the river bank, entered the canoe and told the crew to paddle to the other side.

He heaved a sigh of relief when he stepped ashore. He looked back, but could see no sign of Joseph Johnson. [Pg 225]

Some weeks later his troubled conscience was set at rest by the following letter:

"Bulawayo,
"21/4/19.

"Honoured Sir,

"The enablement was not vouchsafed to me to indicate to Your Excellency the prodigious potentiality of the prophylactic applied with such consummate and conscientious technicality to my unostentatious tenement of clay. For full three weeks the taciturnity prescribed was obediently observed without difficulty or mutinousness of feeling. After which, rising from the slough of my despond, I found my multiloquence had returned fourfold, my linguacious allocution and discursive conversationalism prominently augmented. I then felt that my mission was not to the unenlightened ignoramusses of this neighbourhood but to the encyclopedical omnicients of the south. I have therefore returned to Bulawayo. Now here...."

As there were four closely written pages of this kind of thing, Warner turned to the last of them, which ended:

"Sir, I have the honour to be

"Your Honourable Excellency's most grateful, most humble, most obedient and unforgetful servant,

"JOSEPH JOHNSON."

CORROSIVE SUBLIMATE.

Late one afternoon some natives carried an old man, wrapped in a blanket, into Warner's camp and laid him down on the ground before the tent. Warner came out.

"What is this?" he asked.

"A dead man, killed by a leopard." [Pg 226]

"Why do you bring the dead man to me?"

"He said he wanted to come and told us he would curse us if we did not bring him. We did not wish to trouble the Doctor with a dead man, but a 'dead man's curse' is a fearful thing."

Warned stooped and looked under the blanket. The man wasn't dead, he opened his eyes.

Although far from dead, the native had been very badly mauled and had lost a great quantity of blood. Tyro though he was, Warner could see that his condition was serious. Stepping back into the tent, he poured out half a tumbler of neat whisky and, lifting the man's head, made him drain the glass. The effect upon the patient was immediate; he sat up and began to talk rapidly, describing the accident.

"We were hunting, these dogs, those others, and I. We came upon a leopard in the grass. One, who is not here, thrust an assegai through her. She bit him in the arm and he ran away. Another, and neither is he here, struck the leopard with his axe. She jumped on him and bit him in the neck. He ran away crying out that she had killed him.

"A third, who did not return with us, broke her back with a club, but she tore his thigh with her teeth. Then I went to her and pierced her belly with my assegai. But she bit me in the arm and shoulder and clawed me down the back. She also broke my assegai with her teeth so that it was useless.

"Then, having nothing with which to kill her, I held her by the ears with my two hands, calling to these slaves to come and finish her, for I could see by her face that she was dying. But they were afraid and ran away like women. And the leopard shook her head and my hands slipped because

of the blood which had run down my arm from my shoulder. And when my hands came together, she took them in her mouth and crushed them both. Then she died." [Pg 227]

The man's hands were swollen and shapeless. He had a large gash and a deep puncture in his shoulder, and his back was very badly scored.

After staring for a while at their companion, the natives who brought him slipped quietly away, hastened in their departure, no doubt, by his reference to the sorry part which they had played in the affair.

Warner was greatly pleased. He looked upon the coming of this wounded man as a stroke of good fortune. Here at last was a straightforward case, all clear and above board. And he knew exactly what to do. Corrosive sublimate, one in ten thousand, wash the blood off, keep the wounds clean, make the man comfortable.

He shouted for his kitchen boys and ordered warm water in large quantities. He had not seen them go, so called the wounded man's companions to build a shelter of grass and branches for him. When he realised that they had gone, he set to work on the shelter himself.

For weeks Warner laboured on those wounds. The man improved slowly. As he grew better he spoke of payment. Warner told him not to bother about it, but he persisted.

"Have you not given me back my life?"

"What of it?"

"Are not those others dead?"

Now, this was true. The other wounded men who went to their homes all died of blood-poisoning, and Warner's reputation grew in consequence.

But no matter what arguments and persuasions were used, Warner would not hear of payment in any shape or form. [Pg 228]

The man was obstinate.

"If I receive a gift from a man, must I not give one in return? Am I to be shamed? Is it not the custom that a gift shall be received with a gift? And gifts must be equal. What, then, shall I give to the Great Doctor? What have I, a very poor man, of value equal to the life which the Doctor has given back to me? I have no cattle and no sheep. I have a few goats, very few, and I have some wild cats' skins. But what are these to a life?"

Twice daily did Warner wash and dress the man's wounds. Each time the man spoke of a gift for a gift. He seemed to feel his honour was at stake.

At length the day came when Warner thought he could safely send his patient away. The man's final protestations of gratitude and his entreaties to be permitted to make some payment caused Warner much embarrassment. He firmly declined to accept the merest trifle in return for all his time and trouble. He would not be robbed of the feeling that at length he had done some genuine good for good's sake.

Of course he could explain nothing of this to the old native.

The man was much troubled. He went away at length saying he would bring next day the gift which he knew now the Doctor wanted. Warner repeated that he wanted nothing and would take nothing.

Next morning, when Warner got up and came out of his tent, he found the old man waiting for him. He was not alone. By his side sat a little girl, the old man's daughter.

Warner remembered having seen her several times before during her father's long illness. From time to time she had come with her mother to inquire how the old man progressed and to bring him some horrid-looking native delicacy. [Pg 229]

"Here she is," said the late patient. "Here is my child. She is my only one. You ask for her and I give her to you. A life for a life, which is just."

Warner protested indignantly that he had not asked for the girl, that he did not want her or anything else.

"See, she is strong," persisted the old man. "She is strong to carry water, to grind grain. She is worth three cows, five goats and ten hoes."

Warner became quite angry.

The old man was incredulous and distressed. He had somehow concluded that Warner had really set his heart upon possessing his daughter, his plain, fat little daughter and nothing else, but that, native-like, he had not said so.

In the end Warner accepted, in self-defence, a mangy, evil-smelling cat's skin.

CHLORODYNE.

A day or two after Warner had become the unwilling possessor of the mangy skin, which, by the way, he promptly buried as soon as its donor's back was turned, he set out on a three days' journey from his camp to visit a white trader with whom from time to time he transacted business of some kind. He went on foot, accompanied only by a few natives, one of whom carried the box of medicines.

While he was resting during the midday heat, the Headman of the neighbouring village approached him with many signs of deference.

"Good day to you, Great Doctor."

"Good day to you," Warner replied. [Pg 230]

"Are you indeed the Great Doctor?"

Warner was bold enough to say he was.

"Will the Great Doctor help me with medicines? My wife, who is very old, suffers from a great sickness. Her arms are now no thicker than a stick. Pain is with her always. She never sleeps. All day long and all the night she lies and moans. She no longer cries out. Will not the Great Doctor kill this sickness? I have told her of you."

Warner rose abruptly. He felt a lump rising in his throat. He wished he were a doctor instead of merely the owner of a box of drugs and all but ignorant of the uses to which they should be put.

"Where is your wife?" he asked gruffly.

"The Great Doctor will come!" exclaimed the delighted old native, leading the way towards his village.

Warner could distinguish little or nothing when he found himself inside the Headman's hut. Coming in directly from the outside glare made it difficult to see. The native pointed to a form propped up against the pole which supported the roof of the hut.

Warner looked; suddenly he saw all there was to see, and gasped as a faint moan of pain reached his ears. A thin old woman lay there with closed eyes, so thin that Warner marvelled that she could be alive. Her arms and legs, too, for that matter were indeed, as the Headman had said, as thin as sticks. Her distended ribs showed plainly even in the dim light. She had neither hair nor flesh on her skull, merely wrinkled, dull brown skin adhering closely to the bone. Her neck was no thicker than one's wrist. Her stomach was enormous.

Warner looked down upon this poor, emaciated creature with horror. [Pg 231]

She moaned again.

Her husband said: "See, woman, here is the Great Doctor of whom all men speak. He has turned aside from his journeying to make you well with medicines. Does he not make all men well? Do not the people say so? Soon you will be well and will laugh again. Soon you will sit in the sun or go to the fields. Do you hear, woman? The Great Doctor has come."

Warner cursed under his breath. He never expected this sort of thing when he lightheartedly accepted from the hospital orderly the box of medicines with a conjuring trick thrown in. The thought of that conjuring trick was nauseating in the presence of this pain.

Save for the rapid heaving of her bony chest to laboured breathing, the woman had made no move since he entered the hut. Now, however, Warner saw the drooping eyelids flicker. A fear seized him that the poor creature would look up. He couldn't stand that. He couldn't meet her eyes. He hurried away, saying he would bring some medicine.

He reached his resting place and opened his box. Right on the top lay the bottle of chlorodyne. He repeated to himself: "Chlorodyne, good for pains in the stomach! Chlorodyne, good for pains in the stomach!"

Warner returned to the hut but wouldn't go in. He pushed the bottle into the old man's hand saying, parrot-like: "Good for pains in the stomach, give her some water with it."

Then he went back to his halt again, called to his boys to pack up and follow him, anxious only to put distance between himself and all that pain and suffering.

Ten days later Warner passed by that village again on his return journey. He could have followed another route, but a strong desire to ask about the woman drew him to the village. He must know about the woman. He had casually asked the trader with whom he had transacted his business how much chlorodyne one usually takes at a dose. The reply: "Oh, about fifteen drops or from ten to twenty, according to your size," nearly made his heart stand still. And he, the Great Doctor, had given the old native a full bottle of the stuff! True, he had not told him how much to take, but Warner found scant consolation in this thought. [Pg 232]

As he and his carriers neared the village, he heard a great commotion, men shouting to each other and women making that shrill quavering noise familiar to all travellers in Africa. He thought he could distinguish the word "doctor." He was certain of it now. "The Great Doctor is coming. He who saves the people! The white man with the medicines! The Doctor! The Doctor!"

The natives broke through from the bush on every hand. They surrounded the little party. The

carriers were quickly relieved of their loads. There was no mistaking the nature of the demonstration; it was one of goodwill, not of hate.

The old Headman hobbled up, praising Warner lustily.

What could it all mean?

At length Warner asked the question point blank: "How is your wife?"

"Oh, she is dead," replied the old man. "She died with a smile upon her face. I gave her half a cup full of your medicine filled up with water. She was silent for a long while. Then she said: 'I have now no pain.' And then: 'Give me more.' She smiled when I gave her another cup of your good [Pg 233] medicine. And then she slept. And I knew she had no pain because she smiled. And as she slept she died. And when we buried her the smile was on her face. You are a Great Doctor and your medicine is very good. Good Fortune has come to the people that you are here. Can a man smile who is in pain? Does not a smile mean pleasure? Ah, but that is a good medicine."

"Give me back that bottle," said Warner, and his voice sounded strangely weak.

"Yes, Great Doctor, it is indeed a precious medicine."

Nitrate of Potash.

The memory of that old woman haunted Warner. He argued continuously with himself. Yes, he had certainly killed her. There was no doubt about it. On the other hand, she would have died in any case. If he had not come upon the scene, she might have lingered on for a few more weary weeks, never free from pain. Still, if he had overdosed her intentionally to end her pain, it would surely have been murder. At best it was a criminal blunder. But then he meant well. So, too, do other fools. Common sense told him he had no cause to worry, nothing to regret, it was merely a fortunate accident. Conscience viewed the matter seriously and with harshness.

Warner was still engaged in this mental struggle when a stranger, a white man, walked briskly up to his tent.

"Is anyone at home?"

"Yes, come in."

"Have you any nitrate of potash, doctor?" [Pg 234]

Warner had become so used to the term "doctor" that he did not at once notice the significance of the word when spoken by a white man. So he merely answered: "Yes, I think so. What do you want it for?"

"I, too, am a doctor."

"A doctor?"

"Yes, a medical missionary, your new neighbour on the other side of the hill."

"Sit down a minute, I'll get the stuff."

Warner went to his box and, opening it, surveyed his wretched stock of stale drugs. So here was a real doctor! Thank Providence for that! He passed in review his many cases, only a few of which are set down here. He knew he had done his best, but he blamed himself for ever having aped the doctor.

"Is there anything you want besides nitrate of potash?"

"No, thanks. I've got everything else I'm likely to require."

Warner brought the bottle. "Here you are."

"Thanks. I only want a little."

"Take the lot."

"But you'll want it sooner or later."

"No."

"Of course you will."

"No."

"Then you have some more?"

"No."

"Then of course you'll want it."

"No, I'm not a doctor and I don't know how to use it. I don't really know the use of any drug. I've probably killed off dozens of people in my efforts to assist. I'm so glad you've come to live here."

When Warner sent applicants for medical relief to his new friend on the other side of the hill, [Pg 235]

they went, of course, but not too willingly. The newcomer did much good, but it was Warner who got the credit for it all. The natives invariably consulted Warner before going to the Missionary, and returned again to thank him after they had been treated. They persisted in the belief that the Missionary doctor was their Doctor's man.

Warner is still spoken of as "The Doctor"; all others who came later are referred to as "Medical Men."

THE END.

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FOOTNOTES

[A] *Morena* signifies *Chief*.

[B] Slang term for calico.

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