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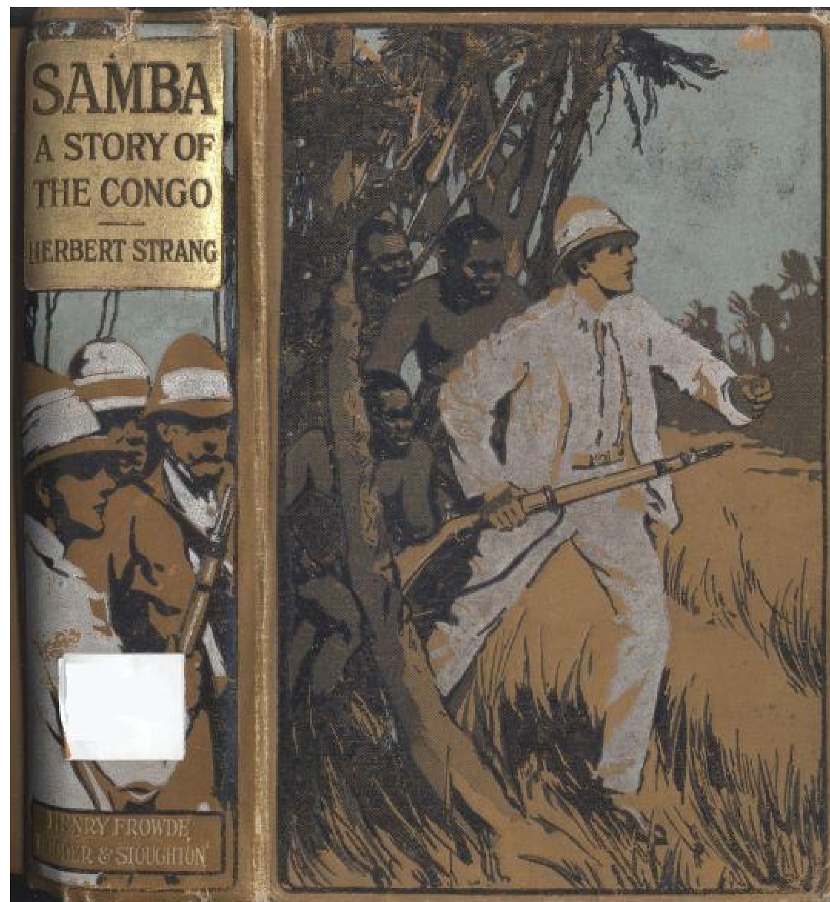

Samba and the crocodile

SAMBA

A Story of the Rubber Slaves of the Congo

By

HERBERT STRANG

Author of "One of Clive's Heroes," "Kobo,"
"Brown of Moukden," "Tom Burnaby," etc., etc

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

"Botofé bo le iwa!—Rubber is Death!"—*Congo Proverb*.

SECOND EDITION

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PREFACE

Nearly a generation has passed since King Leopold was entrusted by the great Powers with the sovereignty of the Congo Free State. The conscience of Christendom had been shocked by the stories, brought back by Stanley and other travellers, of Arab slave raids on the Upper Congo; King Leopold, coming forward with the strongest assurances of philanthropic motive, was welcomed as the champion of the negro, who should bring peace and the highest blessings of civilization to the vast territory thus placed under his sway. For many succeeding years it was supposed that this work of deliverance, of regeneration, was being prosecuted with all diligence; the power of the slave traders was broken, towns were built, roads made, railways opened—none of the outward signs of material progress were wanting.

But of late the civilized world has been horrified to find that this imposing structure has been cemented with the life blood of the Congo races; that the material improvements to which the administrators of Congoland can point, have been purchased by an appalling amount of suffering inflicted upon the hapless negroes. The collection of rubber, on which the whole fabric of Congo finance rests, involves a disregard of liberty, an indifference to suffering, a destruction of human life, almost inconceivable. Those who best know the country estimate that the population is annually reduced, under King Leopold's rule, by at least a hundred thousand. No great war, no famine, no pestilence in the world's history has been so merciless a scourge as civilization in Congoland.

Yet owing to mutual jealousies, the Powers are slow to take action, and while they hesitate to intervene, the population of this great region, nearly as large as Europe, is fast disappearing.

It has been my aim in this book to show, within necessary limitations, what the effect of the white man's rule has been.

If any reader should be tempted to imagine that the picture here drawn is overcoloured, I would commend him to the publications issued by Mr. E. D. Morel and his co-workers of the Congo Reform Association, with every confidence that the cause of the Congo native will thereby gain a new adherent.

I must express my very great thanks to the Rev. J. H. Harris and Mrs. Harris, who have spent several years on the Upper Congo, for their kindness in reading the manuscript and revising the

proofs of this book, and for many most helpful suggestions and criticisms.

HERBERT STRANG.

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Ilombekabasi and surrounding Country, showing Elbel's first camp in foreground

Ilombekabasi and surrounding country, showing the diverted stream and Elbel's third camp

"Every boy and youth is, in his mind and sentiments, a knight, and essentially a son of chivalry. Nature is fine in him.... As long as there have been, or shall be, young men to grow up to maturity; and until all youthful life shall be dead, and its source withered for ever; so long must there have been, and must there continue to be, the spirit of noble chivalry. To understand therefore this first and, as it were, natural chivalry, we have only to observe the features of the youthful age, of which examples surround us."

EDWARD FITZGERALD.

CHAPTER I

The Coming of the White Man

Samba lay face downwards upon the yellow sand, amid which his body shone in the sunlight like polished ebony. Behind, the rising bank was thick with trees and shrubs ablaze with colour, overspread with the delicate tracery of lianas and, creeping plants. Here was a spot of red, there a dash of orange; at intervals the pale yellow flowers of climbing gourds and the mauve blossoms of convolvuli peeped from the wall of vivid green. Tiny rills made music as they trickled through the foliage; and near at hand was a path trodden by herds of antelopes as they came to drink.

Before, rolled the brown waters of a broad river, rippling over whitened rocks in the bed, or over the gnarled limbs of fallen trees. Here, on a sandy islet, flashed the scarlet and blue of little kingfishers, contrasting with the sober grey of the bittern, or the black and white of the vulture. A giant heron perched on a low overhanging branch, gazing solemnly at the ibis standing solitary by a distant bush.

On a smooth spot at Samba's right sported innumerable butterflies, blue and green and

crimson, amid bees and dragon-flies lazily basking in the heat. Samba had but to stretch out his hand to make prisoners of what he chose. But Samba's attention was already occupied. Looking over the brink into the placid water, his eye was caught by a small round soft object lying motionless on the surface. A tiny crocodile, only a few inches long, darted from beneath the leaf of a water-lily, in pursuit of a tinier fish. The round object suddenly contracted: there was a ripple on the water, and the baby crocodile found itself in the grasp of a droll little proboscis that shot out, gripped its hapless prey, and drew it beneath the surface. Samba smiled: he knew that just below lay a trionyx, the owner of that little nostrilled proboscis; he wasted no sympathy on the baby crocodile, which would never grow big to snap up little negro boys at the waterside.

All around was silence, save for the hum of insects and the gentle lapping of the water on the sand. Then a slight sound caught Samba's ear, and turning, he saw a handsome young lizard, pied with yellow and greenish black, flashing along in chase of a fat frog which it had marked for its own. A swish of its flexible tail, a snap of its savage teeth, and ranunculus disappeared—a choice morsel for breakfast.

Such scenes as these gave Samba constant entertainment. He would often wander alone from his village, as he had done to-day, carrying his little broad-bladed dagger in case a snake should cross his path, and spend hours in the forest or by the river bank, listening to the chatter of the monkeys and the screams of the parrots, watching the little stingless bees at their work, mocking the hollow note of the drumbird or the wild pigeon's doleful call, studying the busy doings of the multitudinous ants. There was not a bird or beast or insect within range of his village with whose ways Samba was not familiar.

The trionyx steered himself down stream; the lizard, swishing his pliant tail, went off in search of other prey; and Samba's bright eyes followed the mazy movements of the myriad flies sporting on the surface of the sunlit water, and the shining fish darting this way and that in the clear depths. Suddenly a scream of the fishing eagle caused him to glance up. Then a shout made him spring to his feet and look wonderingly in the direction of the sound. He knew no fear. His lithe dusky body, bare save for a scrap of cloth about his loins and a string of cowries round his neck, stood erect and alert; his keen intelligent eyes expressed nothing but surprise and curiosity. Again came the hail.

"W'onkoe!"[1]

"Em'one!"[2] called Samba in reply.

A boat was being slowly paddled up the stream. Ten stalwart Baenga stood at the paddles, bending forward as they made their strokes. Two other negroes squatted in the forepart of the boat. Amidships sat another figure, the sight of which gave Samba a delightful thrill of expectation. It was a white man, with fair hair and beard, clad all in white. Could this be Bula Matadi, Samba wondered, the white man whom his grandfather, the chief Mirambo, had seen long ago at Wanganga? He waited, standing still as a rock. The boat drew nearer, a few more strokes of the paddle and it came under the bank. The white man leapt ashore, followed by the two men who had been seated. They were big fierce-looking fellows. Each carried a long strangely-shaped stick with a hollow tube; about his waist dangled a bag of skin. The white man stepped up to Samba, smiled upon him, patted his woolly head. Then one of the negroes began to question him. Where was his village? What was it called? Who was its chief? How many huts did it contain? Was there much forest about it? To these questions Samba replied frankly; surely it was a great honour to his grandfather that the white man should take such interest in him! Then came a question that somewhat amused him. Did the forest contain *botofé*?[3] He smiled. Of course it did. Were not the drumsticks in his village made of *botofé*? What a strange question to ask of a forest boy! The white man smiled in return, and said something in a strange tongue to the negro who had spoken. "Take us to your village," said the man; and, nothing loth, Samba set off like a young deer, the three men following him.

Samba was eleven years old. His home was the village of Banonga, a street of bamboo huts thatched with palm leaves and shadowed by the broad foliage of bananas and plantains and tall forest trees. His grandfather Mirambo was the village chief, a tall, strong, wise old man, a great fighter in his day, his body scarred with wounds, his memory stored with the things he had seen and done. Samba's father, Mboyo (or Isekasamba, "father of Samba," as he was called after his boy was born), was the old chief's favourite son, a daring hunter, a skilful fisher, and the most silent man of his tribe. He had several wives, but Samba's mother was the best loved of them all, and wore about her ankles the brass rings that betokened her supreme place in her husband's affections. Grandfather, father, mother, all doted on Samba, and for eleven years he had lived a happy merry life, the pet of the village.

Nothing had troubled the peace of the little community. Banonga was a secluded village, on the outskirts of a dense forest, not far from one of the innumerable tributaries of the great river Congo. Life passed easily and pleasantly for these children of Nature. In the morning, ere the sun was up, the men would spring from their simple bamboo beds, fling their hunting-nets or fishing-baskets on their shoulders, hang about their necks the charms that would preserve them from accident and ensure success in the work of the day, and repair to the old chief, who, sitting on his forked chair in the middle of the street, gave them the *bokaku*—the blessing without which they never left the village. "May you be preserved from accident," he would say; "from wild beasts, from snags in the path and snakes in the grass, and return with great plenty." Then they would

shout their farewells, and hasten with light-hearted laughter into the forest or down to the river.

Meanwhile the women had been long astir. Some, babe on one arm, calabash in the other, went singing to a forest stream, to bathe their children and fill their vessels with water for the day's cooking. Others, with baskets slung upon their backs and rude implements upon their shoulders, sped to the gardens and cultivated fields, to perform their simple operations of husbandry, and to return by and by with manioc, plantains, ground-nuts, which they would prepare against their husbands' return. The morning's work done, they would dress their hair, carefully, even fastidiously; kindle the fires of three converging logs, and set upon them well-heaped pots of manioc, covered with leaves of plantain or nongoti to prevent the escape of steam. Some would prattle or sing lullabies to their babes, others form little knots and gossip, laughing and jesting without a thought of care.

All day the village was cheered by the merry antics and joyous shouts of the children at play. Like children all over the world, the boys and girls of the Congo delight in mimicking their elders. The boys made little hunting-nets and ran hither and thither in mock chase, or spread their fishing-nets in the stream and gleefully boasted of their tiny catches. The girls wove little baskets and played with beads and shells. One and all, the children of Banonga were deft with their fingers, and none so deft as Samba. He was always busy, shaping now a mortar for his mother, now a chair for his grandfather, now a wicker basket so close in texture that he could bring in it water from the stream without spilling a drop.

Most of all Samba loved to squat by his grandfather's chair in the late afternoon, when the old chief sat alone, chin on hand, waiting for the return of the men. Then, and on dark nights, Mirambo would recite, in his deep musical voice, interminable stories and legends, of the spirits that haunted the woods, of the animals he had hunted and slain, of narrow escapes from the greedy jaws of crocodiles, of fierce fights with cannibals, of adventurous journeys by field and flood. Samba never tired of one story: how, years before, Mirambo had made a long journey to Wanganga, far, very far away, and had there seen a white man, who wore cloth all over his body, and had come up the river on a wonderful smoke-boat, driven by a fiery snorting devil that devoured insatiably great logs of wood. Bula Matadi, "breaker of rocks," this wonderful white man was called; but Mirambo had heard that in his own country he was called Tanalay.[4] Samba would listen with all his ears to his grandfather's long narratives, inwardly resolving that he too, when he became a man, would take long journeys and see marvellous things—white men, and smoke-boats, and all.

Then, as the sun draws towards its setting, out of the forest there come faint strains of song. Mirambo's monotone ceases: he sits erect, expectant; the women run out of the huts above which the wreathing smoke proclaims preparations for the evening meal; the children gather in a laughing chattering flock at the end of the street. The sound of singing draws nearer: at length it stops abruptly, but instantly is followed by a loud prolonged shout; only Lianza's brazen throat can utter that sonorous cry:—

"I-yo-li-o! I-yo-li-o-o!"

And the long-drawn hail of Lianza is broken in upon by the roar of his companions. "Yo!" shout eighty men as one. And out of the forest spring the dusky band, laden with their spoils, which with an exultant shout they set down before the chief, amid cries and hand-clapping and slapping of the thighs by the women and children welcoming their return. The flesh is cut up, the fish divided: the women return to their huts to cook the supper; the children cling about their fathers' legs and recount the little adventures of the day. The meal is eaten: the whole population form a wide circle in the street, and, squatting on their hams, give themselves up to the joy of watching the gyrations of the dancing women, who, in their aprons of long grass, decorated with tinkling bells, whirl around to the barbaric music of drums and castanets, as the day darkens and the moon throws her silvery beams upon the scene.

Such were the daily scenes amid which Samba passed his happy boyhood, in the village of Banonga, whither he was now leading the white stranger.

The village came in sight, nestling in a glade. The laughing children ceased their play, and stood finger in mouth shyly contemplating the new comers. The women, busily grinding manioc with pestle and mortar in the open, looked up with startled glance and fled into their huts, where they stood peeping from behind the posts of palm. Mirambo, the chief, rose from his seat and awaited with dignity the approach of the white man. Ceremonious greetings were exchanged. Then ensued a long conversation, the white man speaking, his negroes translating to the chief. He listened intently, and replied in brief phrases, most often contenting himself with exclamations of assent—"Inde!" "Ng'oko!" or of dissent—"Lako!" "O nye!"

Botofé! Yes, he knew where *botofé* could be found. And the white man, the Son of Heaven, wanted *botofé*; it had some value for him? Well, he should have it. Who so hospitable as the men of Banonga? They were not as the men of Kinshassa, who met the white man with cries of anger, and spears, and knives. Had not he, Mirambo, seen Bula Matadi, the friend of the black man? "When my sons return from their hunting," said Mirambo, "they shall provide the stranger with all that he needs. They shall give him plantains, and fowls, and cakes of *kwanga*;[5] they shall make ready a hut for him; and *botofé*—yes, if he needs *botofé*, my young men shall go into the forest and fill their baskets with *botofé* for him. No one shall say but that the white man is

welcome in Banonga."

[1] Are you there?

[2] I am here.

[3] Rubber.

[4] H. M. Stanley.

[5] A preparation of manioc.

CHAPTER II

"Rubber is Death"

"Whew! This is a warm country, Jack. There'll soon be nothing left of us."

"There's plenty at present, uncle," replied Jack Challoner with a smile. "Barney can spare less, after all."

"Sure an' that's the truth's truth, sorr. 'Twas the sorrow uv me mother's heart that I ran to length instid uv breadth. Whin I was a bhoy she had to buy breeches always a size too long for me, and me bones grew so fast they almost made holes in me skin—they did."

"Confound it, man, that's where you score. The mosquitoes leave you alone: can't find enough juice in you to make it worth their while to worry you. Whereas they suck at me till I'm all ulcers. Hi! Nando, when shall we get to this Banonga we've heard so much about?"

"Berrah soon, sah. Paddle small small, sah, den Banonga."

Mr. Martindale mopped his brow and drew his white umbrella closer down upon his head. He was lying under a grass shelter amidships a dug-out, with his nephew Jack at his side and his man Barney O'Dowd at his feet. The clumsy native craft rocked to and fro under the paddles of twelve stalwart Baenga, who stood, their bodies bent slightly forward, singing in time with their strokes. They were paddling against the current of a stream that forced its brown waters into one of the tributaries of the Congo. It was a broiling day. A rainstorm in the night had cleared the sky of the haze that commonly covered it, and the sun beat down out of a dome of fleckless blue, irradiating the crimsons and purples, the golds and whites, of the rich vegetation on the banks.

"I tell you, Jack," continued Mr. Martindale, "I shall grumble if this talk of Banonga turns out to be wind. I don't see what the Congo State has to gain by exterminating the natives; and we know what liars these blacks can be."

"Suppose the talk of gold turns out to be wind, uncle?"

"Eh? What's that? Wind! Rubbish! The difference is that we hear of Banonga from the blacks; but 'twas Barnard told me of the gold, and Barnard hasn't got enough imagination to say more than he knows. No, the gold is there safe enough; and I tell you I shall be glad when we get through this Banonga and can proceed to business."

John Martindale was a florid well-preserved man of fifty-five years. Born in New York, he had early gone west, rapidly made his pile in California, and retired from the direction of his mines. But meeting one day in San Francisco an old friend of his, a queer stick of a fellow named Barnard, who spent his life in roaming over the world and making discoveries that laid the foundation of other men's fortunes, not his own, he learnt from him that clear signs of gold had been observed in the Maranga district on the Upper Congo. Mr. Martindale was very rich; but, like many another man, he found after his retirement that time hung somewhat heavy on his hands. He was still full of energy, and Barnard's story of gold in a new country stirred the imagination of the old miner. He decided to take a trip to Africa and test his friend's information. As a matter of course he invited Barnard to accompany him.

"No, no, John," replied his friend. "I scratched the soil; I know gold is there; I've no further interest in the stuff. I'm off to the Philippines next week. Go and dig, old fellow, and take plenty of quinine with you."

It happened that Mr. Martindale's only nephew, Jack Challoner, a lad of seventeen, was just home from school. He was an orphan. His mother, Mr. Martindale's sister, had married an English barrister of great ability, who had already made a name at the Parliamentary Bar. But he died when his boy was only six years old; two years later his wife followed him to the grave, and the guardianship of Jack fell to his uncle, who, being a bachelor without other ties, readily

assumed the charge. He surprised his friends by the course he took with the boy. Instead of bringing him to America, he entered him at Bilton and afterwards at Rugby, declaring that as the boy was English it was only fair he should receive an English education. "I read *Tom Brown* years ago," he would say, "and if they turn 'em out now as they did then—well, we can't do better this side of the herring pond." Jack spent his holidays either in America, or in travelling about Europe with his uncle, and the two became great chums.

But when Jack reached his seventeenth birthday Mr. Martindale again surprised his friends. "Send him to Oxford?" he said. "Not much! He has had nearly four years at Rugby, he's in the fifth form, and I guess he's enough book learning to serve his turn. He's tip-top at sports: he's a notion of holding his own and helping lame dogs; and I don't want his nose to turn up, as I believe noses have a trick of doing at Oxford. No: the boy'll come home. I don't know what he's to be; but I'll soon find out what he's fit for, and then he'll have to work at it. The least I could do for his father's sake was to give him an English education; he'll come back to America for a smartening up."

It was not long after Jack's return that Mr. Martindale met his friend Barnard. Since Barnard would not be his companion, Jack should. "It will do you no harm to see a little travel off the beaten track," he said, "and I'm not going to work the gold myself: my mining days are done. You may tumble to it; in that case you'll stay in Africa and take care not to waste my capital. You may not: that'll be one thing settled, anyway."

Accordingly, when Mr. Martindale sailed for Europe he took Jack with him. With characteristic energy he very quickly settled the preliminaries. He obtained for a comparatively small sum from a Belgian trading company, the holders of a large concession on the Upper Congo, the mining rights in the Maranga district, on condition of the company receiving a percentage of the profits. The first practical step having been taken, Mr. Martindale's interest in his project became keen. He had never travelled out of America or Europe; there was a certain glamour about an adventure in the heart of Africa; and he was rich enough to indulge his humour, even if the results of Barnard's discovery should prove disappointing.

Uncle and nephew sailed for Africa, spent a few days at Boma, travelled over the cataract railway from Matadi to Leopoldville, and thence went in a steamer for nearly three weeks up the Congo. Then, leaving the main river, they embarked on a smaller steamer, plying on a tributary stream. In about a week they arrived at a "head post," whence they continued their journey, up a tributary of a tributary, by canoe. This last stream was quite a considerable river as the term would be understood in Europe, though neither so broad nor so deep as the one they had just left. But this again was insignificant by comparison with the mighty Congo itself, fed by a thousand tributaries in its course of fifteen hundred miles from the heart of Africa to the sea. Mr. Martindale became more and more impressed as the journey lengthened, and at last burst out: "Well, now, this licks even the Mississippi!"

But not the Shannon! Barney O'Dowd was a true Irishman. Mr. Martindale had engaged him in London as handy-man to the expedition. He had been in the army; he had been a gentleman's servant, wardroom attendant at a hospital, drill-sergeant at a boys' school, 'bus conductor, cabman, and chauffeur; but in none of these numerous vocations, he said with a sigh, had he ever grown fat. He was long, lean, strong as a horse; with honest merry blue eyes, and curly lips that seemed made for smiling. He drove the travellers in a hansom during the week they stayed in London, and looked so sorrowful when Mr. Martindale announced his departure that the American, on the spur of the moment, with bluff impulsiveness, invited him to join the expedition.

"Sure an' 'tis me last chance, sorr," cried Barney, cheerfully consenting. "A sea voyage does wonders for some. There was Terence O'Bally, now, as thin as a lath in the ould counthry; he went to Australia, and by the powers! when he came back to say 'God bless you' to his ould mother, she did not know him at all at all, he was so full in the flesh, sorr. Sure an' I'll come wid ye wid the greatest pleasure in the world, and plase the pigs I'll fatten like Terence. Only wan thing, sorr; ye would not have any inshuperable objection to Pat, sorr?"

"Who on earth's Pat?"

"Just a dog, sorr; a little darlint uv a terrier no fatter than me, sorr; as kind an' gentle as wan uv the blessed angels. He has as poor appetite, sorr, an' sleeps on my coat, so he will not cost ye much for board and lodging. And I would thank ye kindly, sorr, if I might but go home to 'm an' say, 'Pat, me darlint, times is changed. We are in luck, Pat. There's a nice, kind, fat, jolly American gentleman that takes very kindly to dogs an' Irishmen, an'——'"

"There then, that'll do," said Mr. Martindale, laughing. "Bring Pat, if you like. But he'll have to go if he proves a nuisance."

And so Pat became a member of the party. And he lay curled up now in the bottom of the canoe, and cocked an eye as Barney declared with emphasis that the Congo was a "mighty foine river, sure an' 'tis only fair to say so; but by all the holy powers 'tis not to be compared wid the Shannon, blessed be its name!"

It was Pat that sprang first ashore when the paddlers with a resounding "Yo!" drove the canoe alongside a turfy platform by the bank, worn level by the treading of innumerable feet. The

dog uttered one sharp bark, faced round to the river, and stood with ears pricked and stumpy tail wagging, to watch his master step to land.

"Now, Nando," said Mr. Martindale, when all were ashore, "lead the way. Not too fast: and not too near skeeters or jiggers."

"Berrah well, sah; me go fust; frighten skeeters all away."

Leaving ten of the crew in the canoe, the rest of the party set off under Nando's guidance. He led them through the mass of tall grass that lined the river bank, across a swampy stretch of heath, where a narrow path wound in and out among trees large and small, beset by dense undergrowth and climbing plants. Insects innumerable flitted and buzzed around the travellers, provoking lively exclamations from Mr. Martindale and Jack, and many a vicious snap from the terrier, but leaving Barney almost untouched. Once a wild pig dashed across the path and plunged into the thicket, with Pat barking frantically at its heels. Here and there Mr. Martindale caught sight of red-legged partridge and quail, and sighed for his rifle. Parrots squawked overhead; once, from the far distance, muffled by the foliage, came the trumpet of an elephant; but signs of humanity there were none, save the meandering track.

At length, however, they came to a clear open space amid the trees, where, on a low hill, stood a crude open hut, consisting of upright supports surmounted by a roof of bamboos and leaves, and partly walled by cloth.

"Berrah nice place, sah," said Nando cheerfully. "Chief him missis buried dah."

The travellers approached with curiosity. Inside the shed they saw a small image, roughly carved in semblance of a human figure, set upright in the ground. At one side lay two or three wicker baskets, at the other a bottle; in front a big iron spoon stuck out of the soil, and all around were strewed hundreds of small beads. Nando explained that these had been the property of the deceased lady.

"And is she buried under them?" asked Mr. Martindale, stepping back a pace.

"Bit of her, sah."

"What do you mean—a bit of her?"

"All dey find, sah. Bula Matadi come, make big bobbery; bang! chief him missis lib for[1] dead, sah. Bad man cut up, put in pot, only little bit left, sah."

Mr. Martindale shivered, then waxed indignant.

"I don't believe it," he declared stoutly. "Such things aren't done in these days. There are no cannibals in these days—eh, Jack?"

"I hope not, uncle. But are we near Banonga, Nando?"

"Small small, sah, den Banonga."

"Lead on, then," cried Mr. Martindale; "I want to see with my own eyes whether those fellows were telling the truth."

Some distance down the river, just after camping for the night, Mr. Martindale's rest had been disturbed by a loud and excited conversation between his own party and a group of newcomers who had halted to exchange greetings. Inquiring the cause of the commotion, he learnt that the men had brought news of a terrible massacre that had taken place at Banonga, a village in the forest many miles up stream. The villagers had been remiss in their collection of rubber; the agents of Bula Matadi (which, originally the native name for Sir H. M. Stanley, had become the name for the Congo Free State) had appeared at the village with a force of native soldiers, and, according to the informant, who had received the news from an up-country man, the whole population had been annihilated. Mr. Martindale had heard, in America and England as well as in Africa, strange stories of the administration of the Congo State; but, like many others, he had been inclined to pooh-pooh the rumours of cruelty and atrocity as the vapourings of sentimentalists. But the stories imperfectly interpreted by Nando on that pleasant evening by the river made a new impression on him. He was a hard-headed man of business, as little inclined to sentimentality as any man could be; he hated any appeal to the emotions, and unasked gave large subscriptions to hospitals and philanthropic societies so as to avoid the harrowing of his feelings by collectors and other importunate folk; but beneath his rough husk lay a very warm heart, as none knew better than his nephew Jack; and the stories of cruelty told by the lips of these natives made him feel very uncomfortable. At a distance he could shut his eyes to things—open his purse to deserving objects and believe that his duty was done; but here, on the spot, this easy course was not possible. He did not like discomfort, bodily or mental; it annoyed him when any external cause ruffled the serenity of his life; and he made up his mind to pay a visit to Banonga on his way up the river, test the negroes' story, and prove to his own satisfaction, as he believed he would do, that it was exaggerated if not untrue. That done, he would dismiss the matter from his thoughts, and proceed to the proper business of his journey without anything to disturb his peace of mind.

The party left the grave on the hill and followed the same path through another stretch of forest until they came, almost unawares, upon a large clearing.

"Banonga, massa," said Nando, stretching out his hand, and looking into Mr. Martindale's eyes with a glance as of some frightened animal.

"Banonga! But where are the huts?" said Mr. Martindale.

No one answered him. The party of five stood at the edge of the clearing, looking straight before them. Pat the terrier trotted around, wagging his stump, and blinking up into their faces as if to ask a question. What did they see? A long broad track, leading between palms and plantains away into the impenetrable forest. These leafy walls were vivid green, but the road itself was black. A smell of charred wood and burnt vegetation filled the air. There was not a complete hut to be seen. The space once thronged with a joyous chattering crowd was now empty, save for ashes, half-burnt logs, shattered utensils. Here and there a bird hopped and pecked, flying up into the trees with shrill scream as Pat sprang barking towards it. But for these sounds, the silence was as of death.

"Come," said Mr. Martindale, stepping forward. It was he who led the way now as the party left the ring of forest and walked into the clearing. Barney, coming behind with Nando, groaned aloud.

"Stop that noise!" cried Mr. Martindale, swinging round irritably. "What's the matter with you, man?"

"Sorrow a bit the matter wid me, sorr; but it just brought into me mimory a sight I saw in the ould counthry whin I was a bhoy; sure there was nothing to see there either, and that's the pity uv it."

Mr. Martindale walked on without speaking, poking with his stick into the black dust of the road. Nando went to his side, and pointed out such traces of former habitations as remained: here a cooking pot, there a half-consumed wicker basket, a broken knife, a blackened bead-necklace. And among the other scattered evidences of rapine there were the remains of human beings—skeletons, separate bones.

"Whoever did this did it thoroughly," remarked Mr. Martindale with darkening brow. "But who did it? I won't believe it was Europeans till 'tis proved. There are cannibals here; Nando said so: a cannibal tribe may have raided the place. Eh? But where are the people?"

In the thick undergrowth, beyond the desolated village, crouched a negro boy. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes unnaturally bright. His left arm hung limp and nerveless; in his right hand he clutched a broad-pointed dagger. He had been lying in a stupor until roused by a sharp sound, the cry of some animal strange to him. Then he raised himself slowly and with difficulty to his knees, and peered cautiously, apprehensively, through the foliage amid which he was ensconced.

He glared and shrank back when he saw that among the strangers moving about were two white men. But what was this animal they had brought with them? he wondered. Goats he knew, and pigs, and the wild animals of the forest; he knew the native dog, with its foxy head, smooth yellowish coat, and bushy tail; but this creature was new to him. True, it was like a dog, though its brown coat was rough and its tail stumpy; but he had never seen the dogs of his village trot round their masters as this was doing, never heard them speaking, as it seemed, to the men with this quick sharp cry. The dogs he had known never barked; their only utterance was a long howl, when they were hungry or in pain. He hated white men, but loved animals; and, weak as he was, he raised himself once more, and bent forward, to look at this active dog-like creature that came and went in apparent joyousness.

A bird flew down from a tree, and alighted hardily within a couple of yards of the terrier. This was too much for Pat. He darted at the audacious bird, pursued it into the thicket, then came to a sudden surprised stop when he descried a black form among the leaves. He stood contemplating the boy with his honest brown eyes, and his tail was very active. Then with one short bark he trotted back to his master, and looked up at him as if to say: "I have made a discovery; come and see." But man's intelligence is very limited. Barney did not understand.

"And did the cratur' give ye the slip, then?" he said, patting the dog's head.

"That's not the point," said Pat's barks; "I want you to come and see what I have found," and he ran off again towards the thicket, turning once or twice to see if his master was following. But Barney paid little attention to him, and Pat, giving him up as hopeless, went on alone to scrape acquaintance. He stood before the boy at a distance of a yard, blinking at him between the tendrils of a creeper. Then he advanced slowly, wagging his stump, poked his nose through the leaves, and after a moment's sniffing deliberation put out his tongue and licked the black knee he found there. The boy made with his closed lips the humming sound with which the negro of the Congo expresses pleasure, and next moment the dog's paws were in his hands, and the two, dog and boy, were friends.

But whoever was a friend of Pat's must also be a friend of Barney O'Dowd. It was not long before Pat awoke to a sense of his duty. He tried with the negro the plan that had just failed with

his master. He retreated a little way, cocked his head round and barked, and waited for the boy to follow. The latter understood at once; but he shook his head, and said, "O nye! O nye!" under his breath, and lay still. Pat began to see that there was something keeping the white man and the black boy apart. It was very foolish, he thought; they were both such good fellows: it was quite clear that they ought to be friends; but what was a dog to do? He trotted slowly back to Barney, and began to speak to him seriously, with a bark of very different intonation from that he had previously employed.

"Well, and what is it wid ye thin?" said Barney.

"He has caught the bird, I expect," said Jack, amused at the dog's manner, "and wants you to go and see it."

"Sure thin I will," said Barney, "and mutton being scarce, we will have a new kind uv Irish stew, Pat me bhoy. But why did ye not bring it, me darlint?"

He made to follow the dog, whose tail was now beating the air with frantic delight. But he had no sooner reached the edge of the plantation than there was a rustle among the leaves: the boy was leaving his hiding-place and trying to crawl away into the forest.

"Begorra!" quoth Barney, "'tis a living cratur', and a bhoy, black as the peat on me father's bog, and not knowing a word uv Irish, to be sure."

Pat was rubbing his nose on the boy's flank, wondering why he had taken to going on all fours. But the negro did not crawl far. Faint with weakness, moaning with pain, he sank to the ground. Pat gave one bark of sympathy and stood watching him. Meanwhile Jack had come up.

"A boy, did you say, Barney? What is he doing here?"

"Sure I would like to know that same, sorr, but niver a word uv his spache did I learn. Perhaps he has niver seen a white man, not to say an Irishman, before, and thinks 'tis a ghost."

"Nando, come here!" called Jack.

The paddler hurried up, followed quickly by Mr. Martindale.

"What's this? What's this? A boy! They're not all killed then."

"I think he's hurt, uncle, and scared. He tried to crawl away from us, but seemed too weak."

"Well, lift him up, Barney; we'll see."

Barney approached, but the instant he stretched forth his hands the boy uttered a piercing shriek, and made to thrust at him with his dagger.

"Come, this will never do," said Mr. Martindale. "Speak to him, Nando; tell him we are friends, and will do him no harm."

Nando went up to the boy, and Pat stood by, wagging his tail and looking inquiringly from one to the other as the negro talked in his rapid staccato. A few minutes passed; then Nando turned round and with a beaming smile said:

"He understan' all same now, sah. I say massa Inglesa ginleman, blood brudder Tanalay, oh yes. He know 'bout Tanalay: he no 'fraid dis time; he come along along. He Samba, sah."

[1] i.e. *live for*, an expression commonly used in all kinds of circumstances by the natives, practically an intensive for various forms of the verb *to be*.

CHAPTER III

Monsieur Elbel

Samba made no resistance when Nando lifted him and carried him to the centre of the clearing. He moaned once or twice as the Baenga pressed his wounded arm, and almost fainted when he was laid on the ground before Mr. Martindale. But a sip from the traveller's flask revived him, and he smiled.

"That's better," said Mr. Martindale. "Poor boy! He looks half starved. Have you any food about you, Nando?"

"No, sah: get some one time."[1]

He went off into the thicket, and soon returned with a couple of scorched bananas. These Samba devoured ravenously.

"Now I wonder if he could tell us all about it?" said Mr. Martindale. "Ask him, Nando."

Samba told his story. His dialect was different from Nando's, but there is a freemasonry of speech among the tribes of the Congo, and Nando understood. It was not so easy for the others to get at the meaning of Nando's strange jargon as he interpreted, but they listened patiently, and missed little of the narrative. Mr. Martindale sat on an upturned pot, Jack and Barney on charred logs. Nando squatted beside Samba on the ground, and Pat thrust his muzzle contentedly between the boy's knees and seemed to sleep.

The finding of Samba

The finding of Samba

One night, when the moon was at the full, a messenger had come into Banonga village. The time was at hand when the agent of Bula Matadi would attend to collect the tax—the weight of rubber exacted by the Congo State from every able-bodied man. The messenger reminded the chief that Banonga had several times been in default. Only a few men had hitherto been punished, only a few women carried away as hostages for the diligence of their husbands. But the patience of Bula Matadi was exhausted. If on this occasion the due measure of rubber was not forthcoming, the anger of Bula Matadi would blaze, the soldiers would come, and the men of Banonga would have cause to rue their idleness.

The chief listened in silence. He was old; his body was bowed, his spirit broken. Life in Banonga was no longer the same since the white man came. All the joy of life was gone; the people spent their days in unremitting toil, endeavouring to satisfy the cry of their rulers for rubber, always rubber, more rubber. When the messenger arrived the men were away hunting for rubber, but Mirambo knew that, were they doubled in number, they could not gather the quantity required. The vines in their district were exhausted; the men had not been taught how to tap them; they destroyed as they went, and now the whole district around Banonga would not yield half of what was demanded of them. The poor old chief trembled when he thought of the woe that was coming to Banonga, for he now knew from the fate of other villages on the river what the messenger of Bula Matadi foreshadowed. Unless his men could achieve the impossible, find rubber where there was none, the blow would fall. And when it fell Banonga would be no more. The village a little while ago so happy and prosperous would be destroyed, its people killed or scattered. So it had happened to other villages: how could he hope that Banonga would be spared? The messenger indeed had spoken of the leniency of Bula Matadi, but the chief might have reminded him of the outrages the people had suffered; of the rapacity, the ruthless brutalities, of the forest guards. But he said no word of provocation; only, when the man had gone, Samba heard him mutter the terrible sentence now too often on his lips: "Botofé bo le iwa: rubber is death!"

The day came: the agent of Bula Matadi appeared, with an armed escort. The men of Banonga had not returned. They came dropping in by ones and twos and threes, worn out with their long quest. The rubber was weighed: in many cases it was short; excuses were rejected, entreaties scoffed at. The hapless victims suffered taunts, abuse, the terrible whip. One, less enduring than the rest, resisted. This was the signal. A dozen rifles were raised—a dozen shots rang out, strong forms lay writhing in the agony of death. A brief, sharp struggle; another fusillade; and the terrified survivors, men, women and children, fled helter-skelter to the forest, pursued by the shots of the soldiery, ruthless of age or sex. A raid was made upon their deserted huts: everything that had value for the native levies was seized; then the match was applied, and soon what had once been a prosperous happy village was a heap of smouldering ruins.

Samba saw it all. He remained dauntless by his grandfather's side until a bullet put an end to the old chief's life; then he too fled into the forest, to find his father and mother, his brothers and sisters. But he had delayed too long; one of the sentinels fired at him as he ran: his left arm was struck. He struggled on, but his friends were now out of reach: he could not find them. For several days he wandered about, supporting his life on roots and herbs in the vain search for his people. Then, growing hourly weaker, he crept back to his village, hoping that by and by the survivors would return to their desolated homes, to rebuild their huts, and sow new crops. But none came. He was alone! And he had lain down among the trees—as he thought, to die.

"Poor little fellow!" said Mr. Martindale. "How old is he, Nando?"

"He say ten three years, sah," replied Nando after consulting the boy.

"Thirteen. He looks older. This is a pretty kettle of fish. What can we do with him?"

"We must take him with us, uncle!" said Jack.

"Take him with us, indeed! What can we do with him? We can't hunt for his father and mother: he'd be of no use to us in our job. He wants doctoring: he might die on our hands."

"I learnt a little doctoring in the hospital, sorr," said Barney. "Sure I think I could mend his arm."

"Well, well, Nando and the other man had better bring him along to the canoe—gently, you know. Don't make him squeal."

The two negroes lifted the boy, and the party set off to return to the river.

"A fine responsibility you have let me in for, Jack," said Mr. Martindale as they went along. "I've no notion of a Crusoe and Friday relationship."

"Why not say Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, uncle?"

"A man of my girth!" said Mr. Martindale, chuckling. "But joking apart, Jack, this is a serious business. What am I to do with the boy, supposing he gets better? I am not a philanthropist; I can't start a boys' home; and the little chap will be of no use to us in our proper work. For the life of me I don't see daylight through this."

"We may find him useful in other ways, uncle. Besides, we may come across his people."

"And we may not—we may not, Jack. Still, have your way; only remember he's your protégé; I wash my hands of him. And mind you, I'm not going to start a crusade. There's been terrible work in this village: no mistake about it; but I'm not convinced it's the doing of white men: in fact, I refuse to believe it."

"But they're responsible. They shouldn't employ natives who are so blackguardly."

"That's where it is, you see. You Britishers employed Red Indians in our war of Independence, didn't you?"

"Yes, and Lord Chatham thundered against it, and it was put a stop to."

"They taught you history at Rugby, did they? Glad to hear it. Well, I dare say Leopold will put a stop to it if representations are made to him. It's none of my business, but I'll mention the matter when I get back to Boma. Now, Sambo——"

"Samba, uncle."

"Bo or ba, it's all the same. You'll have to be a good boy, Samba. But what's the good of talking! He can't understand what I say. Doesn't know good from bad, I warrant. Well, well!"

They reached the canoe and laid Samba gently down upon rugs. The rude craft was soon under way. For a time Samba lay asleep, with his arm about Pat's neck; but by and by, when the paddlers paused in the song with which they accompanied their strokes, the boy awoke, and began to sing himself, in a low musical voice that struck pleasantly upon the ear after the rougher tones of the men.

"Bauro lofundo! (he sang); bauro lofundo! Bompasu la Liwanga bao lindela ud' okunda ilaka nkos'i koka."

This he repeated again and again until he was tired and slept once more.

"Very pretty," said Mr. Martindale. "The boy'd make a fortune in New York, Jack. But what does it all mean, anyway?"

"Berrah nice song, sah," said Nando. "Me tell all 'bout it. People of Bauro, sah, plenty bad lot. Bompasu and Liwanga been and gone after 'long 'long into de forest, not come back till parrots one two free twenty all dah."

"Well, I can't make much of that. Doesn't seem to have any more sense than the songs that our gals sing at home."

But further inquiry brought out the story. It appeared that a rubber collector, not satisfied with exacting from the people of Bauro the usual quantity of rubber, had required them to furnish him by a certain day with twenty young parrots which he wished to take with him to Europe. Being unable to obtain so large a number by the given date, the people were declared to be surpassingly obstinate and wicked, and the sentries Bompasu and Liwanga were let loose upon them until the twenty parrots were delivered.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Martindale. "Say, wasn't it Macaulay who said he'd write a nation's history from its ballads? Rubber and parrots; what next, I wonder? These Congo people have original ideas in taxation."

"Begorra, sorr," said Barney, "and don't I wish the taxes in the ould counthry were uv the same kind. Sure and ivery man in the counthry would be glad to supply the collectors wid scores uv sparrows or peewits or any other fowl, and murphies and blackthorns—ivery mortal thing but money, sorr."

In the course of a few hours the stream they had hitherto been navigating ran into a larger tributary of the Congo some hundred and fifty miles above the point where it joined the main river. The canoe had scarcely entered the broader river when the crew suddenly stopped paddling, and Nando, turning round with some excitement, said—

"Smoke-boat, sah."

"What?"

"Smoke-boat nebber dis way before, sah."

"A steamer, eh?"

"A launch flying the Congo State flag, uncle—blue with a golden star," said Jack, standing up in the canoe and taking a long look ahead.

Nando explained that the rapids, a day's paddling down stream, had prevented the State officers hitherto from bringing steam launches into this part of the river. Evidently the vessel now

approaching must have been carried, as a whole or in sections, overland past these rapids—a work of great difficulty and labour, for the rapids were at least three miles in length, and the shores were at some parts rocky, at others covered with dense scrub.

Almost before Nando had finished his explanation the canoe had been put about, and the men began to paddle hard up stream towards the mouth of the little river, into which the launch could not follow them.

"Hi, now, Nando, what are you about?" cried Mr. Martindale.

Nando replied that it was always best to avoid the State officials. He would lie in a creek until the launch was past.

"I don't see why we should run away," said Mr. Martindale. "However, after what we've just seen, I've no wish to meet them. I might say something that would lead to a row with the Company."

He lit a cigar and lay back in the canoe. Jack turned flat on his face and watched the launch. It was soon clear that Nando's plan was impossible. The launch was a swift one: it came on with increased speed, and when within hailing distance a voice in French called peremptorily upon the canoe to stop.

"Nando, stop paddling," said Mr. Martindale, leisurely turning round on his seat. "Answer their hail, Jack."

"Who are you?" shouted Jack in English.

The foreigner in the bow of the launch was somewhat taken aback. He had thought to do the questioning, not to be questioned. But he replied stiffly—

"I am Monsieur Elbel, of de Société Cosmopolite du Commerce du Congo."

The launch was now within a few yards of the canoe. Monsieur Elbel was a short thick-set man with reddish hair, and a thick red moustache that stuck out rigidly a couple of inches on each side of his nose. He wore a white topee and white trousers, but his coat was blue, with brass buttons, and gold lace at the shoulders. All but himself on deck were negroes.

Mr. Martindale ordered the paddlers to bring the canoe round, so that he might face the Belgian. Then, still seated, he blew out a cloud of smoke and said—

"Well, I don't know you, Mr. Elbel, and if the work in Banonga yonder is due to you I don't wish to. Paddle ahead, Nando."

The crew looked somewhat awestruck, but obediently dropped their paddles into the stream. Monsieur Elbel's cheeks had turned a fiery red several shades deeper than his hair, and the veins upon his forehead swelled. The canoe sped past him while he was still endeavouring to collect himself. Suddenly a tall negro at his side threw out his hand, exclaiming: "Ok'ok'ok'oka!"[2]

The Belgian looked in the direction pointed out, and the negro followed up his exclamation with a rapid excited sentence. Monsieur Elbel at once sent the launch in pursuit of the canoe, ran her alongside, and cried:

"Halt! I bid you halt. You are rude. I vill run you down if you have not care. Dat boy I see in your canoe I know him; he belong to my société: I demand him to be given up."

"Not so fast, Mr. Elbel. I treat men as they treat me. You have no right to stop me. I am an American, a citizen of the United States, travelling in the Free State, which I believe, is open to all the world. Besides, I have a patent from your company. I propose to continue my journey."

"But—but—I tell you, dat boy is not American: he is subject of Congo State, in concession of my société; still vunce, I demand him."

"Sorry I can't oblige you. The boy is in my service: he has been wounded—perhaps you know how; nothing but an order from the Free State courts will compel me to give him up. And even then I won't, knowing what I know. That's flat, Mr. Elbel. You stop me at your risk. Go ahead, Nando."

The negroes dug their paddles into the water, and the canoe darted past the side of the launch. Monsieur Elbel bit his moustache and savagely tugged its ends; then, completely losing control of his temper, he shouted—

"You hear; I varn you. You act illegal; you come to seek for gold; dat is your business: it is not your business to meddle yourself viz de natif. I report you!"

The launch snorted away up stream, the canoe continued its journey at a moderate pace, and each was soon out of sight of the other.

For some minutes Mr. Martindale seemed preoccupied.

"What is it, uncle?" asked Jack after a time.

"I was thinking over what that fellow Elbel said. He knows more about our business here than I quite like. Of course they all know we're after minerals, but Barnard's find is not the dead secret he thought it was. Or say, Jack, d'you think we are being watched?"

"Perhaps he was fishing?"

"I don't think so, for he didn't wait for an answer. However, we needn't meet our difficulties half-way. Anyhow, 'twill do Mr. Elbel no harm to know that we don't care a red cent for him or any other Congo man. I suppose he's in charge of this section. But what on earth did the fellow want with the boy?"

Nando, without ceasing to ply his paddle, turned his head and spoke over his shoulder to Samba, now wide awake.

"Samba say him uncle dah, sah: uncle Boloko, plenty bad man."

"A wicked uncle, eh?"

"He berrah angry, sah, 'cos Samba him fader hab got plenty more wives, sah; must be chief some day. Boloko he want to be chief: berrah well: Banonga men all say 'Lako! lako!'[3] plenty loud. Boloko berrah much angry: go to white men: tell berrah bad fings 'bout Banonga men. Samba say Banonga men lib for cut off Boloko his head if catch him."

"Wigs on the green, Jack. Then I guess this Boloko fellow wanted to get in first. Well, it doesn't raise my opinion of Mr. Elbel; you know a man by the company he keeps, eh?"

"And the Company by him, uncle."

[1] Immediately.

[2] Exclamation of surprise.

[3] Exclamation of refusal.

CHAPTER IV

Night Alarms

In the course of an hour or two Mr. Martindale's canoe reached the camp, on a piece of rising ground immediately above the river. Here he found the rest of his party—some fifty strong West African natives—the three canoes in which they had come up stream lying nose to stern along the low bank, only the first being moored, the others roped to it.

The party had reached the spot three days before, and were resting after the fatigues of their journey. These had been by no means slight, for the men had had to haul the canoes through the rapids, and sometimes to make portages for a considerable distance. Fortunately the canoes were not heavily laden. They contained merely a good stock of food, and a few simple mining tools. This was only a prospecting trip, as Mr. Martindale was careful to explain before leaving Boma.

His friend Barnard's instructions had been clear enough. The discovery had been accidental. Coming one day, in the course of his wanderings, to the village of Ilola, he happened to learn that the chief's son was down with fever. The villagers had been somewhat unfriendly, and Barnard was not loth to purchase their goodwill by doing what he could for the boy. He cured the fever. The chief, like most of the negroes of Central Africa, had strong family affections, and was eager to give some practical token of his gratitude for his son's recovery. When taking the boy's pulse, Barnard had timed the beats by means of his gold repeater. The chief looked on in wonderment, believing that the mysterious sounds he heard from the watch were part of the stranger's magic. When the cure was complete, he asked Barnard to present him with the magic box; but the American made him understand by signs that he could not give it away; besides, it was useful only to the white man. Whereupon the chief had a happy thought. If the yellow metal was valuable, his friend and benefactor would like to obtain more of it. There was plenty to be found within a short distance of the village. The chief would tell him where it was, but him alone, conditionally. He must promise that if he came for it, or sent any one for it, the people of Ilola should not be injured; for every month brought news from afar of the terrible things that were done by the white men in their hunt for rubber. Perhaps the same might happen if white men came to look for gold.

Barnard gave the chief the desired assurance, undertaking that no harm should come to him

or his people if he showed where the gold was to be found. The American was then led across a vast stretch of swampy ground to a rugged hill some three or four miles from Ilola. Through a deep fissure in the hillside brawled a rapid stream, and in its sandy bed the traveller discerned clear traces of the precious metal.

Barnard explained to Mr. Martindale that Ilola was several days' journey above the rapids on the Lemba, a sub-tributary of the Congo, and provided him with a rough map on which he had traced the course of the streams he would have to navigate to reach it. But even without the map it might be found without much difficulty: its name was well known among the natives along the upper reaches of the river, the chief being lord of several villages.

So far Mr. Martindale's journey had been without a hitch, and he was now within three or four days of his destination. It was the custom of the party to stay at night in or near a native village. There a hut could usually be got for the white men, and Barnard had told them that a hut was for many reasons preferable to a tent. Sudden storms were not infrequent in these latitudes, especially at night—a tent might be blown or washed away almost without warning, while a well-built native hut would stand fast. Moreover, a tent is at the best uncomfortably hot and close; a hut is more roomy, and the chinks in the matting of which its sides commonly consist allow a freer passage of air. The floor too is dry and hard, often raised above the ground outside; and the roof, made of bamboo and thatched with palm leaves and coarse grasses, is rain-tight.

Up to the present Mr. Martindale had met with nothing but friendliness from the natives, and a hut had always been at his disposal. But he had now reached a part of the river where the people knew white men only by hearsay, and could not distinguish between inoffensive travellers and the grasping agents whose cruelty rumour was spreading through the land. The people of the village where he wished to put up for this night were surly and suspicious, and he decided for once to sleep in his tent on the river bank instead of in a hut.

The party had barely finished their evening meal when the sun sank, and in a few minutes all was dark. Samba had been handed over to Barney, whose hospital experience enabled him to tend the boy's wound with no little dexterity, and the boy went happily to sleep in Barney's tent, his arm round Pat's neck. Jack shared his uncle's tent. He had been somewhat excited by the scenes and events of the day, and did not fall asleep the moment he lay down, as he usually did. The tent was very warm and stuffy; the mosquitoes found weak spots in his curtains and sought diligently for unexplored regions of his skin, until he found the conditions intolerable. He got up, envying his uncle, who was sound asleep, his snores vying with the distant roars of hippopotami in the river. Taking care not to disturb him, Jack stepped out of the hut, and understood at once why the air was so oppressive. A storm was brewing. Everything was still, as if weighed down by some monstrous incubus. Ever and anon the indigo sky was cut across by steel-blue flashes of forked lightning, and thunder rumbled far away.

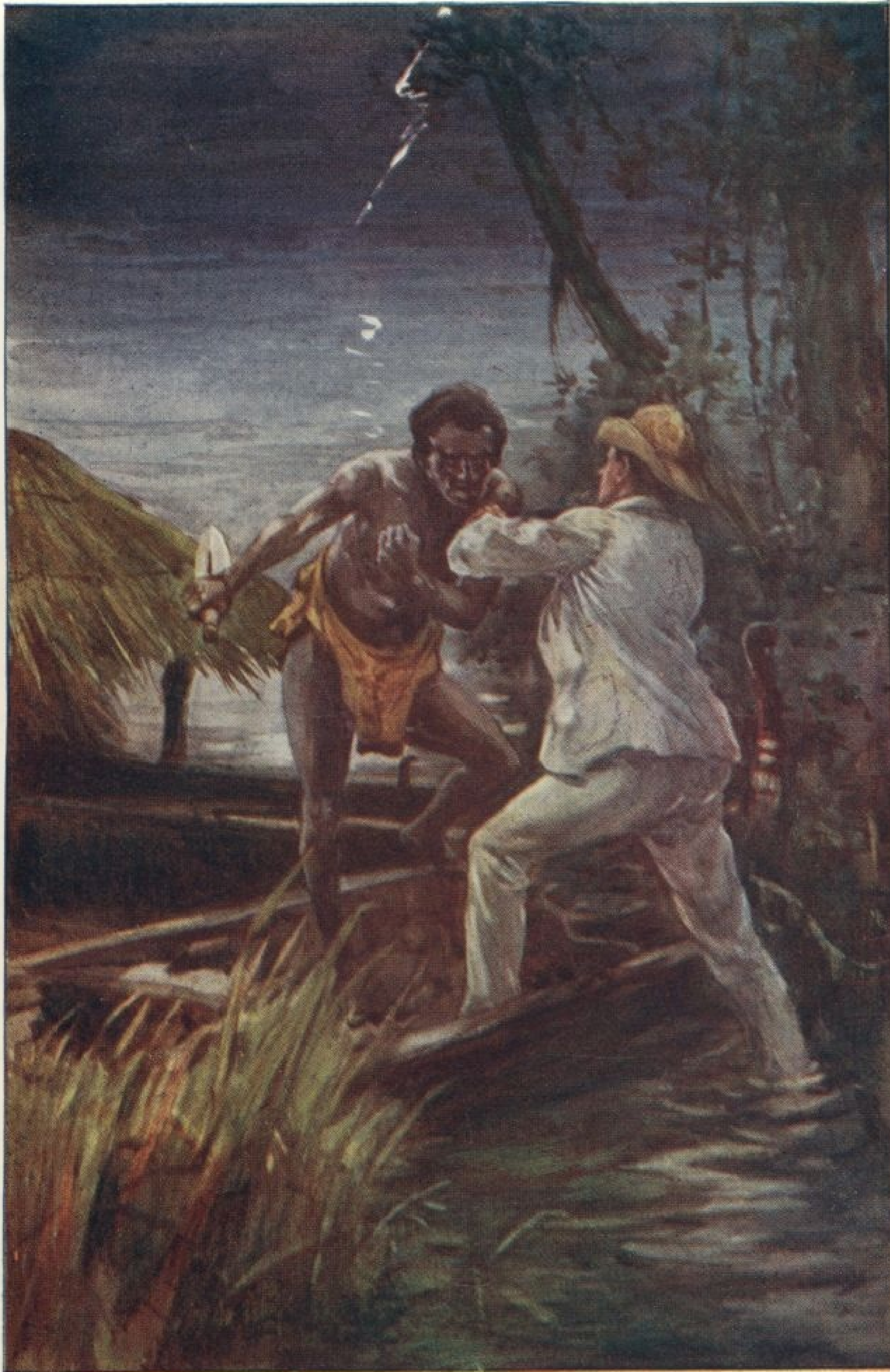
Jack sauntered on, past Barney's tent, towards the river bank, listening to noises rarely heard by day—the grunt of hippopotami, the constant rasping croak of frogs, the lesser noises of birds and insects among the reeds. The boatmen and other natives of the party were a hundred yards away, beyond the tents he had just left. Sometimes they would chatter till the small hours, but to-night they were silent, sleeping heavily after their toil.

He came to a little eminence, from which he could look down towards the stream. Everything was black and indistinguishable. But suddenly, as a jagged flash of lightning momentarily lit the scene, he fancied he caught a glimpse of a figure moving below, about the spot where the nearest of the canoes was moored. Was it a wild beast, he wondered, prowling for food? Or perhaps his eyes had deceived him? He moved a little forward; carefully, for the blackness of night seemed deeper than ever. Another flash! He had not been mistaken; it was a figure, moving on one of the canoes—a human form, a man, stooping, with a knife in his hand! What was he doing? Once more for an instant the lightning lit up the river, and as by a flash Jack guessed the man's purpose: he was about to cut the mooring rope!

Jack's first impulse was to shout; but in a moment he saw that a sudden alarm might cause the natives of his party to stampede. The intruder was alone, and a negro; Why not try to capture him? Jack was ready with his hands: his muscles were in good order; he could wrestle and box, and, as became a boy of Tom Brown's school, fight. True, the man had a knife; but with the advantage of surprise on his side Jack felt that the odds were fairly equal. He stole down the slope to the waterside, hoping that the darkness would remain unbroken until he had stalked his man. A solitary bush at the very brink gave him cover; standing behind it, almost touching the sleeping sentry who should have been guarding the canoes, Jack could just see the dark form moving from the first canoe to the second.

He waited until the man bent over to cut the connecting rope; then with three long silent leaps he gained the side of the foremost canoe, which was almost resting on the bank in just sufficient water to float her. The man had already made two or three slashes at the rope when he heard Jack's splash in the shallow water. With a dexterous twist of his body he eluded Jack's clutch, and swinging round aimed with his knife a savage blow at his assailant. Jack felt a stinging pain in the fleshy part of the thigh, and, hot with rage, turned to grapple with the negro. His fingers touched a greasy skin; the man drew back, wriggled round, and prepared to leap overboard. At the moment when he made his spring Jack flung out his hands to catch him. He was just an instant too late; the negro had splashed into the shallow water on the far side of the

canoe, and disappeared into the inky blackness beyond, leaving in Jack's hands a broken string, with a small round object dangling from the end. At the same moment there was a heavy thwack against the side of the canoe; and Jack, mindful of crocodiles, bolted up the bank. He turned after a few yards, shuddering to think that the man had perhaps escaped him only to fall a victim to this most dreaded scourge of African rivers. But if he was indeed in the jaws of a crocodile he was beyond human help. He listened for a time, but could detect no sound betraying the man's presence. Pursuit, he knew, was useless. Except when the lightning flashed he could scarcely see a yard beyond him.


A midnight encounter

A midnight encounter

Jack did not care to disturb his uncle. He went round the camp, found Nando with some difficulty in the darkness, and ordered him to send ten of the crew to occupy the canoes for the rest of the night. Then he went back to his tent, bound up his wound, and stretched himself on his

mattress. He lay awake for a time, wondering what motive the intruder could have for damaging the expedition. At last, from sheer weariness, he dropped off into a troubled sleep in which he was conscious of a deluge of rain that descended upon the camp.

The morning however broke clear. Jack told his uncle what had occurred.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Martindale. "What's the meaning of it, I wonder?"

"Do you think it was a move of that Belgian fellow, uncle?"

"Mr. Elbel? No, I don't. He has no reason for interfering with us. I've bought the rights from his company, and as they'll get royalties on all the gold I find, he's not such a fool as to hinder us."

"But Samba, uncle?"

"Bah! He was egged on to demand the boy by that villainous-looking nigger, and his dignity being a trifle upset, he thought he'd try it on with us. No, I don't think he was at the bottom of it. I've always heard that these niggers are arrant thieves; the villagers were unfriendly, you remember, and most likely 'twas one of them who took a fancy to our canoes. Glad you frightened him off, anyway. What about your wound?"

"It's nothing to speak of—a slight flesh wound. I washed it with alum solution, and don't think it will give me any bother."

"Lucky it's no worse. We'll set a careful watch every night after this. And take my advice: if you can't sleep, don't go prowling about; it isn't safe in these parts. Try my dodge; shut your eyes and imagine you see forty thousand sheep jumping a patent boundary fence in single file; or if that don't work, say to yourself: 'How much wood would a woodchuck chuck if a woodchuck would chuck wood?'—and keep on saying it. I've never known it fail."

"Perhaps it's a good job I didn't know it last night," replied Jack, laughing. "We should have been minus four canoes."

"And all our stores. But don't do it again, there's a good fellow. I've paid double passage, and I don't want to go home alone."

The camp was by this time astir. The natives, chattering like monkeys, were busily preparing their breakfast. Barney was engaged in a like service for the white men, and Samba proved himself to be an adept at cleaning the fish which some of the men had caught in the early morning.

"Sure an' he'll be a treasure, sorr," said Barney, as he handed Mr. Martindale his cup of tea and plate of broiled fish.

"Is the boy getting better?"

"As fast as he can, sorr. 'Twas want uv food more than wounds that was wrong wid him. All he really needs is a dish uv good honest murphies twice a day, and sorry I am they do not grow in this haythen counthry."

It was one of Barney's crosses that the only potatoes obtainable *en route* were the sweet variety. Mr. Martindale rather liked them—a weakness which Barney regarded with sorrow as an injustice to Ireland.

Breakfast finished, the canoes were manned and the expedition resumed its journey. Samba kept the negroes amused with his songs and chatter and clever imitations of the cries of birds and beasts. His restless eyes seemed to miss nothing of the scenes along the river. He would point to what appeared to be a log cast up on the sand and exclaim "Nkoli!" and utter shrill screams: and the log would perhaps disappear, leaving no trace, or move and open a sleepy eye, and Barney ejaculate, "A crocodile, by all the holy powers!" Once he drew Jack's attention to a greenish lizard, some eight inches long, creeping down an ant-hill towards a tiny shrew mouse. Spying the enemy, the little creature darted down the slope, and took a header into the water; but the lizard came close upon its heels, sprang after it, and dragged it down into the deep.

"And what do you make of this?" said Jack suddenly, showing Samba the amulet he had torn from the neck of the midnight marauder. The boy started, stared at the piece of bone, looked up in Jack's face and exclaimed—

"Bokun'oka fafa!"[1]

"Him say belong him uncle," Nando interpreted.

Samba spoke rapidly to Nando.

"Him say belong berrah bad uncle on smoke-boat, sah. Him say how massa get him?"

Jack related the incident of the night, Nando translating to the boy, who listened gravely, but

smiled at the end.

"Why does he smile?" asked Jack.

"He say him uncle no lib for good any more: lost medicine ring; he no fit for do bad fings any more: get cotched ebery time."

"Begorra, sorr, 'tis like me very own uncle Tim, who niver had a day's luck after he lost the lucky sixpence given to 'm by a ginerous kind gentleman for holding a horse in Sackville Street whin he was a bhoy. He had always been unlucky before that, sorr, and sure the lucky sixpence would have made a rich man uv him in time; but he lost it the very same day, sorr, and had no luck at all at all."

"Well," said Mr. Martindale, laughing, "if the loss of this amulet means that the owner will never succeed in any tricks against us, I congratulate you, Jack. Will you wear it yourself?"

"No, uncle; I'll give it to Samba."

But Samba, when the charm was given to him, looked at it seriously for a moment, then his face broke into a beaming smile as he slipped the string about Pat's neck.

"Mbua end' ólótsi!"[2] he cried, clapping his hands.

Pat barked with pleasure and licked the boy's face.

"They're great chums already," remarked Mr. Martindale pleasantly, as he bit the end off a cigar.

That evening, when the time for camping came, there was no village in sight from the river, and Nando reported that the nearest lay too far from the stream to suit his employer. The banks were thickly wooded, and it appeared as if there would be some difficulty in finding a space sufficiently clear for a camp. But at last the travellers came to a spot where a stretch of level grassland ran wedge-like into the vegetation. At one end the ground rose gradually until it formed a bluff overhanging the river at a considerable height. This seemed as favourable a place as was likely to be discovered, and here the camp was pitched, the evening meal was eaten, and the travellers sought repose.

The night was very dark, and deep silence brooded over the encampment—such silence as the dweller in towns can never know. Not even the shriek of a nocturnal monkey or the splash of a fish pursued by a crocodile broke the stillness. Every member of the party was asleep. But all at once, Samba, lying just within the flap-door of Barney O'Dowd's tent, one arm pillowing his head, the other clasping the terrier, was disturbed by a low whine. He was awake in an instant. He had never heard Pat whine; the dog barked at everything; why had he changed his manner of speech? Samba got up: Pat had left him and stood in the entrance to the tent; the whine had become a growl. The boy followed him, stooped and felt in the dark for his head, then lifted him in his arms and went out, laying a hand on the dog's muzzle to silence him. Like other terriers, Pat objected to be carried.

The whine had wakened Barney also; Pat and he had passed many a night together. He heard the slight sound made by Samba's departure, and rising, went out in his stockings to follow him. He walked a few yards in the direction he supposed Samba to have taken; but it was too dark to see him, and neither boy nor dog made any further sound. Barney retraced his steps, and, wandering a little from the way he had come, stumbled over the sleeping body of one of the men placed as sentinels. He gave him a kick.

"Get up, you varmint!" he cried. "Is that the fashion uv keeping gyard?"

But as soon as he had passed on the man rolled over, gave a grunt, and was fast asleep again.

Meanwhile Samba had walked on towards the river bank, stopping at intervals to listen. He heard nothing; not even the usual nightly sounds came to him; the surrounding forest seemed asleep. But suddenly, Pat became restless and uttered a rumbling growl. Samba held him close and whispered to him, and the dog apparently understood, for the growl ceased. Then Samba caught the faint sound of paddles up-stream—a sound so familiar to him that he could not be mistaken.

He crept cautiously along, up the gradual ascent, until he came near the summit of the overhanging cliff. Moving stealthily to the edge he peered over; but in the blackness he could see nothing. The sound had ceased.

Feeling his way carefully with his bare feet, Samba slowly made his way down the grassy cliff until he came near the water's edge, then crept along the bank up stream. Again Pat uttered his low growl, but was instantly silent in response to the boy's whispered warning. Samba seemed to find his way by instinct over the uneven ground. Now and again he heard a beast scurry away at his approach and rustle through the bushes or plunge into the river; but he was not afraid: there was little risk of encountering a dangerous animal, and he was too far above the sandy level to stumble upon a crocodile lying in wait.

He went on steadily. It was not a native custom to move about in the dark hours, and, remembering what had happened the night before, he was intent upon discovering the business of the mysterious paddlers. After Pat's last smothered growl he proceeded more cautiously than ever. At last the sound of low voices ahead made him halt. Whispering again to Pat, who licked his hand as if to reassure him, he set the dog down and crept forward again, bending low, and taking care, dark as it was, to avail himself of every bush for cover. To judge by the voices, a large number of men must have gathered at some point not far ahead. He drew still nearer. All at once he halted again, and laid a hand on Pat's neck. Among the voices he had distinguished one that he knew only too well: it was that of his uncle Boloko. He stood rooted to the spot with dismay.

A few minutes later his quick ears caught the sound of men moving off at right angles to the river in a direction that would enable them to skirt the cliff and come upon the sleeping camp through the forest in its rear. In a flash he saw through their scheme. Bidding Pat in a whisper to follow him, he turned and hurried back, climbing the face of the cliffs with a panther's surefootedness, and racing along at his top speed as soon as he came to the downward slope. With Pat at his heels he dashed into Barney's tent.

"Etumba! Etumba!"[3] he exclaimed breathlessly. "Ba-lofúndú bao ya!"[4]

And Pat chimed in with three rapid barks.

[1] My father's younger brother.

[2] Good dog!

[3] Fight! (the natives' alarm signal).

[4] The villains are upon us!

CHAPTER V

The Order of Merit

"Bad cess to you, you young varmint!" exclaimed Barney, waking with a start. "What do you say at all?"

"Ba-lofúndú bao ya! Boloko!"

"Be jabers if I know what you'd be meaning. Off! Run! Nando! And it's pitch dark it is."

The boy scampered, Pat still at his heels. The dog had evidently been impressed by Samba's warnings, for he ran silently, without growl or bark. They came to the spot where Nando lay, beneath a spreading acacia. Samba shook him without ceremony.

"Ba-lofúndú bao ya!" he cried. "Betsua! Betsua!"[1]

Nando growled and bade him be off; but when the boy poured his story with eager excitement into the big negro's sleepy ears, Nando at last bestirred himself, and hurried to Mr. Martindale's tent, bidding Samba remain at hand.

"Samba him uncle, berrah bad man, come to fight," said Nando breathlessly when Jack came to the door of the tent. "Bad man go round round, hide in trees, come like leopard. Massa gone 'sleep: massa him men all lib for big sleep; Boloko shoot; one, two, massa dead all same."

"What, what!" said Mr. Martindale, flinging off his rug. "Another alarm, eh?" He pressed the button of an electric torch and threw a bright light on the scene.

"An attack in force this time, uncle," said Jack. "Some black fellows are coming to surprise us in the rear."

"How many are the villains?" said Mr. Martindale, pulling on his trousers.

"Two, free, hundred, fousand."

"A dozen all told, I suppose! Well, we'll fight 'em."

"Rather risky that, uncle," said Jack. "There may be more than a dozen, after all, and our men are not armed: we two couldn't do much against a hundred, say."

"True. Why was I such a fool? That Britisher at Matadi said I'd better arm my men, and I wish

I'd taken his tip. We're in a tight corner, Jack, if the nigger is correct. Here, Nando, are you sure of this?"

"Sartin sure, sah. Me see fousand fifty black men creep, creep 'long ribber, sah: big lot guns, 'Bini guns, massa, go crack, crack. Come all round, sah; run like antelope: no time for massa run away."

Nando's face expressed mortal terror; there was no doubt he believed in the reality of the danger.

"How did they come?" asked Mr. Martindale.

"In boat, sah."

"Where are they?"

"Small small up ribber, sah."

"And I suppose you've alarmed the camp?"

"No, sah, no. Me no tell one boy at all."

"Well, it looks as if we're going to be wiped out, Jack. We can't fight a hundred armed men. If our fellows were armed, we might lay a trap for 'em; but we aren't strong enough for that. But perhaps if we show we're ready for 'em, and they're not going to surprise us, they may sheer off."

"Then why not take the offensive, uncle?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Attack the canoes while the most of them are marching round. They'd hear our shots and bolt back, as sure as a gun."

"That's slim. We'll try it. Go and wake Barney, Jack."

Barney, however, was already on his way to the tent, Jack explained the situation to him.

"Here's a revolver, Barney," said Mr. Martindale, as the Irishman came up. "You must do the best you can if there's a rush. Jack and I are going right away to the river: you're in charge."

Barney handled the revolver gingerly.

"Sure I'd feel more at home wid me shillelagh!" he muttered as he went away. Mr. Martindale turned to the negro.

"Now you, Nando, lead the way."

The man's eyes opened wide with fear.

"Me plenty sick in eyes, sah," he stammered. "Me only see small small. Boy Samba him eyes berrah fine and good, see plenty quick, massa; he show way."

"I don't care who shows the way," said Mr. Martindale, too much preoccupied with his hunting rifle and ammunition to notice the inconsistency between Nando's statement and the story he had already told. Nando called to Samba and told him what was required, and the party set off, the boy going ahead with Pat, Mr. Martindale and Jack following with their rifles, and Nando in great trepidation bringing up the rear.

Mr. Martindale puffed and panted as he scaled the bluff, and breathed very hard as he followed Samba down the rough descent to the brink of the river. When they came to comparatively level ground they halted.

"How far now?" asked Mr. Martindale, in a whisper.

"Small small, massa," replied Nando.

"Well, Jack, when we come near these precious canoes we'll fire both barrels one slick after the other, then reload."

"And go at them with a rush, uncle?"

"Rush! How can I rush? I'm pretty well blown already. But I could fetch wind enough to shout. We'll shout, Jack. Nando, you'll bawl your loudest, and the boy too. If I know these niggers they'll bolt. And look here, Jack, fire in the air: we don't want to hit 'em. If they stand their ground and resist, we can fire in good earnest; but they won't."

They took a few cautious steps forward, then Samba ran back, clutched Nando by the arm and whispered—

"Boat dah, sah," said the negro, under his breath. "Oh! me feel plenty sick inside!"

"Hush! Howl, then, when we fire. Now, Jack, ready? I'll let off my two barrels first."

Next moment there was a flash and a crack, followed immediately by a second. Nando and Samba had begun to yell at the top of their voices. Mr. Martindale bellowed in one continuous roll, and Pat added to the din by a furious barking. The noise, even to those who made it, was sufficiently startling in the deep silence of the night. Jack fired his two shots, but before his uncle had reloaded there was a yell from the direction of the canoes, then the sound of men leaping on shore and crashing through the bushes. Immediately afterwards faint shouts came from the forest at the rear of the bluff.

"We've done the trick," said Mr. Martindale with a chuckle. "Now we'll get back. They've had a scare. Let's hope we shall have no more trouble to-night."

He flashed his electric torch on the river bank below, and revealed five large canoes drawn up side by side.

"There must be more than a hundred of them," he added. "Each of those canoes can carry thirty men."

On the way back to the camp, they heard renewed shouts as the men who had marched into the forest broke out again in a wild dash for the threatened canoes. The camp was in commotion. Barney was volubly adjuring the startled natives to be aisy; but they were yelling, running this way and that, tumbling over one another in the darkness. The sight of Mr. Martindale's round red face behind his electric torch reassured them; and when Nando, who had now quite recovered his spirits, told them that he, with the white men's assistance, had put to flight twenty thousand bad men and Boloko, they laughed and slapped their thighs, and settled down in groups to discuss the event and make much of Nando during the rest of the night.

There was no more sleep for any of the party except Samba. He, satisfied that his new friends were safe, curled himself up on his mat with the inseparable terrier, and slept until the dawn. But Mr. Martindale sat smoking in his tent, discussing the events of the night with his nephew.

"I don't like it, Jack. We're on top this time, thanks to a little bluff. But there must have been a large number of them to judge by the canoes and the yells; and but for that fellow Nando we might easily have been wiped out. And from what Nando says they are those villainous forest guards of the Concession. What's the meaning of it? It may be that the Concession have repented of their bargain and want to keep me out, or perhaps Elbel is terrified lest I shall expose him when I get back to Boma. Either way, it seems as if we're going to have a bad time of it."

"I don't think it can be Elbel's doing, uncle. It's such a risky game to play, your expedition being authorized by his own people."

"I don't imagine Elbel is such a fool as to attack us officially. He can always disavow the actions of those natives. At any rate, I shall make a point of getting rifles for the men as soon as I can."

"They can't use them."

"Of course they can't; but you'll have to turn yourself into a musketry instructor. Meanwhile I must give that fellow Nando some sort of reward. It will encourage him and the others too."

When daylight broke Mr. Martindale went down to the river while Barney was preparing breakfast. There was no trace of the enemy. Presumably they had set their canoes afloat and drifted down stream in the darkness. They had no doubt reckoned on surprising the camp, and their calculations had been upset by the certainty of meeting with resistance, the fact that the travellers were poorly armed being forgotten in the panic bred of the sudden uproar in the night.

After breakfast Mr. Martindale had the men paraded in a semicircle around the tent, and, sitting on a stool in front of it, with Jack on one side and Barney on the other, he called Nando forward.

"We are very much pleased with your watchfulness, Nando."

The negro grinned, and with a ludicrous air of importance translated the sentence to his comrades.

"It is due to you that we were not surprised in the dark: you did very well, and set an excellent example to the men."

"Me plenty clebber, sah, oh yes!"

"I shall take care in future to have our camp more closely guarded, and punish any carelessness. But now, to show how pleased I am with you, I am going to give you a little present."

Nando's mouth spread from ear to ear. He translated the announcement to the negroes,

looking round upon them with an expression of triumphant satisfaction that tickled Jack's sense of humour. Barney had shut one eye; his lips were twitching.

"But before I do that," went on Mr. Martindale, "I want you to tell us how you came to discover the enemy in the darkness."

Nando for a moment looked a little nonplussed, scratching his head and shifting from foot to foot. Then inspiration seized him; he elaborately cleared his throat, snapped his fingers, crossed his arms on his brawny chest, and began—

"Me no get sleep, me get up and go round about, fink see if massa's fings all right. Me stop, go sick inside; one, two eyes like twinkle twinkle look down out of tree." He waved his arm towards the acacia under which he had been sleeping. "Me fink dis plenty bad; what for man lib for hide in tree and look at Nando? Me no 'fraid, no, no; me walk all same, like me no see nuffin. Yah! me see all same, wait long time, man no fit for see Nando. Bimeby man come down like snake, creep, creep, 'long, 'long; me go too, what for? 'cos man plenty bad man, him go 'Bini gun, him go into wood. What for? Muss see; s'pose he go fetch bad man and shoot massa? He no come dis way 'less he lib for do bad fings. Him got 'Bini gun, me got spear; no good! Me no 'fraid. Plenty debbils in forest! Me no 'fraid. Massa say Nando look after fings; all same: Nando look after, no 'fraid, 'Bini gun, debbils and all. What for? Massa him Nando him fader and mudder. S'pose bad men shoot; s'pose debbil come; all same: muss do what massa say, look after fings, look after massa. Me no 'fraid!"

Again Nando paused and scratched his head, looking troubled. Then his face cleared; he took a deep breath and continued—

"Me go 'long 'long after bad man. He come to place no trees, grass all same: one, two, twenty, fousand bad men dah. Bad man say 'Kwa te! Kwa te!'[2] Dey talk, oh yes! whish! whish! same as trees when wind make talk. Me get behind tree; me hab got two, four, twenty ears. Me listen! Dey say come, creep, creep, bring 'Bini gun; white man all 'sleep; black man come, no nise, shoot: oh my gracious! White man all lib for dead! Me no 'fraid!"

"Who was the chief of these bad men?" interrupted Mr. Martindale.

"Boloko, sah!—Samba him uncle."

"But how could you tell that in the dark?"

"Dey hab got light: one, two, twenty tiny small fire on stick."

"Torches, he means, I suppose," said Mr. Martindale. "How did you find your way back in the dark?"

"Yah! Me know all 'bout dat. Me lib long time in forest, oh yes! Me fight little tiny men; dey plenty small, plenty good fighter all same; shoot one, two, free arrow; one, two, free fings gone dead. Me fight dem; so me find way like leopard."

"Well, you're a clever fellow, and you did very well. Here is a present for you."

He took from his pocket a huge bone-handled penknife, and displayed its various parts one by one: four blades, a corkscrew, a file, a hook, and an awl. Nando's eyes opened wide with delight; he chuckled gloatingly as one after another these treasures came to view. Mr. Martindale was shutting them up before handing over the knife when Barney stepped quietly forward, touched his cap and said—

"If you plase, sorr, before you part wid this handsome presentation, will I have yer leave to ax Mr. Nando wan question?"

"Why, you can if you like," said Mr. Martindale in surprise.

"Thank you, your honour. Now Mr. Nando, would you plase tell us if you ate a big supper uv maniac last night?"

"Manioc, Barney," corrected Jack with a smile.

"Sure that's what I said, sorr! Would you plase tell his honour, Mr. Nando?"

The man looked in amazement from one to another. He seemed to suspect a pitfall, but was puzzled to make out the bearing of the question.

"Sure I speak plain. Did ye, or did ye not, eat a big supper uv anything at all last night?"

"Me eat plenty little manioc," said Nando, thinking he was expected to defend himself against a charge of gluttony. "Me no pig like common black man."

"And you did not get a pain?"—here Barney helped out his meaning with pantomime—"nor dream all that terrible wild stuff you have just been telling us?"

"Me no can dream!" cried Nando, indignantly. "Me say true fings all same."

"Sure, thin, if your supper didn't give ye the nightmare, mine did. Begorra! 'twas a mighty terrible dream I dreamt, indeed, Mr. Nando. I dreamt you was snoring like a pig—like a common black pig, to be sure; and there came a little spalpeen uv a black bhoy, a common black bhoy, and shook ye by the shoulder, and called 'Baa! Baa! Bloko!' and some more I disremimber now; and thin——"

Nando, who had been looking more and more uneasy, here interrupted, hurriedly addressing Mr. Martindale—

"Me plenty sick inside, sah," he said, pressing his hands to the pit of his stomach. "Me eat plenty too much manioc all same."

Crestfallen and abashed the big fellow slunk away, Jack roaring with laughter, Mr. Martindale looking on in speechless amazement.

"Begorra, sorr," said Barney, "'tis a born liar he is. He was fast in the arms uv murphies, or maniac, speaking by the card, till the bhoy Samba woke him up. 'Twas Samba, sorr, that spied the enemy, and 'twas me little darlint uv a dog that gave the first alarm. Give a dog his due, sorr, and if you plase, give Samba the knife."

Mr. Martindale first looked annoyed, then broke into hearty laughter. He called for Samba, who came up smiling, with Pat at his heels.

"Where's that villain Nando?" cried Mr. Martindale. "He shall come and interpret."

In response to a summons Nando came from behind the crowd of natives. He had recovered his composure, and translated with glib and smiling unconcern the story which Samba told. Only when Mr. Martindale handed Samba the knife did the negro look sorry.

"Me no lib for eat too big lot manioc nudder time," he said glumly, as he went away.

[1] Wake up!

[2] Hush!

CHAPTER VI

Samba is Missing

Nando was like a child in his humours. His broad face could not long be overclouded. When the party once more embarked he performed his work as chief paddler with his usual cheerfulness. All that day the river washed the edge of a continuous forest tract—a spur, as Jack understood from Nando's not too lucid explanations, of the vast Upper Congo forest that stretched for many hundreds of miles across the heart of Africa. Jack gazed with great curiosity, merged sometimes in a sense of awe and mystery, at the dark impenetrable woodland. It was only a year or two since he had read Stanley's account of his wonderful march through the forest, and his vivid recollection was quickened and intensified by the sight of the actual scene.

"And are there pigmies in that forest—little men, you know?" he asked Nando.

"Sartin sure, sah. Me fight fousand hundred little tiny men: me no 'fraid. Dey shoot plenty good, sah: one arrow shoot two free birds. Dey hab berrah fine eye, sah; see what big man no can see. Massa see dem some day: make massa laugh plenty much."

Here and there, in places where the river widened out, the travellers came upon herds of hippopotami disporting themselves in the shallows. Their presence was often indicated first by strange squeals and grunts: then a huge head would be seen on the surface of the water as the beast heard the regular splash of the paddles and was provoked to investigate its cause; his jaws would open, disclosing a vast pink chasm; and having completed his long yawn, and satisfied himself that the strangers intended no harm, he would plunge his head again beneath the water, or turn clumsily to wallow in uncouth gambols with his mates. The negroes always plied their paddles more rapidly at such spots. Nando told stories of hippopotami which had upset canoes out of sheer mischief, and of others which, pricked and teased by native spears, had lain in wait among the rushes and wrecked the craft of fishers returning to their homes at dusk.

"Me no 'fraid of little man," said Nando; "me plenty much 'fraid of hippo."

Now and again a crocodile, disturbed in his slumbers by the splashing of the paddles or the

songs of the men, would dart out of a creek and set off in furious chase; but finding the canoe a tougher morsel than he expected, would sink after a disappointed sniffing and disappear. Occasionally Mr. Martindale or Jack would take a shot at the reptiles, but they were so numerous that by and by the travellers desisted from their "potting," Mr. Martindale regarding it as a waste of good ammunition.

The natives whom they saw at riverside villages were now sometimes suspicious, and disinclined to have any communication with the strangers. Returning from interviews with them, Nando reported that they had heard of the massacre at Banonga, and though he assured them that his employer was no friend of the tyrants, he failed to convince them: he was a white man; that was enough. It was with some difficulty, and only after the exercise of much tact, patience, and good humour on Nando's part, that he managed to secure enough food to supply the needs of the men.

Two days passed amid similar scenes. The journey never became monotonous, for in that wonderful land there is always something fresh to claim the traveller's attention. Jack began to give Samba lessons in English, and found him an apt enough pupil, though, in practising his newly-acquired words afterwards, the boy, to Jack's amusement, adopted a pronounced Irish accent from Barney.

On the morning of the third day, when the camp became active, Barney was somewhat surprised to find that Samba and Pat did not join him as usual at breakfast. Boy and dog had gone to sleep together in his tent, and he had not seen or heard their departure. Breakfast was cleared away, everything was packed up in readiness for starting, and yet the missing members of the party had not appeared. Both were very popular; Samba's unfailing cheerfulness had made him a general favourite, and Pat's sagacity, his keen sporting instincts, and the vigour of his barking when hippopotami or crocodiles came too near the canoe, won for him a good deal of admiration from the natives.

"What! Samba gone!" exclaimed Mr. Martindale, when Barney told him of the disappearance. "Have you called him?"

"Sure me throat is sore wid it, sorr," said Barney, "and me lips are cracked wid whistling for Pat, bad cess to 'm."

"The dog has gone too, eh? I reckon Samba's a thief like the rest of 'em."

"Begging yer pardon, sorr, it takes two to make a thief, one to steal, the other to be stolen. Pat would never agree to be stolen, sorr; besides, he would never be such an ungrateful spalpeen uv a dog, not to speak uv the bad taste of it, as to desert his ould master for a nigger bhoy."

"Well, what's become of them, then? Nando, where's Samba?"

"Me no can tell, sah. Me fink crocodile eat him, sah. Little tiny black boy go walk all alone alone night time. Yah! crocodile come 'long, fink black boy make plenty good chop. Soosh! little black boy in ribber, crocodile eat him all up, sah. What for black boy go walk alone? One time all right, Nando eat manioc[1]; nudder time all wrong, crocodile eat Samba."

Nando shook his head sententiously; Samba's exploit on the night of the alarm was evidently still rankling.

"That's not it at all," said Barney. "Pat would niver permit any crocodile, wid all his blarney, to eat him; and if a crocodile ate Samba, sure Pat would have been the first to come and tell us."

"No, it's your Irish that has frightened the boy," said Jack gravely. "I've been trying to teach him a few words of English; but I've noticed once or twice, after I've done with him, that he pronounces the words as if he'd learnt them in Ireland. No decent black boy could stand that, you know, Barney."

"Faith, 'tis Irishmen that speak the best English," returned Barney; "did I not hear them wid me very own ears in the house uv Parlimint?"

"Well, Jack, we must go on," said Mr. Martindale. "I was afraid the boy would be a botheration."

"He has done us a good turn, uncle. Couldn't we wait an hour or two and see if he appears?"

"It's not business, Jack."

"My dear uncle, it's no use your posing as a hard-hearted man of business. You know you're quite fond of the boy."

"Eh! Well, I own he's a likely little fellow, and I sort of felt he's a part of the concern; in short, Jack, we'll put in an hour or two and give him a chance."

An hour passed, and Pat made his appearance. He trotted soberly into the camp, not frisking or barking joyously as was his wont.

"Arrah thin, ye spalpeen, where's Samba?" cried Barney as the dog came to him.

Pat hung his head, and put his tail between his legs and whined.

"Go and fetch him, then," cried Barney.

The terrier looked at his master, turned as if to do his bidding, then moved slowly round and whined again.

"Sure 'tis not devoured by a crocodile he is, or Pat would be in a terrible rage. The bhoy has deserted, sorr, and Pat's heart is after being broken."

"Well, we'll wait a little longer, Barney," said Mr. Martindale; "he may turn up yet."

The day wore itself out, and Samba had not returned. Mr. Martindale and Jack spent part of the time in shooting, adding a goodly number of wild ducks, a river hog and an antelope to the larder. Part of the time they watched the men fishing, or rather harpooning, for they caught the fish by dexterous casts of their light spears. Towards evening Mr. Martindale became seriously anxious, and a little testy.

"I'm afraid a crocodile has made a meal of him, after all," he said. "I don't reckon he'd any reason for leaving us; he got good victuals."

"And a good knife, uncle. Perhaps he has gone to find his father."

"No, I don't bank on that. Too far for a young boy to go alone, through the forest, too, on foot. Anyway, he's an ungrateful young wretch to go without saying a word; I've always heard these blacks don't measure up to white people in their feelings."

Mr. Martindale delayed his departure until the middle of the next day in the hope that Samba would return. Then, however, he declared he could wait no longer, and the party set off.

Late in the afternoon of the next day they came to a spot where a gap occurred in the thick vegetation that lined the bank. Here, said Nando, they must land. Ilola, the principal village of the chief to whom they were bound, stood a short distance from the river, and the way to it lay through the clear space between two forest belts. A quarter of an hour's walking brought them to the village, a cluster of tent-shaped grass huts almost hidden in the bush. The settlement was surrounded by a stockade, and the plantations of banana, maize, and ground-nuts showed signs of careful cultivation.

Nando went alone to interview the chief, bearing a present of cloth and a small copper token which Mr. Martindale had received from his friend Barnard. The chief would recognize it as the replica of one given to him. Nando returned in an hour's time, troubled in countenance. Imbono the chief, he said, had refused to meet the white man, or to have any dealings with him. He well remembered the white man who had cured his son and given him the token two years before; had they not become blood brothers! But since then many things had happened. Dark stories had reached his ears of the terrible consequences that followed the coming of the white man. One of his young men—his name was Faraji—who had joined a party of traders carrying copper down the Congo, had just come back with dreadful tales of what he himself had seen. When Imbono was a boy his people had lived in terror of the white-robed men from the East.[2] There had been a great white-robed chief named Tippu Tib, who sent his fighting men far and wide to collect ivory and slaves. These men knew no pity; they carried destruction wherever they went, tearing children from parents, husbands from wives, chaining them together, beating them with cruel whips, strewing the land with the corpses of slaves exhausted by long marching or slain because they were ill or weak.

But terrible as were the warriors of Tippu Tib, surely the servants of the Great White Chief[3] were more terrible still; for it often happened that the slave hunters, having come once, came not again; like a fierce tempest they passed; but as, when a storm has devastated a forest, new trees grow and flourish in the room of the old, so when a village had been robbed of its youth, their places were in course of time filled by other boys and girls. And even when the slave hunters came some villagers would escape, and hide in dens or among the forest trees until the danger had passed. But the servants of the Great White Chief were like a blight settling for ever on the land. They came, and stayed; none could escape them, none were spared, young or old. Imbono feared the white man; he prayed him to go in peace; the men of Ilola were peaceable, and sought not to make enemies, but they had bows and arrows, and long shields, and heavy-shafted spears, and if need be they would defend themselves against the stranger.

"I guess this is kind of awkward," said Mr. Martindale when Nando had finished his report. "You can't trade with a man who won't see you. Did you explain that we don't belong to the Great White Chief, Nando?"

"Me say all dat, sah; chief shake him head."

"I suppose you told him our men are not armed?"

"No, sah; me forgot dat, dat am de troof."

"Well, go back; tell the chief that I'm a friend and want to see him. Say that I'll come into the village alone, or with Mr. Jack, and we'll leave our guns behind us. Tell him the white man he saw two years ago said he was a very fine fellow, and I'll trust myself unarmed among his people, bows and arrows and spears and all."

Nando went away, and after another hour returned and said that Imbono, after much persuasion, had agreed to receive the white man because he was a friend of his blood brother. Leaving their rifles and revolvers in Barney's charge, Mr. Martindale and Jack accompanied Nando to the village. The single entrance to the stockade was guarded by a throng of tall warriors with curiously painted skins, and armed with the weapons Nando had described, carrying in addition knives with long leaf-shaped blades.

"They ain't the daisiest of beauties," said Mr. Martindale as he passed them.

"Ugly fellows in a scrimmage," said Jack.

They went on, past the first huts, stared at by knots of the villagers, until they came to the chief's dwelling in the centre of the settlement. Imbono was a tall, well set up, handsome negro, standing half a head taller than the men about him. He received the strangers with grave courtesy, offered them a cup of palm wine, and motioned them to two low carved stools, seating himself on a third.

Through Nando Mr. Martindale explained his business, dwelling on the friendly relations which had existed between the chief and the white man, and assuring him of his peaceable intentions and of his absolute independence of the servants of the Great White Chief. Imbono listened in silence, and made a long reply, repeating what he had already said through Nando. Suddenly he turned to the young man at his side, whom he called Faraji, and bade him tell the white man what he had seen.

"Ongoko! Ongoko!"[4] exclaimed the other men. Faraji stepped forward and told his story, with a volubility that outran Nando's powers as an interpreter, and at the same time with a seriousness that impressed his hearers.

"I come from Mpatu," he said. "It is not my village: my village is Ilola. I passed through Mpatu on my way home. It is no longer a village. Why? The servants of the Great White Chief had come up the river. They told the people that the lords of the world, the sons of heaven, had given all the land to the Great White Chief. Mpatu belonged no more to the chief Lualu: it belonged to the Great White Chief. But the Great White Chief was a good chief; he would be a father to his people. Would he take their huts, their gardens, their fowls, their children? No, he was a good chief. Everything that was theirs should be left to them; and the Great White Chief would keep peace in the land, and men should live together as brothers. Only one thing the Great White Chief required of them. In the forest grew a vine that yielded a milky sap. This stuff when hardened with acid from another plant would be of use to the Great White Chief, and he wished them to collect it for him, and bring to his servants every fourteenth day so many baskets full. Every man of Mpatu must bring his share. And they said too that the Great White Chief was just: for all this rubber they collected he would pay, in brass rods, or cloth, or salt; and seeing the Great White Chief was so kind and good, only a bad man would fail in the task set him, and such bad men must be punished. And two servants of the Great White Chief would be left in Mpatu to instruct the people as to the furnishing of the rubber; and these kind teachers the men of Mpatu would surely provide with food and shelter.

"The men of Mpatu laughed at first. Well they knew the vine! Was there not enough of it and to spare in the forest? How easily they could collect what was demanded! How soon would they become rich! And they set the women and children to weave new baskets for the rubber, and made ready new and well-built huts for the men who were to teach them their duty to the Great White Chief.

"But as time went on, woe came to Mpatu. The two servants of the Great White Chief were bad men, selfish, cruel. They stalked about the village, treating the people as their slaves; they seized the plumpest fowls and the choicest fruits; if any man resisted, they whipped him with a long whip of hippopotamus hide.

"But the servants of the Great White Chief demanded still more. It was not only rubber the men of Mpatu were bade to bring them, but so many goats, so many fowls, so many fish and cassava and bananas. How could they do it? The rubber vines near by were soon exhausted. Every week the men must go farther into the forest. They had not enough time now to hunt and fish for their own families. How supply the strangers too?

"Grief came to Mpatu! For long days there was no man in the village save the chief Lualu and the forest guards. The women cowered and crouched in their huts. No longer did they take pride in tidy homes and well-tended hair; no longer sing merrily at the stream, or croon lullabies to their babes; all joy was gone from them.

"Some of the men fled, and with their wives and children lived in the forest, eating roots and leaves. But even flight was vain, for the forest guards tracked them, hunted them down. Some they killed as soon as they found them; others they flogged, chained by the neck, and hauled to

prison. There they are given heavy tasks, carrying logs and firewood, clearing the bush, cutting up rubber; and there is a guard over them with a whip which at a single blow can cut a strip from the body. Many have died; they are glad to die.

"And now Mpatu is a waste. One day the rubber was again short; the soldiers came—they burned the huts; they killed men, women, and children; yea, among the soldiers were man-eaters, and many of Mpatu's children were devoured. Only a few escaped—they wander in the forest, who knows where? I tell what I have seen and heard."

When Faraji had finished his story, there was silence for a time. The chief seemed disposed to let the facts sink into the minds of the white men, and Mr. Martindale was at a loss for words. Faraji's story, so significantly similar to what he had himself discovered at Banonga, had deeply impressed him. Were these atrocities going on throughout the Congo Free State? Were they indeed a part of the system of government? It seemed only too probable—the rubber tax was indeed a tax of blood. And what could he say to convince Imbono that he was no friend of the white men who authorized or permitted such things? How could the negro distinguish?

"'Pon my soul," said the American in an aside to Jack, "I am ashamed of the colour of my skin."

Then the chief began to speak.

"The white man understands why I will have nothing to do with him—why I will not allow my people to trade with him. It may be true that you, O white man, are not as these others; you may be a friend to the black man, and believe that the black man can feel pain and grief; but did not the servants of the Great White Chief say that they were friends of the black man? Did they not say the Great White Chief loved us and wished to do us good? We have seen the love of the Great White Chief; it is the love of the crocodile for the antelope: we would have none of it. Therefore I say, O white man, though I bear you no ill-will, you must go."

Courteously as the chief spoke, there was no mistaking his firmness.

"We must go and take stock of this," said Mr. Martindale. "It licks me at present, Jack, and that's a hard thing for an American to say. Come right away."

They took ceremonious leave of the chief, and were escorted to their camp at the edge of the stream.

"What's to be done, my boy?" said Mr. Martindale. "We can't find the gold without the chief's help, unless we go prospecting at large: we might do that for months without success, and make Imbono an open enemy into the bargain. We can't fight him, and I don't want to fight him. After what we've seen and heard I won't be responsible for shedding blood; seems to me the white man has done enough of that already on the Congo. This is a facer, Jack."

"Never say die, uncle. It's getting late: I vote we sleep on it. We may see a way out of the difficulty in the morning."

[1] The native word for any food or meal.

[2] Arab slave raiders.

[3] Leopold II, sovereign of the Congo Free State and king of the Belgians.

[4] Yes, do so.

CHAPTER VII

Blood Brothers

But in the morning the situation appeared only more grave. Provisions were threatening to run short. Hitherto there had been no difficulty in procuring food from the natives met *en route*, and Mr. Martindale's party had carried with them only a few days' provisions, and the "extras" necessary for the white men's comfort. But now they were come to a less populous part of the country: Imbono's villages were the only settlements for many miles around; and unless Imbono relaxed the rigour of his boycott Mr. Martindale's party would soon be in want.

Mr. Martindale was talking over matters with Jack when, from the slight eminence on which the camp was pitched, they saw a canoe, manned by six paddlers, pass up stream. Jack took a look at the craft through his field glass.

"It's Imbono, uncle," he said; "I wonder what he is up to."

He followed the progress of the canoe for some distance through the glass; then, looking ahead, his eye was caught by a herd of eight or nine hippopotami disporting themselves on a reedy flat by the river bank.

"What do you say, uncle? Shall we go and get some hippo meat? It will relieve the drain on our stores, and Nando told me the men are rather fond of it."

"We'll go right away, Jack. We must keep the larder full at any rate. I suppose we shall have to stalk the beasts."

"I don't think so, uncle. Those we saw as we came up seemed pretty bold; they've such tough hides that they've no reason to be much afraid of the native weapons."

"Well, we'll paddle up to them and see how we get on."

A canoe was launched, and Mr. Martindale set off with Jack, Barney, and the terrier, Nando and six of the men paddling. By the time they arrived opposite the feeding ground several hippos had come out from the reeds for a bath in the shallows of the river, only their heads and backs showing above the water. The rest had moved off into the thicker reeds and were hidden from sight.

"One will be enough for the present," said Mr. Martindale. "Our fellows are great gluttons, but there's enough meat in one of those beasts to last even them a couple of days; and we don't want it to go high!"

"Let us both aim at the nearest," suggested Jack. "Fire together, uncle: bet you I bag him."

"I guess I won't take you, and betting's a fool's trick anyway. We'll aim at the nearest, as you say; are you ready?"

Two shots rang out as one. But apparently there had been a difference of opinion as to which of the animals was the nearest. One of them disappeared; another, with a wild roar of pain and rage, plunged into the reeds; the rest sank below the surface. Nando, knowing the ways of hippopotami, began to paddle with frantic vigour, and set the canoe going at a rapid pace down stream, much to the indignation of Pat, who stood with his forefeet on the side of the canoe, barking fiercely. Half a minute later a head appeared above the surface some fifty yards behind; then another and another: but the beasts seemed to have recovered from the alarm, for after a long cow-like stare at the receding canoe, they turned and swam ashore, to rejoin their companions in the reeds.

"Easy all!" said Mr. Martindale. "We'll give 'em a quarter of an hour to settle down, then we'll go back. What about your bet, eh, Jack?"

"It's your hippo, uncle, no doubt of that," said Jack with a rueful smile. "An awful fluke, though; you didn't hit once to my twice coming up stream."

"A fluke, was it? I kind o' notice that when you young fellows make a good shot or pull off a good stroke at billiards or anything else, it's real good play; whereas an old boy like me can only do anything decent by a fluke."

"Well, you've lost him, anyway. The hippo hasn't come up."

"Too cocksure, my boy; he's only just below the surface."

The beast mortally wounded by Mr. Martindale's rifle was lying in shallow water. Pat could no longer restrain himself. He leapt overboard and swam towards the hippo, barking with excitement, and becoming frantic when he found that it was just out of his reach. In his eagerness to attack the animal he even made an attempt to dive, so comical that all on board the canoe were convulsed with laughter. Being paddled to the spot, Mr. Martindale found that the beast was quite dead.

"Now what are we to do with him?" said Mr. Martindale. "Shall we go back and send a party to cut him up?"

"No, no, sah," said Nando instantly. "Tie rope; pull, pull; hippo he come 'long all behind."

"Tow him, eh? Very well. I allow that'll save time."

A rope was fastened firmly about the beast's neck and jaws; the other end was fixed to the canoe; and the men began to paddle down stream, towing the hippo. The tendency of the animal being to sink, the canoe seemed to Jack to be dangerously low in the water at the stern. But they had only a part of the usual complement of men on board, and the paddlers were among the most skilful on the Congo. They had gone but a few strokes when Jack, glancing back, caught sight of Imbono's canoe returning. Like Mr. Martindale's it was keeping fairly close to the bank. All at once a great shout of alarm broke from the chief's paddlers; their easy swing was quickened to desperate exertion, and they pulled out violently towards the middle of the stream.

"By Jove! uncle, a hippo's after them," cried Jack.

Just astern of the chief's canoe, between it and the shore, a huge hippopotamus, with jaws distended, showing his gleaming tusks, was swimming along in pursuit. For a little he gained, and Jack's pulse beat more quickly with excitement as he saw that the enraged beast was not more than half a dozen yards from the canoe. But the gap widened as soon as the six strong paddlers had settled down to their quickened stroke.

Imbono, sitting in the stern, had caught sight of the white men as his canoe cut for a few moments across the current, and with the natural vanity of the negro he began to show off. At a word from him one of the crew dropped his paddle, and, catching up a spear, hurled it at the pursuing hippo. There was a hoarse bellow from the animal, and a wild cheer from the men; the shaft of the spear was seen standing almost perpendicularly above the hippo's shoulder. With fierce exertion the beast increased his pace, and the gap momentarily diminished; but the negro resumed his paddle, and again the canoe drew away.

As the canoe came almost level with the towed hippo at a considerable distance towards mid-stream, Imbono ordered the same manoeuvre to be repeated. But fortune doubly befriended the pursuing animal. Just as the negro was poising his spear, a submerged tree stopped the canoe with a sudden jerk; the man lost his balance and fell overboard; half of the crew followed him into the water, the rest tumbled over one another into the bottom of the canoe. Imbono had been thrown backward as the vessel struck the snag. He had barely time to rise and plunge into the water when there was a hideous crackling sound; the stern of the canoe was caught between the hippo's gaping jaws and crunched to splinters.

The consequences of the chief's temerity would have been amusing but for his manifest danger. The negroes were swimming in all directions, keeping as much as possible under water to escape the eyes of the hippo; but Imbono, an older man than the rest, was not so expert a swimmer, and Jack saw with concern that the hippo, leaving the sinking canoe, was making straight for the chief.

A hippopotamus may be distanced by a canoe, but not by a man swimming. Imbono did not look behind, but seemed to know instinctively that death was within a few yards of him, and he struck out more and more desperately for the bank.

At the moment when the canoe struck the snag, Jack had seized his rifle; but after the catastrophe, canoe, hippo, and swimming natives were so intermingled that he could not venture a shot at the beast without the risk of hitting a man. The hippo's huge body provided a target sufficiently broad, indeed; but Jack knew that to strike it anywhere save at a vital spot would merely add to the beast's rage and make it doubly formidable to the men in the water. When he saw the plight of the chief, however, the great head now only a couple of yards behind him, the jaws already opening, disclosing the vast red chasm flanked by gleaming tusks and molars—when Jack saw Imbono thus in the very article of peril, he could no longer hesitate. The canoe was already at rest. Bidding Nando keep it steady, Jack raised his rifle to his shoulder and took careful aim.

The chief was gasping for breath after a vain attempt to dodge the beast by diving; the horrid jaws were just about to snap, when a shot rang out. A squealing grunt came from the closing gullet; the uncouth actions of the beast ceased; and he began to sink slowly and silently beneath the surface.

"A1!" ejaculated Mr. Martindale. "That makes up for your miss, Jack."

"Oka mö!"[1] shouted the negroes. Imbono's men had gained the bank, but the chief himself, overcome more by his fright than his exertions, seemed unable to swim any farther.

"Quick, haul him in, Jack," said Mr. Martindale. "There may be a crocodile after him next!"

A few strokes of the paddles brought the canoe within reach of the chief. Laughing heartily—the negro's laugh is always very near the surface—Nando and a comrade hoisted Imbono into the canoe.

"Me tell Imbono he oughter die of shame," said Nando gravely.

"What on earth for?" asked Mr. Martindale.

"What for, sah! Has he not made big puddle in massa's canoe? He plenty much wet, sah."

"Well, he couldn't help that. Tell him we're glad he came off so well. You need not say anything about the puddle."

But Nando had his own views as to the proper thing to do. As he spoke the chief glanced at the pool of water that had flowed from his body, and replied in a tone that was clearly apologetic.

"He say he die with shame him so wet, sah," said Nando. "Him no do it no more. Say he praise de young Inglesa for shooting de hippo; say he gib massa de hippo and manioc and bananas and anyfing whatever dat massa like. Say he want massa and young massa to be blood brudder. Me say berrah good; tell him oughter had sense before."

"That's all right. We'll accept supplies with pleasure, and pay for them. The hippo is Mr. Jack's already, of course. As for becoming his blood brothers, I don't just know right off what that means; but if it'll please him, and doesn't mean any nastiness, we'll think it over."

The canoe, towing Mr. Martindale's hippo, was rapidly paddled down stream to the encampment, the second beast being left to drift slowly down the river until, in the course of some hours, it should finally rise to the surface. On landing the chief renewed his protestations of gratitude, then went off to the village, to polish himself up, said Nando, and replace his ruined headdress, a curious structure of cloth and feathers stuck on to the chignon into which his hair was gathered. Mr. Martindale sent back another canoe to find and tow down the dead hippo. When it was hauled up on the low sandy bank, Jack and his uncle went down to examine it.

"You said I missed, uncle," cried Jack. "What do you make of this?"

He pointed to a furrow ploughed across the full breadth of the beast's forehead.

"Nothing but a bullet did that, I know. My shot must have hit him, but didn't enter the skull. I suppose he hid in the reeds, and vented his fury on the chief. He happened to have a harder skull than your hippo, uncle; you see it was a fluke after all."

Mr. Martindale slowly cut and lighted a cigar. Not until he had watched a big cloud of smoke float across the river did he speak. Then he said quietly—

"Just so!"

Somehow Jack felt that he had not the better of the argument.

Before the sun went down, a group of men came from Ilola staggering under loads of grain and fruit, a quantity large enough to supply the camp for several days. That night the men had a royal feast, consuming so many hippo steaks that Barney professed himself indignant.

"Bedad! 'tis greedy scoundhrels they are," he said, "Wheniver me mother gave us bhoys a stew—and 'twas not often, ye may be sure, meat being the price it was—'twas wan tiny morsel uv mutton, and a powerful lot uv murphies: she said too much meat would spoil our complexion and ruin our tempers. And begorra! isn't it meself that proves it!"

Mr. Martindale laughed at Barney's logic.

"I'm not afraid of the niggers' complexions or their tempers," he said; "I only hope they won't keep up that hullabaloo all night and spoil our sleep."

The men were indeed very uproarious, and remained around their fires for the greater part of the night, recounting for the hundredth time the exciting events of the day, and composing on the spot songs in praise of the young white man whose fire-stick had slain the terror of the river. One of these songs seemed especially to strike their fancy, and it remained a favourite for many days:—

Happy Imbono!
Oh! oh! Imbono!
Who saved Imbono?
The good stranger!
The young stranger!
The brave stranger!
Good Jacko!
Young Jacko!
Brave Jacko!
He came to Ilola!
Happy Ilola!
Lucky Ilola!
He saved Imbono
From five hippos,
From ten hippos!
Lucky Imbono!
Happy Imbono!
Oh! oh! Imbono!

Next morning, as soon as it was light, Imbono came to pay a visit of ceremony. He had got himself up most elaborately for the occasion. A strip of yellow cotton was wound about his waist. His arms were covered with polished brass rings, and copper rings weighing at least ten pounds each encircled his wrists and ankles. A new headdress decked his hair; and he must have kept his barber busy half the night in arranging his top-knot and painting his face with red camwood and white clay. Pat by no means approved of the change, and barked at him furiously.

"Whisht, ye spalpeen!" said Barney, calling off the excited dog. "Sure 'tis only his Sunday clothes!"

Surrounded by a group of his young men, who were again loaded with offerings of food, the chief began a long speech, which was by no means abridged in Nando's translation. He related the incident of the previous day, omitting none of the most insignificant details, accounting, as it appeared, for every tooth in the jaws of the huge animal from which he had been saved. He went on to say that in gratitude to the white man he had changed his mind. No longer would he withhold food; his young men even now had their hands full of the best products of Ilola. No longer would he refuse his friendship; he would even show the white man the place where the yellow metal was to be found—on one condition, that the white man would become his blood brother. Imbono and the white men would then be friends for ever.

"Well, I'll be very glad to be friends with the chief," said Mr. Martindale, "and I'm right down obliged to him for agreeing to show me the location of the gold. And what's this blood brother business anyway? I don't size up to that without knowing something about it, you bet."

"Me tell all 'bout it, sah. Imbono hab got knife; he come scratch, scratch massa his arm; den blood come, just little tiny drop, oh yes! Den Imbono he lick massa him blood. Massa he hab got knife too: he scratch Imbono him arm all same, lick Imbono him blood. Me fink massa not like black man him blood—not berrah berrah much. Den massa gib Imbono little tiny present—knife, like knife Samba stole from Nando; Imbono gib massa fowl, or brass ring, or anyfing massa like. Den massa and Imbono dey be blood brudder, be friends for eber and eber amen."

"Well, I guess the blood business sounds rather disgusting. What do you think, Jack?"

Jack made a grimace.

"Couldn't we leave all the licking to him, uncle?"

Here Nando broke in. "Me fink massa not like black blood. All same, I show de way. Massa hold Imbono him arm tight, berrah tight, pretend to lick, get little drop of blood on hand; dat nuff; Imbono pleased."

"If he's satisfied with that I'm willing, so fire away."

The chief beamed when he learnt that the white man had given his consent. The ceremony was quickly performed. Then Imbono handed them each a copper ring, and received in return a pinch of salt from Mr. Martindale and a lucifer match from Jack, Nando assuring them that no more acceptable presents could have been thought of. Imbono recited a sort of chant, which was explained to mean that he, his sons, his friends, the men of Ilola, from that time forth and for evermore would be the true friends of the white men; everything he had was theirs. With a suitable reply from Mr. Martindale and Jack the ceremony ended.

Jack noticed when the chief had gone that Nando's face wore a somewhat woebegone look.

"What's the matter, Nando?" he asked.

"Nando berrah sick, sah. Imbono hab got present, massa hab got present, little massa hab got present all same; Nando hab got no present, no nuffin. Dat make Nando sick. Samba hab got Nando him knife: what for Nando no hab nuffin at all?"

"Seems to me he wants a commission on the transaction," said Mr. Martindale with a smile. "Give him something, Jack; he's not a bad sort."

"I've got a lucky sixpence, uncle; he can string that round his neck. Here you are, Nando."

The negro took the coin with delight.

"Bolotsi O!" he exclaimed. "Nando no sick no more. Him plenty comfy inside. All jolly nice now sah: oh yes!"

[1] Bully for you!

CHAPTER VIII

Jack in Command

"We've come out of that better than I expected," said Mr. Martindale, when the chief had gone. "I only hope our new brother won't carry his affection too far. If he keeps piling in food in this way, our fellows will wax fat and kick."

"You'll have to give him a hint, uncle. Proverbs are mostly old-fashioned rubbish, but there's

one that would suit him: 'Enough is as good as a feast.'"

"Which no nigger would believe. Now I wonder when he will take us to find this ore. The sooner the better, although I calculate he doesn't know the value of time."

Imbono returned in the course of the afternoon, and said that he would be ready to conduct the white men to the gold region next day. But he stipulated that only his new brothers should accompany him. To this condition no one objected but Nando, who appeared to regard it as a personal slight.

"Berrah well, berrah well," he said, his tone suggesting that he washed his hands of the business. "Nando no go, massa no can say nuffin to Imbono. Berrah well; all same."

Immediately after breakfast next morning the two set off in Imbono's company, Jack carried a prospector's pan for washing the soil, Mr. Martindale having declared that he didn't expect to find nuggets lying around. They also carried enough food for the day. Imbono struck off due west from the village; then, when well out of sight, he made a detour, and passing through a couple of miles of dense forest, entered a broken hilly country, which to Mr. Martindale's experienced eye showed many traces of volcanic disturbance. At last, forcing their way through a belt of tangled copse, with many scratches from prickly sprays, they came upon a deep gully, at the bottom of which ran a stream of brownish water, now some twenty feet in breadth. That it was much broader at certain seasons was shown by the wide edging of sand and pebbles at each side.

The chief came to a halt at the edge of the gully, and pointing up and down the stream, said something in his own language. Mr. Martindale nodded his head, but said to Jack—

"I suppose he means we're right there. Why on earth could not he let Nando come and do the translating?"

"Show him your watch, uncle!"

At the sight of the watch Imbono nodded his head rapidly and ejaculated what was clearly an affirmative. Then he led the way down the rocky side of the gully, the others scrambling after him. On reaching the sandy strand Mr. Martindale bent down and eagerly examined it. Taking some of the sand and pebbles in his hand, he stuck a magnifying glass in his eye and picked them over carefully.

"Looks promising, Jack," he said, with the enthusiasm of an old miner. "There are little granules of quartz mixed up with the sand, and a particle or two of iron. But that don't prove there's gold. We'll just try a little experiment."

He emptied a few handfuls of the soil into the pan, filled this with water from the stream, and moved the pan to and fro so as to give the water a concentric motion, Jack and the chief watching him with equal interest. Every now and then Mr. Martindale would cant off a little of the water, which carried off some of the lighter sand with it.

"What you may call a process of elimination or reduction," he said.

"*Reductio ad absurdum*, uncle?"

"I hope not. Guess you're smartening up, Jack."

"Call it survival of the fittest, then."

"Of the thickest, I'd say. This washing carries off the useless light sand, and leaves the heavy stuff behind, and it's in that we'll find gold if at all."

After nearly half an hour's patient manipulation of the pan, there was left in the bottom a blackish powder and some coarse grains of quartz, with just enough water to cover them.

"Look at that, my boy," said Mr. Martindale. "First time you've seen anything of that sort, I guess."

"But where's the gold, uncle?"

"That's what remains to be seen—perhaps. Keep your eye on that groove as I tilt the pan round. The black stuff is iron-stone; you needn't trouble about that. See if it leaves anything else."

He gently tilted the pan so that the water slowly flowed round the groove, carrying with it the quartz grains and the powder. Jack watched narrowly. After the contents of the pan had made the circuit two or three times he suddenly exclaimed—

"There's a sort of glitter left behind the powder, uncle."

"I reckon that's enough," said Mr. Martindale, setting down the pan. "We've hit it, Jack."

Jack could not refrain from giving a cheer. The chief, who had but half approved the proceedings at the beginning, caught the infection of the lad's enthusiasm, and snapped his

fingers and slapped his thighs vigorously.

"We'll have another look higher up," said Mr. Martindale. "One swallow don't make a summer—another piece of what you call antiquated rubbish, Jack. There's gold here, that's certain; but I don't know whether it's rich enough to be worth working."

They walked for half a mile up the stream, and Mr. Martindale went through the same process with the soil there. He was again rewarded. This time, however, the trace of gold was more distinct.

"Jack, my boy," he said, "there's a small fortune in the bed of the stream alone. But I'm not satisfied yet. It's up to us now to discover the mother lode. To judge by the size of the stream it can't be far off. The botheration is we can't talk to the chief, and I say it's most unbrotherly to refuse us the advantage of an interpreter."

"Well, we've plenty of time, uncle. I vote we have our lunch and then go on again."

They sat down on boulders at the edge of the river and ate the manioc cakes and bananas with which Barney had provided them. Imbono seemed pleased when he was invited to share their lunch. Going into the forest, he returned with a large leaf which he shaped like a cup, and in this he brought water from the stream for the white men.

After lunch they followed up the stream. At intervals Mr. Martindale stopped to test the gravel, and found always some trace of gold, now slight, now plentiful. Some three miles up they came to a confluence. The stream was joined by a smaller swifter one, which evidently took its rise in the steep hilly country now becoming visible through the trees.

"We'll try this, Jack."

"Why?"

"Because the bed's more gravelly than the other. I guess the big stream comes out of the forest somewhere; the other will suit our book best."

They found their progress becoming more and more difficult. The ground was more rocky, the sides of the gully were steeper, and the edging of dry gravel diminished until by and by it disappeared altogether, and the prospectors had to take off their boots and socks and wade. There were trees and bushes here and there on the sides and at the top of the gully, but the vegetation became more and more scanty as they ascended. Presently the sound of falling water struck upon their ears, and a sudden turn of the stream brought them into full view of a cataract. At this point the gully had widened out, and the water fell over a broad smooth ledge of rock, dashing on the stones after a descent of some fifty or sixty feet.

"That's fine!" exclaimed Jack, halting to watch the cascade sparkling in the sunlight, and the brownish white foam eddying at the foot.

"Grand!" assented Mr. Martindale. "There's enough water power there to save many a thousand dollars' worth of machinery."

"I was thinking of the scenery, not machinery, uncle," said Jack, with a laugh.

"Scenery! Why, I've got a lot finer waterfall than that on my dining-room wall. It isn't Niagara one way or t'other, but it'll do a lot of mill grinding all the same. Now, Jack, you're younger than I am. I want to see what there is by those rocks ten feet away from the bottom of the fall. Strip, my boy; a bath will do you a power of good, a hot day like this; and there are no crocodiles here to make you feel jumpy."

Jack stripped and was soon waist deep in the water. Reaching the spot his uncle had indicated, he stooped, and found that he could just touch the bottom without immersing himself. The water was too frothy for the bottom to be seen; he groped along it with his hands, bringing up every now and then a small fragment of quartz or a handful of gravel, which Mr. Martindale, after inspecting it from a distance, told him to throw in again.

At last, when he was getting somewhat tired of this apparently useless performance, he brought up a handful of stones, not to as eyes differing from what he had seen for the past half hour. He spread them out for his uncle, now only two or three yards away, to examine.

"I guess you can put on your clothes now," said Mr. Martindale. "Why, hang it, man! you've thrown it away!"

Jack had pitched the stones back into the water.

"I thought you'd done, uncle," he said.

"So I have, and you're done too—done brown. D'you know you've thrown away a nugget worth I don't know how many dollars?"

"You didn't tell me what you were after," said Jack, somewhat nettled. "I couldn't be expected

to know you were hunting for nuggets."

"No, you couldn't be expected: and that's just exactly what I brought you over to America for. When you've had the kind of smartening up I mean you to have, you won't talk about what's expected or not expected; you'll just figure it out that there's some reason in everything, and you'll use your own share of reason accordingly."

"All right, uncle," replied Jack good-humouredly. "I might have put two and two together, perhaps. At school, you see, they liked us to do as we were told without arguing. 'Theirs not to reason why'—you know. Shall I fish for that nugget?"

"Not worth while. A few dollars more or less are neither here nor there. I know what I want to know, and now I think we'd better be getting. Put your clothes on. Our brother Imbono has several times anxiously pointed to the sun. He evidently isn't comfortable at the idea of being benighted in these regions."

Screwing some of the sifted gravel into a bag of leaves, Mr. Martindale signed to the chief that he was ready to return. They reached the camp just as the sun was setting. In honour of the recent discovery, Mr. Martindale invited the chief to supper, and gave him a regale which astonished him. To see the white man bring peaches out of a closed pot made Imbono open his eyes; but the sensation of the evening was furnished by a bottle of soda water. When the stopper was loosed and the liquid spurted over, the chief shrank back in amazement, uttering a startled cry. Nando, not skilled in European politeness, guffawed uproariously.

"Him say debbil water, sah. Yah! yah!"

Nothing would induce Imbono to drink the stuff. But he took kindly to tea, and being prevailed on to try a pinch of snuff, he laughed heartily when the paroxysm of sneezing was over, and asked for more.

"Him say like laugh-cry dust plenty much," said Nando.

When the chief had eaten his fill, Mr. Martindale, with considerable diplomacy, explained that the discovery of gold was of little use to him unless he could take men to the spot, and desired the withdrawal of the prohibition. Nando took a long time to convey this to Imbono, and Jack suspected that he was making somewhat lavish promises in the nature of *quid pro quo*. Imbono at length agreed to the white man's request, provided none of the workers he wished to take with him were servants of the Great White Chief. He consented also to lead him back to the cataract next day, so that he might complete his search for the gold-bearing rocks.

On this second journey Mr. Martindale and Jack were accompanied by two of their negroes with picks. On arriving at the spot the men were set to break away portions of the rocky wall on the left of the cataract.

"You see, Jack," said Mr. Martindale, "the fact that we found gold in the stream shows that it is still being washed down by the water; otherwise it would have been swept away or buried long ago. The rock must be of a soft kind that offers comparatively little resistance to the water, and I'm rather inclined to think that not so very many years ago the cataract was a good deal farther forward than it is now. Well, the gold-bearing stratum must run right through the cataract, horizontally I suspect. It may not be a broad one, but it will probably extend some distance on each side of the fall, and a few hours' work ought to prove it."

As the rock fell away under the negroes' picks, Mr. Martindale and Jack carefully washed samples of it. In less than an hour the glittering trail shone out clear in the wake of the granules of rock as they slid round the groove.

"So much for the first part of our job," said Mr. Martindale, with a quiet sigh of satisfaction. "The next thing is to see if the gold extends above the cataract."

Under Imbono's guidance the party made their way by a detour to the river banks above the falls. After a search of some hours Mr. Martindale declared himself satisfied that the lode was confined to the rocks over which the water poured.

"We can't do much more for the present," he said. "The next thing is to get machinery for working the ore. We'll have to go back to Boma. We can probably get simple materials for working the alluvial deposits there, but the machinery for crushing the ore must be got from Europe, and that'll take time. We'll pack up and start to-morrow."

But after breakfast next morning, when Mr. Martindale had lighted his morning cigar, he startled Jack by saying suddenly—

"Say, Jack, how would you like to be left here with Barney and some of the men while I go back to Boma?"

"What a jolly lark!" said Jack, flushing with pleasure.

"Humph! That's a fool's speech, or a schoolboy's, which often comes to the same thing. I'm

not thinking of larks, or gulls, or geese, but of serious business."

"Sorry, uncle. That's only my way of saying I should like it immensely."

"I've been turning it over in the night. I want to make a man of you, Jack; I want to see if there's any grit in you. There ought to be, if you're your mother's boy. Anyway this will give you a chance. Things are this way. We've struck a fortune here. Well, I'm an old miner, and I don't allow anybody to jump my claim. I don't reckon any one is likely to jump it; still, you never know. That fellow Elbel, now; he's an official of the Belgian company, and he knows what I'm here for. He might take it into his head to steal a march on me, and though I've got the mining monopoly for all this district, you bet that won't be much of a protection of my claim all these miles from civilization. So it's advisable to have a man on the spot, and it's either you or me. You don't know anything about mining machinery, so I guess it's no good sending you to Boma. Consequently, you must stay here."

"I'm jolly glad of the chance, uncle. I'll look after your claim."

"Spoiling for a fight, eh? But we mustn't have any fighting. Mind you, all this is only speculation—foresight, prudence, call it what you like. I don't calculate on any one trying to do me out of my rights. And if any one tries to jump my claim, it won't do for you to make a fool of yourself by trying to oppose 'em by force. All you can do is to sit tight and keep an eye on things till I get back. I don't know I'm doing right to leave you: you're the only nephew I've got, and you can't raise nephews as you raise pumpkins. But I thought it all out while you were snoring, and I've made up my mind to give it a trial. Patience and tact, that's what you want. You've got 'em, or you haven't. If you have, I reckon it's all right: if you haven't——"

"Your cigar has gone out, dear old man," said Jack, laying his hand on his uncle's.

"So it has. I'll try another. Well, that's settled, eh? I'll be as quick as I can, Jack: no doubt I'll find a launch when I reach the Congo, or even before if Elbel's boss at Makua likes to make himself pleasant. But I've no doubt Elbel has coloured up our little meeting in his report to headquarters. Anyhow, I should be right back in two or three months—not so very long after all. I'll forward some rifles and ammunition from the first station where I can get 'em: the sale of arms is prohibited in this State, of course; but that isn't the only law, by all accounts, that's a dead letter here, and I don't doubt a little palm-oil will help me to fix up all I want. You'll have to teach the men how to use 'em, and remember, they're only for self-defence in the last extremity. See?"

"I'll be careful, uncle. It's lucky we've a friend in Imbono. I think we'll get along first-rate. Nando can do the interpreting till I learn something of the language."

"Jingo! I'd forgotten Nando. That's a poser, Jack. I shall want him to pilot me down to Boma. I can't get along without an interpreter. That's a nailer on our little scheme, my boy; for of course you can't stay here without some one to pass your orders to the men."

Jack looked very crestfallen. The prospect of being left in charge was very delightful to him, and he had already been resolving to show himself worthy of his uncle's trust. The thing he had regretted most in leaving Rugby was that he would never be in the Sixth and a "power." He did not shrink from responsibility; and it was hard to have his hopes of an independent command dashed at the moment of opportunity. Suddenly an idea occurred to him. "Are you sure none of the other men know enough English to serve my turn?" he said.

"Nando said not a man jack of 'em knows it but himself. I'll call him up and ask him again."

Nando came up all smiles in answer to the call. "You told me that none of the men speak English but yourself," said Mr. Martindale; "is that true?"

"Too plenty much true, sah. Me speak troof all same, sah."

"That's unfortunate. We're going back to Boma. I wanted to leave Mr. Jack here, but I can't do that unless he has some one to do the talking for him. Go and get the things packed up, Nando."

The negro departed with alacrity. But not five minutes later he returned, accompanied by a negro a little shorter than himself, but otherwise showing a strong resemblance. Both were grinning broadly.

"My brudder, sah," said Nando, patting the younger man on the shoulder. "He berrah fine chap. Him Lepoko. Speak Inglesa; berrah clebber. Nando go with big massa, Lepoko stay with little massa; oh yes! all too fine and jolly."

"Lepoko speaks English, does he?" said Mr. Martindale. "Then you're a liar, Nando!"

"No, sah, me no tell lies, not at all. Lepoko no speak Inglesa all de time, sah. What for two speak Inglesa one time? Too much nise, massa no can hear what Nando say. Nando go, all same; massa muss hab some one can talk. Berrah well; den Lepoko hab go; can talk all right. He show massa what can do."

"One, two, free, forty, hundred fousand," began Lepoko glibly. "Ten little nigger boys. What de good of anyfink? Way down de Swannee ribber——"

"That'll do, that'll do!" cried Mr. Martindale, laughing. "You've got your interpreter, Jack. Nando, get ready to start. Bring nine men with you, the rest will stay with Mr. Jack. The fellow was hankering after the flesh-pots of Boma, I suppose," he added, when Nando had gone, "and that accounts for his sudden discovery of his brother's eloquence—too jealous of his own importance to give it away before. Now there's Barney, Jack. I don't know how he'll take being left here."

Barney took it very well. When Mr. Martindale mentioned that he would be absent for at least two months, he remarked—

"Bedad, sorr, I'll be getting fat at last. Imbono sent another heap of maniac this morning, and seeing that I'll have nothing whativer to do for two months, sure I'll be a different man entirely by the time you come back."

An hour later the shore was crowded with natives come to bid the white man farewell. Imbono was there with all the men of his village. At his final interview with Mr. Martindale he had promised to watch carefully over the welfare of his young blood brother; he would supply him and his men with food, and defend him from wild beasts and aggressive black men, and his villagers should at once set about building new huts for the party.

"Remember, Jack, patience—and tact. God bless you, my boy."

"Good-bye, uncle. Hope you'll have a pleasant journey. And on the way down keep an eye lifting for Samba."

Then the ten natives struck the water with their paddles, the canoe glided down the stream, and as it disappeared round a bend of the river Jack heard the men's voices uplifted in a new song composed for the occasion.

"What are they singing, Lepoko?" he asked of his new interpreter.

"Me tell massa.

"Down brown ribber,
Broad brown ribber,
White man go
In canoe.
Good-bye, Ilola,
Good-bye, Imbono,
Good-bye, Jacko,
Brave Jacko,
Young Jacko.
He save Imbono,
Lucky Imbono;
Down brown ribber
White man go."

CHAPTER IX

Samba Meets the Little Men

Samba had cheerfully accompanied Mr. Martindale's expedition, in the confidence that one of its principal objects, if not indeed its main one, was the discovery of his parents. Nando had told him, on the ruins of Banonga, that the white man would help him in his search, and the white man had treated him so kindly that he believed what Nando said. But as the days passed and the canoes went farther and farther up stream, miles away from Banonga, the boy began to be uneasy. More than once he reminded Nando of his promise, only to be put off with excuses: the white man was a very big chief, and such a trifling matter as the whereabouts of a black boy's father and mother could not be expected to engage him until his own business was completed.

Samba became more and more restless. He wished he could open the matter himself to the white men; but the few words of English he had picked up from Jack and Barney were as useless to him as any schoolboy's French. Jack often wondered why there was so wistful a look upon the boy's face as he followed him about, much as Pat followed Samba. He spoke to Nando about it, but Nando only laughed. Samba began to distrust Nando. What if the man's assurances were false, and there had never been any intention of seeking his father? The white men had been kind to him; they gave him good food; he was pleased with the knife presented to him as a reward for his watchfulness; but all these were small things beside the fact that his parents were lost to him. Had the white men no fathers? he wondered.

At length he came to a great resolution. If they would not help him, he must help himself. He would slip away one night and set off in search. He well knew that in cutting himself adrift from the expedition many days' journey from his old home he was exchanging ease and plenty for certain hardship and many dangers known and unknown. The forest in the neighbourhood of Banonga was as a playground to him; but he could not know what awaited him in a country so remote as this. He had never been more than half a day's journey from home, but he had heard of unfriendly tribes who might kill him, or at best keep him enslaved. And the white men of Bula Matadi—did not they sometimes seize black boys, and make them soldiers or serfs? Yet all these perils must be faced: Samba loved his parents, and in his case love cast out fear.

One morning, very early, when every one in the camp was occupied with the first duties of the day, Samba stole away. His own treasured knife was slung by a cord about his neck; he carried on his hip, negro-fashion, a discarded biscuit tin which he had filled with food saved from his meals of the previous day; and Mr. Martindale's knife dangled from his waist cord. It was easy to slip away unseen; the camp was surrounded by trees, and within a minute he was out of sight. He guessed that an hour or two would pass before his absence was discovered, and then pursuit would be vain.

But he had not gone far when he heard a joyous bark behind him, and Pat came bounding along, leaping up at him, looking up in his face, as if to say: "You are going a-hunting: I will come too, and we will enjoy ourselves." Samba stopped, and knelt down and put his arms about the dog's neck. Should he take him? The temptation was great: Pat and he were staunch friends; they understood each other, and the dog would be excellent company in the forest. But Samba reflected. Pat did not belong to him, and he had never stolen anything in his life. The dog's master had been good to him: it would be unkind to rob him. And Pat was a fighter: he was as brave as Samba himself, but a great deal more noisy and much less discreet. Samba knew the ways of the forest; it was wise to avoid the dangerous beasts, to match their stealth with stealth; Pat would attack them, and certainly come off worst. No, Pat must go back. So Samba patted him, rubbed his head on the dog's rough coat, let Pat lick his face, and talked to him seriously. Then he got up and pointed towards the camp and clapped his hands, and when Pat showed a disposition still to follow him, he waved his arms and spoke to him again. Pat understood; he halted and watched the boy till he disappeared among the trees; then, giving one low whine, he trotted back with his tail sorrowfully lowered.

Samba went on. He had come to the river, but he meant to avoid it now. The river wound this way and that: the journey overland would be shorter. He might be sought for along the bank; but in the forest wilds he would at least be safe from pursuit, whatever other dangers he might encounter. At intervals along the bank, too, lay many villages: and Samba was less afraid of beasts than of men. So, choosing by the instinct which every forest man seems to possess a direction that would lead towards his distant village, he went on with lithe and springy gait, humming an old song his grandfather Mirambo had taught him.

His path at first led through a grassy country, with trees and bush in plenty, yet not so thick but that the sunlight came freely through the foliage, making many shining circles on the ground. But after about two hours the forest thickened; the sunlit spaces became fewer, the undergrowth more and more tangled. At midday he sat down by the edge of a trickling stream to eat his dinner of manioc, then set off again. The forest was now denser than anything to which he had been accustomed near Banonga, and he went more warily, his eyes keen to mark the tracks of animals, his ears alive to catch every sound. He noticed here the scratches of a leopard on a tree trunk, there the trampled undergrowth where an elephant had passed; but he saw no living creature save a few snakes and lizards, and once a hare that scurried across his path as he approached. He knew that in the forest it is night that brings danger.

The forest became ever thicker, and as evening drew on it grew dark and chill. The ground was soft with layers of rotted foliage, the air heavy with the musty smell of vegetation in decay. Samba's teeth chattered with the cold, and he could not help longing for Barney's cosy hut and the warm companionship of the terrier. It was time to sleep. Could he venture to build a fire? The smoke might attract men, but he had seen no signs of human habitation. It would at any rate repel insects and beasts. Yes—he would build a fire.

First he sought for a tree with a broad overhanging branch on which he could perch himself for the night. Then he made a wide circuit to assure himself that there were no enemies near at hand. In the course of his round he came to a narrow clearing where an outcrop of rock had prevented vegetation, and on the edges of this he found sufficient dry brushwood to make his fire. Collecting an armful, he carried it unerringly to his chosen tree, heaped it below the hospitable branch, and with his knife whittled a hard dry stick to a sharp point. He selected then a square lump of wood, cut a little hollow in it, and, holding his pointed stick upright in the hollow, whirled it about rapidly between his hands until first smoke then a spark appeared. Having kindled his fire he banked it down with damp moss he found hard by, so as to prevent it from blazing too high and endangering his tree or attracting attention. Then he climbed up into the branch; there he would be safest from prowling beasts. The acrid smoke rose from the fire beneath and enveloped him, but it gave him no discomfort, rather a feeling of "homeness" and well-being; such had been the accompaniment of sleep all his life long in his father's hut at Banonga. Curled up on that low bough he slept through the long hours—a dreamless sleep, undisturbed by the bark of hyenas, the squeal of monkeys, or the wail of tiger-cats.

When he awoke he was stiff and cold. It was still dark, but even at midday the sun can but feebly light the thickest parts of the Congo Forest. The fire had gone out; but Samba did not venture to leave his perch until the glimmer of dawn, pale though it was, gave him light enough to see by. He was ravenously hungry, and did not spare the food left in his tin; many a time he had found food in the forest near his home, and now that he felt well and strong, no fear of starvation troubled him. Having finished his simple breakfast, he slung the empty can over his hip and set off on his journey.

For two days he tramped on and on, plucking here the red berries of the phrynia, there the long crimson fruit of the amoma, with mushrooms in plenty. Nothing untoward had happened. In this part of the forest beasts appeared to be few. Now and again he heard the rapping noise made by the soko, the gibber of monkeys, the squawk of parrots: once he stood behind a broad trunk and watched breathlessly as a tiger-cat stalked a heedless rabbit; each night he lighted his fire and found a serviceable branch on which to rest.

But on the third day he was less happy. The farther he walked, the denser became the forest, the more difficult his path. Edible berries were rarer; fewer trees had fungi growing about their roots; he had to content himself with forest beans in their brown tough rind. When the evening was drawing on he could find no dry fuel for a fire, and now, instead of seeking a branch for a sleeping place, he looked for a hollow tree which would give him some shelter from the cold damp air of night. Having found his tree he gathered a handful of moss, set fire to it from his stick and block, which he had carefully preserved, and threw the smouldering heap into the hollow to smoke out noxious insects, or a snake, if perchance one had made his home there.

The fourth day was a repetition of the third, with more discomforts. Sometimes the tangled vines and creepers were so thick that he had to go round about to find a path. The vegetation provided still less food, only a few jack fruit and the wild fruit of the motanga rewarding his search. He was so hungry at midday that he was reduced to collecting slugs from the trees, a fare he would fain have avoided. Fearless as he was, he was beginning to be anxious; for to make a certain course in this dense forest was well-nigh impossible.

At dusk, when again he sought a hollow tree and dropped a heap of smouldering herbage into the hole, he started back with a low cry, for he heard an ominous hiss in the depths, and was only just in time to avoid a python which had been roused from sleep by the burning mass. In a twinkling the huge coils spread themselves like a released watch-spring beyond the mouth of the hole and along the lowermost branch of the tree. With all his forest lore, Samba was surprised to find that a python could move so quickly. The instant he heard the angry hiss he crouched low against the trunk, thankful that the reptile had chosen a branch on the other side. Armed only with a knife, he knew himself no match for a twenty-foot python; had he not seen a young hippopotamus strangled by a python no larger than this? Like Brer Rabbit, Samba lay low and said nothing: until the python, swinging itself on to the branch of an adjacent tree a few feet away, disappeared in the foliage. Then, allowing time for the reptile to settle elsewhere, Samba sought safer quarters. The python's house was comfortable, even commodious; but Samba would scarcely have slept as soundly as he was wont in uncertainty whether the disturbed owner might not after all return home.

He felt very cramped and miserable when he rose next day to resume his journey. This morning he had to start without breakfast, for neither fruits nor berries were to be had: a search among fallen trees failed even to discover ants of which to make a scanty meal. Constant walking and privation were telling on his frame; his eyes were less bright, his step was less elastic. But there was a great heart within him; he plodded on; he had set out to find his father and mother; he would not turn back. The dangers ahead could be no worse than those he had already met, and no experienced general of army could have known better than Samba that to retreat is often more perilous than to advance.

In the afternoon, when, having found a few berries, he had eaten the only meal of the day and was about to seek, earlier than usual, his quarters for the night, he heard, from a short distance to the left of his track, a great noise of growling and snarling. The sounds were not like those of any animals he knew. With cautious steps he made his way through the matted undergrowth towards the noise. Almost unawares he came upon an extraordinary sight. In the centre of an open space, scarcely twenty feet across, a small man, lighter in hue than the majority of Congolese natives, was struggling to free himself from the grip of a serval which had buried its claws deep in his body and thigh. Two other small men, less even than Samba in height, were leaping and yelling around their comrade, apparently instructing him how to act, though neither made use of the light spears they carried to attack the furious beast. The serval, its greenish eyes brilliant with rage, was an unusually powerful specimen of its kind, resembling indeed a leopard rather than a tiger-cat. It was bent, as it seemed, upon working its way upward to the man's throat, and its reddish spotted coat was so like his skin in hue that, as they writhed and twisted this way and that, an onlooker might well have hesitated to launch a spear at the beast for fear of hitting the man.

One of the little man's hands had a grip of the serval's throat; but he was not strong enough to strangle it, and the lightning quickness of the animal's movements prevented him from gripping it with the other hand. Even a sturdily-built European might well have failed to gain the mastery in a fight with such a foe, and the little man had neither the strength nor the staying power to hold out much longer. Yet his companions continued to yell and dance round, keeping

well out of reach of the terrible claws; while blood was streaming from a dozen deep gashes in the little man's body.

Samba stood but a few moments gazing at the scene. The instinct of the born hunter was awake in him, and that higher instinct which moves a man to help his kind. Clutching his broad knife he bounded into the open, reached the fainting man in two leaps, and plunged the blade deep into the creature's side behind the shoulder. With a convulsive wriggle the serval made a last attempt to bury its fangs in its victim's neck. Then its muscles suddenly relaxed, and it fell dead to the ground.

Samba's intervention had come too late. The man had been so terribly mauled that his life was ebbing fast. His comrades looked at him and began to make strange little moaning cries; then they laid him on a bed of leaves and turned their attention to Samba. He knew that he was in the presence of Bambute, the dreaded pigmies of the forest. Never before had he seen them; but he had heard of them as fearless hunters and daring fighters, who moved about from place to place in the forest, and levied toll upon the plantations of larger men. The two little men came to him and patted his arms and jabbered together; but he understood nothing of what they said. By signs he explained to them that he was hungry. Then, leaving their wounded comrade to his fate, they took Samba by the hands and led him rapidly into the forest, following a path which could scarcely have been detected by any except themselves. In some twenty minutes they arrived at a clearing where stood a group of two score small huts, like beehives, no more than four feet high, with an opening eighteen inches square, just large enough to allow a pigmy to creep through. Pigmies, men and women, were squatting around—ugly little people, but well-made and muscular, with leaves and grass aprons for all clothing, and devoid of such ornaments as an ordinary negro loves.

They sprang up as Samba approached between his guides, and a great babel of question and answer arose, like the chattering of monkeys. The story was told; none showed any concern for the man left to die; the Bambute acknowledge no ties, and seem to have little family affection. A plentiful dinner of antelope flesh and bananas was soon placed before Samba, and it was clear that the pigmies were ready to make much of the stranger who had so boldly attacked the serval.

One of them knew a little of a Congolese dialect, and he succeeded in making Samba understand that the chief was pleased with him, and wished to adopt him as his son. Samba shook his head and smiled: his own parents were alive, he said; he wished for no others. This made the chief angry. The chiefs of some of the big men had often adopted pigmy boys and made slaves of them; it was now his turn. The whole community scowled and snarled so fiercely that Samba thought the safest course was to feign acquiescence for the moment, and seize the first opportunity afterwards of slipping away.

But nearly three weeks passed before a chance presented itself. The pigmies kept him with them, never letting him go out of their sight. They fed him well—almost too well, expecting his powers of consumption to be equal to their own. Never before had he seen such extraordinary eaters. One little man would squat before a stalk bearing fifty or sixty bananas, and eat them all. True, he lay moaning and groaning all night, but next morning would be quite ready to gorge an equal meal. Since they did not cultivate the ground themselves, Samba wondered where they obtained their plentiful supply of bananas and manioc. He learnt by and by that they appropriated what they pleased from the plantations of a neighbouring tribe of big men, who had too great a respect for the pigmies' poisoned arrows and spears to protest. Samba hoped that he might one day escape to this tribe, but a shifting of the village rendered this impossible, though it afforded the boy the opportunity for which he had so long been waiting.

On the night when the pigmy tribe settled down in its new home, four days' journey from the old, Samba took advantage of the fatigue of his captors to steal away. He had chosen the darkest hour before the dawn, and knowing that he would very soon be missed and followed up, he struck off through the forest as rapidly as he could. With plentiful food he had recovered his old strength and vigour, and he strode along fleetly, finding his way chiefly by the nature of the ground beneath his feet; for there was no true path, and the forest was almost completely dark, even when dawn had broken elsewhere. As the morning drew on the leafy arcades became faintly illuminated, and he could then see sufficiently well to choose the easiest way through the obstacles that beset his course.

Despite all his exertions his progress was very slow. Well he knew that, expert though he was in forest travel, he could not move through these tangled mazes with anything like the speed of the active little men who by this time were almost certainly on his track. At the best he could hardly have got more than two miles' start. As he threaded his way through the brushwood, hacking with his knife at obstructive creepers, and receiving many a scratch from briar and thorn, he tried to think of some way of throwing the pursuers off the scent; but every yard of progress demanded so much exertion that he was unequal to the effort of devising any likely ruse.

Suddenly coming upon a shallow stream about two yards wide that ran across his line of march, he saw in a flash a chance of covering his trail. He stepped into the stream, pausing for a moment to drink, then waded a few paces against the current, narrowly scanning the bordering trees. They showed a close network of interlacing branches, one tree encroaching on another. Choosing a bough overhanging the brook, just above his head, Samba drew himself up into the

tree, taking care that no spots of water were left on the branch to betray him. Then, clambering nimbly like a monkey from bough to bough, he made a path for himself through the trees at an angle half-way between the directions of the stream and of his march through the forest. He hoped that, losing his track in the stream, the Bambute would jump to the conclusion that he was making his way up or down its bed, and would continue their chase accordingly.

Among the trees his progress was even slower than on the ground. Every now and again he had to return on his tracks, encountering a branch that, serviceable as it might look, proved either too high or too low, or not strong enough to bear his weight. And he was making more noise than he liked. There was not only the rustle and creak of parting leaves and bending twigs, and the crack of small branches that snapped under his hand; but his intrusion scared the natural denizens of the forest, and they clattered away with loud cries of alarm—grey parrots in hundreds, green pigeons, occasionally a hawk or the great blue plantain-eater. The screeches of the birds smothered, indeed, any sound that he himself might make; but such long-continued evidence of disturbance might awaken the suspicion of the little men and guide them to his whereabouts.

By and by he came to a gap in the forest. The clear sunlight was welcome as a guide to his course; but he saw that to follow the direction which he believed would bring him towards Banonga he must now leave the trees. He stopped for a few minutes to recover breath, and to consider what he had best do. As he lay stretched along a bough, his eye travelled back over the path he had come. The vagaries of lightning that had struck down two forest giants in close proximity disclosed to his view a stretch of some twenty yards of the stream which he had just crossed on his primeval suspension bridge. What caused him to start and draw himself together, shrinking behind a leafy screen thick enough to hide him even from the practised eyes of the little forest men? There, in the bed of the stream, glancing this way and that, at the water, the banks, the trees on every side, were a file of Bambute, carrying their little bows and arrows and their short light spears. They moved swiftly, silently, some bending towards the ground, others peering to right and left with a keenness that nothing could escape. Samba's heart thumped against his ribs as he watched them. He counted them as they passed one after another across the gap; they numbered twenty, and he was not sure that he had seen the first.

The last disappeared. Samba waited. Had his ruse succeeded? There was absolute silence; he heard neither footstep nor voice. But the little men must soon find out their mistake. They would then cast back to the point where they had lost the scent. Could they pick it up again—trace him to the tree and follow him up? He could not tell. They must have been close upon him when he climbed into the tree; evidently he had left the path only in the nick of time. This much he had gained. But he dared not wait longer; there was no safety for him while they were so near; he must on.

CHAPTER X

A Trip with a Crocodile

Samba looked warily round, then began to descend from his perch in the tree, moving as slowly and with as many pauses as a timid bather stepping into the water. Once more he was on the ground. Pausing only to throw a rapid glance on all sides, he struck off in a direction at right angles to the course of the stream, and resumed his laborious march through the forest maze.

Hour after hour he pushed on without meeting a living creature. But he had heard too much of the cunning and determination of the Congo dwarfs to delude himself with the idea that he had finally shaken them off. Tired as he was, sweating in the moist oppressive heat, he dared not rest, even to eat in comfort the food he had brought in his tin. He nibbled morsels as he went, hoping that by good speed during the whole day he might get far enough from the pigmies to make his ultimate escape secure.

Towards evening he heard in front of him the long monotonous rustle of a stream foaming over a rocky bed. He was careful in approaching it: to meet a crocodile ambushed near the bank would be as dangerous as to meet a man. Pushing his way cautiously through the shrubs, he came to the edge of a broad river, flowing in swift eddies from white rapids above. It seemed to Samba that this must be a tributary of the Lemba, the river on whose bank he had left the white men, and to which, lower down, he must ultimately make his way. Pursuit by the white men might now be safely disregarded; Samba thought he could hardly do better than keep to the stream, taking his chance of meeting negroes at isolated villages on the banks. These, if he met them, would at any rate be easier to elude than the Bambute.

But the sun was going down, the air becoming chill. He must find a shelter for the night and pursue his riverside journey next day. A little search revealed, on a bluff above the river, a boulder having a deep cavity on one side. Here Samba sat down to eat the little food left in his tin; then he curled himself up for the night. Nothing disturbed his sleep.

In the morning he felt more than usually hungry. His tin was empty; he did not care to leave the river and go hunting in the forest, perhaps vainly, for berries or roots. A little way down stream he noticed a spot where the dark surface of the water was scarcely disturbed by a ripple; was that a deep pool, he wondered, where fish might be? He went down to the edge and, leaning flat upon a rock peeped over. Yes; in the depths he caught the scaly gleam of darting fish.

Springing up, he went to a swampy patch hard by and cut a long, straight, stiff reed. Then he took the hard stick with which he made fire, and, sharpening the point until it pricked like a needle, he fitted the wood to the reed so as to make a spear. With this in his hand he once more leant over the pool. He lay still for a few moments, intently watching; then, with a movement of extraordinary swiftness, he plunged his spear into the depths, and brought it out with a silvery trout impaled. The fish had stopped to nibble at a root in the bank. When Samba had thus caught three he was satisfied. He did not pause to cook the fish. He split them open, dexterously boned and cleaned them, and ate them raw.

He had scarcely finished his breakfast when he saw, hurtling down the rapids above him, a huge forest tree—a mass of green, for most of its branches in full leaf were still upon it. Clearly it had not long lost its grip of earth. It came swirling towards Samba, every now and then stopping as its submerged part was caught by some rock, only to be whirled round and driven past the obstacle by the weight of water behind. It made a zigzag course through the rapids, and then floated peacefully down the still reach of water beneath.

As he watched the tree sailing gently towards him, Samba had an idea. Why not use it as a raft to carry him on his way? It was strong enough to bear his weight; he could hide in the foliage with at least as good a chance of escaping observation as if he were moving along the banks.

By the time he had grasped the notion the tree was past him. He sprang up, raced along until he was level with it, then took a neat header into the water. A minute's rapid swimming brought him to the end of the trunk, which, he saw, had been snapped clean off and was not encumbered by the roots. He clambered up, and the trunk was so long that his trifling weight scarcely depressed its end. Smiling with pleasure, he crawled along it until he was in the centre of the leafy screen.

This, however, now that he was there, did not seem so dense as when he had viewed it from the bank; he was not concealed so well as he had hoped. Every now and again, too, his novel raft gave an ominous lurch and roll, suggesting that the portion above water might at any moment change places with that below. If that happened, Samba wondered, would he be able to disengage himself from the tangle of branches and swim clear? But these momentary fears were banished by the novelty and excitement of his position. How delightful it was, after his toilsome and fatiguing journey through the forest, to float down the river without effort of his own in a leafy arbour that defended him from the fierce rays of the sun! And his voyage had the pleasures of variety. Sometimes the foliaged top went first; then, when the branches swept the bottom of the stream in shallow reaches, the trunk swung round and went broadside to the current. Sometimes the branches stuck fast, the current carried the trunk round in a circle, and when an eddy set it again in motion, the trunk end became the bow of this uneasy ship. Bump! That was some rock or sandbank; the tree shook, and Samba was nearly toppled from his perch. Nk'oketo! [1] It was all right; the friendly water had washed the tree clear, and Samba was off again, his black eyes gleaming with fun as he peered between the branches.

It was early in the afternoon, and very hot even for those latitudes. Everything seemed asleep. No breeze ruffled the leaves in the trees along the banks. The air quivered. Samba was dozing, lulled by the gentle motion of the tree, whose progress had not for some time been checked.

All at once there was a shock. Samba instinctively clutched a branch as he felt himself jerked from his seat. His lumbering vessel was twirling round; and looking through the leaves, he saw that it was caught by the head on a sandbank in midstream.

But next moment he felt a shiver run down his spine, and an eery creeping about the roots of his hair. Below him, not four feet away, a gigantic crocodile was staring at him with his cunning baleful eyes. The swish of the projecting branches upon the sandbank had aroused the reptile from his siesta on this vantage ground, whence, at the lazy opening of an eye, he could survey a long stretch of the river. And he had awoke to see a plump and tempting black boy at the inconsiderable altitude of four feet above his snout.

Those who have seen the crocodile only in his hours of ease, lazily sunning himself on a river bank, or floating with scarcely more than his eyes and forehead visible on the surface of the stream, may have come to the comfortable conclusion that he is a slow-moving and lethargic beast. But see him rushing at the bank to seize in his terrible jaws the unwary antelope or zebra that has come to drink, or to sweep it into the river with a single blow of his mighty tail. Watch him when, roused from his doze on a sandbank, by the sting of a rifle bullet on his armour, he vanishes with lightning rapidity beneath the water. At one moment to all seeming as lifeless as a log, the next he is a raging monster, ready to tear and rend any hapless creature which his inertness has beguiled.

Of the two, Samba and the crocodile, it was the saurian that first recovered his wits. His

instinct when disturbed at close quarters is to rush forthwith upon his enemy or victim. Thus did the crocodile now. Considering that he is a beast not built for jumping, the leap he attempted, with a spasmodic wriggle of his formidable tail, was quite a creditable feat. With his teeth he grazed the lower part of the branch on which Samba sat; and the boy, gazing down into the beast's eyes, shuddered and shrank away. Fortunate it was for him that his legs had not been dangling. Nothing could then have saved him.

The reptile, slipping back after its failure, maintained its hold on the lower branches with its forefeet. Before it could make a second attempt, Samba had swung himself into the branch above. The tree toppled slightly, and for one moment of terror Samba feared he would be thrown into the very jaws of the monster. But the sandbank held the tree firmly, and that peril was past.

With thick foliage between it and the boy, the crocodile saw no chance of securing its victim from its present position. But it was determined not to be balked, and, cunning beast! could afford to wait. It seemed to know that the boy was only safe so long as he clung to his perch. On the sandbank, or in the water, his end would alike be speedy. So the reptile slid off the bank into the water, and swam to the trunk end of the tree, which had been swung round by the current and was now pointing down stream. If it could not leap, it could crawl, and up the trunk the approach to its prey was easy.

Samba's eyes were now wide with fright, as he saw the beast's intention. Up a tree on the river bank he could have laughed any crocodile to scorn; but this sandbank in midstream was ground peculiarly the creature's own, even though the prey was on a branch ten feet above it. With its experience of sandbanks the crocodile knew there was no permanency in this arrangement.

The attempts of the huge reptile to gain a footing on the trunk had a result which caused Samba mingled hope and fear. The tree floated clear of the bank, and the voyage began again. But how different were the circumstances! In the stern, no longer a cheerful smiling boy, carelessly watching the slow banks glide by, but a boy whose hands and feet gripped his perch with anxious tenacity, and whose scared eyes were quick to mark every movement of the unwelcome, the abhorred, passenger amidships. With many a splash of its tail, and many a grunt of impatient fury, the monster at last made good its footing on the broad trunk, which under its weight was for more than a quarter of its length invisible beneath the surface of the water. For some minutes it lay still, staring at Samba with unwinking eyes, displaying all its teeth as if to grin sardonically at its victim. Samba regretted for the moment that he had not swarmed down from his perch and attacked the crocodile with his knife while he was still struggling to mount the trunk. But then he reflected that he had after all done wisely, for the reptile would have slid back into the water, and before Samba could gain his retreat, he might have been swept off by one swish of the terrible tail.

Samba, as he had shown more than once, and notably in the recent incident of the serval, had no lack of courage; but he had never before been at such close quarters with a crocodile, the most terrible of all the natural enemies of man in the regions of the Congo. And as he sat and watched the glassy stare of the hideous reptile now wriggling inch by inch towards him, he felt a strange helplessness, a kind of fascination that seemed to chill and paralyse his power of movement as of thought. He had retreated as far as he dared. His weight had caused some of the slenderer and more elastic branches to bend towards the water; he had even imagined that, as he tested them, the pressure threatened to make the tree revolve. What his fate would be if the whirling of the trunk on its axis brought him into the river he well knew. The crocodile would slip as nimbly as an eel after him; and, entangled in the foliage, which to his armoured enemy would offer no obstacle, he would fall an easy prey.

The crocodile wriggled on, till it came to the place where the first branch forked from the trunk. Scarcely more than its own length now separated it from Samba. Apparently it had come as near as it cared to venture; not being a climber, the feat of crawling up the tapering branch on which Samba was perched was not one to its taste. It lay still, with jaws agape, its eyes half-closed in a kind of wicked leer.

Samba tried to look away from the hideous beast, but in vain; he found his gaze drawn back uncontrollably. He felt even more subject to the fascination now that the crocodile's movements had ceased. The conviction was growing upon him that sooner or later he would slide down the branch and fall dreamily into the open jaws. He was fast becoming hypnotized.

But he was roused from this dangerous trancelike state by a sudden roll of the tree. Perched high as he was, the motion caused him to swing through an arc of several yards and brought him perilously near the water. The danger quickened his faculties: he clung on with a tighter grip, bethinking himself to look whether his fishing spear, which he had stuck into the bark, was still safe. He was relieved to find that it was undisturbed. The tree righted itself, and a gleam of hope lightened Samba's mind when he saw that the crocodile was in the water. Though, stretched on the trunk, the beast had felt the roll less than Samba above, it had a less tenacious grip and less ability to adapt itself; and first the tail, then the rest of its body had slid off. It was violently struggling to regain its position, its jaw resting on the trunk, its forepaws furiously beating the water.

The memory of the reptile's former difficulties in mounting inspired Samba with an idea,

which, impelled equally by terror and hate, he was prompt to act upon. The tree was still rocking slightly before regaining its steadiness, and the crocodile, despite its efforts, was unable to gain a firm grip on the moving trunk. All its attention was engaged upon the accomplishment of its immediate purpose: it would lose the dainty morsel if it did not once more mount the tree. Samba was quick to seize the critical moment. Spear in hand he crept downwards along the branch on which he had been perched, careful that his movements should not divert the crocodile's attention. Reaching the junction of the branch with the parent stem, only five or six feet from the reptile, he let himself down noiselessly into the river on the far side of the tree, and swam for a second or two until he came opposite the crocodile. During these few seconds he had been hidden from the creature's view by the mass of the trunk, which rose out of the water to some height above his head.

The crocodile had now managed to get its forepaws on the tree, and in struggling to hoist itself its snout was raised almost upright, exposing the soft underside, the sole part in which it is vulnerable to anything except a very heavy bullet. Samba caught sight of the tip of the snout above the tree; here was the opportunity he had hoped for in making this hazardous experiment. Taking with his left hand a firm grip of a wart on the trunk, he raised himself in the water, and with the right hand drove his spear twice into the monster's throat. The crocodile made no sound; a lash of the powerful tail drove up a wave that caused the tree to rock violently: then the huge body slipped backwards into the water.

The moment he had driven his spear home Samba let go his hold on the tree, and trod water until the current brought the foliage to him. Then he drew himself nimbly up into the branch he had formerly occupied. He was breathless, and scarcely yet recovered from his scare; but there was no sign of the crocodile, and knowing that the reptile when mortally wounded sinks into deep water, he felt that his enemy had gone for ever. He heaved a deep sigh of relief, but chancing to look back, he noticed with a start of renewed dread that the water in the wake of the tree was faintly tinged with red. Was it possible that the crocodile, though wounded, was still following? He felt a shiver thrill through him, and, bending down from his perch, kept his eyes fixed in a stare on that ominous sanguine thread.

The minutes passed. Still the water showed that faint persistent tidge. Samba was becoming more and more nervous. Like the reptile's eyes but a little while ago, that line of red held his gaze in a strange fascination. He was still watching it when the tree suddenly gave a violent lurch, and turned half over. Samba, whose hold had relaxed in his nervousness, was flung off the branch into a clump of bushes at the side of the river, which here began to race rapidly through a deep gorge. Scratched and dazed by the fall he picked himself up slowly. He rubbed his eyes. What was this? He was in the midst of a group of pigmies, who were pointing excitedly, uttering their strange coughing cry, to the branches of the tree. In its lurch it had been turned almost completely round, so that the foliage formerly beneath the water was now uppermost. And there, firmly wedged in a fork of two boughs, lay the lifeless body of the crocodile.

The Bambute jabbered to Samba, stroked his arms, patted his back, examined the spear which, though it was broken in his fall, he had not let go. From the bank they had witnessed the boy's bold fight, and they had followed the course of the floating tree until it ran ashore on a jutting bed of rock. Samba made signs that he wished to pursue his journey on foot; but the Bambute shook their heads and grunted and carried him away with them. Once more he was a prisoner.

[1] Nothing wrong!

CHAPTER XI

Bula Matadi comes to Ilola

"Well, Barney," said Jack, when Mr. Martindale's canoe had disappeared, "I don't know how a first mate would feel if he lost his captain in mid-ocean, but I should fancy he'd feel pretty much as I do now."

"And what sort of feeling is now consuming ye, sorr?"

"Mixed, Barney, very mixed! I like the idea of being left in charge, trusted, you know; there's something jolly pleasant about that. But that's the point, you see; I am left in charge."

"Sure I see your maning widout your telling me, sorr. 'Tis just the very same feeling I used to have whin a bhoy, and me mither put the baby in me arms and tould me to sit wid her on the doorstep. 'Twas a sweet pretty colleen, an' I thought a powerful deal uv having such a heap uv loveliness in me arms; but thin, just as you say, sorr, she was in me arms, an' they being thin an' she being fat—begorra! I was soon mighty tired uv it, an' I wished she was ugly so that I might

hate her widout sin."

"I hope I shan't feel quite so bad as that, Barney," said Jack with a laugh. "But I own I'm a little anxious with so many people in my charge."

"And not wan uv them to be trusted, saving Pat and meself."

"And this mining claim of my uncle's to keep an eye on and defend without using force."

"And wild beasts prowling around——"

"And that villainous uncle of Samba's somewhere in the neighbourhood, I suppose, waiting a chance to molest us."

"And bedad! if he does, he'll find an Irishman, an Englishman, and a terrier, Irish by breed and Irish by nature, and them three are a match for any fifty Blokos, widout a doubt."

"You're an optimist, Barney. But you're right. It's silly to meet troubles half-way. We had better set about doing something. I used to think our house-master kept our noses rather too close to the grindstone, but I begin to see he was right when he said work was the best cure for the dumps."

"And for what the advertisements call a tindency to corpilence. But what will you be after doing at all, sorr?"

"Well, don't you think that, now our numbers are reduced, it would be as well to move our camp nearer to Imbono's village? We shall be here for a couple of months or so, and if Boloko is still on our tracks we should be less open to surprise near Ilola. Besides, it will give the men something to do. They'd better build grass huts for the whole party, and I don't see why we shouldn't try our hands at architectural improvements."

"Indeed, 'tis a good notion, sorr. But are ye sure Imbono would be willing to have us for close neighbours?"

"We can try. He's my blood brother, you know. And I dare say we can put him up to a thing or two."

The chief made no objection to the suggested change of site; indeed, he offered the assistance of his men in the construction of the new huts. This, however, Jack declined in the politest terms, thinking it better to provide plenty of work for his own men until he had had time to take his bearings. The new huts were built within a short distance of Ilola, near a stream. They were the ordinary grass huts of the natives, but Jack, seeing a number of wooden slabs taken from the bottoms of old canoes, had purchased them from Imbono, and when shaped a little they made a very fair substitute for flooring boards. The new settlement was surrounded with a stockade in the native manner, space enough being left within to accommodate Mr. Martindale and his party when they should return.

This work occupied a fortnight. Everything had gone smoothly, save for trifling squabbles among the natives. These Jack managed to settle with little difficulty, in great part through the excellent qualities of Lepoko, who turned out to be a much better man all round than his brother Nando. When the new village was completed, Jack set the men to make Indian clubs from the trees near at hand, and spent part of the cool hours in instructing his followers in their use. They took readily to the new pastime, and very quickly became proficient in executing a great variety of intricate figures. Jack was elated at the success of his experiment: it not only provided an admirable drill for the men, but accustomed them to take commands from him and thus consolidated his authority.

Imbono's men caught the infection: Indian clubs were soon the order of the day in Ilola; and it gave Jack and Barney no little amusement to see men, women, and children at all times of the day whirling clubs around their heads. Imbono saw that his men's performances were greatly lacking in rhythm and grace, and he begged his blood brother (whom he had named Lokolobolo, "strong leg") to allow some of his men to join in the daily practising. Jack was nothing loth; the more influence he could obtain in this way the better his chances of success in the task his uncle had set him.

He was casting about for some new employment to occupy and interest his men, when a couple of canoes came up the river bearing a letter from Mr. Martindale, and a small consignment of Mauser rifles and ammunition. The letter was dated from Baraka.

DEAR JACK,—

I've got here safely, no interference, no upsets. I've managed to get hold of some rifles—I won't tell you how—and send them to you in charge of some canoe "boys." Hope they'll reach you safely. I've paid the boys well, and promised them as much more if they return and meet me with an acknowledgment from you. I'm off to Boma; will write you again from there if I can find a

means of sending the letter. Let me know by the bearer how you are getting on.

On the way down I made more particular inquiries than were possible in coming up as to the methods of the Congo Government. At Stanleyville I met a Frenchman who told me a good deal, and here got rather chummy with an English missionary on his way home to tell the British public some of the effects of King Leopold's rule. One need only look at the man to see that he is the right sort, with the stuff in him for martyrdom if the call came. The things he told me made my skin creep. Leopold seems to be doing his best to depopulate the country. He'll soon make Vanderbilt sing small as a multi-millionaire; but when his pile's made this State of his will be a wilderness.

I find that the natives are required to bring in four kilos of rubber every fortnight. They're supposed to be paid for it, and they do get brass rods or something of the sort; but the pay works out at the rate of three cents a pound—when rubber to my knowledge fetches about eighty cents a pound in the European market! I hear of cases where they don't even get that; a spoonful of salt is supposed to be sufficient. If the rubber don't measure up to the standard, the least punishment the poor wretches get is twenty-five lashes with a whip of hippo hide—the *chicotte*, an outrageous thing that would cut through a pine log. But they don't stop at twenty-five; a hundred ain't uncommon; no wonder some of the poor creatures peg out after it.

But that's not the worst. These precious "forest guards," as they call them, seem to be little less than fiends. I saw with my own eyes, at one of the villages on the way down, a basket filled with hands, cut from the people these savages have killed for not bringing in enough rubber. The Frenchman told me they have to produce these hands before the Commissary to prove they haven't wasted their cartridges. According to State law they oughtn't to be armed with rifles, but they've got a Belgian thing called the Albini, and that's how they use it. I wouldn't believe that this hand-chopping was done with the knowledge of the officials, though even then it don't relieve them of responsibility; but I heard of a State officer at one of the outposts who actually paid in brass rods for the hands brought him.

Law doesn't count here, and justice is only a name. What do you think of this? A Belgian official quartered himself with twenty native soldiers on a small village, and because they couldn't fix up at once the food required for the visitors, he carried the chief and some of his men to his camp up river, and kept 'em there tied up for a month till a fine of 5,000 brass rods had been paid—ruination for such a small place. The missionary told me that "fights" are constantly taking place, and "fight" simply means massacre. Districts that once held a thousand people are now reduced to a hundred; what natives are not killed get so worn out and dispirited that they are bowled over by sleeping sickness. If this sort of thing goes on much longer, the whole population will be wiped out.

You'll be surprised to get such a long letter; but fact is, I can't think of anything else just now. It makes me fairly sick to think that America had a hand in putting this huge territory under the control of a man whose philanthropic high-falutin comes to this. The whole system is organized murder and pillage under the form of law, and for this King Leopold, who pockets a thumping profit, is responsible before God and man. Now I've told you this you'll know how to deal with that fellow Elbel if he tries any tricks. But remember, no fighting except in self-defence. Patience, my boy—*toujours la patience*, as the Frenchman said to me when I was boiling with rage and wanted to go right away and speak my mind to the Governor.

Your affectionate uncle,
JOHN MARTINDALE.

P.S.—I saw and heard nothing of Samba.

There was plenty of food for thought here, especially when Jack learnt from the head paddler who had brought the letter that the officials of the Trust in which Ilola was situated were coming up the river to establish new dépôts for the rubber. He wrote a brief account of what he had been doing, and despatched it by the same men. Then, to be prepared for eventualities, he picked out the most intelligent of his followers and began to teach them the use of the rifle. Only a few of them showed any promise as marksmen. But Jack was very patient with them; and having a good stock of ammunition and the promise of more, he did not spare practice, and in a short time had about fifteen fairly trustworthy shots. One man, named Makoko, took to the rifle from the first and ran Jack close as a marksman. Jack was very proud of his pupil. He himself had been the crack shot of his school company; and though there was all the difference in the world between shooting at the butts from a position of rest and shooting at alligators or hippos from a canoe, he had tested his marksmanship with success as he came up the Congo.

Now that some of his men had rifles it occurred to Jack to teach them what he remembered of his company drill. It was a welcome change after their long practice with the Indian clubs, and they entered into it with the pleasure and zest of children. Lepoko was gratified with the rank of sergeant, and Makoko made corporal in recognition of his diligence and skill in musketry. When the company was formed Barney reminded Jack that he had been a corporal in the Irish Fusiliers. "And sure I'd be in the army now, sorr, only they didn't invent the Irish Guards till I was a time-expired man. But having been a corporal, it's meself that is cut out to be your liftinant here, sorr.

We've got Pat for the pet uv the reg'mint," he added, "and the only thing that's wanting is the uniform."

"Well, Barney, perhaps for the sake of uniformity we'd better strip and take to the loincloth."

"Ah! you must always be having your bit uv fun, sorr. We'd be far too conspicuous, for my skin at any rate would turn red wid modesty, and the generals say that red coats make the best targets for the inemy."

The drilling of Jack's company was followed with great interest and admiration by Imbono and his men. They never failed to attend the daily parade, and soon desired to join it. Jack delighted the chief by putting the villagers through the same exercises as his own men, excepting, of course, the musketry practice, for which they had no rifles. Before long Jack found himself captain of a company a hundred and fifty strong, all but his fifteen riflemen being spearmen.

Nearly two months had now passed. Jack had not heard again from his uncle, whose return he daily expected. He was anxious to see him again, for lately news had been brought in by excited natives that the servants of the Great White Chief were drawing nearer, their progress being attended by wanton cruelties which boded ill for the men of Ilola. So distressed was Imbono at the tales he heard from these messengers that he thought of dismantling his village and migrating into the depths of the forest. There for a time he and his people might hide from the destroyer. But to a people accustomed to the open the prospect of making a new home in the forest was gloomy indeed. Most of them would probably die of disease before they became acclimatised, and there was great risk of starving while clearings were being made and brought under cultivation. Imbono resolved to wait a little longer, hoping that Bula Matadi might turn back, sated with the spoils from lower reaches of the Lemba.

One day, the visitors so long expected and so little desired arrived at the village. Jack's settlement being on the further side of Ilola from the river, he did not know of their approach until informed of it by a messenger from Imbono. Thirty forest guards of the Great White Chief had come, and with them twenty nondescripts, hangers-on of the licensed pillagers. Their leader was not a white man, as Imbono had expected, but a black man like themselves. This surprised Jack. It was of rather ill omen that the first representatives of King Leopold in Imbono's village should be negroes free from white men's control. But the strangers reported that a white man—his name, they said, was Elobela—was coming up the river behind them. Meanwhile they, in his name, called upon the chief to supply rubber. Imbono desired that his brother Lokolobolo would come into the village and give him advice.

"Faith, I'd do nothing of the sort, sorr," said Barney. "What would ye have any truck wid Elbel's scoundhrels for?"

"But it would be a poor return for Imbono's kindness to refuse. I shall certainly go; the question is, shall I go armed?"

"The blessed angels help ye if ye don't, sorr. Take your revolver; I'll come wid ye, and so will Pat; 'tis right to make a good show for the honour of the reg'mint."

Accordingly captain, lieutenant, and regimental pet, with Lepoko as interpreter, left the stockaded camp and crossed to Ilola. They found the thirty forest guards already swaggering about the village as if it belonged to them. They were big muscular Ngombe, armed with rifle, cutlass, and whip. Their leader was engaged in conversation with the chief. No sooner did Pat perceive him than he darted forward with a growl, and coming to the negro, began to bark furiously at his heels. The man turned round quickly and aimed a blow with his whip at the dog, which made Pat bark and jump more vigorously than ever. At the same moment the man caught sight of Jack, and his face expressed surprise, guilt, and bravado in turn.

"Begorra!" said Barney under his breath, "'tis Bloko himself!"

The chief's countenance cleared; he was unmistakably pleased at Jack's ready response to his request. Then he anxiously asked what he should do.

"I don't think you can do anything but obey," replied Jack. "Undoubtedly the Great White Chief is lord of the land. By the laws he has made you are bound to supply these people with rubber. It is your tax. If you resist it will mean ruin to yourself and your villages. How is the rubber to be paid for?"

"In brass rods."

"Well, let your men do their best. We will see if you get your due pay. My uncle will soon be back; he is a determined man, and if you are not properly treated he will take care that somebody hears of it."

Boloko scowled, then laughed, when Lepoko translated this answer to the chief. He swaggered away to his men, and the whole crowd were soon laughing heartily, every now and then making derisive gestures at the white men. With some difficulty Barney had got hold of Pat, whose barking had subsided into a rumbling growl. But for his restraining hand Barney knew

well that the dog would have thrown prudence to the winds and set upon the strange negroes.

From that day Imbono's villagers began the collection of rubber. Boloko and his men seized as many huts as they required, and demanded regular and copious supplies of food for themselves and their hangers-on. Before twenty-four hours had passed Boloko, with half a dozen of his guards, strolled over to Jack's village, and looked in at the gateway of the stockade. Jack had already decided to adopt military precautions. Two of his best men were doing sentry-go at the gate. When Boloko saw them and their rifles he thought better of entering as he had purposed. He stood for some time taking stock of the tidy compound and the neat new huts around, and discussing with his men this unexpected discovery. Then with a malignant scowl he returned to Ilola.

For some days Jack saw no more of Boloko. He remained within his own stockade, thinking it would do the chief no good if he too openly showed friendship. Every day he put the men through their usual drill, never giving the least sign that he was aware of being closely observed by the forest guards. The drilling of Imbono's men had ceased; the adult villagers were now engaged in the collection of rubber.

From what Jack heard from his men, it soon became clear to him that Boloko was anxious to pick a quarrel with the chief. His motive, Jack guessed, was partly to show his authority, partly to flaunt his contempt of the friendship between Imbono and the white men. His design was to some extent kept in check by the knowledge that Jack had fifteen men well armed and trained, and the presence of the two white men, Inglesa too—he had a wholesome respect for the Inglesa—was in itself a considerable deterrent. But he began to find fault with the quality of the rubber brought in; declared that the villagers kept the best fish for themselves and gave him the worst; complained that his men were made ill by rotten manioc. Imbono took care that the details of these grievances were carried to Jack, who, however, held aloof, still feeling that interference on his part would do no good, while it would certainly aggravate the situation. When the Congo Free State entrusted the collection of its revenue to such subordinates as Boloko, commanding ruthless savages like the forest guards, there was nothing to be done.

One evening, after sunset, Lepoko came into Jack's hut to say that the chief desired to see him. Jack hurried out, and found Imbono in company with one of his villagers. He invited them into his hut, lighted a candle, and setting food and palm wine before them, inquired the object of their visit.

"Look, my brother!" said the chief, pointing to his companion.

The man turned, and showed three terrible gashes in his back. He lifted his right foot and removed a bandage; Jack saw that two of the toes were missing.

"You see, brother!" said Imbono. "Ifumi was eating caterpillars in his hut. The guard Bomolo saw him and came to him and said, 'Your rubber is short. You eat caterpillars instead of collecting rubber.' Ifumi said: 'No, my rubber is not short. There is my basket; you see it is full.' But Bomolo cut three gashes in his back, and struck off two of his toes with his knife."

"That is the truth, Ifumi?" asked Jack.

"It is true," replied the man.

"You did not provoke Bomolo?"

"No, I said to him only what the chief has told."

"You did right to come, Imbono," said Jack quietly. "Go back now: you had better not be seen here. I will send you a message in the morning."

The two men thanked him and went away, Ifumi limping as he walked, supported by the chief's arm. Jack called Barney and told him what had happened.

"It makes my blood boil, Barney. I hoped it would not come to this. Poor wretches—to be at the mercy of such savages! I can't stand by and see such things done. I'm sure my uncle would not wish me to. Yet what can I do? We could fight Boloko and his men, and beat them I hope; but goodness knows what that would lead to. Whatever little right they have to maim these poor people, we have none whatever to interfere, and we should have the regular forces of the State down on us for treason or rebellion or what not. But something must be done. I wish my uncle were here!"

"Well, sorr, I'm ready for anything. The quickest and easiest way would be to fight, for wid all this drill wan uv our men is worth two uv those blagyards."

"No, my uncle said we were to fight only in self-defence. I can't go against that. Couldn't we persuade Boloko to keep his men in order—bribe him, perhaps?"

"I'd sooner try to persuade the divil, sorr."

"Well, I shall try it. I'll invite him to a palaver. We'll give him a feast—open our last bottle of

soda water; a good dinner improves a man's temper sometimes, you know, Barney."

"True, sorr; but it sometimes makes a man very impident. Will I send Lepoko over wid the invitation the morn's morn, sorr?"

"Yes, directly after breakfast. Say that I shall be pleased if Boloko will come to see me in my camp. He may bring his rifle and half a dozen of his men."

CHAPTER XII

Samba Comes Back

As Jack had expected, Boloko was flattered by the invitation, with its implied recognition of his importance. There is nothing a negro likes better than an opportunity for talk, and Boloko declared himself quite ready to meet the Inglesa. But he would not venture into the camp; the meeting must take place outside. The objection, considering the thinly-veiled hostility of the two parties, was not unreasonable. Jack gave up the idea of a banquet, and, about eight o'clock in the morning, went with Barney and Lepoko to the site of his original camp, where he found Boloko and half a dozen of his men already assembled.

It is of the essence of a palaver to be deliberate, not to say long-winded, and Jack followed the advice of Lepoko in passing many compliments and talking about a great variety of matters before he came to the point. Then, however, he made the point perfectly clear. He spoke of what he had learnt of the forest guards' behaviour in the village, and of Bomolo's outrage in particular.

"You must know," he concluded, "that it is against the law of the land to injure or assault the people. Your duty is to see that they do not destroy the vines by improper cutting, and that they go regularly into the forest. You have no right to ill-use them."

"The white man speaks very wisely; he knows much more than Boloko. Boloko knows nothing of law or right; he does what is the custom."

"But you know, my friend, it is a wrong custom."

"It may be as the white man says, but the Inglesa is not my master. My master is Elobela. Let the Inglesa complain to Elobela. As for right, what right has the Inglesa to interfere? He is a stranger; he is not a servant of the Great White Chief."

"I am indeed a stranger; I am not a servant of the Great White Chief. But the Great Spirit who made the world and all men bids me speak if I see wrong done."

Boloko broke out in insolent laughter, and said something to his men which Lepoko refused to translate.

"Him say berrah nasty fing 'bout massa; me no can tell massa."

Jack saw that it was time to bring the interview to a close. There was no coping with insolence.

"Very well," he said sternly. "It will be my duty to report at Boma what I have seen and heard in the village. And more, Boloko; I shall lay a complaint against you for attempting to cut loose our canoes, and for conducting an attack by night upon our camp."

Boloko looked startled and began to bluster when this was translated to him. But it was evident that this manner was assumed as a cloak to a real uneasiness. The moment Lepoko had concluded, Jack walked away from the meeting, and as he returned to his own quarters he heard the guards discussing in excited and vehement tones what he had said. For all his bluster, Boloko had been impressed. For a few days Jack heard of no overt acts of violence. Imbono's gratitude for the intervention was almost overwhelming. He heaped praise and compliments upon his brother Lokolobolo, and, not content with words, made him a valuable present. Half a dozen of his men staggered to Jack's hut one night under the weight of a huge tusk of ivory, which Imbono had kept since the time when elephant-hunting was a profitable occupation.

Two days after the palaver a canoe arrived with another dozen Mauser rifles and ammunition from Mr. Martindale. The head paddler was cautious enough to send one of his men in advance to the camp to announce his arrival, and Jack managed to get the rifles brought secretly within his stockade under cover of night. It was just as well, he thought, to keep Boloko in ignorance of this new acquisition of strength.

The man reported that he had been despatched from Irebo by an Inglesa who had entrusted him with a bonkanda[1] for the young Inglesa. Jack opened the note eagerly. This time it was very short:—

DEAR JACK,—

All going well. Have been delayed by little investigating trips I have made in the concessions of the Abir Trust and the Domaine de la Couronne. Atrocities even worse than I thought. Hope all well with you. Patience—and tact.

J.M.

P.S.—I am sending a dozen rifles and some ammunition; can't get any more.

The paddler said that he had had great difficulty in eluding the white men and their agents. Only a few days before, he and his companions had almost run into a white man who was coming up the river in a smoke-boat, establishing new outposts for the collection of rubber. No doubt an outpost would be established at Ilola; for Imbono was the chief of several villages and had many young men.

This news gave Jack no little uneasiness. Instinctively he felt that the difficulties arising from Boloko's presence would be increased by the arrival of his Belgian superior. For after what he had learnt from his uncle he could not doubt that the tyranny of the forest guards was practised at least with the connivance, if not by the actual authority, of the officials. As a precaution he took care to have men constantly on the look-out at the river bank for the approach of strange boats, and when one day Elbel's launch was sighted, he withdrew all his men within the stockade and posted double sentries. He felt pretty sure that the white man in command was Monsieur Elbel, the man with whom Mr. Martindale had already had a brush; and of Elbel he had a profound mistrust, formed at first sight and accentuated by all that he had subsequently heard.

Boloko and his satellites went in a crowd to the bank of the river to greet the new arrivals. From behind his stockade Jack watched them through his field-glass as they landed from the launch and set off for the village. The white man was certainly Elbel. He was accompanied by a number of forest guards armed like Boloko's, and by a crowd of hangers-on—negroes of many varieties. On the way up to the village Boloko walked by Elbel's side, talking very earnestly, and Jack saw the Belgian throw a keen and inquisitive glance in the direction of his camp.

Not an hour afterwards Elbel left the village and walked over to Jack's settlement, which the natives had named Ilombikambua, "house of the dog," in reference to Pat the terrier. Jack had given orders that the white man was to be admitted if he came, but no black man in his company. The Belgian had come alone, and looked a little surprised when the sentries at the gate received him with a correct military salute. Jack rose from his stool in front of his hut and doffed his hat courteously. Outwardly he was calm enough; but he felt by no means easy in mind, realizing that his responsibility was far from being the "jolly lark" he had light-heartedly called it when Mr. Martindale announced his intention of leaving him in charge.

"Good morning, sir," said the Belgian in his foreign accent.

"Good morning. I think I have the pleasure of addressing Monsieur Elbel?"

"Dat is my name. I do not know your name."

"John Challoner."

"Yes, I believe I see you before in a canoe."

"When I was coming up the river with my uncle."

"Who is now returned to Boma. Yes, I heard of dat. Mr. Martindale—I zink dat is de name—have found de gold he sought?"

"I am not at liberty to discuss Mr. Martindale's business."

"Exactly. I see. Ve must not be indiscreet, hein? Now as for your Mr. Martindale, I am not pleased, I say at vunce. I am not pleased viz Mr. Martindale. He refuse to give me up de black boy dat vas in your canoe. Dat vas against de law: it is not permitted in de Congo State for de natives to leave deir village."

"But if the village no longer exists, Mr. Elbel?"

The Belgian shrugged.

"Dat make no difference! But I have more to say. I have learn dat your men have rifles; I see dem myself; dey even hold deir rifles at de salute, dey have military training, hein? Now it is not permitted to have rifles in de Congo State: dey are vat you call contraband. I muss ask you to be so kind and give de rifles to me."

"I am afraid I can't oblige you, Mr. Elbel. The rifles belong to my uncle."

"Dat make no difference! I find de rifles here: I muss ask you in de name of de Free State to give dem up."

"I don't know that you have any right to speak in the name of the Congo State. I believe, sir, you are an official of the Société Cosmopolite du Commerce du Congo—a private trust. I can't recognize your authority, Mr. Elbel."

"But it is de law."

"If you talk of law! ... are your practices legal, Mr. Elbel? Is it legal to shoot and maim the natives as you have been doing for a hundred miles and more along the river? Is it legal to incite a night attack on peaceable travellers?" (Here Elbel could not suppress a start, and looked far from comfortable.) "But whether I am acting legally or not, I cannot recognize your authority. If you want the rifles, I must ask you to wait until Mr. Martindale's return and demand them from him. Until then they are in my charge, and I cannot give them up."

Jack thought afterwards that he might have spoken a little less bluntly; but he wished to put an end to a disagreeable interview. His firmness made the Belgian angry.

"Ver' vell, ver' vell!" he said, flushing with annoyance. "You vill suffer for dis. You not recognize my right: vell, Capitaine Van Vorst, an officer of de State, comes up de river; he have right; and I say, Mr. Chon Shalloner, you shall be arrest and made to pay heavy amende—if not put in prison."

Jack's bow was a courteous intimation that the interview was ended. But the Belgian caught the flicker of a smile on his face, and flung away in a rage which he made no attempt to disguise. Jack's sentries, who again brought their rifles to the salute, shrank back before Elbel's scowl as he passed out of the gate.

Jack was not ill-pleased with the result of the interview. You have always scored a point when the enemy loses his temper. Apparently Elbel did not intend to take strong measures himself. He knew the weakness of his position. The situation would be changed if a State officer was indeed on his way up the river: but Jack did not allow himself to be disturbed by Elbel's threat; his uncle would doubtless be back in a few days, and he had unbounded faith in Mr. Martindale's judgment and discretion.

From that time he took care that either Barney or himself should be always in the stockaded camp. His men had become a well-disciplined force, but he could not answer for their being able to act discreetly towards a white man whom they had reason to dread.

For a day or two there was no sign of hostility from Elbel. He did not repeat his visit, which Jack did not feel called upon to return. But news came from Ilola that, while the Belgian's arrival had checked the ghastly ferocities of the forest guards, the chicotte had been still more freely in play than before. Every man whose basket did not contain the requisite five kilos of rubber, or the quality of whose rubber did not approve itself to Elbel, was unmercifully flogged. Those with whom no fault could on any pretext be found were paid with perhaps a piece of cloth or some trumpery article which was useless to them, and which in many cases they threw away.

Imbono sent word one day that the most distant of his villages had been burnt. It contained a hundred adult male inhabitants, but only fifty had brought rubber to Ilola, the remainder having been engaged in hunting down a herd of elephants which had been ravaging their crops. Elbel had refused to accept the explanation. He had retained the fifty men as hostages, and sent a detachment of his forest guards to bring in the unruly fifty and burn their village down. Jack could only express his sympathy: he felt that there was nothing to be done.

One morning Barney, who acted as storekeeper to the camp, reported that food was running short.

"Well, Imbono will supply us," replied Jack.

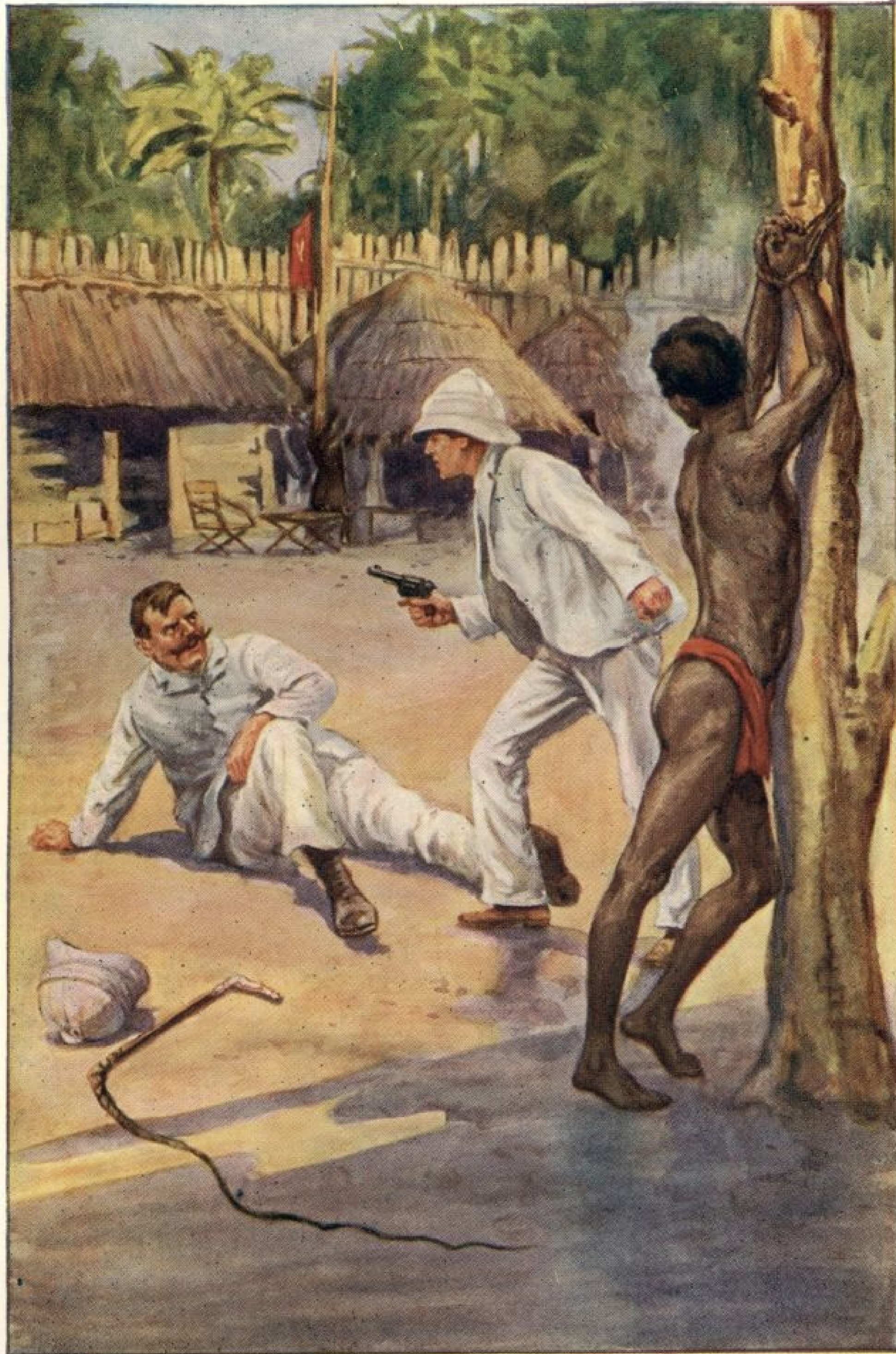
"Beggin' your pardon, sorr, Imbono has little enough for himself since Elbel and his blagyards came to the place. The thieving villains will have the best, and divil a ha'penny do they pay for it."

"We must have food. When I was at Akumbi the other day I saw a good crop of ground-nuts. I'll go over myself and see if I can arrange for a supply."

Akumbi was the smallest of the chief's villages, situated about five miles up the river. Jack set off early with Lepoko, taking the well-worn path through the fringe of forest. As he approached the village he heard cries of pain. Instinctively he quickened his steps and hurried through the gateway in the stockade; then he came upon a scene that made his blood boil. Tied to a tree was a youth, who, Lepoko told him, was the son of Lofundo, the sub-chief of the village. Elbel was thrashing the captive with the chicotte, every lash cutting into the quivering flesh and provoking shrieks of agony. Not another villager was to be seen; all had fled either into their huts or into the forest.

Infuriated at the sight, Jack forgot all counsels of prudence. He rushed towards the spot, peremptorily calling on Elbel to desist. The Belgian swung round savagely, gave one disdainful

look at the interrupter, and raised his arm with the intention of putting all his force into another stroke. But Jack sprang at the uplifted arm, caught Elbel by the wrist and arrested the blow. Wrenching himself free, the Belgian, livid with rage, made a fierce cut at Jack. He was too near for the long lash to have the full effect intended; but Jack felt the sting as the flexible thong curled round him. Then his attitude changed. Before, he had merely been conscious of a desire to protect the negro; now, he was afire with a personal grievance. Elbel had not time to raise the whip for a second stroke. Flinging out his left fist Jack caught him a smashing blow on the cheek, and followed it up with a right-hander which hurled him half senseless to the ground. Elbel staggered to his feet, presenting a piteous spectacle, blood streaming from his nose, his left eye half closed. He groped for his revolver, but the sight of Jack standing over him, pale but determined, revolver in hand ready for the next move, cowed him. He fumbled for a few seconds at his belt, then slunk away without a word.



Jack turns the tables

The village compound was immediately filled with a crowd of natives, who poured out of the

huts: whence they had secretly watched the scene. Jack was overwhelmed with protestations of gratitude. He cut the boy loose and restored him, bleeding from the lash, to his father. Then he extricated himself from the excited throng, took Lofundo aside, waived his demonstrations, and, completing the business on which he had come, left the village as soon as he could. Now that the heat of the moment was passed, he feared he had not done the villagers or himself any good. A personal affray with Elbel was the last thing he would have desired; and though he felt that he could hardly have acted otherwise than he had done, he was in anything but an elated mood when he returned to his camp.

He at once told Barney of what had occurred, and spoke of his misgivings.

"Arrah thin, sorr," said the Irishman, "I do not see any cause for disthress at all at all. The villain got his deserts, and 'twill tache him a lesson. Sure I'd like to have seen his face, the spalpeen!"

"But I'd no right to interfere, Barney; you can't get over that."

"Begging your pardon, sorr, I do not agree wid that at all. Ye may say a father has the right to thrash his children; 'twas the holy Solomon himself said so! But if he lays it on too heavy, the law steps in and says 'Hands off!' A farmer has a right to get work out uv his horse; but if he overtaxes the poor baste, the law steps in again and says 'No more uv that.' These poor niggers seem to have to work widout fair pay, and pay rent into the bargain. That's more than an Irishman would stand; and when the nigger-driver begins to maul 'em as well, worse than poor dumb beasts widout souls uv their own—be jabers! sorr, what would I do, if I saw a man ill-treating my Pat? I would knock him down, sorr, if he was the Lord-Liftinant himself!"

The fact that several days passed without any sign of resentment or vengeance on Elbel's part did not make Jack less uneasy. So far from his trouncing having a deterrent effect, the treatment of the natives became steadily worse. Things were following the inevitable course. The vines in the neighbourhood of the village had yielded all the rubber of which they were at present capable, and the men had to go continually further afield. This necessitated their remaining for days at a time away from their homes, in improvised shelters which afforded poor protection against the weather and the wild beasts. They had to put up with indifferent food that gave scanty nourishment. When, having collected the rubber, they returned at last to their homes, they could only remain there a couple of days, for the next demand was upon them. Meanwhile their families had been at the mercy of the forest guards. Day by day complaints came to Jack from Imbono of the brutalities of these ruffians, some of them so horrible that his whole being quivered with passionate indignation. Why did not his uncle return? How long must he remain helpless here, unable to lift a hand in defence of the oppressed?

One evening, just as he had retired to rest, he was woke by Barney and told that a strange negro had come to the gate and asked admittance. He had specially desired to see the Inglesa. Jack sent word that the man was to be brought to him, and awaited his coming outside the hut.

The negro came up in charge of Lepoko. By the light of his electric torch Jack saw a tall man, so much emaciated that he appeared almost a skeleton. His cheeks were sunken in, his arms and legs were no thicker than a child's, and—what was this! The man held up one arm; the hand was gone!

"Who is he?" asked Jack, shuddering at the sight of the half-healed stump.

"Him call Batukuno, sah. Come from Nsongo. Him carry baumba[2] to brudder, sah: Ekila, him forest guard, meet Batukuno, say, 'Gib me baumba.' Batukuno say, 'No can do: me carry to brudder.' Rubber day come. Batukuno bring basket; Ekila say, 'Rubber too much bad, Batukuno.' Batukuno say, 'No bad at all; good rubber all same.' Ekila laugh, sah; cut off Batukuno him hand."

"Just in revenge for not getting the baumba?"

"Rebenge, sah, rebenge, all same."

"But how came he here?"

"Boy Samba, sah. Him tell Batukuno Inglesa massa good white man, brudder Tanalay, oh yes! Inglesa no 'fraid Boloko, no 'fraid Elobela; Inglesa gib Batukuno hut, gib food, gib plenty rings. Him come long long way: hurt berrah much, sah, berrah sick; want eat, no can find nuff. Him hide long time 'cos 'fraid Boloko. Now hab got massa; no 'fraid no more; Boloko, Elobela, dem 'fraid now."

"Where is Samba then?"

"Samba him long long way: him go find fader and mudder."

"I was right after all," said Jack turning to Barney. "I'm glad to hear the boy's alive. Well, Lepoko, take Batukuno to one of the huts and give him some supper. Another sign of King Leopold's fatherly treatment, Barney! Uncle said they cut the hands from the dead, but it appears that the living are mutilated too."

"The curse uv Cromwell on them, sorr. But, begging your pardon, you made a mistake."

"How's that?"

"Sure you said 'twas my Irish English that sent little Samba away."

"Did I?" said Jack, laughing. "I'd forgotten it. He's a capital little fellow, Barney. Fancy, going by himself that long journey through the forest to find his people! And yet there are fools who think that because a man is black he hasn't feelings or affections like ourselves."

Batukuno was only the firstfruits of Samba's missionary zeal. From day to day, men, women, and children began to drop in at Jack's camp, many of them mutilated, all showing terrible signs of ill-usage and privation. Some were survivors of Samba's own people, the villagers of Banonga; but they numbered among them men from other tribes. Some had heard of the benevolent Inglesa from Samba's own lips; others from people he had told. Among them was an old chief, who appeared heart-broken at having been compelled to leave his country.

"Why did I leave, you ask, O white man!" he said in reply to a question of Jack's. "In the morning, bullets; in the evening, bullets. They shot our mouths away, they shot through our hearts and our sides. They robbed us of everything we had. Why should we stay to be killed like that? That is why I ran away."

"Were many of your people killed?"

"Ah, ah!" he replied, "once we were as bafumba[3] in multitude; now we are only as these."

He spread out his fingers twice or thrice.

"And they have been killed—not dying by the sleeping sickness?"

"No. We have lost a few by the sleeping sickness, but only a few. It is rubber that has killed our people. Botofé bo le iwa!"

Jack's sympathy was keenly enlisted on behalf of these unfortunate people; and he looked forward more and more eagerly for Mr. Martindale's return. He could not but smile a little whimsically, remembering his uncle's protestations, to find that Mr. Martindale was gaining a reputation for general philanthropy through a large section of the Upper Congo territory. But as the stream of fugitives showed no signs of diminishing he began to feel a certain embarrassment. It was all very well to open a cave Adullam for every one that was distressed: to start a hospital for the halt and lame and blind; but the space he had at command within his stockade was limited: already the huts he had reserved for Mr. Martindale and his men were occupied, and every fugitive meant another mouth to feed. He feared, too, lest the peace and order of his settlement should be disturbed by the influx of so many idle strangers. And more than all, he feared that some of the poor wretches who came seeking asylum with him would fall into the hands of Elbel ere they reached their desired haven. It was that consideration that induced him to refuse none who sought admittance. Elbel had been absent for some days from Ilola, and the fugitives, by choosing always the fall of night to approach the place, had so far managed to elude observation by their enemies. But that could not continue; the presence of strangers in Ilombikambua must soon become known to Elbel; then a watch would be set, and the wanderers would be intercepted. What their fate then would be Jack knew too well. None suffered so terribly at the hands of the forest guards as people caught straying from their villages. Such absences interfered with the regularity of the rubber supply, which in turn affected the revenue and reduced profits. No runagate serf in mediæval Europe was more severely dealt with than the Congo native who dared to range afield.

Jack could not hand the people over to Elbel's tender mercies; yet it would soon be impossible to find room for more. While he was puzzling how to deal with this perplexing situation it was suddenly made still more complicated. Early one morning he heard Pat barking with more than his usual vigour, and with a note of wild pleasure which he had not expressed for many a day. Leaving his hut to ask what had happened, he was met by the terrier, who ran up to him, leaped this way and that, darted off towards the gate, then back again, all the time barking with frantic joy. In a moment Jack saw the meaning of the dog's excitement. Samba himself was running towards him!

The boy flung himself down at Jack's feet, paying no attention even to Pat.

"I am glad to see you, very glad," said Jack in Samba's own tongue. "What have you been doing?"

His knowledge of the language was not great enough to permit him to follow Samba's answer, poured out as it was with great rapidity, and a pitiful earnestness that brought a lump to Jack's throat. But Lepoko was at hand, and translated faithfully.

Samba was in terrible distress. He had found his father and mother, and had brought them through peril and privation to the very verge of safety, when they fell among a number of forest guards evidently placed to intercept fugitives. All three were captured and taken to Boloko, who was beside himself with delight at the sight of his brother Mboyo a prisoner. He had a special

grudge against him, dating from their old rivalry in Banonga. Elbel had just returned from a visit to outlying villages; the prisoners had been carried before him, and when Boloko explained who they were, the Belgian ordered them to be tied up, and sentenced them to be thrashed publicly on the next day. Samba had contrived to escape from custody, and had now come to implore the Inglesa to save his parents. They were so worn out by their long journey, so ill from the hardships they had suffered, that they would certainly die under the whip.

"Poor little fellow!" said Jack, laying his hand soothingly on the boy's head. "The whipping is to be to-morrow? You are sure?"

Yes; Elobela would be absent this day; he would not return till the evening. The flogging was fixed for dawn on the following morning.

"Come into my hut; we will see what can be done. Barney, you come too."

"Niggers have no feelings!" said Barney, releasing Pat from the grasp in which he had been struggling while Samba told his story. "Begorra! they might as well say the same uv dogs!"

[1] Any kind of letter or document.

[2] Riches.

[3] Driver ants.

CHAPTER XIII

"Honour thy Father and thy Mother"

Jack felt himself in a distressing predicament. Could he allow Samba's father and mother, for whom he suspected the boy must have made heroic exertions, to undergo a punishment which, as he had learnt from more than one of the refugees, frequently ended in the death of the victim? Yet how prevent it? Whatever might be urged against it, the use of the chicotte had become established as a recognized instrument of administration in the Congo Free State. As a stranger and a foreigner he had, to begin with, no right to interfere, and his previous relations with Elbel had been such that a protest and an attempt at dissuasion would be equally useless. His action on behalf of Lofundo's son had been taken on the spur of the moment; it would not dispose Elbel to pay any attention to calmer and more deliberate measures now. Even a threat to report him would probably have no effect on the Belgian. He was only doing what the officers of the State, or the officials of the Trusts holding authority from the State, were accustomed to do, whether by themselves or their agents. A protest from Jack would merely aggravate the punishment of the wretched people.

Although Elbel had not taken any open step against Jack since their last meeting, the latter felt assured that he was nursing his spite and only awaiting a favourable opportunity to indulge it. Indeed it was likely that something had already been done. Perhaps Elbel was in communication with Boma. He had mentioned that a captain of the State forces was on his way up the river; for all that Jack knew the officer might deal very summarily with him when he arrived. That Elbel would tamely endure the humiliation he had suffered Jack did not for a moment believe.

Jack put these points to Barney.

"If I attempt to do anything for Samba's people," he added, "I must be prepared to back up my demands by force, and that will mean bloodshed. I can't run the risk, Barney. Uncle left me in charge, and, as I've told you, said I wasn't to fight except in self-defence."

"Bedad, sorr, but he'd fight himself if he were here."

"That may be, but I can't take the responsibility."

"Cannot we get the people out uv the scoundhrel's clutches widout fighting, sorr? The bhoy escaped, to be sure."

"True; how did you get away, Samba?"

The boy explained that he had been imprisoned separately from his parents: he did not know why. They had been chained by the neck and fastened to a tree in front of Boloko's hut; he had been roped by the ankle and secured to another tree farther away. In the middle of the night he had wriggled and strained at his bonds until, after much toil and pain, he had released his foot. Then, when the sentry's back was turned, he had slipped away, stolen behind the huts, and with

great difficulty clambered over the stockade.

"And are your parents still chained to the tree?"

Samba did not know. He had not ventured to approach them after releasing himself, for his sole hope was in the Inglesa, and if he were recaptured he knew that his parents' fate was sealed. But if the Inglesa wished, he would steal back into the village and see if the prisoners were still at the same spot.

"That will never do," said Jack. "The boy would certainly be caught, Barney."

"That's the truth, sorr. But 'tis the morning for Lingombela to go to the village for eggs; could he not find out what you wish to know?"

"He's a discreet fellow. Yes, let him try. He must be very careful. I wonder that Elbel has not forbidden our men to go into the village; and if he suspects any interference there'll be trouble."

Barney went out to send Lingombela on his errand. Meanwhile Jack got Samba to tell him, through Lepoko, how he had found his parents. The boy gave briefly the story of his wanderings, his perils from the wild beasts of the forest, his hunger and want, his capture by the Bambute, his escape, his adventure with the crocodile, his second capture and more successful escape under cover of a great forest storm. Jack was deeply impressed at the time; but many of the details came to him later from others, and each new fact added to his admiration for the indomitable young traveller.

The pigmies who had captured Samba at the river were a different tribe from those with whom he had lived in the forest. Like those, however, they made much of him, giving him plenty of food, but never letting him go out of their sight.

One night, a fierce tempest swept through the forest, snapping great trees and whirling them about like feathers. Thunder crashed, lightning cut black paths through the foliage; and the Bambute cowered in their huts, dreading lest these should be crushed by a falling tree or scorched by the lightning's flame, yet feeling safer within than without. But Samba rejoiced in the elemental disturbance. Reckless of the terrors of the storm in his fixed determination to escape, he stole out when the uproar was at its height and plunged into the forest. All other peril was banished by the fury of the tempest. Once he passed a leopard within a few feet, but the beast was too much scared by the lightning to seize the opportunity of securing an easy meal.

After many days of wandering and privation Samba came within a day's journey of what had been his village. Stumbling accidentally upon one of his fellow-villagers, he told him his story, and was taken by him to a cave in the forest where several of the fugitives from Banonga were in hiding, some badly wounded. Samba came to them like a sunbeam. What he told them about Mr. Martindale gave them courage and hope. Some set off at once to seek out the Inglesa whose praise Samba was so loud in singing; they would implore his protection: others, more timorous or less hardy, dreading the long and toilsome journey, resolved to remain where they were, for they were at least in no straits for food. None of them could give Samba any news of his parents: so after remaining a day or two with them he went on alone. He reached the site of the desolated village in the evening, and took refuge in the branches of a tree. His intention was to push on next day and search the forest beyond the village. But with morning light something impelled him to wander round the scene of his happy childhood. Here had stood his father's hut; there, not far away, the old chief Mirambo had dwelt. It seemed to Samba that the place was altered in appearance since he had left it in company with Mr. Martindale. An attempt had been made to repair the ruins of Mirambo's hut. Somewhat startled, Samba approached it curiously, and was still more startled to hear low groans proceeding from a spot where a corner of the site had been covered with rough thatch. Entering, he discovered with mingled joy and terror that his father and mother lay there, nearly dead from wounds and starvation.

With the negro's instinct for returning to his old haunts, Mboyo had come back with his wife to Banonga, and managed to rig up a precarious shelter in his father's shattered hut. Then his strength failed him. He had been wounded in the attack on the village, but had made good his escape to the forest with his favourite wife. His other wives and children had disappeared; of them he never heard again. The unwonted exposure soon told upon his wife Lukela; she fell ill, and, weakened as Mboyo was by his wounds, they were unable to scour the forest as they might otherwise have done for food. As the days passed their condition had gone from bad to worse, and at last they had painfully, despairingly, made their way back to their old home, to die.

But Samba did not mean them to die. He set himself at once to rescue them. As he knew well, there was little or no food near by; the wanton destruction of plantations had been very thorough. They were too weak to travel. He emptied his tin, to which he had clung through all his wanderings, of the food it contained, and making a rough barrier for them against wild beasts, cheered them with hopeful words and started back on his tracks for a further supply of food.

When he reached the cavern where he had left his fellow-villagers, he found it empty. Apparently even the timid ones had set off to seek the protection of the good Inglesa. He could do nothing that night, but next morning he went down to the stream whence they had obtained their supply of fish and plied his spear until he had caught several. Then he made the long journey

back, filling his tin as he went with berries and nuts and anything else from which nourishment could be obtained. His parents were already a little better, thanks to the food he had already given them, and perhaps also to the new spirit awakened in them by the unexpected arrival of their dearly loved son.

Thus for several days Samba watched over them, making long journeys for food. Each time he left them his absence became more prolonged; food was harder to get, and he was less able to hunt for it. While his parents slowly regained a little strength, Samba weakened from day to day. At last he could scarcely drag one foot after the other; he was worn out by the terrible fatigue of constant marching through the forest, and by want of sleep, for he stinted himself of rest so that his parents might be left alone as little as possible. More than once he sank exhausted to the ground, feeling that he could go no farther, do no more. His strength was spent; his head swam with dizziness; a mist gathered before his eyes. Thus he would remain, half conscious, perhaps for minutes, perhaps for hours; he knew not: he had lost count of time. Then with the enforced rest the small remnant of his strength returned to him, and with it the memory of his parents' plight. Upon him depended the life of the two beings he held dearest in the world. As the perils to which they were exposed were borne in upon his fevered intelligence he would struggle to his feet, and grope his way painfully along the forest track, his feet blistered, his flesh torn with spikes and thorns: above all, a dreadful gnawing hunger within him, for he would scarcely spare himself sufficient food for bare sustenance while his parents were ill and in want.

This dark and terrible period was illumined by one ray of hope. His weariness and toil were bearing fruit. Day by day his parents grew stronger; in a fortnight they were able to move about, and a week later they were ready to start for the cavern. But now it was Samba who required tendance. He could walk only a few yards at a time, supported by Mboyo, who almost despaired of reaching the cavern before starvation again overtook them. But the weary journey was completed at last, and after a few days' stay at the cavern within easier reach of food, the party became fit to undertake a longer march, and set out hopefully for Mr. Martindale's camp.

Jack could only conjecture what the terrors of that march had been, for before Samba's story was finished Lepoko returned from the village. He reported that Elobela, furious at the boy's escape, had announced that he would double the punishment to be meted out to his parents. This practice of striking at children through parents, and at parents through children, was so much the rule in the Congo system of tax collection that Jack did not doubt Elbel would carry out his threat. Meanwhile the two prisoners had been removed from the open air before Boloko's hut at the far side of the village, and conveyed to a stoutly-built fetish hut near the stockade. This change of quarters had provoked murmurs not only from the villagers, but from Elbel's own men. The fetish hut was sacred to the medicine man of the village, and even he affected to approach it with fear and trembling. The whole population was talking about the desecration of the hut by the presence of the two captives; men were shaking their heads and saying that something would happen; and the medicine man himself—a hideous figure with his painted skin—did not fail to seize the opportunity of inflaming the minds of the villagers against the impious white man. But no one ventured to remonstrate with Elbel. He meanwhile had gone off with a number of forest guards to an outlying village, leaving orders that the captives were to be watched with particular vigilance.

Samba's face was an image of despair as he listened to Lepoko's report. What hope was there of his parents' rescue now?

"Poor little chap!" said Jack. "After going through so much for them he'll be heart-broken if he loses them now. What can we do for him, Barney?"

"Faith, I can see nothing for it, sorr, but to lead a storming party. And I would go first, wid the greatest pleasure in life."

"That's out of the question, especially as Elbel's away. All's fair in war, they say, Barney; but I shouldn't like to attack the village in Elbel's absence. In any case I don't want to fight if there's any other way. Samba, run away with Pat; don't go beyond the gate; I want to see if I can think of any way of helping your parents."

Both the white men were touched by the boy's wistful look as he left the hut. Jack stuck his legs out straight in front of him, plunged his hands into his pockets, and bent his head upon his breast as he pondered and puzzled. Barney sat for a time leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, smoking an old clay pipe. But he soon tired of inaction, and rising, proceeded to open a tin of oatmeal biscuits in anticipation of lunch. He had just wrenched the lid off when Jack sprang up with a sudden laugh and slapped him on the shoulder.

"I have it, Barney!" he cried. "They said something would happen; well, they were right; something shall happen, old man. And it's your doing!"

"Mine, sorr! Niver a thing have I done this blessed day but smoke me pipe, and just this very minute tear a hole in my hand wid this confounded tin."

"That's it, Barney! It was the tin gave me the idea. You know how giants are made for the Christmas pantomimes?"

"Divil a bit, sorr."

"Well, don't look so surprised. Empty that tin of biscuits while I tell you, and when that's empty, open another and do the same."

"Bedad, sorr, but all the biscuits will spoil."

"Let 'em spoil, man, let 'em spoil. No, I don't mean that, but at present I think more of the tissue paper in those tins than of the biscuits. We'll make a framework, Barney—any stalks or sticks will do for that—and cover it with that tissue paper, and paint a giant's face and shoulders on the paper, and we must find some coloured glass or something for the eyes, and something white for the teeth. We have some candles left, luckily. Don't you think, Barney, a lighted candle behind the paper would make a very decent sort of bogie?"

"And is that the way, sorr, they make the giants at the pantomime?"

"Something like that, Barney. But what do you think of the idea?"

"'Tis the divil's own cleverness in it, sorr. But I'll niver enjoy a pantomime any more, now that I know the way 'tis done. And how will ye go to work wid the bogie, sorr?"

"Why, we'll make the framework to fit my shoulders. Then you'll see. The first thing is to get it made. Go and get the materials. We shall want sticks about three feet long, and ngoji cane[1] to tie them together, as there are no nails here. And you must send over to Imbono and ask for some colouring matter. Red and black are all we shall need. I don't know what we shall do for the eyes; there's no coloured glass handy, I suppose. We must do without if we can't find anything. Now, hurry up, Barney, and send Lepoko to me."

For the rest of the day Jack and Barney were very busy in the hut. It was an easy matter to put the bamboo framework together. The tissue paper from the two biscuit tins proved just sufficient to cover it. When this was done, Jack sketched with his pencil as ugly a face as his artistic imagination was capable of suggesting, then laid on the pigments with his shaving brush, no other being at hand. He gave the giant very thick red lips, opened in a hideous grin, heightening the effect by carefully tying in a number of goat's teeth. The eyes presented a difficulty. No coloured glass could be found among any of the villagers' treasures, and after several attempts to supply its place with leaves, petals of red flowers, and glass beads stuck together, Jack decided that the best effect would be made by leaving the eye slits empty. The making of the bogie was kept a close secret between himself and Barney; but he got some of his men to make two light bamboo ladders, which they did with great expedition, wondering not a little to what use Lokolobolo would put them.

In the afternoon, as soon as he was assured that his bogie would turn out a success, Jack sent Lepoko into Ilola to foment the villagers' fear that the desecration of the fetish hut would certainly be followed by a visit from the offended spirit. He was to talk very seriously of a great medicine man he had once met on the coast, who knew all about the spirits of the streams and woods, and those who protected the forest villages. One of these spirits, said the medicine man, took the form of a giant, and any mortal upon whom he breathed would surely die. Jack knew that this story would be repeated by the villagers to the forest guards, and would soon be the property of the whole community. Reckoning upon the fact that Elbel had his quarters near the gate of the stockade, and that the fetish hut was on the opposite side of the enclosure, not far from the stockade itself, so that the whole width of the village separated them, Jack hoped to create such a panic among the superstitious sentries that he would have time to free the captives before Elbel could intervene.

At dead of night, when he believed that the enemy must be sound asleep, Jack left his camp silently, accompanied only by Samba. He himself carried the bogie; the boy had the ladders. But even his own parents would not have recognized the Samba of this midnight sortie. Jack had been much interested on the way up the Congo by a kind of acacia which, when cut with an axe, exudes a sticky substance, emitting in the darkness a strong phosphorescent glow. With this substance a series of rings had been drawn on Samba's body, and he wore on his head a number of palm leaves arranged like the Prince of Wales's feathers, smeared with the same sticky material. He made an awful imp in attendance on the horrific monster.

Samba stepping close behind Jack to avoid observation, the two made their way stealthily around the village, keeping within the fringe of the encircling forest. Then Jack fixed the bogie upon his shoulders, lighted the candles placed in sconces of twigs cunningly constructed by Barney, and crept forward towards the stockade, closely followed by Samba, both bending low so as to escape discovery before the right moment.

Lepoko had reported that two sentries had been placed over the fetish hut. Jack guessed that by this time their nerves would be at pretty high tension, and that they would not improbably be keeping a safe distance from the awful place they had been set to guard. One of the ladders was planted by Samba against the stockade. On this Jack mounted, and the hideous countenance rose slowly and majestically above the palisade.

A small oil lamp swung from the eaves of the hut. By its light Jack saw the two sentries some distance away, but near enough to keep an eye on the entrance so that the inmates could not

break out unnoticed. At first they did not see the apparition. To quicken their perception, Jack gave a weird chuckle—a sound that would have startled even sturdy English schoolboys in the depth of night. The negroes turned round instantly; there was one moment of silence: then shrieking with fear they rushed helter-skelter into the darkness.

Taking the second ladder from Samba, Jack calmly descended on the other side, and was quickly followed by the boy. The latter made straight for the fetish hut. A light shone through the entrance immediately he had entered; there was a muffled shriek; then voices in rapid talk, followed by the sound of heavy hammering. By the light of Jack's electric torch Samba was breaking the fetters.

By this time the whole village was astir. At the first instant of alarm every man, woman, and child gave utterance to a yell; but as soon as they caught sight of the dreadful apparition, the vengeful spirit Whose visit had been predicted, the giant with hideous jaw and flaming eyes, they ceased their cries, and scampered in awestruck silence across the compound towards the gate.

Slowly Samba's parents limped out of the hut after him, and with his assistance mounted the ladder and descended on the other side of the stockade. Jack had bidden Samba take them for a time into the forest. To harbour them in his camp would involve further embroilment with Elbel, a thing to be avoided if possible. They had barely disappeared in the darkness when a shot rang out, and Jack felt something strike the framework above his head. Elbel had been awakened from sleep by the first yell, but on leaving his hut found himself enveloped in so thick a crowd of quivering, panic-stricken negroes that he could neither see what had caused their alarm nor get an answer to his irritable questions. The delay had been just long enough to allow the prisoners to escape.

Jack heard Elbel's voice raging at the people. As another shot whizzed by he reached up and extinguished the candles, then slipped over the stockade, drawing the ladder after him. Burdened with the bogie and the two ladders he hastened away into the forest. For some minutes he wandered about, missing the guidance of Samba, who was with his parents. At length he struck the path, and making his best speed regained his camp. Barney was awaiting him at the gate with loaded rifle, the trained men drawn up under arms.

"The bogie did it!" he cried, feeling very hot and tired now that his task was accomplished.

"Praise be!" ejaculated Barney. "Eyes front! Present arrms! Dismiss!"

[1] This abounds in the forest, and is alike nails, string, and rope for the natives.

CHAPTER XIV

Lokolobolo's First Fight

"I am afraid we are in for it now," said Jack, as he sat with Barney, when the camp had become quiet, discussing the situation. "Elbel will know well enough who played the bogie, and he has now another grievance against me. I wonder what he will do."

"I would not disthress meself about it at all, sorr," said Barney. "He had a peep at a Pepper's ghost widout paying for a ticket, and 'tis himself that ought to be plased."

"Don't you ever have a fit of the dumps, Barney? You seem to live always in the top of spirits."

"What would be the good uv doing anything else, sorr? I've too little flesh on me bones now; what would I be if I grizzled?"

"I'm glad enough, I assure you. I don't know what I should have done without you. Uncle little imagined what he was leaving me to. Do you think anything has happened to him? It is three months since he went away, and five weeks since I had any news of him. I am getting anxious."

"'Tis true he is behind, like the cow's tail, sorr. An 'tis meself can explain it. Ye see, sorr, I've noticed wan thing about these niggers. Time is not much to an Irishman, to be sure, but 'tis less than nothing to a nigger. They don't keep count uv the days; an almanac would be clean beyond them; and 'tis my belief Nando has just put the master back a month, sorr, unbeknown."

"That's an original explanation, at any rate. But by Jove! here's Samba again. What does he want now?"

"Him say mudder lib for plenty sick, sah," said Lepoko, called in to interpret. "Mudder plenty tired fust; muss stand all de night in hut; no gib no food; her no can go no more; tumble down in forest. Samba say please massa, let fader and mudder come; please, please, massa, please,

massa, him say please massa plenty too much all time."

"We must have them in, I suppose," said Jack, unable to resist the appeal in Samba's eyes and gestures. "I didn't want them here, they only add to our dangers and difficulties. Let him fetch them, Lepoko; he must be careful; if they are captured again they are sure to be shot."

Samba's face shone with delight. He scampered away. An hour passed before he returned. Mboyo was carrying his wife in his arms; she was in the last stage of exhaustion. They were given shelter in Lepoko's hut; and that night, when Samba curled himself up to sleep with Pat, for the first time for many weeks he was a happy boy.

Jack had but just finished his breakfast next morning when a note was brought him from Elbel.

MONSIEUR,—

On m'a fait informer que les deux individus échappés de ce village sont a présent réfugiés dans votre camp. J'ai l'honneur de vous sommer de rendre ces individus immédiatement, en outre le petit garçon dont j'ai déjà demandé la reddition. Au cas que lesdits sujets de PEtat du Congo ne soient pas ramenés dans ce village avant midi cejourd'hui, je serai obligé de faire à leur égard des démarches qui me sembleront bonnes.

Agréez, monsieur, l'assurance de ma
considération distinguée,
ELBEL,
Agent de la Société cosmopolite
du Commerce du Congo.

"What do you think of this, Barney? He says he's been told that the two persons who escaped from Ilola are now in my camp. He has the honour to request that I will give them up at once. Listen: 'In case the said subjects of the Congo State are not brought back to this village by noon to-day, I shall be compelled to take such steps in regard to them as may seem to me good.' Very precise and formal. My answer shall be a little shorter."

He lost no time in penning his reply. He wrote:

SIR,—

The three people you mention are with me. I shall be glad to learn the offence with which they are charged, and by what authority you take it upon yourself to try them and punish them.

Yours truly,
JOHN CHALLONER.

"We shall get no answer to that, Barney."

But he was mistaken. A second note was brought him in which Elbel refused to explain or justify his actions to Monsieur Challoner. He was responsible to his Société and to the administration of the Free State. He repeated his threat that at twelve o'clock, failing compliance with his demand, he would take steps to recover the fugitives, and concluded by saying that Monsieur Challoner must be answerable for the consequences.

"The fat's in the fire now, sorr," said Barney, when Jack had translated this letter to him. "I suppose you'll just say 'Go and be hanged' in answer to that?"

"No. I shan't answer it on paper. The crisis has come at last, Barney. I couldn't attack Elbel yesterday and be responsible for the first blow. But things are changed now. His action in regard to these poor people is sheer persecution; they've sought my protection, and no Englishman that I ever heard of has given up a wretch fleeing from persecution. We'll have to stand firm now, Barney. Elbel shan't get hold of them if I can prevent it."

"I'm wid ye, sorr, heart and soul. Sure an Irishman is not the man to stand by and see poor people ill-treated. What'll we do to get ready for him, sorr?"

"You can go and get some of the men to rig up platforms at several points inside the stockade. What a lucky thing it was we taught 'em how to board and floor the huts! Those planks will come in handy now. And stay: set two or three men to bore loopholes in the stockade—not our riflemen; the men who've lost their right hands can manage that, perhaps, with their left if they try. Meanwhile, parade the riflemen. I'll come out to them in a few minutes."

When the men were paraded, Jack felt very proud of his little company. They were all alert, eager, ready. Jack explained to them through Lepoko what the difficulty was.

"I don't want you to fight against your will," he said. "If any man is unwilling to fight he may leave the camp if he chooses, or remain and do any other work required. But if he elects to fight he must obey orders, do his best, and never give in. You understand that: never give in!"

The men responded with loud cries of approval. Not a man of them fell out of the ranks. The exercise and drill they had undergone had filled them with military ardour; they were proud of their new accomplishments, and evidently eager to test them in earnest. And the white officials were so well hated that the opportunity of setting one at defiance was in itself a sufficient motive. Jack paid them a compliment on their readiness to serve—the negro dearly loves praise—and after inspecting each man's rifle and ammunition, dismissed them to various duties in the camp until the moment for action arrived.

The day's water supply had scarcely been got in, and there were no vessels at hand for storing a large quantity. The stock of food in the camp was sufficient to keep the whole population for three days on full rations, and might be eked out for a week or more if each man's allowance was reduced. It was inevitable that the idea of a siege should cross Jack's mind, and he foresaw that the difficulty about water would prove serious. Meanwhile, he could at least send out a few men to obtain supplies of food from the chief's other villages. He chose for this errand the men least likely to be useful as fighters, and impressed on them the necessity of avoiding Elbel's men. It would not be long before Elbel had the surrounding country closely patrolled, and then no man would be able to approach without taking his life in his hand. What supplies they should succeed in collecting were to be held concealed in the forest until there was an opportunity of conveying them into the camp without danger.

There were now within his stockade, besides himself and Barney, twenty-two men armed with rifles; the chief Mboyo, with his wife and Samba; fifteen men, ten women, and twenty-five children who had sought asylum with him; and the livestock of the natives—a few goats and fowls. Pat was one by himself. There were rifles for twenty men besides the twenty-two, but the fugitives were too much maimed, or too much reduced in strength by their sufferings, to make it seem worth while to arm them. Four or five, however, had recovered very rapidly, and seemed likely to prove useful recruits. They had at any rate enough reason for fighting well; not only on behalf of their chief, but in memory of their own sufferings. Pending an opportunity of teaching them the use of the rifle, Jack armed them with spears and employed them as sentries. A careful watch was kept to guard against surprise, which was little likely to occur in broad daylight across the wide open space between the two settlements.

Jack awaited with no little anxiety the approach of noon, trying to forecast Elbel's course of action. The Belgian had, so far as he had been able to gather, about sixty men armed with Albini rifles, with probably as many hangers-on; but the natives' conceptions of arithmetic are so vague that this information could not be relied on; the actual number might be larger or smaller. It was not likely that the followers of the forest guards could be utilized as fighting men; but the guards themselves were well armed and full of confidence, for they had become accustomed to lording it over the virtually unarmed and helpless populace from whose forced labour the Congo Free State derives its profits. Jack was quite prepared to find that Elbel, knowing that his opponent's men had but recently been armed, and were not, like his own men, to all intents professional soldiers, would think himself strong enough to rush the camp, especially as, since the day of his arrival, the Belgian had appeared to show no further interest in the force at Jack's disposal.

"Perhaps he thinks we've drilled them merely for parade," he remarked with a smile to Barney. "But I think he'll find we can hold our own. I'm not afraid of a direct attack. But if he tries to starve us out it'll be a different matter. I'm bothered about the water."

"Be aisy, sorr. Whin I was a bhoy me mother often did not know at breakfast time where the supper was coming from; but I only went to bed wance widout it, and that was whin I'd eaten it before the time, and was put to bed early as a punishment."

Soon after twelve o'clock the sentries reported that the white man was approaching from the direction of the village. Jack hastened to the platform near the gate, which he had had barricaded, and saw Elbel at the head of about forty men, at his side a negro bearing a white flag. About fifty yards from the stockade he halted, and formally demanded the surrender of the fugitives. In phrases as formal as his own Jack replied that they would not be given up.

While this brief exchange of courtesies was going on, the sentries stationed on similar platforms within the stockade had turned round with natural curiosity to see what was passing, and withdrew their attention from the ground they were supposed to be watching. All at once Jack felt a tug at his arm, and looking round, saw Samba excitedly pointing to the rear of the camp. A score of Elbel's riflemen were scurrying across the open ground. To Jack's surprise they were headed by a white man in military uniform. Was this the Captain Van Vorst, he wondered, who, Elbel had told him, was coming up the river? Had he to contend with a regular officer of the State as well as an official of the Concession? One thing was clear, that while his attention was being held by the parade of the men in front, an attempt was being made to rush the camp from the rear.

Jack gave no sign of his discovery, but quietly ordered Barney to take ten men with rifles and five with spears and deal with the attackers when their heads or hands appeared above the stockade.

"Keep out of sight until they're upon you," he added in a low tone. "Fifteen men on the platform will be equal to more than double their number trying to scramble over."

He had kept his face turned towards Elbel as he spoke, apparently intent upon a serious consideration of what the Belgian was saying.

"I varn you. Dis is not child's play. Vunce more I say gif up de people; den I interfere no more. I am satisfied. But if you refuse, den I repeat: I will haf de people, and you shall see vat it is to defy de officers of de Free State."

Jack was spared the necessity of replying. A series of yells and cries of pain told that the rear attack had begun. Next moment a couple of shots rang out from the trees behind Elbel, and Jack, whose head just appeared over the stockade, felt one bullet whistle close above his topee, while a second embedded itself beside him in one of the saplings of which the stockade was constructed. Taken in conjunction with the attempted surprise, this was as close an approximation to the methods of an assassin as could well be imagined; and Jack, as he dodged down out of harm's way, felt, not for the first time, that he had to deal with a man who was not only astute but quite unscrupulous.

In less than a minute the attack on the stockade had become general. The assailants showed no want of dash. Perhaps they were encouraged by the impunity with which they had hitherto made their assaults on native villages similarly protected. But the conditions were different now. The defenders were armed with weapons as precise and deadly as those of the attackers themselves. Elbel's men came forward at a rush, in a more or less compact body, and Jack was amply satisfied with the result of his training as his men, at a sign from him, poured a volley through the loopholes bored in the stockade, while the enemy were still a dozen yards distant. Several of them dropped; Jack's men were completely screened from any effectual reply.

The moral effect of white leadership became apparent when the forest guards, scarcely realizing their losses in the excitement of their dash towards the stockade, helped one another to swarm up, many effecting a lodgment on the top. It was at this point that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the defenders of an African village would have flung away their arms and run. But the discipline of the past two months told. At Jack's command, before the enemy on the stockade had made their footing sufficiently sure to enable them to use their weapons, the men within, clubbing their rifles, sprang at them and hurled them to the ground.

Meanwhile Barney, who thanks to Samba's watchfulness had been enabled to forestall the surprise in the rear, had beaten off the attack and sent the enemy scurrying for cover. Leaving only three or four men under Lepoko to watch the position there, Jack was able to bring almost the whole of his force to bear on repelling the main attack. Elbel had greatly reduced his chances of success by detaching a third of his body; and he entirely lost their co-operation, for when they were repulsed by Barney they made no attempt to rally, but simply disappeared from the fight.

Elbel and his men were crouching at the foot of the stockade in temporary security, for in that position the defenders could not bring their rifles to bear upon them. Jack heard him give his men an order; in a few seconds a crowd of black heads again appeared above the stockade, but now some thirty yards from the point where the first assault had been made. With Barney at his right hand Jack led his men to the spot. From his platform he might have shot the attackers down with comparative ease; but he was determined from the first to do his best to avoid bloodshed, never forgetting his uncle's injunction to use rifles only in the last resort. The enemy themselves had no chance of firing, for they no sooner showed their heads above the palisade than they were beset by the defenders. There was a brisk five minutes in which Jack and Barney found plenty to do leading their men wherever the show of heads, hands, and shoulders over the stockade was thickest. Barney was in his element. His rifle fell like a flail, and for every blow that got home he shouted a wild "Hurroo!" which evoked responsive yells from the negroes beside him, catching his enthusiasm. Jack's heart glowed as he saw how stoutly they fought.

It was not until the enemy had made two attempts to mount the stockade that they realized how very different their present task was from the massacre of unresisting men, women, and children that had hitherto represented their idea of fighting. The first repulse merely surprised and enraged them: they could not understand it; they were not accustomed to such a reception; and they yelled forth threats of exacting a terrible vengeance. But when for the second time they found themselves hurled back, they had no heart for further effort. Suddenly Elbel discovered that he was alone, except for one man lying stark beside him; the unwounded had scampered across the open to the shelter of the nearest trees. Some half dozen who had been hit with rifle bullets or clubbed at the palisade, were dragging themselves painfully towards the same shelter.

Jack, watching from his platform, perceived that Elbel was not among the retreating crowd. Was he hurt, he wondered? The next moment, however, he saw the Belgian sprint after his men, bending his head between his shoulders as a boy does to avoid a snowball. Several of Jack's men who had joined him on the platform brought their rifles to the shoulder, and only a curt stern order from Jack to drop their weapons saved Elbel from almost certain death.

"Bedad, thin, 'tis a pity not to let them have their way, sorr," expostulated Barney.

"That may be," replied Jack, "but I'm only on the defensive, remember. We're in no danger for the present; they've had enough of it; it's not for me to continue the fight. I hope Elbel has learnt a lesson and will leave us alone."

"Sure I do not agree wid you at all at all, sorr," said Barney, shaking his head. "To judge by the phiz uv him, Elbel is a disp'rate bad character. And isn't it all his deeds that prove it, with his whips and his forest guards—blagyards I call 'em—and all? Why, sorr, whin ye knocked him down the other day, why didn't he stand up fair and square and have it out wid ye? 'Twas an illigant chance which no gentleman, no Irishman, bedad! would have missed for worlds. Gentleman! 'Tis not the fortieth part uv a gentleman he has anywhere about him. 'Twas not the trick uv a gentleman to try to take ye by the back stairs while he blarneyed ye at the front door. And did he not try to murder ye before the fight began? A dirty trick, sorr; I would have let my men shoot him widout the hundredth part uv a scruple."

Jack was compelled to smile at Barney's honest indignation.

"All you say is very true," he said, "but we couldn't take a leaf out of his book, you know, Barney. Besides, look at it in another way. Suppose we shot Elbel? What would happen to uncle's mining venture? There's another Belgian here—I wonder where he came from. Apparently he has skedaddled. He'd certainly go and report to the authorities what had happened. You may be sure he wouldn't put our side of the case; and even if he did, there's no knowing how the Free State people would twist the evidence. They say the Free State judges are completely under the thumb of the executive. No doubt Elbel himself—who I suppose has to account for the cartridges his men use—will report this fight as a little affair with natives revolting against the rubber collection. He hasn't come well enough out of it to be anxious to call general attention to the matter. We've got off with a few bruises, I'm thankful to say; and we may very well be satisfied to let the quarrel rest there if Elbel takes no further steps."

Barney shook his head.

"Ye're a powerful hand at argyment, sorr," he said, "and ye'd be elected at the top uv the poll if ye stood as mimber uv Parlimint for Kilkenny. But an Irishman niver goes by argyment: he goes by his feelings, and my feeling is that there's no good at all in a man who refuses such an illigant chance uv a stand-up fight."

"Well, he's not altogether a ruffian. Look! there are three of his negroes coming with a flag of truce, to fetch the poor fellow who was killed, I expect. The State officials as a rule look on the negro as so much dirt; but Elbel seems to have some of the instincts of a human being."

"Bedad thin, I wouldn't be surprised if they're cannibals come for their dinner."

"Shut up, Barney. It's too terrible to think of. You'll take away my appetite; here's Samba, coming to tell us, I hope, that dinner's ready."

Jack scanned the neighbourhood. Save for the negroes carrying their dead comrade there was no sign of the enemy. He left two sentries on guard and returned to his hut, hot and famished. The sultry heat of the tropical afternoon settled down over the camp. Outside the stockade all was still; inside, the natives squatted in front of their huts, volubly discussing the incidents of the morning, and watching the antics of Pat, who, having been tied up, much to his disgust, during the fight, was profiting by his liberty to romp with the children.

The victory did not pass unchronicled. Before the negroes retired to rest, one of them had composed a song which will be handed down from father to son and become a tradition of his tribe:—

To the house of the dog
To fight Lokolobolo.
Inglesa was he,
Brave Lokolobolo,
Lion and leopard,
Friend of Imbono,
Chief of Ilola.

Came Elobela,
(*Chorus*) Yah!
Bad Elobela,
(*Chorus*) Yo!
To the house of the dog
Came Lokolobolo,
(*Chorus*) Yah! Yo!
Short was the fight.
Where is he now,
Sad Elobela?
Gone to the forest,
Beating his head,

Hiding his eyes
From Lokolobolo,
Friend of Imbono,
Lion and leopard,
Brave Lokolobolo.

CHAPTER XV

A Revolt at Ilola

Every day since the advent of Elbel, Jack had been conscious of the growing danger of his position. A negro village, in the grip of rubber collectors; adjacent to it, a little settlement occupied mainly by negroes, many of whom were fugitives from a tyranny illegal indeed, but regularized by custom; in both settlements, natives who looked to him for help against their oppressors. It was a situation difficult enough to daunt the pluckiest lad not yet eighteen. But it is lads like Jack Challoner who make one of the prime glories of our Anglo-Saxon race. Is not page after page of our national annals filled with the deeds of youths—drummers, buglers, ensigns, midshipmen—who have stepped forward in moments of crisis, and shown a noble courage, a devotion to duty, and a capacity beyond their years?

Jack did not quail before the responsibility his uncle had all unwittingly thrown upon him, even though he knew that his victory over the Belgian might enormously increase his difficulties. Already he had wondered why Elbel had not put his settlement in a state of siege. The only conclusion he could come to was that the man was little more than a blusterer, without enough imagination to conceive the right means to adopt, or destitute of sufficient organizing power to put them in force. It would have been a comparatively simple matter, seeing his overwhelming strength in point of numbers, to prevent Jack from securing his needful supply of water from the stream; but day by day Elbel had allowed the women with their calabashes to go and come unmolested. Surely, Jack thought, he would now at any rate take that most obvious step towards the reduction of his enemy. And as he sat in his hut that evening, his head racked with pain from long thinking, he felt sick at heart as he realized how the fate of these poor people who had sought his aid seemed to depend on him alone.

Just as darkness had fallen, the chief Imbono came into the camp. Elbel had forbidden any one to leave the village, but the chief had bribed the sentry and been allowed to pass. He came to report that his young men had just returned from their rubber hunt after a week's absence in the forest, and learning of what had taken place, were bent on exacting vengeance for the insults and injuries inflicted on their people by the forest guards and by Elbel himself. With his defeat the Belgian's prestige had utterly gone, and to the ignorant negroes the opportunity seemed favourable for revenge. But Imbono, more far-seeing than they, had come to ask advice. He had great difficulty in holding his men in. Should he let them loose, to work their will upon their oppressors?

Jack earnestly advised the chief to do his utmost to restrain them.

"Believe me, my brother," he said, "if they do as you say they wish to do, it will almost certainly bring ruin upon you. Elobela will be only too glad to have an excuse for visiting upon you the rancour caused by his reverse. True, he failed to force my camp; but he is still stronger in arms and men than I. I could do nothing to help you; for if I once move out of the shelter of my stockade, I shall be at Elobela's mercy. In the open it is only rifles that count."

"I will do as you say, O Lokolobolo. But it is hard for me, for since the coming of Elobela my people do not obey me as they used to do. If I say, do this, Elobela forbids it; if I say, refrain from this, Elobela bids them do it. It is hard for them to serve two masters. But I will tell them what my brother says; I can do no more."

"You have another white man with you now, besides Elobela?"

"It is true, and he was struck by one of the balls from your guns, and is now lying sick in my hut: they have turned me out, and Elobela has said that I am no more to provide food for you, my brother, either from Ilola or from my other villages. But one of my young men told me that the party you sent out have obtained a supply, and wait in the forest until you bid them bring it in."

Jack thanked the chief, who returned to his village.

The news he brought was not of a kind to lessen Jack's anxiety. What he had expected had at last happened. He had little doubt that the commandeering of food would soon be followed by the stoppage of his water supply. Without access to water the camp was doomed. It was possible that if he made common cause with Imbono their united forces might overcome Elbel's forest guards; but the attempt could be made only at a terrible risk, and if it failed the whole population of the two settlements must be annihilated. Jack saw now that the presence of his camp so near Ilola was a source of danger to it. This could not have been foreseen; but how much better it would

have been, he thought, if he had chosen a different site. At another spot, remote from the village, with a more defensible position, and near a good water supply, the present weaknesses would not have existed, and at all events Imbono might not have been involved in the consequences of the quarrel with Elbel.

But it was too late to think of that. Certainly no move could be made while Elbel was close by with a considerable force. If Elbel took advantage of his superiority to hold the camp closely invested, there would never be any possibility of moving at all. Deprived of water, Jack must soon choose between the alternatives—to surrender, or to make a sally at the head of his men and put all to the hazard of an open fight.

Two days passed. Jack kept a close watch on Ilola through his field-glass; all seemed quiet there, and of Elbel himself he saw nothing. What was his amazement, when at daybreak he took his stand on the platform overlooking Ilola, to see Elbel marching out at the head of the greater part of his force, and making for the river bank. He waited an hour, and when they did not return, and the patrols had not appeared, he sent out a couple of men by a roundabout way to follow the movements of the force, and allowed the usual water carriers to go out with their calabashes. These, returning soon with water, reported a strange thing. From the women of Ilola whom they had met on a like errand at the river, they had learnt that Elobela had set off with his men in their smoke-boat, and that Boloko had been left in charge of the village with about as many men as he had brought at first. Several hours later Jack's scouts came back, and said that they had followed along the bank the course of Elobela's launch; he was going rapidly down the river. They could only suppose that he was making for the headquarters of his company some hundreds of miles away.

"What did I say at all at all?" remarked Barney when Jack told him the great news. "He's no gentleman, that's as plain as the nose on his face, sorr. A man who will take two lickings and thin run away is not fit to wipe your shoes on."

"You seem disappointed, Barney, but frankly I'm very glad. I could fling up my hat and cheer if I hadn't to keep up my dignity before these natives. Though I fear we haven't seen the last of Mr. Elbel by any means. We shall have him upon us sooner or later with an overwhelming force. But sufficient unto the day; my uncle should be back long before that, if Elbel doesn't meet and stop him on the road. Well, we now have a chance to move our camp, for if Elbel is on his way to headquarters he can't get back for weeks. And first of all, Barney, take a dozen men and bring in that food that's waiting in the forest. We shan't be able to move for a day or two, at any rate; we must choose our site more carefully this time."

Thinking over the matter, Jack was not long in coming to the decision that the best place to establish his new camp would be near the cataract. From his recollection of the ground above it he thought it was admirably situated from a strategical point of view. It would have the incidental advantage of protecting Mr. Martindale's claim.

The one disadvantage was its distance from the sources of food supply. But this caused Jack to give serious consideration to a matter which had once or twice dimly suggested itself to him. He had been more and more impressed with the necessity of his party being self-supporting, so far as the staple articles of food were concerned, if they were to make a long stay in this country. He remembered how Stanley during his search for Emin Pasha had been able to sow, grow, and reap crops at Fort Bodo in a remarkably short time. Why should not he do the same? When he was joined by Mr. Martindale's contingent a large quantity of food would be needed. No doubt they would bring stores with them; but these could not last very long, especially in view of the unexpected drain upon the resources of the expedition caused by the arrival of the fugitives from Banonga and elsewhere.

"I wonder what Uncle will say when he sees them," Jack remarked to Barney, when he opened up to him this question of food supply. "You remember at Banonga he said he wasn't going to start a boys' home; this is still more serious—a sort of convalescent home for non-paying patients."

"'Tis meself that isn't wan little bit afraid uv what the master will say. Sure don't I know to a letther what 'twill be! 'My gracious me!'—don't ye hear him, sorr?—'what in the world will I want wid all these disgraceful lookin' objects? This ain't business. I'm not a philanthrophy, an' I don't exactly see my way to run a croosade.' An' thin he'll say, 'Poor fellow!' an' 'Poor wumman!' an' 'Poor little chap!' an' he'll dive his hands into his pockets an' suddenly remimber himself that money is no manner uv good in this counthry, an' he'll say: 'We must kind uv fix up some sort uv something for 'em, Barney.' Didn't I know 'm by heart the first day I drove him in London, and he went up to the horse and opened his jaw an' looked in his eyes an' says 'He'll do.' Sure I'd niver have named me little darlint uv a Pat to 'm if I hadn't known the kind uv gintleman he was at all."

Jack smiled at Barney's way of putting it, but admitted the truth of the portrait. Mr. Martindale was indeed a capable man of affairs—an example of the best type of the American man of business, the embodiment of the qualities by which the extraordinary commercial prosperity of the United States has been built up. But Jack knew that he was more than a man of business. His was a big heart, and it was one of the minor vexations of his life that he had to take some trouble to conceal it.

Jack's final conclusion was that there was not only every prospect of an extended stay if this mining scheme was to be followed up, but that the number of persons to be provided for would be more considerable than it was possible at present to calculate. Obviously, then, it behoved him to employ the time before Mr. Martindale's arrival in preparing for contingencies.

Elbel's departure had immediate consequences in Ilola. His presence had in some measure curbed the worse propensities of his black followers: they could only be brutal in obedience to orders; but the moment he was gone they began to show themselves once more in their true light. Before a day had passed Imbono came into the camp to complain of the insolence and rapacity of Boloko and his men. Jack advised him to do nothing to give Boloko any excuse for violence, but he had still to plumb the depths of savagery and brutality in the men whom the Free State Government callously allowed the trading companies to employ in the exploitation of rubber. He had still to learn that where violence was intended, not even the shadow of an excuse was any longer considered necessary.

One morning Imbono came to him in a frenzy of rage and indignation. His third wife had been tending her cooking pot when Boloko came up and asked what food she was preparing. "A fowl," she replied civilly. "Give it me," he demanded. "It is not yet cooked, O Boloko," the poor woman answered. "You refuse me, Ngondisi?" cried the ruffian. "Lift your hands and open your eyes wide that I may see the white of them, or I will shoot you." Ngondisi in terror obeyed. "You do not open them wide enough," said the wretch with a laugh, and he lifted the gun and fired; and the woman fell upon her face; she would never open her eyes again.

But Boloko had in this case reckoned without the spirit of confidence engendered in the natives by the discomfiture of Elbel. He had only ten men in the village when the incident occurred; the rest were absent, levying toll on Imbono's other villages a few miles distant. Even while Imbono, with tears of anguish, was telling Jack what had been done, the spark had been applied to the tinder. An extraordinary commotion was heard in the direction of Ilola: shots, yells, the war cry of infuriate men. Rushing out with Imbono, Jack arrived in the village to find that retaliation had at last been wreaked for months of wrong. It was difficult at first to make out what had happened. It appeared that in Imbono's absence the men of the village had suddenly seized their arms, and flung themselves in one desperate rush upon Boloko and his men. What cared they if several of their number fell before the tyrants' rifles? Heedless of wounds they closed about the forest guards; there was a brief hand-to-hand fight, eight of Boloko's men had fallen to weapons wielded with the energy of despair, and of the party only Boloko himself and two men had made their escape into the forest.

Elate with their victory, the men of Ilola had hastened off to the other villages, to surprise the guards there. It was too late now to recall them, but Jack had arrived on the spot just in time to rescue one man, whom the villagers were on the point of massacring. The white sous-officier who had been wounded in the fight before Jack's camp had been placed in Imbono's hut. Roused by the sound of firing, he had dragged himself from his mattress and, rifle in hand, came to the entrance of the hut just as Jack entered the gate with the chief. The villagers had forgotten him; but when they saw in their power a white man, one of those to whom all their afflictions were due, a band of them sprang towards him with uplifted spears. He fired: one of the men fell. The rest paused for an instant, and were on the point of dashing forward to make an end of their enemy when Jack rushed between them and their prey, and cried to them in Imbono's name to stay their hands. Reluctantly, with lowering countenances, they obeyed the command of their chief's white brother. No mercy had been shown to them: why should they show mercy? But when Imbono reminded them that the slaying of a white man would bring upon them the hordes of Bula Matadi, and that Elobela had already gone down the river, probably to bring many soldiers back with him, they sullenly drew off, and allowed Jack to remove the man to the safety of his own camp.

The Belgian knew no English, but Jack had a fair working knowledge of French which he found was equal to the occasion. The man explained that he was an ex-noncommissioned officer of the State forces, whose services had been enlisted by Elbel in dealing with the refractory natives. He seemed quite unable to understand Jack's point of view. To him the natives were so many parasites, the goods and chattels of the State, with no property and no rights.

"Why, monsieur," he said, "we pay them for the work they do; we have a right to demand labour of them for nothing. See what we have done for their country! Look at the rubber stations on the river, the fine buildings, the telegraphs, the cataract railway; where would all these blessings of civilization have been but for the noble self-sacrifice of King Leopold?"

Jack gave up the attempt to argue with him that the country belonged primarily to its natural inhabitants, forbore to point out that King Leopold had expressly declared that he had the advancement of the natives at heart. He contented himself with insisting that the actions of which Elbel and his minions had been guilty in Ilola were contrary to the law of the Free State itself. He was much struck by the Belgian's answer.

"Ah, monsieur, we have no book of rules, no code of laws. What can we do? We are the only law. Yes, monsieur, we are the only God in the Maranga."

Next day Jack went with Imbono and Lepoko to the waterfall, to survey the place as a possible site for a camp, or, to speak more strictly, a settlement. The chief was troubled and

displeased at the prospect of the removal of his blood brother's camp, but made no urgent remonstrance. On arriving at the spot, Jack at once detected signs that some one had recently been making investigations there. He had no doubt that this was Elbel. The secret of the gold had probably been disclosed in an incautious moment to one of his escort by the men who had accompanied Mr. Martindale on his second visit. Elbel already knew enough of the American's business to make him keenly interested, and alert to follow up the slightest clue. Knowing what he now knew of the methods of the State officials, Jack was ready to believe that Elbel would strain every nerve to get Mr. Martindale hounded out of the country, in order to have an opportunity of turning the discovery of gold to his own profit. Could his sudden departure from the village, Jack wondered, have been his first move in this direction?

Carefully examining the ground above the waterfall, Jack saw that a good deal would have to be done to make it suitable for a settlement. He heard from Imbono that during several months of the year the stream was much broader than at present, and at the point where it debouched from the hill, three or four miles below, it and other streams overflowed their banks, forming a wide swamp, almost a lake, some ten miles from east to west and more than half a mile broad. This, during the rainy season, practically cut off all communication from the direction of the village. On the far side of the hill the bluffs were so precipitous as to make access very difficult. This isolated hill formed therefore a kind of huge castle, of which the swamp for half the year was the natural moat.

It seemed to Jack that the most convenient site for his new camp was the slope of the hill immediately above the cataract. The incline here was very slight; the hill face only became steep again about a quarter of a mile from the fall; there it rose abruptly for fully fifty or sixty yards, sloping gently for the next half mile. Jack saw that if he built his entrenched camp in the neighbourhood of the waterfall, it would be to a slight extent commanded by an enemy posted on the steep ascent above. But by raising his defences somewhat higher on that side he hoped to overcome this disadvantage.

With a little labour, he thought, the soil around the cataract could be made suitable for planting food-stuffs. It was virgin soil, and owing to the slight fall of the ground at this spot, and to the fact that it was partially protected by the contour of the hill against floods from above, the leaves that for ages past had fallen from the thick copses fringing the banks, and from the luxuriant undergrowth on the small plateau itself, had not been washed down. These deposits had greatly enriched the alluvium, and Imbono said that large crops of manioc, maize, groundnuts, and sweet potatoes could easily be grown, as well as plantains and bananas and sugar cane.

On returning to his camp by Ilola, Jack told Barney the results of his investigation, and announced that he had definitely made up his mind to settle on the new site.

"Very good, sorr," said Barney; "but what'll become uv Ilola? Beggin' your pardon, sorr, 'twas a very solemn affair, that ceremony uv brotherhood, an' though sure it had niver a blessing from a priest—an' like enough Father Mahone would think it a poor haythen sort uv business—still, to the poor niggers, sorr, it may be just as great a thing as if the priest had blessed it in the name uv Almighty God."

"Well, what are you driving at, Barney?"

"Why this, sorr. The chief and you made a bargain to help wan another; an' sure ye've kept it, both uv you. Well, if we go away, there's no more help for either uv you, an' 'tis Imbono will be most in need uv it."

"You mean that I'm deserting my ally, eh?"

"Bedad, sorr, isn't it me that knows ye'd niver do it? But I just speak for the look uv the thing, sorr. Sure niver a man knows betther than Barney O'Dowd that things are not always what they seem."

"To tell you the truth, Barney, I've been thinking it over on the way back. I could see that Imbono doesn't like the idea of our moving, though he was too polite to mention it——"

"'Tis a rale Irish gintleman he is, sorr," interrupted Barney.

"There's no doubt that Elbel, or Boloko, or both, will come back sooner or later. Leaving me out of the question, the slaughter of Boloko's party won't go unpunished. To overlook that would ruin the authority of the forest guards for hundreds of miles round. Well, what does it mean when they return? They'll make a terrible example of Ilola. Imbono and his people will be wiped out. And you're quite right in believing that I couldn't stand by and see that done. But you see what it involves. We must plan our camp so as to be able to take in the whole of Imbono's people from the three villages—I suppose about four hundred in all, children included. That's a large order, Barney."

"True it is, sorr. But you wouldn't keep out the childher, poor little souls; an' mighty proud uv Pat they are, too. Besides, sorr, they'll all help, ivery soul, to build the camp; many hands make light work; an' ye couldn't expect 'em to set up a lot uv huts for us barring they saw a chance uv bein' invited now and again, at least as payin' guests, sorr."

"Well, Barney, I'd made up my mind to it all along, but I thought I'd like to sound you first. So all we've got to do now is to relieve Imbono's suspense and set to work. We'll start with clearing the soil for crops. It will take some time to plan the new camp, and we've always this one to retreat to. Take Lepoko over to Ilola and make the announcement yourself, Barney."

"I will, sorr, wid the greatest pleasure in life. 'Deed, 'twas meself that took the news to Biddy O'Flaherty whin her pig had won the prize at Ballymahone Show, and was just coming away wid a penny in me pocket when I met Mike Henchie. 'An' what would ye be afther, Mike?' says I. 'Carryin' the news to Biddy O'Flaherty, to be sure,' says he. 'Arrah thin, 'tis too late ye are,' says I. 'Isn't it meself that's just got a penny for that same news?' 'Bedad,' says he, 'what will have come to Biddy at all?' 'What is it ye'd be maning?' says I; 'sure she didn't give me a penny,' says Mike, 'last year whin I brought her the news. She gave me a screech and went black in the face, an' sure 'twas for the same fun I'm here this blessed minute?' 'Husht!' says I. 'Biddy didn't win the prize last year at all. 'Twas Patsy M'Manus.' 'An' who is it this time but that same Patsy?' says Mike. 'But I heard the judge wid me very own ears give it to Biddy!' says I. 'Deed so,' says he; 'but some wan renumbered him that Patsy had won it two years on end. "Me old friend Patsy!" says he. "Sure I couldn't break her heart by spoilin' the third time. I'll give it to Patsy," says he.' An' Patsy hadn't shown a pig at all that year, sorr."

CHAPTER XVI

The House by the Water

With characteristic energy, Jack next day set about the work in earnest. He posted sentinels several miles down the river and on the only forest paths by which a force was likely to approach, to give him timely notice if the enemy appeared. Then, with as many men as he could muster, and a great number of women, he hastened to the waterfall, and began the work of clearing the ground. He had decided to start from the site of the proposed settlement and work outwards, so that the crops would be as much as possible under the protection of the camp: it would never do to raise a harvest for the enemy to reap.

He placed Mboyo, Samba's father, in command of all his own people who had turned up, and of such people from other tribes as now came dropping in daily, the news of the white men who helped the negroes and feared not Bula Matadi having by this time spread abroad in the land. Every new contingent of fugitives brought a fresh tale of outrage, causing Jack to persevere under the discouragements with which he met, and to vow that he would do all in his power to protect the poor people who looked to him for succour. What the ultimate result of his action would be he did not stay to consider. It was enough for him that a work of urgent need lay ready to his hand.

He did not blink the fact that he and his followers were now in reality in revolt against the constituted authorities of the Free State. Elbel, it was true, was only a servant of a concessionnaire company, vested with certain trading and taxing privileges; but government as understood in the Free State was conducted by the delegation of powers from the central authority to private or corporate trading concerns. How far the powers of such a man as Elbel really extended in point of law Jack did not know. But he had been driven into his present position by a series of events in the face of which he could not find that any other course of action than the one he had adopted was open to him. And while he recognized fully the essential weakness of his position, however well fortified he might regard himself on grounds of humanity, he faced boldly what seemed the likeliest immediate consequence of his actions—the return of Elbel in force.

Meanwhile he was beginning to be a little concerned at not hearing from Mr. Martindale. It was many weeks since his last note had arrived. Jack was not yet seriously anxious about his uncle's non-appearance in person, for he could easily conceive that delays might occur in the prosecution of his business in strange places and among strange people, and when he reflected he came to the conclusion that Mr. Martindale might naturally hesitate to send many messengers. They were very expensive, having to come so many hundreds of miles, and moreover there was always a chance that a letter might miscarry. The Congo was not too safe a highway; the Free State methods had not been such as to instil a respect for "law" among the victims of its rule. Jack knew full well that if a messenger from his uncle fell into Elbel's hands, he would not be allowed to proceed. It was possible that Mr. Martindale's purchase of rifles, and their destination, had been discovered; and the idea that he might be involved in some trouble with the courts made Jack feel uneasy at times.

But he was so extremely busy that he had little leisure for speculation of any kind. The work of clearing the ground proceeded with wonderful rapidity.

"They talk about the negro being lazy," he remarked one day to Barney; "he doesn't look like it now."

"Ah, sorr, they say the same about my counthrymen. Perhaps the truth is the same in Ireland as 'tis here. For why are the niggers here not lazy, sorr? Just because you'd explained to them what the work's for, and they know they'll get the good uv it. There may be scuts uv spalpeens that won't work at any time for anything or anybody at all. 'Tis they I'd use that chicotte on, sorr; but I don't see any here, to be sure."

When enough ground had been cleared and sowed to furnish a considerable crop, Jack turned the whole of his available force on to the work of building the entrenched camp. Imbona had welcomed with gratitude and enthusiasm the suggestion that the new settlement should be made large enough to contain the whole population of his villages in case of need; and his men having discontinued their unprofitable search for rubber when the forest guards disappeared, he could employ them almost all in the work. For Jack did not recognize the prescriptive right of the men to leave all the field work, when the clearing had been done, to the women, as is the invariable negro custom. Whether in the fields or on the new defences, he insisted on all taking a share.

The greatest difficulty he encountered in the construction of his new camp was the want of materials. The country in the immediate vicinity of the waterfall was only sparsely wooded, and too much time and labour would be consumed in hauling logs from the forest below. But he found a large copse bordering the stream, higher up, and here he felled the trees, floating the logs down to the side of his settlement, not without difficulty, owing to the narrow tortuous bed. These, however, proved quite insufficient for the construction of a thick and impenetrable stockade round the whole circuit of the chosen site. Jack therefore determined to use the boulders that lay in the course of the stream, thus unawares making his camp a cross between an Afghan stone sangar and a log fort, such as were built by the pioneers and fur-traders of the American west. The labour of transporting the heavy boulders to the site of the settlement was very great; but the heart of the labourers being, as Barney had said, in their work, they toiled ungrudgingly, and, with the ingenuity that the negro often unexpectedly displays, they proved very fertile in simple labour-saving devices.

The fort was built on the left bank of the stream just above the cataract, so that the steep cliffs formed an effective defence to its southern side. Before falling over the precipice, the stream ran through a gully some twelve feet deep. The western side of the fort rested on the gully, and was thus with difficulty accessible in this quarter. Only on the north and east was it necessary to provide strong defensive works. These faces were each about a hundred yards long. At the western extremity of the northern face, where it rested on the stream, Jack placed a solid blockhouse of logs. He constructed a similar blockhouse at the eastern extremity of this face, and a third at the south-east corner where the stone wall abutted on the precipice. All three blockhouses were constructed as bastions, so as to enfilade the northern and eastern faces.

When the outer defences were thus completed, the negroes were set to work to build the necessary habitations within. Hundreds of tall stems, thousands of climbers, vines, and creepers, piles of palm and phrynia leaves, were collected, and in an amazingly short time the space so lately bare was covered with neat huts built in native fashion for the negroes, with three more substantial dwellings, somewhat apart from the rest, for Mr. Martindale, Jack, and Barney. A wide open space was left in the middle. At one point a great heap of boulders was collected for repairing the wall if necessary; and Jack placed his ammunition securely in an underground magazine.

In two months from the departure of Elbel Jack was able to transfer his stores to the new settlement. The crops in the cultivated area were already far advanced. Jack was amazed to see how quickly in this teeming soil the bare brown face of the earth became covered with the tender shoots of green, and how rapid was the progress to full maturity. Clearly the new village, to which the natives had given the name Ilombekabasi, "the house by the water," would be in no straits for its food supply.

It was Barney who suggested a doubt about the water. Jack found him as a rule a good commentator, but a poor originator; he could very prettily embroider an idea, but very rarely had an idea of his own. But on this occasion he had a flash of insight.

"By the powers, sorr," he said one morning, as Jack and he were walking along the stream, "I do remimber just this very minute two lines uv poethry, out uv a poethry book I was made to learn whin I was a bhoy an' they talked uv sendin' me in for 'zamination by the Intermaydiate Board. It never come to anything, to be sure, because by the time I was old enough to sit for the 'zamination I was too old, sorr."

"Well, what are the lines?"

'"Water, water iverywhere,
An' not a dhrop to dhrink.'"

'Twas about some poor sailor man that shot a bird at sea, an 'twas a holy bird, an' whin 'twas dead the wind did not blow, an' the sailors dropped down dead, an' ghosts came aboard, an' the sky was like a hot copper, an' this poor divil uv a fellow was alone, all, all alone, as the book said, wid the dead bird slung round his neck, an' his lips parched, an' water all about, but as salt as a herring, so that he couldn't drink it; bedad, sorr, I remimber how mighty bad I felt meself whin my ould tacher—rest his sowl!—read out those lines in a sort uv whisper, an' me lips went as dhry

as an old boot, sorr."

The idea, you perceive, was by this time pretty well smothered under its embroidery.

"You mean that the enemy might try to divert the stream if they attacked our camp?"

"'Tis the very marrow uv it, sorr, an' mighty aisy it would be. Sure there are plenty uv boulders left, an' they could make a dam that would turn this stream at the narrow part above, an' niver a blessed dhrop uv dhrink should we get."

"You're right, Barney. We must be prepared for anything. Let us go and look round."

Strolling up stream, they came, within a short distance of the spot where inspiration had flashed upon Barney, to a small spring bubbling up near the river bank.

"Here's water, Barney," said Jack. "It rather suggests that we'd find water inside the camp if we sank a well."

"True, sorr; but I'm thinking that would need a terrible deal uv diggin'."

"Still it may have to be done. We can't use this spring; it's a hundred yards at least away from the stockade—too far to come, under fire from Albini rifles."

"And we couldn't make it run into the camp, sorr, more's the pity."

"Stop a bit. I don't know that we couldn't. We might make a conduit."

"What might that be, sorr?"

"A pipe. It would have to be underground."

"And if we got a pipe, an' could lay it, the marks uv the diggin' would bethray us. Don't the streets uv London prove it whin the County Council has been taking up the drains?"

"Unless we could cover them in some way. That might be managed. A greater difficulty is the natives. They've worked very well, but we don't know yet how far they can be trusted; and if they knew of this water-pipe we propose, they might blab the secret and undo all our work."

"And where's the pipe, sorr? There are no gas pipes or drain pipes in this haythen counthry."

"No, but there are plenty of bamboos. We could make an excellent pipe of them. The digging is the difficulty. We can't get the natives to do it without giving our plan away, and we can't do it ourselves for the same reason. I shall have to think this out, Barney."

"Sleep on it, sorr. Begorra, I remimber two more lines from that same poetry book—

> 'Sleep, sleep, it is a blessed thing
> Beloved from pole to pole';

an' no wonder at all, for many a time I've gone to me bed bothered about wan thing or another, and bedad, the morn's morn 'twas all as clear as the blessed daylight, sorr."

"Well, I'll sleep on it, Barney, and let you know to-morrow what the result is."

It was close thought, however, before he fell asleep that gave Jack the solution of the problem. All the natives now knew that the object of the white man's presence here was to search for gold; they knew also that to obtain the gold the soil had to be excavated. Why not turn their knowledge to good account? Instead of laying his conduit in a direct line from the spring to the nearest point of the stockade, he would lay it along, or rather in, the side of the gully; it would thus be more likely to escape observation, and the disturbed ground could be planted with quick-growing creepers or covered up with boulders. As a blind to the natives, he would have a number of excavations made at the edge of the gully, both above and below the waterfall, and one of these could be used for the bamboo pipe without anybody being the wiser save the few who must necessarily be in the secret.

Next morning, accordingly, Jack, under pretence of continuing the search for gold, set the men to make a series of shallow excavations. Most of these were cut below the cataract, and, using the prospector's pan, Jack obtained what he hoped his uncle would consider good results from the soil. He carefully noted the places along the exposed bed of the stream in which the best returns were found. But the excavations were abandoned one by one, and attention was not unduly directed to any of them.

One of the excavations above the waterfall was the channel for the conduit. Jack carried it from within a few yards of the spring to a spot near the north-west blockhouse, overlooking the gully. At one time it seemed that his plan would be wrecked, literally upon a rock, for a huge mass of stone of almost granite hardness was met with a little less than half-way from the spring. But Jack was relieved to find soft earth beneath it, and the obstacle was turned by sinking the conduit at this place some feet below the usual level.

At a short distance from the blockhouse, within the stockade, Jack set the men to excavate a large tank, with a surface outlet over the cataract; and from the bottom of the tank he drove a tunnel, just large enough to accommodate a bamboo pipe, to the nearest point of the gully.

The tank was an object of great curiosity to the natives, both those who had dug it and those who looked on. The children amused themselves by jumping in and out until the bottom became so deep as to make that sport dangerous; their elders congregated at the edge, chattering among themselves, some suggesting that it was intended as a storehouse for grain, others, as a grave in which to bury Elobela and his men when they were killed in the fight that all expected.

Meanwhile Jack had taken two of the natives into his confidence. They were Mboyo and Samba. The former was silent by nature and habit. Samba would have torn out his tongue rather than divulge any secret of his master's. Jack entrusted to them the construction of the conduit. He knew enough of their language by this time to be able to explain what he wanted without Lepoko's assistance, and they quickly seized his idea. Working by themselves in a bamboo plantation at Ilola, they selected stalks of slightly different thickness which would fit into one another; and Jack found that by carefully packing the joints with earth from the peaty swamp, he could make a pipe of the required length practically free from leakage.

It remained to lay the conduit in position. This task he reserved for himself and Barney, with the assistance of Mboyo and Samba. To avoid observation by the people, it was necessary to do the work at night. Accordingly one day Jack gave orders that no one was to leave the camp without permission after the evening meal was eaten. Immediately after sunset the four quickly issued from the gate in the northern wall of the fort, one at a time so as not to attract attention. Mboyo and Samba brought the sections of the pipe from the place where they had concealed them, and under Jack's direction they laid them along the gully, covering up each length of bamboo as it was placed. The trench having been already prepared, the actual labour involved was not great, the only difficulty being to remove as far as possible the traces of their operations. But it took time, and was impeded by the darkness, so that on the first night, after several hours of work, only the pipe had been laid, no connexion having yet been made with the tank or the spring.

The work was continued under similar conditions on the following night. A connexion having been made with the tank, it only remained to tap the spring. A hole, some three feet deep, was dug where the water bubbled up, and formed into a fairly water-tight chamber by lining it with stone chipped from the boulders. Into this one end of the conduit was carried. Then the hole was filled in, and covered with two heavy pieces of rock, placed in as natural and unstudied a position as possible. While this was being done by Mboyo and Samba, Jack and Barney dibbled the roots of sweet potato creepers into the soil along the whole length of the conduit, knowing that they would grow so rapidly that in a few weeks every trace of their work would be hidden by the foliage; moreover the plant would serve a double purpose.

The spring was a small one; nevertheless, by the time the night's task was completed, and the party returned to the camp, there were already two or three inches of water in the tank, and it was steadily rising. Barney was even more delighted than Jack.

"'Tis wonderful what a power uv good poethry can do in the world, sorr," he said. "An' sure the commissionaires uv education in the ould counthry would be proud men the day did they know that Barney O'Dowd, though he didn't pass his 'zamination, has made a mighty fine use uv the little poethry book."

Great was the surprise of the natives when they awoke next morning to see the mysterious tank full of water, and a tiny overflow trickling from it over the cataract. They discussed it for the whole of the day, inventing every explanation but the right one. The original spring had been so near the river and so inconspicuous that its disappearance was not noticed.

Jack felt a glow of satisfaction as he looked round on his work. Here was an orderly settlement, on an excellent natural site, defended by a stockade and wall impregnable save to artillery, with fresh clean huts, well-cultivated fields, and an inexhaustible water supply. It had involved much thought and care and toil; how amply they had been rewarded!

His men were now all transferred from their old settlement to the new one. Imbono's people still remained in their villages, not without reluctance. They knew that the gate of Ilombekabasi would always be open to them if danger threatened; but they felt the attractions of the place, and wished to migrate at once. And they were particularly jealous of the refugees. These people were strangers; why should they have better habitations and stronger defences than they themselves? Why were they permitted to remain in Imbono's country at all? Jack had much ado to keep the peace between the two parties. Quarrels were frequent, and that they did not develop into open strife was a tribute to Jack's diplomacy, and to the strange influence which Samba had acquired. The winning qualities which had captivated Mr. Martindale seemed to have a magical effect upon the people. The boy had always been a special pet among his own folks; his merry nature won the affection of Imbono's subjects also. Jack kept an observant eye upon him, and more than once saw him quietly approach a group where bickering and recrimination were going on, and by some grace of address, or some droll antic played with his inseparable companion Pat, turn frowns to smiles, and suspicion to good fellowship.

Among the inhabitants of Ilombekabasi was the Belgian sergeant rescued from the villagers in Ilola. He gave his parole not to attempt to escape, and indeed endured captivity patiently, for he knew not how far away his friends might be, and to wander alone in this forest country meant death. Jack sometimes talked with him, taking the opportunity of airing his French, and finding some little interest in sounding the man's views. At first the Belgian would not admit that the natives had any rights, or that there was anything particularly obnoxious in the system of administration. But he changed his mind one day when Jack put to him a personal question.

"How would you, a Belgian, like it if some strange sovereign—the German emperor, say—came down upon you and compelled you to go into your woods and collect beech-nuts for him, paying you at the rate of a sou a day, or not at all, and thrashing or maiming or killing you if you did not collect enough?"

The question was unanswerable, and from that time the Belgian became a meditative man.

The refugees were gradually increasing in number. By the time the camp was finished Mboyo's command had grown to sixty men, with nearly as many women and twice as many children. All brought stories of the barbarous deeds of the rubber collectors; many bore in maimed limbs or scarred backs the personal evidences of the oppressors' cruelty. Jack was moved almost to tears one day. A fine-looking negro came into the camp carrying something wrapped in palm leaves, and asked to be taken to Lokolobolo. When brought before Jack he removed the wrappings, and, unutterable woe depicted on his face, displayed a tiny black hand and foot. His village had been raided, he said, and with his wife and children and a few others he had fled to the forest, where they lived on roots and leaves and nuts. The forest guards tracked them out. One day, when he was absent fishing, a brutal sentry came upon his wife as she was collecting leaves for the evening meal. He learnt from one of his friends what happened. Before the woman could escape the sentry shot her, and as she was only wounded, his "boys" chopped her with their knives till she died. Others of his hangers-on took the children; and when the father returned to the place where he had left them, he found the dead body of his wife, and one hand and foot, all that remained of his little ones from the cannibal feast.

It was incidents like these that stiffened Jack's back. He had crossed his Rubicon: the gate of Ilombekabasi stood open to all who chose to come. And they came steadily. For a time many of them were too weak to be useful members of the little society. But as with good food and freedom from care their strength increased, they began to be self-supporting, Mboyo employed them in attending to the crops and bringing new ground under cultivation. Several were artificers, and were useful in doing smith's or carpenter's work.

In addition to keeping the villagers employed, Jack set apart a portion of every day for military exercises. Every able-bodied man was armed; those for whom there were no rifles carried the native spears. When Boloko fled from Ilola he left a number of Albini rifles and a stock of ammunition behind. These Jack appropriated, so that his corps of riflemen now numbered sixty. He used his cartridges very sparingly, for his stock was not large, and he saw no possibility of replenishing it.

Now and again he arranged for a sham fight. One party of men was told off to storm the stockade, an equal party to defend it. No firearms were used on these occasions; the weapons employed were wooden poles with wadded ends. Such fights afforded excellent practice against a real attack, and not a little amusement and enjoyment to the natives, who entered into the spirit of them enthusiastically, and took the hard knocks and bruises with as much cheerfulness as schoolboys on a football field. These little operations were useful to Jack also. By their means he discovered the weak spots in his defences, and was able to strengthen them accordingly.

But he was now becoming seriously alarmed at Mr. Martindale's continued absence. Eight weeks had passed since his last letter came to hand, nearly five months since his departure. What could have happened? Jack could not think that his uncle had willingly left him so long to bear his heavy responsibility, and now that he had more leisure he could not prevent himself from imagining all kinds of mishaps and disasters. At last, when he was on the point of sending a special messenger down the river to make inquiries, a negro arrived at the settlement with a letter. He had come within a hundred and fifty miles of Ilombekabasi as a paddler on a white man's canoe; the remainder of the distance he had covered on foot. Jack opened the letter eagerly. It read:—

MY DEAR JACK,—

Sorry to leave you so long. Have been on my back with an attack of malaria; three weeks unconscious, they told me. No need to be anxious: I'm on the mend; soon be as fit as a riddle. Pretty weak, of course; malaria isn't exactly slathers of fun. It will be a fortnight or three weeks before I can start; then must travel slowly. Expect me somewhat over a month after you get this. I've been in a stew about you. Hope you've had no trouble. Can you stomach native food? Didn't forget your birthday. Got a present for you—quite a daisy.

Your affectionate uncle,
JOHN MARTINDALE.

P.S.—Got some hydraulic plant at Boma: a bargain.

CHAPTER XVII

A Buffalo Hunt

"Dear old uncle!" said Jack as he handed the letter to Barney. "'Pon my soul, I'd forgotten my own birthday, and I haven't the ghost of a notion what the day of the month is; have you, Barney?"

"Divil a bit, sorr."

"Though, of course, I could reckon it out by counting up the Sundays. D'you know, Barney, I almost wish I'd made these negroes knock off work one day a week."

"Sure it wouldn't have answered atall atall sorr. A day's idleness would mean a day's quarrelling. Uv coorse 'tis a pity they're ignorant haythens, an' I wish we could have Father Mahone out for a month or two to tache the poor craturs; but until they can be tached in the proper way, betther let 'em alone, sorr."

"Perhaps you're right, Barney. Doesn't it seem to you odd that Uncle says nothing about the rubber question? His first letter, you remember, was full of it."

"Master's a wise man, sorr. What he does not say says more than what he does. He wouldn't be sure, you see, that his letter would iver reach you. And bedad, if he'd had good things to say uv the State officers, wouldn't he have said 'em? He's found 'em out, sorr, 'tis my belief."

"I shall be jolly glad to see him, dear old boy."

"And so will I, sorr, an' to see some things fit for a Christian to ate. Master's stomach won't take niggers' food, an' mine wouldn't if I could help it."

"But you're getting fat, man!"

"Sure that's the terrible pity uv it. Wid dacent food I kept as lean as a rake, and I'd niver have believed that the only way to get fat was to ate pig's food; for that's what it is, sorr, this maniac and other stuff. I'll now be wanting to get thin again, sorr."

The white men's stores had long since given out. For weeks they had had no sugar, no coffee, tea, or cocoa. Jack as well as Barney had to share the natives' food. Jack did not mind the change, and he believed that Barney's objection was more than half feigned, for the Irishman ate with unfailing appetite. The native diet was indeed nutritious and not unappetising. It included fish from the streams, which they ate both fresh and smoked; bananas, pine-apples, plantains, Indian corn, manioc, ground-nuts, and sweet potatoes. Manioc was their most important food, and Jack after a time began to like it, as made into *kwanga*. The root of the plant is pounded to a pulp, soaked for twenty-four hours in running water, and when it ferments, is worked up into a stiff dough. Cut into slices and fried in ground-nut oil it is very palatable. Jack also found the groundnuts delicious when roasted. A few goats kept in the settlement provided milk, and they had a regular supply of eggs from their fowls, so that Jack at least considered himself very well off.

The crops around the settlement ripened and were gathered: fine fields of Indian corn, amazing quantities of manioc and ground-nuts, that ripen beneath the soil. Yet Jack began to wonder whether his plantations would meet the needs of the population. It was still growing. The renown of Lokolobolo and Ilombekabasi had evidently spread far and wide, for every week more refugees came in from villages far apart. Besides the men of Jack's original party, there were now nearly two hundred people in the settlement, and Jack always had to remember that these might any day be increased by the four hundred from Imbono's villages, if Elbel returned to avenge Boloko's expulsion, as he certainly would do. Further, Mr. Martindale would no doubt bring back with him a certain number of trained workmen—carpenters, engine-men, and so forth; all these must be provided with house room and food. Jack was glad that he had planned the settlement on generous lines, though as he looked around he asked himself somewhat anxiously whether it would suffice to accommodate all. And what would his uncle say to it? Would he endorse what Jack had done, and take upon himself the protection of these outcasts against their own lawfully constituted, however unlawfully administered, government? Only time could decide that, and Jack awaited with growing impatience his uncle's return.

One morning a messenger came in from Ilola to say that news had reached Imbono of a herd of buffaloes which were feeding about five miles off in the open country to the west. Hitherto Jack had not had leisure to indulge his tastes for sport; but the knowledge that big game was now so near at hand prompted him to try his luck. Leaving Barney in charge of the settlement, he set off the same morning with Imbono and Mboyo, who had both become very fair marksmen, the

former with an Albini rifle that had been Boloko's, the latter with a Mauser presented to him by Jack.

Samba and Lepoko were in attendance, carrying lunch for the party. Though Jack had picked up a good deal of the language, he found it in some respects so extraordinarily difficult that he was always glad of Lepoko as a stand-by.

By the time they had reached the spot where the herd had first been sighted, it had moved some distance away; but it was easily tracked, and by dint of careful stalking up the wind the party got within three hundred yards without being discovered by the keen-scented beasts. Then, however, the country became so open that to approach nearer unseen was impossible, and Jack decided to take a shot at them without going farther.

He had brought the heavy sporting rifle which had accounted for Imbono's enemy the hippopotamus in the river. Selecting the largest of the herd—they were the red buffaloes of the district, a good deal smaller than the kind he had seen in America—he fired and brought it down. The others broke away towards a clump of euphorbias, and Jack got another shot as they disappeared; but neither this nor the small-bore bullets of the chiefs' rifles appeared to take effect, for in an instant, as it seemed, the whole remaining herd vanished from sight.

Jack slipped two more cartridges into his empty chamber, and, leaving the bush from behind which he had fired, ran towards his kill. It was his first buffalo, and only those who have known the delight of bagging their first big game could appreciate his elation and excitement. He outstripped the rest of his party. The two chiefs, chagrined at their failure to bring down the animals at which they had aimed, seemed to have lost all interest in the hunt. Samba left them discussing with Lepoko the relative merits of their rifles, and hurried on after his master.

Jack bent over the prostrate body. Despite the tremor of excitement he had felt as he cocked his rifle he found that his aim had been true: the buffalo had been shot through the brain. At that moment—so strange are mental associations—he wished his school chum Tom Ingestre could have been there. Tom was the keenest sportsman in the school; how he would envy Jack when he saw the great horns and skull hanging as a trophy above the mantelpiece when he paid that promised visit to New York!

But while recollections of "Tiger Tom," as the school had nicknamed him, were running through his mind, Jack was suddenly startled by a bellow behind him and a couple of shots. Springing erect, he faced round towards the sound, to see Samba's dark body darting between himself and a second buffalo plunging towards him from the direction of the bushes. As happened once to Stanley travelling between Vivi and Isangila, the suddenness of the onset for the moment paralysed his will; he was too young a sportsman to be ready for every emergency. But the most seasoned hunter could not have dared to fire, for Samba's body at that instant almost hid the buffalo from view, coming as it did with lowered head.

The animal was only ten yards away when Samba crossed its track; but the boy's quick action broke its charge, and it stopped short, as though half inclined to turn in pursuit of Samba, who had now passed to its left. Then it again caught sight of Jack and the dead buffalo, and with another wild bellow dashed forward. In these few instants, however, Jack had recovered his self-possession, and raised his rifle to his shoulder. As the beast plunged forward it was met by a bullet which stretched it inert within a few feet of Jack's earlier victim.

"Bonolu mongo!"[1] exclaimed Jack, clapping Samba on the shoulder. "But for your plucky dash I should have been knocked over and probably killed. You saw him coming, eh?"

"Njenaki!"[2] replied Samba, with his beaming smile.

Meanwhile the two chiefs had run up with Lepoko and were examining the second buffalo, with an air of haste and excitement. They began to talk at one another so loud and fiercely, and to gesticulate so violently, that Jack, though he could not make out a word of what they were saying, saw that a pretty quarrel was working up.

"Now, Lepoko," he said, putting himself between the chiefs and sitting on the buffalo's head, "what is all this about?"

"Me tell massa," said Lepoko. "Imbono he say he kill ngombo; Mboyo say no, he kill ngombo; Lepoko say massa kill ngombo; no can tell; me fink one, two, free hab kill ngombo all same."

"Well, my own opinion is pretty well fixed, but we'll see. Why, there are three bullet marks in his hide besides mine. That's mine, you see, that large hole in the middle of the forehead. One of you two must have hit him twice. And I'm hanged if the bullets didn't go clean through him. No wonder he was in a rage. Tell them what I say, Lepoko."

On hearing what Jack had said, the chiefs began to jabber at each other again.

"Kwa te!" said Jack. "What do they say now, Lepoko?"

"Imbono say he make two holes, Mboyo say no, he make two holes. Lepoko fink bofe make two holes—how can do uvver way?"

"Two and one make three, my man, not four. I'll soon tell you who made the two."

By comparing the wounds he found that two of them had been made by Mauser bullets and one by an Albini.

"There's no doubt about it, Mboyo hit him twice. But to put an end to your squabble let me tell you that you both might have fired at him all day and never killed him if you hit him in those parts. Neither of you did him any damage, though you might have done for me, irritating him as you did. We'll settle the matter by saying he is Samba's buffalo. It was Samba who got in his way and gave me time to take good aim at him. And Samba might have been killed himself. I am grateful to your son, Mboyo, and proud of him, and when I get back I shall give him one of the rifles I have left, as a reward."

This end to the controversy satisfied both the chiefs. Neither grudged Samba anything. As for the boy, he was more than delighted. He had never dreamt of handling a rifle until he was at least fifteen, when the negro boy is as old as the white boy of twenty; and to have one his very own made him enormously proud.

"He say larn shoot one time, massa," said Lepoko. "Lepoko plenty mislable. What for? 'Cos he shoot plenty well; but massa no tell him to bring gun. No; Lepoko must lib for talk, talk, talk all time; me no happy all same."

"You shall have your chance next time. Now, Samba, run off to the camp and bring some men to cut up the buffaloes. We will wait hereabouts until you come back."

When Samba had gone it occurred to Jack that he would eat his luncheon at the summit of a small hill that rose steeply about half a mile from the spot where the buffaloes had been killed. The chiefs, disinclined like all Africans for exertion that was avoidable and seemed to have no object, pointed out that their present situation was quite suited for having the meal, and they were quite hungry enough without climbing for an appetite. But Jack persisted. He wished to ascertain whether there was a clear view from the hill, and though he might have ascended it alone, he feared lest in his absence the chiefs would again fall out over the buffalo. With an air of resignation the negroes accompanied him on the short walk, and luncheon was eaten on the hill-top.

Jack at least felt that he was well rewarded for his climb. A magnificent panorama was open to his view—a vast extent of forest-clad country, with here and there strips of open ground such as that below in which they had discovered the buffaloes. The forest stretched in an almost unbroken mass of foliage as far as the eye could reach, approaching on the north-east very close to Imbono's village.

After luncheon Jack got up and walked about the hilltop, taking a nearer view of the country through his field-glass. Here he caught a glimpse of the river, a small bluish patch amid the green; there, of a little spire of smoke rising perhaps from the fire of one of Imbono's scouts. All at once he halted and stood for some moments gazing intently in one direction. Far away, across a clearing only just visible through the trees, something was moving, continuously, in one direction. So great was the distance that the appearance was as of an army of ants. But he fancied he detected a patch or two of white amid the mass of black.

"Mboyo, look here!" he called.

The chief went to his side, and, stretching his head forward, gazed fixedly at the moving mass.

"Soldiers!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Black soldiers, and white chiefs! They are going to Ilola."

Imbono sprang to his side.

"It is true," he cried. "Mboyo speaks the truth. They are going to Ilola!"

Jack drew a deep breath. The long-expected was coming to pass. The enemy was at hand! And it was ominous that he was coming from the west by land instead of by river from the south. This must have involved a detour of many miles, through difficult forest country; but thus the enemy avoided the certainty of his approach being heralded in advance, as it would have been if he had come by the river. Elbel was planning a surprise!

There was no time to be lost in getting ready for his coming.

"Can they reach Ilola to-day, coming through the forest?" Jack asked Imbono.

It was just possible, replied the chief, but only by dint of very hard marching, and they could not arrive before nightfall.

"We must get back," said Jack. "Come, my brothers."

They descended the hill, and set off at full speed for Ilombekabasi. On the way they met a party of men coming under Samba's guidance to bring in the buffaloes. Jack bade them hasten in their task; they were far from any probable line of march of the enemy, and the meat might now

prove very valuable. Hurrying on to his camp, Jack told Barney what he had seen.

"We're in for it now, Barney," he said.

"And we're ready, sorr, praise be!" said Barney.

Jack lost no time. At his request Imbono sent out scouts to get more exact particulars of the column and its progress, warning them to use the utmost care to avoid discovery. Imbono himself returned to Ilola to prepare his people for a migration to Ilombekabasi. Later in the day the scouts returned with the news that the enemy had pitched their camp about ten miles away. The force consisted of some two hundred forest guards armed with rifles, and a much larger number of followers carrying spears. Boloko was with them, and Elobela, and two other white men. The line of march had been direct for Ilola, and strict silence was kept. One of the scouts had seen Elobela himself strike a man who had incautiously shouted to his comrades.

"There's no doubt of their intentions, Barney," said Jack. "They want to surprise Ilola. That means a massacre; but by God's mercy we know in time!"

The inhabitants of Ilola and of Imbono's other villages were already flocking into the camp, bringing with them large supplies of food and their principal belongings. Before the sun set the villages were deserted. Jack was glad now to think that this contingency had been so long foreseen. It would have been impossible to make adequate arrangements for so large an additional population if he had waited until the danger was upon them. As it was, the huts stood ready.

It was a strange and impressive scene as Imbono's people filed in. They were excited, but not with alarm or fear. Some of them even were merry, laughing at little mishaps—the dropping of a basket of manioc, the breaking of a pot, the sprawling of children as Pat dashed in and out among them, barking as though it was he that was shepherding the throng. Barney was the master of ceremonies. With Samba's help he separated the various families, and showed each father the hut or huts he was to occupy. It was not a wealthy community, and only a few of the men had more wives than one; but these tried Barney's patience sorely, and he sighed for Father Mahone to come and tache the haythens betther manners.

"Only what could he do, if he came?" he said. "Whin a man has been fool enough to marry two or three wives, faith, I don't see how ye can alter it unless ye make 'em all widders."

About two miles from the camp there was a spot above the river from which the clearing and village of Ilola could be seen. An hour before dawn Jack went out with Samba to this spot and waited. Just after day had broken they perceived a large body of men rushing out from the forest towards the village stockade. Through his field-glasses Jack saw that the negroes were led by two men in white. Imbono, before he left, had had the gate of Ilola closed and barricaded. The invaders did not pause to break it down; they swarmed up the stockade and momentarily hesitated at the top, as though suspecting, from the silence of the village, that a trap had been laid for them. Then some of them could be seen dropping down inside; the rest instantly followed; and Jack smiled as he saw them assemble in little groups in the deserted compound, gesticulating in their excitement.

A few minutes later dense volumes of smoke rose from the village. The forest guards had fired the huts, no doubt in their first fury at the escape of the villagers. Jack could not help thinking that they would regret their hasty action. If they intended any long stay in the neighbourhood, the village would have been more useful to them intact than as a ruin. He had dismantled his own former camp, so that unless Elbel's men set about building for themselves they would have no shelter. Their folly only confirmed Jack's belief that they were but a poorly-disciplined rabble, and that Elbel himself was out of his element in work of a military kind.

Having learnt all that he wished to know, Jack returned to his camp. Elbel had clearly not expected the village to be abandoned. Jack wondered if he had learnt of the formation of the new camp. It seemed likely that news of it would long since have been carried down the river. He had apparently planned to wipe out the villagers first and tackle Jack later.

"Bedad, sorr, if he's any sinse at all he will lave us alone," said Barney when Jack told him what he had seen.

"I don't expect that. I'm sure he'll use his men against me. He'll want his revenge, for one thing; and then he has his eye on the gold, remember. He didn't dig about the cataract for nothing. He'll be glad of any excuse for attacking, if he sees a fair chance of beating us. You may depend upon it he knows all that Uncle has been doing, and if he can manage to drive us out and occupy this ground before Uncle gets back, it's all up with poor Uncle's claim, Barney. Possession is more than nine points of the law in this State. If Uncle had known the sort of things that go on here, he'd have thought twice before spending his money."

Very soon after Jack regained his camp, Imbono's scouts came in to report that the enemy was on the move. Before midday the head of the column was sighted making its way up the stream, this forming on the whole an easier approach than the rough stony ground on either bank. There was immense excitement in the camp as the people watched the advancing crowd. Jack could not but be touched as he observed the demeanour of the people. A few months before

the sight of so many of the dreaded forest guards would have made them cower in abject fear; now, so great was their trust in the young Inglesa who had twice defeated Elobela, and who had prepared for them this fine new village with its wonderful defences, that they viewed the progress of the enemy with feelings only of anticipated triumph.

"Please God, I won't fail them," thought Jack.

About half a mile below the cataract the column came to a halt, and three men in white, attended by half a dozen armed negroes, advanced to within less than a quarter of a mile of the wall.

"The impident scoundhrels!" quoth Barney, standing at Jack's side.

"They do show a pretty cool trust in our forbearance," said Jack; "we could pick them off easily enough."

"Begorra, I would, sorr; do they deserve any betther? Elbel was a deceitful villain—you remimber, sorr, whin he fired under a flag uv truce at the ould camp. I wouldn't have any more mercy on him than I would on a rat."

"Yes, you would, Barney. We must play the game, whatever they do. And I wonder what they're up to. Here comes a man with a white flag. We shall soon see."

[1] "Brave boy."

[2] "I saw."

CHAPTER XVIII

Elbel's Barrels

The negro looked by no means comfortable as he clambered up the steep side of the gully from the bed of the stream and approached the fort. There was no gate in the western face, and the man seemed somewhat uncertain what to do. But perceiving that he had a note in his hand, Jack ordered Lepoko to lean over the wall and take the paper on the point of a spear.

"Now let's see what he has to say," said Jack, unfolding the paper. "Listen, Barney. 'Having returned with a force sufficient to re-establish law and order in this part of the Congo State, I call upon you instantly to surrender the camp which you have constructed without permission on the territory of the State. The negroes who are with you are subjects of the State, and will be dealt with by me in accordance with the powers that I possess. You, being a foreigner, will be taken to Boma, to be tried under due form of law by the State Courts.'"

"Which means quick murder for the niggers, sorr, and slow murder for you. Don't answer his impidence, sorr."

"Oh, I must answer. We can't let things go by default, and we can go one better than he, Barney. He hasn't copied his letter, you see. It's very lucky I've got a duplicate book; who knows?—these documents may come in handy some day."

He wrote a brief reply, saying that he was not aware there was anything illegal in constructing a suitable camp on ground leased from the Société Cosmopolite; that, on the other hand, the natives who had sought shelter with him complained of treatment which was clearly against all law and justice; and that in these circumstances he proposed to remain where he was. When this note reached Elbel, he read it to the two white men with him, laughed, put it in his pocket-book, then returned with his party down the stream.

"A pretty little farce!" said Jack. "He knew what my answer would be; all he wanted was a chance of examining our defences."

"Sure he didn't get much for his trouble. He'd have to be a deal taller to see much uv us, sorr."

During the rest of the day Elbel was seen in the distance on various sides of the camp making further observations. From a point on the slope above he could overlook part of the enclosure, and what he observed from there through his field-glass evidently gave him food for thought, for before sunset he marched all his men down the stream, followed cautiously by Imbono's scouts. These reported by and by that the enemy had encamped about two miles away. The white men had tents, the natives were cutting branches to form temporary shelters. Foragers had been sent out in all directions. Jack knew that they would do little good. There were no people to harry, all

were within his walls, and the crops around the villages had been gathered in. But this dearth was not likely to affect the besiegers for the present; for the scouts reported that some of their canoes had now come up the river loaded with stores.

Jack concluded from the fact of Elbel being in command that the Administration of the Congo State had not yet seen fit to intervene and equip an expedition under regular military officers. The Société Cosmopolite, in fact, an extremely wealthy corporation, had determined to root out this source of disaffection and revolt within its territory. The force commanded by Elbel represented practically the whole military establishment of the Company. He had no doubt received telegraphic authority from Europe to undertake the expedition, and could rely on the ultimate support of the State Government, which meanwhile would prefer the work to be done by the Company's troops rather than magnify the affair by employing its own forces.

It soon became clear to Jack that the lesson of his previous reverse had not been lost on Elbel. For a time, at least, there was to be no repetition of the rushing tactics that had proved so disastrous. Two days passed, and he had made no move. Scouts reported that he was busily engaged in building and fortifying his camp. The site chosen was a good deal nearer to Ilombekabasi than the first night's bivouac. It lay in a hollow somewhat more than half a mile from the cataract—in the face of an equal or inferior enemy, a very dangerous position, commanded, as it was, on almost all sides by the heights around. But it was sheltered from rifle-fire from the fort, and had a good water supply from a brook that fell some distance below into the stream that flanked Jack's settlement. Elbel could afford to ignore its strategical weakness by reason of his greatly superior numbers. For Jack could not occupy the rim of the hollow without drawing most of his men out of the fort, thus leaving it open to attack; and in any case, with only forty-five rifles, he could not do much to endanger a camp held by two hundred.

Ilombekabasi and Surrounding Country, showing Elbel's First Camp in Foreground

These reflections passed through his mind as he pondered on the information given by the scouts. His constant preoccupation during the past months with problems of attack and defence had given rise to a habit of looking at every move or incident in its military bearings.

"I wonder whether the fellows in the army class would envy me or pity me most!" he thought.

Elbel attempted nothing in the way of fortification for his camp except a light stockade—with his superior numbers defensive work seemed almost a superfluity. By comparing the reports of various scouts—who, as usual with negroes, were somewhat erratic in their ideas of number—and by his own observation through his field-glass, Jack concluded that Elbel had, in addition to his two hundred rifles, about five hundred spearmen. Jack himself had, in addition to his forty-five rifles, three hundred spearmen. The mere numbers were, of course, no real index to the proportionate strength of the two forces. In ordinary circumstances, indeed, the spearmen might almost be neglected; the striking power was to be measured in rifles alone. But Jack hoped that, with the drill and discipline his men had undergone, it would be proved that a determined fellow behind a spear was still by no means a combatant to be held lightly. Had not the Arabs of the Soudan shown this? He had no little confidence that, when the time of trial came, his three hundred spearmen would prove every whit as staunch as the dervishes who broke the British square at Abu Klea and threw away their lives by the thousand at Omdurman.

On the second morning after Elbel's appearance Jack found that pickets were posted all round the fort. Clearly it was no longer safe to send out scouts, at all events by daylight. The danger was little diminished after dark, for fires were lit at various points and a regular patrol was established.

"I don't care about sending out any of the men now," said Jack to Barney. "If one of our fellows was caught, his fate would be horrible. It's to prevent scouting, I suppose, that Elbel has posted men round us."

"Might it not be to prevent reinforcements from reaching us, sorr?"

"Not likely. There are no people for scores of miles round, and the country indeed is mostly virgin forest. The only reinforcement likely to reach us is my uncle's contingent, and their arrival is sure to be advised all along the river for days or perhaps weeks in advance; and that's one of my worries, Barney. I don't want Uncle to fall into Elbel's hands, but how can I stop it?"

"Send a couple of men off to meet him, sorr, and tell him of the danger."

"I might do that, perhaps. But, as you see, they'd have to run the gauntlet of Elbel's forest guards. Elbel either wants to catch my uncle, or he has got some scheme of attack in preparation which he's anxious we shouldn't discover. Whichever it is he means to keep us bottled up."

Jack was sitting at the door of his hut with Barney, talking by the light of a small fire. Samba had been hovering about for some time, waiting, as Barney thought, until the time should come for him to curl himself up as usual at the entrance to the hut after his friend the Irishman had entered. The conversation ceased for a moment, Jack bending forward and drawing patterns on the ground with his stick. Samba came up and began to speak.

"Begorra, massa," he said, "me can do."

"What can you do, my boy?" asked Jack, smiling a little at the exclamation Samba had adopted from Barney.

Samba struggled to find words in the white man's puzzling tongue. But, recognizing that his small stock of phrases was insufficient, he ran off and fetched Lepoko.

"Me tell massa all same," said the interpreter, when Samba had spoken to him. "Samba boy say, sah, he lib for go out see fings for massa. He no 'fraid. He go in dark, creep, creep, no 'fraid nuffin nobody. He lib for see eberyfing massa want see, come back one time say all same fings he see."

"No, no, it's too dangerous. Samba is the very last of my people I should wish to fall into Elbel's hands."

Samba laughed when Lepoko repeated this to him.

"He no 'fraid Elobela," said Lepoko. "He hab got foot like leopard, eye like cat, he make Elobela plenty much 'fraid. Want go plenty much, sah; say Mboyo one fader, massa two fader; two times he want go."

"Shall we let him go, Barney?" asked Jack doubtfully.

"To be sure I would, sorr. He's gone through the forest and cheated the lions and tigers and all the other beasts and creeping things, ivery wan uv 'm a mighty power cleverer than Elbel."

"Barring the lions and tigers, I think you're right, Barney. Well, if he's to go we must do all we can to help him. Could he get down the gully side, I wonder?"

"He say dat plenty good way, sah. He lib for swim like fish, go through water, come back all same."

"We'll let him down by a rope, Barney, and we'll place Mboyo at the stockade in charge of it; he'll have the greatest interest in seeing that the boy goes in and out safely. And look here, I've heard Samba imitating the cries of various animals; he'd better arrange with Mboyo to be ready for him when he hears a certain cry. And he must carry enough food with him to last a day in case he is prevented from getting back. If he's out more than one day he must fend for himself; but I fancy, after what he has already been through, at least it'd be a very bare country where he couldn't pick up enough to keep him going. He's a splendid little fellow."

"That's the truth's truth, sorr; and sure, whin we leave this haythen country, he'd better come back wid us to London, sorr. Wid him wan side uv me an' Pat the other, I'd be on me way to be Lord Mayor, bedad!"

Thus it was arranged. With a tinful of food slung about him, Samba was let down by a rope from the stockade, and crept in the darkness down the gully. A few minutes later, from some point on the other side, came the strident call of a forest-beetle twice repeated, and Mboyo knew that his son was safely across.

When morning broke, Jack saw that the pickets were placed as they had been on the previous day. He could easily have disposed of several of them, either by rifle fire or by a quick sally; but even at the present stage he had a great reluctance to open hostilities, which must involve much bloodshed and suffering. He resolved to bide his time, knowing that so far as food supply was concerned he had enough for at least a couple of months, and was in that respect probably better placed than Elbel, while the secret of the water supply with good luck would escape detection. Now that the purpose of the tank was known, Jack's prestige among the natives, great as it had been before, was much enhanced, and they had added to their stock of songs one in which the wonderful providence of the Inglesa in arranging that the daily water should not fail was glowingly extolled.

The day passed undisturbed. Jack was puzzled to account for the enemy's silence. Elbel must have a scheme in preparation, he thought. What could it be? Jack had heard a good deal of hammering going on in the camp below, the sound coming faintly on the breeze; except for that there was no sign of activity; and the hammering was sufficiently accounted for by the work of finishing off the construction of the camp.

Before turning in for the night he went to the spot where Mboyo was posted, to learn whether anything had been heard of Samba. While he was there, he caught the low rasping notes of the forest-beetle.

"Samba n'asi!"[1] cried Mboyo, springing up.

He lowered the rope over the stockade. In a few moments it was gently tugged, and soon Samba slipped over the stockade and stood beside Jack. He had an interesting report to make. In the forest, he said, a large number of men were tapping certain trees for a resinous gum, which was being run into small barrels. It was the work of making these barrels that had caused the continuous hammering Jack had noticed.

"Good boy!" said Jack. "I suppose you are very tired now, Samba?"

No, he was not tired; he was ready to go out again at once if Lokolobolo wished. But Jack said he had done enough for one day, and bade him go to sleep.

"So that's their game!" said Jack to Barney, when all was quiet. "There's only one use for resin here, and that's to fire our fort, and they can't intend to make fireballs, or they wouldn't take the trouble to make barrels. They want barrels for carriage, and that means that they intend to bring the resin here. They can't shy barrels at the natives' huts, and so much of the wall is stone that it won't easily catch fire. What else is there inflammable?"

"There's the blockhouses at the corners, sorr."

"You're right. They are going to fire the blockhouses. I'm sorry now I didn't make 'm of stone as I intended. But we had enough trouble with the wall, and the natives are so little used to stonework that perhaps after all they'd have made a poor job of it."

"Sure, I don't see how they are going to get near enough to do any damage, sorr. They can't come up under fire. Do the spalpeens think they'll catch us napping, begore?"

"Can't say, Barney. We must wait and see. The sentries are arranged for the night, eh?"

"They are that, sorr. 'Tis mighty hard to keep the niggers awake; not wan uv 'm but would see the inside uv the guard-room pretty often if they were in the Irish Fusiliers. But Samba and me just take turns to go the rounds all night and keep 'm stirring, sorr; and 'twould be a lucky man that got across into this place widout a crack over the head."

The full purpose of Elbel was seen earlier than Jack had expected. A little before dawn

Makoko, who had been on duty at the gate in the northern wall, hurried down to say that he had heard a sound as of a number of men marching for some distance up the hill above the fort. Jack accompanied him back, gently reprimanding him on the way for leaving his post. Judging by the sounds, there was unquestionably a large body of men on the move. They were approaching as quietly as negroes can; it is not an easy matter to persuade a force of black men to keep perfect silence.

While Jack was still with Makoko, another man came running up from the southern end of the fort and reported that he had heard the sound of many men advancing up the stream. Clearly a serious attack was intended at last. Sending word to Barney to remain on the *qui vive* at the southern wall, Jack waited anxiously for the glimmering light of dawn to reveal the enemy.

At last he could see them. They took little pains to conceal themselves. Elbel's riflemen were assembling on the ridge of the slope above. Among them were men carrying each a small barrel on his shoulder. They must have made a wide circuit from their camp below so that their movements might not be suspected until they were well in position.

The word was rapidly passed round the fort. In a few seconds every man was at his appointed place. The women and children had been bidden to remain in their huts, for a part of the enclosure being exposed to fire from the slope above, it would have been dangerous for any one to cross. Barney and his men at the southern wall were protected from this fire in their rear by the huts. At the northern wall Jack stood on a narrow platform by the gate, similar to that which he had used at his former camp near Ilola. His riflemen were posted below him, half of them at loop-holes left at intervals in the wall, the remainder just behind, ready to take their places at the word of command.

Jack was surprised to feel how little flustered he was. The responsibilities of the past months had bred self-control, and the capacity to grasp a situation quickly and act at once. And constant work with the same men, whom he had learned to know thoroughly, had created a mutual confidence which augured well for their success when put to the test.

A glance assured Jack that the main attack, if attack was intended, would be made by the riflemen. The spearmen in the valley of the river were designed to create a diversion and weaken the force available to oppose the principal assault. Barney could be trusted to hold his own against them.

So little did the enemy, having gained the position above, seek to conceal their movements, that Jack was tempted to salute them with a volley that must have done great execution—the range being scarcely two hundred yards. But Elbel seemed to know by instinct the feeling by which Jack would be animated. He evidently counted on being allowed to fire first. And indeed there was little time for Jack to consider the matter, for even as he made a mental note of the enemy's bravado, he heard a word of command given in a loud voice, and saw Elbel emerge from a small clump of bushes at the edge of the gully. The whole force, except ten men carrying barrels, flung themselves flat on their faces; and Jack had only time to give a rapid warning to his men when a scattered volley flashed from the line of prone figures, the bullets pattering on the stone wall like hail on a greenhouse.

Next moment the men with the barrels dashed forward, some making for the blockhouse above the gully, others for that at the opposite end of the northern wall. Through the clear space between the two parties the riflemen continued to fire as fast as they could reload. It was clear to Jack that Elbel expected the fire of his two hundred rifles, added to the unexpectedness of the movement, to keep down the fire of the defenders long enough to enable the barrel men to reach the blockhouses. But in this he was disappointed; nothing but a direct and combined assault on the wall would have gained the time he required. His rifle fire from a distance was quite ineffective. Jack had ordered his men to keep out of sight, and to fire through the loop-holes in the wall, aiming, not at the riflemen lying on the ground, but at the men sprinting with the barrels. Consequently, when the twenty-five rifles within the fort replied to the first volley, three of the runners fell on the one side and two on the other, their barrels rolling down the slope, some over the edge into the gully, others towards the copse on the east.

The other men, seeing the fate of their comrades, thought of nothing but their own safety. They dropped their barrels and rushed back. But even then they did not take the safe course. Instead of scattering and so lessening the chances of being hit, the two parties joined, and ran up the slope in a compact group. None of them reached the line of prostrate riflemen who were still blazing away ineffectually at the walls and blockhouses. The unfortunate men were caught in full flight and fell almost at the same moment, each man struck by several bullets.

Not till then did Jack allow his riflemen to turn their attention to the enemy's firing line. But one volley was sufficient. Elbel saw that his scheme had totally failed, and his position was untenable. Not a man of his opponents could be seen; his men had only small loop-holes to fire at, and the average negro is not a sufficiently good marksman to be formidable in such conditions. The defenders, on the other hand, found the enemy an excellent target; for, by some inexplicable piece of folly, Elbel had not ordered them to seek cover behind the many rocks and boulders that were scattered over the ground. He had lost all his barrel men and several of his riflemen, and within five minutes of the first volley he drew off his troops.

A yell of delight from the stockade followed his retirement. The men slapped their thighs and shouted "Yo! Yo!" until they were hoarse. The women and children poured out of the huts and danced about with wild enjoyment. Imbono's drummer banged with all his might. Some of the boys had made small trumpets of rolled banana leaves, and tootled away to their hearts' content, the sound being not unlike that made by blowing through tissue paper on a comb. Amid all the uproar Pat's joyous bark acclaimed the success.

"Faith, sorr, 'tis real mafficking, to be sure."

"Not quite, Barney. There's nobody drunk."

"True, an' the haythen sets an example to the Christian. There are no grog-shops here, praise be, wan at this corner and wan at that, to tempt the poor craturs."

"I only hope they're not shouting too soon, Barney. We haven't done with Elbel yet."

[1] Below.

CHAPTER XIX

Breaking the Blockade

Throughout that day Jack was on the alert in anticipation of another move on the part of the enemy. But Elbel's men, except the pickets, did not come within sight of the fort, and nothing was heard of them. Samba wished to go out again on a scouting mission, but Jack refused to allow him to leave the fort in daylight; perhaps in the darkness he might risk a journey once more.

Although the attempt to fire the blockhouses had been foiled, Jack, thinking over the matter, saw that the feat would not have been impossible with the exercise of a little common sense coupled with dash. A second attempt, better organized, might be successful.

"I wish we could guard against the risk," he said to Barney. "We don't want to be continuously on the fidget in case the blockhouses are fired. Yet we can't make 'em fireproof."

"That's true, sorr; still, something might be done to rejuce the inflammation."

"What's that?" said Jack without a smile. To call in question Barney's English was to wound him in the tenderest part.

"Why, sorr, why not drop down some uv them boulders we keep for repairing the wall? If we let them down wid care to the foot uv the blockhouses, close up against the woodwork, 'twould prevent any wan from setting a match to 'm."

"A good idea! we'll try it. Get the men to carry the stones up to the wall. We won't do anything more till it is dark."

When the sun had set, Jack had the stones hauled up to the roof of the blockhouse at the north-west corner, and then dropped down outside, as close to the woodwork as possible. The task was carried on in almost total darkness, only a few rushlights inside the camp preventing the workers from colliding with one another. But it was impossible to contrive that the heavy stones should fall silently, and a shot from up the slope soon told that the enemy had discovered what was going on. Active sniping for a time gave Jack a good deal of annoyance, and one or two of his men were hit; but he persevered in his work, and had partially accomplished it, when another danger suddenly threatened.

Up the slope, near the position occupied by the enemy in the morning, there appeared small points of light, which moved apparently at random for a few moments, and then came all in one direction, down the hill. They all started fairly close together, and Jack counted twelve in a line; but soon some diverged from the rest and went off at an angle. The others came on more and more rapidly towards the fort, jumping occasionally, but keeping on the whole a surprisingly straight course.

"Barrels again!" said Jack to Barney.

Only a few seconds after he had first observed them, they came with a quick succession of thuds against the wall and the half-finished rampart at the foot of the blockhouse, and the points of light spread out into fierce tongues of flame. Lighted matches had been attached to the barrels, and with the bursting of these by the stonework the resin they contained had taken fire. Of the dozen barrels that started, only four had reached their goal, the rest having rolled over the gully on the western slope as had happened during the day.

Jack hoped that his new stonework was sufficient to protect the logs at the base of the blockhouse. But one of the barrels, under the impetus gained in its passage down the hill, had jumped the boulders, and breaking as it crashed over, burst into flame within an inch or two of the woodwork. Another line of barrels was starting down the slope. Jack had called up his best marksmen at the first alarm, and ordered them to take pot-shots at the twinkling points of light, or the figures above, dimly lit up by the matches attached to the barrels. Whether any of the shots got home he could not tell; another set of barrels was trundling down towards the fort.

It appeared to Jack that nothing could save the blockhouse. Burning resin could only be extinguished by a deluge of water, and he had no means of bringing water from the tank in sufficient quantities. The logs were dry, and, when once fairly alight, would burn furiously. Barney suggested dropping a heavy boulder on the barrel most dangerously near, but Jack saw that the effect of this would be merely to spread the flames without necessarily extinguishing them. The fire would continue beneath the stone; it would lick the lowest logs, and in a few minutes the whole base of the blockhouse would be ablaze. The imminence of the danger acted as a spur to Jack's resourcefulness. It flashed upon him that there was one chance of saving the fort. Calling to Samba to follow him, he rushed from the roof of the blockhouse down the ladders connecting it with the second floor and this with the ground, and ran at full speed to his hut, where he seized an empty tobacco-tin and searched for a piece of wire. For a few moments he could not lay hands on any, but he then bethought himself of the wired cork of a Stephens' ink-bottle. Wrenching this out, he hastened to the underground magazine where the ammunition was, stored. Samba had preceded him thither with a lighted candle in a little lantern of bamboo.

Among the ammunition was a keg of loose powder sent up by Mr. Martindale for refilling cartridge cases. While Samba very cautiously held the lantern out of harm's way, Jack, with the brad of a penknife, bored two thin holes in the tin and two corresponding holes in the lid. Then he inserted the wire and filled the tin with powder. Clapping on the lid and firmly securing it by twisting up the wire, he rushed back to the blockhouse, up to the roof, and cleared out all the men helter-skelter, bidding them go with Samba and bring baskets full of earth to the base of the wall.

The place was now reeking with acrid smoke from the burning resin, great black eddies of it whirling over the roof, stinging Jack's eyes and making him cough and choke. When none but himself was left—for there was some danger in what he purposed—he went to the edge of the roof, and bending over, almost blinded by the fumes, he marked the spot where the flame seemed the fiercest, and dropped the tin into the midst of it. Though he sprang back at once, he had not reached the inmost edge of the roof when there was a loud explosion. The blockhouse rocked; clouds of sparks flew up; and feeling the tremor beneath him, Jack feared he had destroyed rather than saved. But the trembling ceased. He rushed back to the fore edge of the roof and peered over. As the smoke cleared away he saw no longer a blazing mass below him; nothing of the barrel was left; but all the ground for many yards around was dotted with little tongues of flame. The force of the explosion had broken up the huge devouring fire into a thousand harmless ones.

But the woodwork near which the barrel had rested was smouldering. There was still a danger that the blockhouse would burn. While that danger remained Jack felt that his task was not yet done, and he instantly prepared to meet it. Flames from the other barrels that had struck the wall were lighting up the scene. To carry out his purpose involved a great risk, but it was a risk that must be run. Calling to Samba, who had remained nearest at hand, he bade him bring a rope and send Barney and Makoko to him. When they arrived he got them to knot the rope about him, and let him down over the wall on the gully side, which was in deep shadow. Creeping round the blockhouse on the narrow ledge between it and the gully, he called to the men above to lower some of the baskets of earth which had been placed in readiness. As they reached him he emptied them upon the smouldering logs. It was impossible now to keep in the shadow; his every movement was betrayed by the still flaming barrels; and his work was not completed when bullets began to patter about him. His only protection was the rough rampart of boulders which had been thrown over from the roof. But he bent low; it is difficult even for expert marksmen to aim without the guidance of the riflesights, and Elbel's men were far from being experts; Jack finished his job as rapidly as might be, and escaped without a scratch. Then creeping round once more to the gully, he laid hold of the rope and was drawn up into safety.

The other blockhouses meanwhile had been in no danger. That at the north-east corner was defended by the nature of the ground, which sloped so rapidly that a barrel rolled from above could never hit the mark. That at the southeast corner, being at the edge of the precipice, could only be fired by the hand of man, and no man could approach it safely. By averting the danger at the north-west Jack had saved the camp.

But the attempt had been so nearly successful that he resolved to lose no time in completing the work of protection already begun. The moment was come, too, for showing Elbel that he could only maintain a thorough investment of the fort with the acquiescence of the besieged. At any time a sally must break the chain of pickets, for Elbel's force was not large enough to support them adequately all round. Averse as Jack was from shedding blood, he felt that it was necessary to teach the enemy a wholesome lesson.

Before he could do anything, however, he must know how the force was distributed, and how the pickets were placed. He remembered his half promise that Samba should be allowed to go

scouting that night. No other could be trusted to move so warily or act so intelligently. Samba was accordingly let down into the gully. While he was gone Jack explained to Barney the plan he proposed to try should the boy's information favour it.

"I shall lead some of the men out, I don't know yet in what direction. At least it will surprise Elbel. I hope it will alarm his men and throw them into confusion. You must take advantage of it to go on with our defences. Let down more boulders from the roof, and build them up as fast as you can to form a facing three or four feet high to the two northern blockhouses. You'll only have about half an hour for the job, for Elbel will have got his whole force together by then, and I shan't be able to fight them all. But we've plenty of men to turn on to it, and when I give the signal they must tumble over the wall and get to work."

Within an hour Samba returned. He reported that the enemy had all retired to their camp except the pickets. About forty men were posted about a camp fire up stream near the place where the barrels had been rolled down. Another picket of the same strength was lying at the edge of the copse about a quarter of a mile to the east, and a third picket lay across the gully to the west. Samba had had great difficulty in eluding this western picket, and would have returned sooner but for the detour he had been obliged to make.

All favoured Jack's enterprise. The pickets were so far from the camp below the southern face of the fort that some time must elapse before help could reach them. They could only support one another, and the idea of a ruse to prevent that had already flashed through Jack's mind.

Selecting fifteen of his steadiest riflemen, including Makoko and Lepoko, Jack had them lowered one by one into the gully, and then himself followed. The night was fortunately very dark; all the flames from the barrels had gone out, and he trusted that the enemy would be quite unprepared for any movement from the fort. When all were assembled, they crept up the gully in dead silence, walking as far from the water as the steep sides allowed, so as to avoid kicking stones into it and making a splash. At first the gully was at least twelve feet deep, but it became more shallow as they proceeded, until by and by its top barely rose above their heads.

They had not gone far when they heard laughing and talking beyond them. However Elbel might regard his defeat, it had evidently not affected the spirits of his men; the negro's cheerfulness is hard to quench. At a bend in the stream, out of sight from the fort, shone the faint glow of the camp fire; and Jack, peeping cautiously round, saw a sentry on each bank, moving backwards and forwards, but stopping now and again to exchange pleasantries, or more often fatuous remarks about food, with the rest of the picket at the fire. It was nothing new to Jack that the Congo soldier's idea of sentry-go is somewhat loose.

Again Jack was favoured by circumstances. The glow of the fire did not extend far into the darkness of the gully; the noise of the laughing and talking was loud enough to drown all slight sounds for some distance around. Thus the sixteen men in the gully could approach very near the camp fire without being seen or heard. Jack's plan, already half formed before he started, was quickly adapted to the conditions. Silently gathering his men together, he ordered them in a whisper to follow him in a charge with the bayonet; not to fire except at the word of command; not in their pursuit of the enemy to go beyond the camp fire. It would have been easy to dispose of at least a third of the picket by firing upon them from the darkness; the distance was only about a hundred yards, and every shot would tell, for they were huddled together. Such an act would be justified by all the rules of warfare. Jack knew that in a like case he would receive no mercy from the enemy; but he was too young a campaigner to deal with them as they would deal with him; he could not give the order to shoot them down unawares.

When his men clearly understood what was required of them he led the way, and they all crept forward again. The glow of the fire now made them dimly visible to one another, but not to the picket, who were in the full light, nor to the sentries, whose attention was largely taken up by the proceedings of their comrades. When the sound of talking lulled for a few moments, Jack halted; when it grew in force, and he heard the sentries join in the chatter, he seized the opportunity to steal forward a few yards more. So by slow degrees they approached within forty paces.

To go further without discovery seemed to Jack impossible. Pausing for a moment to whisper once more to his men, he suddenly shouted the order to charge, and, springing up the bank, dashed forward with a cheer that was reinforced by the yells from fifteen lusty throats. The sounds of joviality about the camp fire died on the instant; the cheer from the river, echoed by the rocky walls of the gully, seemed to come from a host of men. Yells of alarm broke from the dusky figures by the fire. Some of the men seemed for the moment spellbound; others leapt to their feet and made a dash for the rifles stacked close by, tumbling over one another in their agitation; the majority simply scurried away like hares into the darkness, only anxious to get as far away as possible from this shouting host that had sprung as it were out of nothingness. As Jack's men rushed up there were a few reports of rifles hastily shot off, and eight or nine men made as if to stand firm near the camp fire; but they could not face the steel gleaming red in the glow. One or two hapless wretches were bayonetted before they had time to run; the rest, with a wild howl, flung down their weapons and bolted.

The sound of the conflict, Jack knew, would be taken by Barney as the signal to begin work outside the blockhouses. What would be its effect on the enemy? Would it draw their pickets on

the right and left to the support of their comrades? Or would they be so much alarmed that nothing but flight would occur to them? He thought the probabilities favoured the former, for the firing having ceased, the immediate cause of alarm would seem to have been removed. Without staying to consider that the chain of investment would be broken by their action, the outer pickets would in all likelihood move towards each other for mutual support.

Here was an opportunity which Jack was quick to seize. Without a moment's loss of time, he called his men together and hurried back down the gully, where he ordered them to line the banks on both sides, keeping well in shadow from the light of the fire. The position they took up was about forty yards below the bivouac, almost the same spot from which the charge had been made. The men had only just established themselves when the picket from the eastern quarter came running up. Jack's situation was now so serious that he had no longer any compunction. As the negroes emerged from the gloom into the light of the camp fire, he ordered his men on the opposite bank to shoot. Several of the enemy fell; the rest turned tail, finding their comrades falling about them without being able to see their assailants. But they did not run far; when they had passed beyond the circle of light they halted.

Meanwhile all was quiet from the direction of the other picket beyond the gully. If this was advancing, it was with more caution. For some minutes no sound was heard; then on his left hand Lepoko detected a slight rustle in the brushwood, and he whispered to Jack that the enemy were creeping forward, feeling their way. At the same time there were sounds of movement on the right.

Now was the chance to attempt a ruse. Withdrawing his men stealthily down the stream for a hundred yards, Jack halted. The camp fire was dying down for want of fresh fuel; he hoped that the two parties would mistake each other in the gloom. A quarter of an hour passed. Then the air rang with shots and shouts; the two pickets had met and come into conflict. The error was soon discovered, and then there arose a terrific clamour as each party accused the other.

Jack considered that the work of the fort should have been completed by this time, all danger of interruption by the pickets having been removed by his sortie. He therefore led his men back along the gully, and arrived to find Barney putting the finishing touches to the work by the light of his bamboo lantern.

"All well?" said Jack.

"All well, sorr. You're not hurt at all?"

"Not a bit. None of us scratched. Now we'll get back. I don't think they'll try that particular dodge again."

They had hardly returned within the stockade when they heard the sound of a considerable body of men moving up the opposite bank of the stream towards the pickets above.

"Too late!" said Jack with a chuckle.

"Truth, sorr. That Elbel was niver intended for a sojer, 'tis plain. But who are the two white men wid him, thin? Sure, I thought he'd brought 'em wid him to tache him what to do, but they would all seem to be birds uv wan feather, sorr."

"We may find out by and by, perhaps to our cost. Meanwhile we had better man the walls and blockhouses in case he's going to favour us with a night attack."

But the sounds of movement among the enemy ceased, and the remainder of the night passed in unbroken quietness.

CHAPTER XX

David and Goliath

Next morning Jack's men found resting against the stone wall of the fort several barrels of resin which had not burned. The bumping they had received in rolling down the slope had shaken out the fuses. This was a lucky discovery. The inflammable contents of the barrels would come in useful—for making fireballs, if for no other purpose. Jack had them carried into the fort and stored in the magazine.

Very soon after daybreak Jack saw what seemed to be the greater portion of Elbel's force moving up the hill. He counted at least five hundred men, and noticed that only about a hundred of these were riflemen, the remainder carrying spears, or tools of some kind.

"You see what they are at, Barney?" he said.

"Shifting their camp, by what it appears, sorr."

"No, I don't think that's it. Elbel has failed with fire; he's now going to try water. He's going to cut off our water supply."

"Sure he's entitled to, as we don't pay rates, which is rubber. But we can do widout his water supply, sorr, having a private distillery uv our own."

"I'm pretty sure I'm right, for you see the men are going a great deal farther up the hill than they need if they're merely looking for another base of attack."

"Bedad, why shouldn't we have a little rifle practice at 'em, sorr? 'Tis long range firing, indeed, but mighty good practice."

"No. Our ammunition is too precious to be wasted; and even if we hit a few of them, that wouldn't stop Elbel's scheme, whatever it is. We'll keep our eye on the river and see if there's any shrinkage."

It was not until late in the afternoon that he got positive proof that Elbel was in fact diverting the stream. He had fancied for some time that the height of the water was less, but only about four o'clock did the fall become decided. After that, however, the stream dwindled very rapidly, until, towards nightfall, there was only a thin trickle of water in the river bed below the fort, where in the morning the stream had been twenty feet broad and nearly six feet deep. At the same time a remarkable change in the appearance of the country east of the fort had attracted the attention of the natives, who swarmed upon the platform on that side and gazed in amazement. Lokolobolo had brought water into their camp; but who had made water run in a swift river where no river had ever been before?

Nearly a mile away to the east, a broad shallow stream was rushing down the slope that extended from the precipice on which the fort stood to the foothills two miles beneath. The river, dammed no doubt by boulders far up the hill, had now been forced into the course which, but for a rocky barrier, it would long since have discovered for itself.

"A very pretty scheme, bedad!" said Barney. "And I just wish we could set a fountain going, like those in Trafalgar Square, just to show Mr. Elbel that he may have his river all to himself if he pleases."

"That wouldn't do at all, Barney. We don't want to flaunt our good fortune. In fact, our best course is to keep Elbel in the dark. Indeed I think we had better stop that overflow from our tank. Now that the cataract has dried up, the overflow would easily be seen."

"But what'll we do wid the overflow, sorr? Sure, we don't want a flood in the camp!"

"Certainly not. We'll break it up into a number of tiny trickles, and let them find their way through the wall at different points. They'll be sucked up or disappear before they reach the ground below."

"Bedad, now, I would niver have thought of that! Mr. Elbel will think we get our water from heaven, sorr, if he's iver heard uv it."

The work of damming the river having been accomplished, the main body of the enemy marched down just before dark and regained their camp. As they passed within earshot of the fort, Elbel's negroes could not refrain from flinging taunts at the men of their colour within the walls, telling them that they could no longer cook their food, much less wash their babies. This made the men very angry; they prepared to blaze away with their rifles at the gibing enemy, and Jack's command to drop their weapons might, perhaps, for once have been disregarded had not Samba suddenly struck up the song which one of the men had composed, chronicling Lokolobolo's great deeds with water and fire:

Lokolobolo
In Ilombekabasi
Dug a great hole,
Filled it with waters
Great is his magic!
How can we praise him—
Lokolobolo?
Lo! Elobela
Came with the fire tubs
To Ilombekabasi.
But the Inglesa
Lokolobolo
Filled a pot with the fire-stuff.
What a noise!
What a smoke!
Fire tubs are broken.
Ha! Elobela!
Where is your fire now?
What is the good of you?
Inglesa's magic

No one can master.
Is it fire?
Is it water?
Lokolobolo
In Ilombekabasi
Quenches the fire,
Keeps water for black men.
Ha! Elobela,
Go home to your cook-pot.
No good in this land,
In Ilombekabasi.

The song was taken up one by one by the people, and in the delight of singing Lokolobolo's praise and Elobela's shame, the jeers of the negroes outside were forgotten.

That night Elbel posted no regular pickets round the fort. He had clearly given up the idea of a strict blockade, which was indeed impossible with the force at his command; but except for the desire to mask his own movements, he lost nothing by the withdrawal of his pickets, for even if the garrison took advantage of it to issue from the fort, they could make little use of their freedom in a country bare of supplies. Jack did not doubt that Elbel had many scouts abroad, and would be on the watch for an attempt to obtain water. He would imagine that none was procurable save from a distance of at least half a mile from the fort, and was doubtless already congratulating himself on the success of his strategy.

Several days passed, and life went on in the camp as peacefully as though no enemy was near. The women performed their daily tasks of cleaning and cooking; the men drilled and exercised; the children amused themselves as children always can. Jack took it into his head to teach them some of the round games popular with English children, knowing that the elders were sure to copy them; and every little novelty tended to amuse them and keep them cheerful. Indeed, he found the men so like children in their capacity for finding easy amusement, that one day he started a game of leap-frog for them, and soon the whole camp was hilarious, the men springing over one another's backs all round the enclosure with great shouts of laughter.

As Jack expected, Elbel kept a sharp watch by means of scouts all round the fort, to ensure that no water reached the besieged. Jack smiled as he pictured the Belgian's amazement, when day after day went by without any sign of distress. Now that the regular night pickets were removed, some of Jack's men found it easy to get out for little scouting expeditions; and except for an occasional brush between men of the two forces employed in this duty, there was nothing to show that four hundred men on the one side, and seven hundred on the other, were engaged in deadly warfare. In these duels the men of Ilombekabasi invariably came off best. They were at home equally in the forest and the plain; the enemy were for the most drawn from the Lower Congo—an inferior type of negro and less used to fighting in wooded districts. And a long immunity had rendered them careless. They were accustomed to see whole villages panic-stricken at the sight of an Albini rifle. They had had no need to cultivate the art of scouting, except in tracking runaways; nor even the higher kind of marksmanship; for it was their practice to tie their victim to a tree before shooting: in this way the State or the Concessionary Company was saved ammunition. Indeed, one cartridge was frequently sufficient to account for two or more men, women, or children, if they were tied up with due regard for the convenience of the marksman. It was a new and very disconcerting experience to meet men of their own colour who were not afraid of them, and they did not easily adapt themselves to the new condition of things.

For this work of scouting Jack had found no man yet to match Samba. The boy seemed to be endowed with a sixth sense, for he went safely in the most dangerous places, returned more quickly than the rest, and brought more information. And though he soon made himself expert with the rifle presented him by Jack after the buffalo hunt, he never took it with him on these scouting trips, preferring to go unencumbered. He relied on his knife.

One morning, when Jack was awakened as usual by Barney, he noticed a very comical look on the Irishman's face.

"Anything happened?" he said.

"Bedad, sorr, I didn't mean to tell ye till ye were dressed. What d'ye think that little varmint has done now?"

"Samba? No mischief, I hope."

"Mischief, begorra! Just after daybreak, whin you were sound asleep, sorr, and I was going the rounds as usual, Mboyo calls to me from the wall, and whin I comes up to 'm, there he is hauling like the divil on the rope. 'Samba must be getting fat like me,' says I to meself, lending a hand, 'for sure the boy will not need such a mighty big haul.' Mboyo jabbered away, but I couldn't understand him. And then, sorr, up comes a villainous ugly head, followed by a body ten times the size of Samba's, and a big nigger comes over, almost choked with a new kind uv necklace he was wearing, and shaking with the most terrible fright mortal man was iver in. Mboyo lets down

the rope again, and up comes Samba, grinning like a Cheshire cat.

"'Me hab catch,' says he. 'Catch what?' says I. 'Begorra!' says he, 'bont'one!'[1] Which was Dutch to me, sorr, only he pointed to the nigger. 'Catch him?' says I. He nodded his head till I thought 'twould break off. 'Ku?'[2] says I. 'Nyango!'[3] says he; and thin I laughed, sorr, 'cos the idea uv a boy taking prisoner a man ten times his size——"

"Draw it mild, Barney."

"True, sorr, he doesn't look quite so big as he did. I wished to wake ye at once, but Samba said no, he'd keep the prisoner safe till your usual time, and here he is, sorr, and the prisoner too."

Jack had been putting on his clothes while Barney spoke. Leaving the hut he saw Samba holding one end of the tendril of a creeper, the other end being looped about the neck of a tall strong negro. Jack listened patiently, and with the aid of many questions, was able to piece out his story.

Creeping in the darkness up the dry river bed some distance from the fort, Samba had seen for a moment the form of a man dimly silhouetted against the starlit sky. Then the man disappeared; but it was child's play to find him again, for he made his way into the channel and moved slowly down towards the fort. He had a rifle, and was head and shoulders taller than Samba; but neither his strength nor his weapon was to avail him against the ingenuity and cat-like agility of his young enemy.

It would have been easy for Samba to stalk him and make an end of him with the knife; but a brilliant idea occurred to the boy: how much better to capture him and take a living prisoner to the fort! For two hours Samba kept in touch with him, never more than a few yards away, yet never by the slightest sound betraying his presence. At last the man found a position above the fort which satisfied him, for he established himself there, apparently intending to wait for the dawn.

Samba felt sure that when he moved to regain his own camp he would retrace his steps up stream. To go down would bring him within view of the fort. His course would be to ascend the channel and fetch a wide circuit back to his own people.

Samba acted quickly on this assumption. As silently as a shadow he glided past the man until, some distance up the channel, groping on the bank, he came across a tough creeper. From this he cut off three or four yards of a pliant tendril, and with deft fingers made a slip-knot at one end. Then he went again down stream, and made his way to a rock overhanging the left bank, whence he had many a time speared fish while the fort was being built. On this rock he lay at full length, ready to move at the slightest sign of the negro stirring.

When dawn broke Samba saw that the man was staring intently at the fort. After a prolonged examination he turned, and, as Samba expected, moved up the gully, keeping under the left bank to avoid observation from the walls. Slowly and cautiously he picked his way upward, little recking of the lithe form stretched like a panther on the rock above. He was passing the rock, the rifle in his left hand, the right hand assisting his wary steps over the rugged channel, when the lasso curled gently over his head; a short vigorous tug, and the man, dropping his rifle and clutching at the strangling cord around his throat, was pulled backward on to the rocky side of the gully. Samba had marked where the rifle fell, and leapt nimbly down. Before the negro, wriggling to his feet, had succeeded in loosing the terrible noose, Samba was at his side, the Albini in his hand.

The suddenness of the onset and the shock of his fall had robbed the man of all power of action. When Samba said that he must either accompany him to Ilombekabasi or be shot, he saw no third course and accepted the first. Perhaps he was tired of his service with Elobela; perhaps he was curious to see the village of the wonderful Lokolobolo; certainly he was very much afraid of being shot. So he made no resistance, but went quickly down the gully, a step or two in advance of Samba, who carried the rifle, as he did not fail to remind his captive from time to time.

Through Lepoko Jack questioned the man. He showed no reluctance to answer; no wish to conceal his employer's purposes. *Esprit de corps*, Jack surmised, was a sentiment not cultivated on the Congo. The prisoner confessed that Elobela exulted in the belief that within a few days the fort would be compelled to surrender by lack of water. And he had promised his men an orgy when the surrender should take place. Not a soul should be spared. There were man-eaters among his force, and they were looking forward to a choice banquet; many young and tender children frolicked in Ilombekabasi.

Jack felt himself turn pale as he heard this. The facts were coming home to him. The thought that little Bakota, the chubby boy whom Barney employed to wash dishes, or little Ilangala, the girl whom the same indefatigable factotum had taught to darn his socks, might fall into the hands of these ruthless cannibals, to be torn limb from limb, and sacrificed to their brutal appetites, kindled emotion within him much more poignant than the mere report that such things had happened in the collection of rubber on the Congo, somewhere, at some time.

He dismissed the man under guard, and went to his hut, wishing to be alone. An hour or two later Lepoko came to him; the prisoner had given more information.

"Him say, sah, big massa lib for come back up ribber. Him say Elobela no let massa come to Ilombekabasi; catch him, sah."

Here was a new source of uneasiness and anxiety. Jack had longed for his uncle's return; now he almost wished that something had happened to prevent his departure. Already he had had such proofs of Elbel's vindictive and unscrupulous temper that he dreaded what might happen should Mr. Martindale fall into his hands. But for the moment he saw no means of warning his uncle, and he tried to crush his fears and forebodings.

During the next few days several of Elbel's scouts were killed or wounded by Jack's men, who had so far been wonderfully successful in escaping injury. One man of the enemy who was brought in wounded confirmed the first prisoner's statement that the Inglesa was said to be on his way. The river was being watched at various points of its course, and Jack recognized the hopelessness of attempting to evade these sentinels and give his uncle timely warning.

Ten days had passed since the stream had been diverted, and the last captured scout said that Elobela was growing very impatient. He could not understand how the fort had been able to hold out so long. Every day he expected to see a flag of truce hoisted, and to receive a message asking for the terms of surrender. One evening another scout was captured, and from him Jack learnt that his secret had at last been partially discovered. Angry at being so long baulked, Elbel had determined to find out the source whence the defenders obtained the water he knew they must have. He sent out scouts for this express purpose. One of them, creeping up the bed of the stream below the southern face of the fort, had discovered that the precipice, which from a distance looked dry, was running with water, and that a thin stream was trickling into the gully. The ground had gradually become saturated, and the overflow, which had at first disappeared into the earth, was now making itself only too visible. When the discovery was reported to Elbel, he concluded that there must be a spring within the fort. Great was his fury at having wasted so much time and labour fruitlessly. In his anger he declared that the defenders should have plenty of water in future.

"What did he mean by that?" asked Jack.

The man did not know. Elobela did not tell all his purposes to the black men.

The very next morning it was observed that a large body of men was again on the move up the hill. Jack hurried to the top of the north-west blockhouse and followed the movements through his field-glass. This time an even larger force was engaged than had been previously employed to dam the stream. Two parties, riflemen and spearmen, numbering in all, as he estimated, nearly six hundred, were marching up the heights. Clearly some new work was to be undertaken, and it must be of no little magnitude. There were no signs of preparation for an immediate attack. The troops continued their upward march for at least a mile. Then Jack was surprised to see them set to work rolling boulders down the hill towards the slope at the north-east of the fort and the new course of the river. Whatever the scheme was, it involved a great deal of labour, for the whole day was spent upon it, and still the parties of workers had made but small progress down the hillside. It became clear to Jack that the supply of boulders lower down had been used up in constructing the dam. More boulders were evidently required, and to procure these Elbel had had to take his men a considerable distance up the hill.

Late in the afternoon the negroes were marched back to camp. As soon as it appeared safe, Jack sent Samba out to ascertain what had been done. When he came back he reported that a large quantity of stones had been collected near the dam, and that though the main body had returned to their camp, there were still several large parties engaged in hauling boulders nearly a mile away from this point.

Jack could form no idea of what Elbel's plan was; but it seemed to him that in any case the time had come to meet it with a counterstroke. For hours that night he sat with Barney discussing every means of striking a blow that occurred to him; but he came to no decision. A stand-up fight in the open was impossible; there could only be one end to that, outnumbered as Jack was in riflemen by nearly five to one, and at present the enemy's movements did not suggest to him any opportunity for stratagem.

Next morning he stood with Barney at the wall, watching the enemy as once more they marched up to the scene of the previous day's work. As usual, he did his best to count them—no easy matter, for the men did not march in orderly ranks like a disciplined regiment, but either in small groups or in several long files.

"Elbel is getting impatient," remarked Jack at last. "He wants to hurry up that work of his, for I make out that he is taking over fifty more men up to-day."

"Sure there can't be more than fifty left in camp, sorr."

"I suppose not. That's rather risky," he added thoughtfully—"in an enemy's country, Barney."

"Would you be meaning to go for them, sorr?" returned Barney, his eyes lighting up. "Bedad,

I'd rejoice in that same. I haven't told ye, sorr, but many's the time I've felt I should just go raging mad if I had to stay in this camp much longer. 'Tis all very safe and comfortable, sorr, but 'tis a prison all the same, and there's no man on earth likes to be caged up less than an Irishman."

"D'you think we could do it, Barney? The camp is only about half a mile below us; Elbel's men are a mile above, some at least a mile and a half. Could we rush the camp before the main body could be brought to its relief?"

"Say 'tis two miles between 'em as the crow flies; they could run that in twelve minutes widout distressing themselves."

"But they couldn't take the shortest road, because that would bring them under fire from our walls. The distance would be a good deal more than two miles. And we should have to cover half that distance to the camp and back, the return journey up hill. It doesn't leave much margin, Barney."

"Five minutes at the very most, sorr. But a man can do a power uv fighting in five minutes."

"Let us think it out carefully. We mustn't throw away all our success by a mad enterprise now. We oughtn't to weaken the defensive strength here much, for Elbel has such numbers that he could afford to lose a few in storming."

"And we needn't, sorr. 'Tis not numbers that will count in rushing the camp; 'tis dash, sorr, and ivery man together."

"That's quite true. And I think our men will work together better than Elbel's. But there's a very serious difficulty—that outpost of his half-way between us and his camp. It's the only post he has kept up permanently, and now it's a nuisance to us."

He referred to a couple of men stationed at the edge of a copse to the west of the stream. They were screened by rocks, and from their position they could see the blockhouses and the tops of the huts, and keep the west and south quarters of the fort under fairly strict observation.

"You see, they would instantly detect any movement of ours down the hill; and by the time we got to the camp the enemy would be on the *qui vive*."

"There's only wan thing to be done, sorr."

"Well?"

"Shut the eyes and the ears and the mouths uv the niggers at the outpost."

"All very well; but they're too well screened to be shot at, and killing them is the only way to destroy all their senses. Besides, it would be madness to fire. The sound would alarm the enemy and spoil our plans."

"'Twas not meself that thought uv firing at all at all, sorr. I was thinking uv Samba."

"Samba! What can he do?"

"Sure and I don't know no more than the dead, or I'd tell it you meself, sorr. But Samba's the ould wan himself at schaming; will I fetch him?"

"Certainly. We'll see if he can do anything. Hurry up!"

[1] This man.

[2] Are you speaking the truth?

[3] Mother!—the strongest affirmative.

CHAPTER XXI

A Dash and All Together

Barney brought back with him both father and son. Mboyo was a finely-built negro, but Samba, who had been growing rapidly, promised to outstrip his father in height, as he already excelled him in nimbleness of wit. He had a noble brow, and eyes of extraordinary lustre; and Jack could not help contrasting him with the mean-looking white man, who, in the providence of King Leopold, was entrusted with the lives of such people as these.

Jack explained his purpose, and the difficulty which seemed to stand in the way. A glance was exchanged between Samba and his father; then the boy said that they would deal with the outpost.

"How will you do it?"

"We will creep upon them."

"But it is daylight."

"True. We may fail; but we will do our best."

"Very well. Now we must get our men together, Barney. It will be useless for Samba and Mboyo to start until we are ready. In fact, we will postpone the whole thing for an hour or two. In the hottest part of the day the men in the camp will very likely be dozing or fast asleep; even if they're awake, they'll probably not have all their wits about them."

He selected twenty riflemen, including Imbono, Makoko, and Lepoko, and fifty spearmen, the pick of the force, and ordered them to assemble at a given signal at a small exit he had recently had cut in the base of the wall on the gully side. The hole had been made at a spot where the gully was very rugged and covered with creepers, so that any one leaving the fort by this small aperture could scarcely be detected except by an observer placed immediately opposite. The portion of the wall which had been removed could be replaced, and it would be impossible, save on very close scrutiny, to discover the existence of the exit.

A dozen of the men, besides carrying their weapons, were to sling round their shoulders some large fireballs which had been made under Barney's superintendence from the resin in the confiscated barrels.

"Begorra, sorr, 'tis meself that has an idea!" cried Barney in the midst of these preparations. "Couldn't we do something to hould the attention uv those villains at the outpost while Samba and the chief are doing their job?"

"A good idea, indeed. What do you suggest?"

"'Deed now, I wish we had Mike Henchie and Denis O'Sullivan and a few more uv the bhoys. We'd treat the niggers to the finest dancing wid the shillelagh that iver was seen this side uv Limerick."

"I wish we had! You speak of shillelaghs. Won't Indian clubs do? I have it! We'll get some of the children to go through their exercises. Go and collect them, Samba—Lofinda and Ilafa and Lokilo and Isungila, they're the best, and about a dozen more. But hang it! I forgot. They won't be seen over the wall."

"Sure there's the platform by the blockhouse, sorr. 'Tis uncommon small for a stage play, but 'tis meself could make it wider in a brace uv shakes."

"Then do so, like a good fellow. It's a capital idea of yours, Barney."

The platform was quickly enlarged. Then, just after midday, when the sun was blazing fiercely, and in the ordinary course of things everybody would be at rest in the huts, Barney marshalled some twenty children, boys and girls, on the platform, and Jack accompanied Mboyo and Samba to the little exit.

"You must give me a signal if you succeed with the outpost," said Jack, as they prepared to slip through. "It must not be a sound. You had better show yourself for a moment above the rocks, Samba."

The instant they had reached the gully, Imbono's drummer began to beat his drum, not with the powerful strokes that would have sent a thunderous boom echoing for miles around, but with gentle taps that would scarcely be heard beyond the two outposts. At the same time two or three children blew softly through their little trumpets of banana leaves. In a moment two woolly heads could be seen cautiously peeping over the rocks for which Mboyo and Samba were making. Then the performance began. Instructed by Barney, the children on the platform swung their clubs about, wondering why they were forbidden to sing the song about Lokolobolo which usually accompanied their exercise. They knew nothing of the intention of their instructor, nor why he had chosen this hot hour instead of the cool of the evening; but they loved him, and delighted in the rhythmic motion, and they plied their clubs gracefully, all unconscious of the four curious eyes watching them from the rocks a few hundred yards away.

Jack saw nothing of their pretty movements. He was at the wall. The two men of the outpost gazed at the children. Jack gazed at them. Below him squatted his warriors, subdued to unnatural quietness by the thought of what was before them. Impatiently they waited for the word. They did not know exactly what they were to do; Lokolobolo had simply said they were to follow him. But they knew Lokolobolo; had he not time and again brought Elobela's schemes to nought? Lokolobolo had said they were to follow him; and they were confident that where he led was the one place in the world for them.

Twenty minutes passed. The performance on the platform still went on. Then Jack suddenly saw the two black heads above the rocks disappear. Next moment Samba's head showed itself where they had been.

"Aiyoko!"[1] said Jack to his men.

Quickly, one by one, they slipped through the narrow hole, and formed up under cover of the thick-growing creepers in the gully. Jack went last, saw that the opening was closed behind him, and turned to address his men.

"We are going to Elobela's camp," he said. "We shall go down the gully until we come opposite to it, then I shall lead you; you will come behind me silently, keeping your ranks. I hope the men in the camp may be asleep. You will not fire until I give the word. When we have driven them out of the camp, those of you who have fireballs will set fire to their huts. Then seize on all the guns and ammunition you can find, and return as quickly as possible to the fort."

The men's eyes gleamed with excitement. Stealthily as panthers they crept down the dry gully after their leader. They did not know that behind them, at the wall, Barney, having abruptly dismissed the children, was watching with a very wistful look. The good fellow wished that he were with them.

Down they went, as rapidly as the rough ground permitted, scarcely making a sound. At length Jack halted. He turned and gave one quick glance over the eager faces; there was no falterer among his band. Then he scrambled over the brink of the gully. Lepoko was first after him, Makoko was second; the rest of the men stood upon no order of going, but made each for the easiest point of ascent. And there Mboyo and Samba joined them. Standing on gently sloping ground Jack looked eagerly ahead. Had his movement been detected? There, two hundred yards away, was the camp within its light stockade. Not a man was to be seen. The midday sun beat fiercely down; doubtless the garrison were enjoying a siesta. No sentry was posted, or, if posted, he had forgotten his duty. The gate of Ilombekabasi on the northern face was far away; what simple negro would suppose that the enemy was approaching silently from the nearer end?

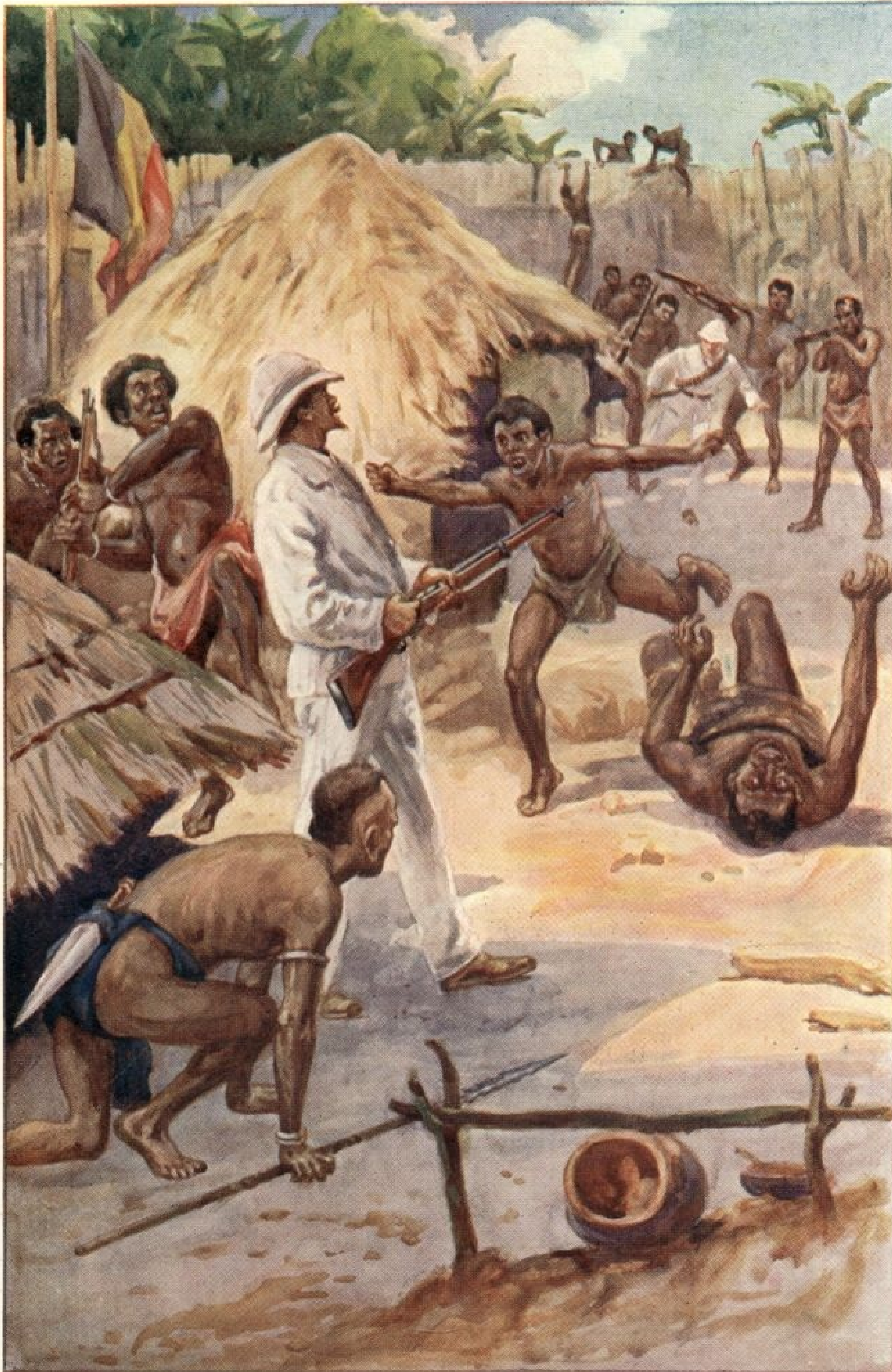
In compact and orderly ranks Jack's men were sprinting noiselessly after him, holding their weapons so that no clash or click should disturb the silent camp. They were within a few yards of the stockade when suddenly there was a cry. All were black men in the camp save one. At that moment he, in the intolerable heat, was about to leave his tent and bathe in a clear stream that ran through the enclosure. He saw the running band; he cried to his men, and, flinging away his towel, sprang back to his hut to get his rifle. He was too late. Jack, getting a "shove up" from one of his men, was on and over the stockade in a few seconds; his men were leaping all around him. And now their tongues were loosened. Yells and rifle shots aroused the lethargic garrison, some from sleep within their huts, some from drowsy lolling in shady quarters by the stockade. For most of them one glance was enough. Here was Lokolobolo, the Inglesa, and with him a crowd of men among whom they recognized some they had beaten in Ilola with the whip. With frantic yells of alarm they ran for dear life across the compound to the gate on the further side, out into the open, never pausing until they had gained the forest fringe, with half a mile between them and the men they feared.

But not all; the white man had seized his rifle and collected a small band about him. Mboyo, near Jack, gave a cry; among the negroes around the white man he saw Boloko, his renegade brother. Taking cover where they could, they began to fire at the invaders, hastily, frantically. But Jack had his men in hand. Bidding them also take cover, he sent those who had fireballs to creep round the camp and set light to the huts. Soon volumes of dense suffocating smoke bellied across the camp, screening attackers from defenders. Then Jack gave the order to close in upon the few who resisted. With triumphant yells his men swept forward through the smoke—a few shots were fired; one or two men fell; then the white man, with Boloko and the rest of his band at his heels, made a dash for the gate. Two men dropped ere they could pass through; but the white man and Boloko and half a dozen others were more fortunate. Out in the open they ran like hunted deer; and Elobela's burning camp was left in the hands of Lokolobolo.

Jack lost no time. The stockade and the huts on the windward side were ablaze; soon the whole place must be in flames. The sound of the shots, the sight of the smoke, would bring back Elbel and all his force. Shouting to his men to collect all the arms and ammunition they could carry and then rush back to the fort, Jack went outside the stockade beyond the cloud of smoke to keep watch. The flames were roaring and crackling behind him; but even at this distance, nearly two miles from the place where Elbel was at work, he fancied he heard the shouts of the amazed and angry enemy. Then suddenly the deep resonant note of Imbono's drum struck his ear. Barney must be warning him! He turned and called to his men to delay no longer. Back to the fort! Meanwhile Barney had followed the movements of the gallant band. He heard the shots and yells, and saw the first spiral of smoke; then he hastened to the northwest blockhouse, calling to all the riflemen left with him to line the wall overlooking the gully. In a few minutes he saw the negroes above dashing helter-skelter down the slope. And yes! there was Elbel at their head, a figure in white, running as though he were running for a prize. Barney smiled with satisfaction.

"Begorra! They're forgetting me!" he murmured pleasantly, as he saw that the enemy, in their frantic haste, were making for the shortest path along the further edge of the gully, within

easy range of the camp. Barney determined to wait until they were well abreast of him, and then give them a volley. But the impatience of a negro forced his hand. In the excitement of the moment one of the riflemen, free from Jack's restraining presence, fired his piece. The shot brought Elbel to his senses. He suddenly remembered the danger into which he was running. Turning sharp to the right, he sprinted straight to the cover of the copse. Some of his men followed him; others ran heedlessly on. Growling at the man who had spoilt his scheme, Barney gave the order to fire, and half a dozen of the enemy fell. But Elbel had escaped; and the rest of his men took warning and diverged from the direct course as he had done. Barney saw that further efforts would be wasted; so, ordering his men to cease fire, he returned to the other end of the fort to see how Jack was faring.



Jack rushes Elbel's camp

Here they come! Makoko is leading, staggering up the gully under the weight of half a dozen rifles. Behind him is Lombola, poising a load of ammunition on his head. There is Lingombela, with a bundle of cartridge pouches roped to his back. So one after another they file up the gully. Barney opens the little gate in the wall; willing helpers within haul the loads through. No man enters until all the rifles and ammunition have been handed in; then they scramble through, laughing and jesting; and Jack comes last of all.

"Well done, sorr!" said Barney heartily.

"Well done, Barney!" returned Jack, gripping his hand. "By Jove! What's that?"

A loud explosion set the air trembling, and a hundred echoes flying from the rocks around. A dense volume of flame and smoke rose from the site of Elbel's camp.

"There goes the last of their ammunition!" said Jack with a laugh. "We've got best part of it here."

"Bedad, sorr, now's the chance for me meself. Give me leave, sorr, and I'll go at them wid the men and wipe them clean off the face uv the earth."

"Stop, stop, Barney! We mustn't be impatient. They've no more ammunition in reserve, but every man who was with Elbel will have a good many rounds with him. We can't risk a pitched battle against two hundred rifles."

"Ochone, sorr! Will I niver get a chance at all?"

"Cheer up! Your chance will come, and you've done splendidly as it is. It was a fine idea of yours to sound that drum when you saw them running down. And it was your idea to set something going here to occupy the attention of the outpost. By the by, I haven't had time to ask Samba yet how they dealt with those fellows."

He called up the boy. His story was very simple. Mboyo and he had crawled round under cover of the rocks and bushes, and came upon the unsuspecting sentries from the rear. They had their knives; the men died without a sound. Jack shuddered. It was not an Englishman's way of dealing with an enemy; it was the negro's way. But his feeling of compunction was somewhat diminished when Samba added that one of the men was Bomolo, the brutal forest guard who had been the terror of Imbono's people. For how many maimings and murders had this man been responsible? Surely in this quick death he had met with far less than his deserts!

Jack had every reason to be satisfied with the success of his sortie. To have burned the enemy's camp; captured more than half his reserve ammunition, and destroyed the rest, was no mean feat. And as for the people of Ilombekabasi, they were frantic with delight. So quietly had Jack made his preparations that the majority of the people knew nothing of what was happening until they heard the first shot. Then they crowded to the wall and watched eagerly. The camp itself was hidden from them by the contour of the hill, but they saw the smoke rising above the bushes and hailed it with loud shouts. When they understood the meaning of the great noise that followed Lokolobolo's return they were almost beside themselves with joy. And in the cool of the evening Jack allowed them to hold a great feast, after which Imbono reeled off a long oration in praise of Lokolobolo, and the village bard composed and chanted a new song in numerous stanzas, the whole populace roaring the chorus:—

O kelaki na?
Bomong'ilombe,
Bosak'owa wanga,[2]
Lokolobolo!

For several days after the sortie Jack was left undisturbed. He guessed how Elbel was occupied, and his conjecture was confirmed by Samba, who at once resumed his scouting work. Elbel was constructing another camp a good distance east of his former position. And he was spending more time and labour on it; the stockade was more than usually high and thick, and was flanked with bastions after the model of the blockhouses at Ilombekabasi.

Samba also discovered that on the day after the burning of the camp one of the white men with twenty paddlers had gone down the river. Jack had no doubt that he had been despatched to the headquarters of his Company for more ammunition. Clearly Elbel was rendered only the more determined by his successive rebuffs.

"And I don't wonder at it," remarked Jack, talking the situation over with Barney. "We are making hay of the rubber collection in this district, and Elbel's Company will be pretty mad with him. I understand why he hasn't got help before this from the State forces. For one thing he has got to rehabilitate himself with his Company, who'll certainly cashier him if he doesn't find a way out of the mess he has got into. For another thing, if he brings the State forces on the scene, he'll most likely lose all chance of collaring uncle's gold, and I believe that's at the bottom of it right through. But things can't last much longer as they are. The State must intervene soon, whether Elbel likes it or not."

"And what then, sorr?"

"Then it will be all up with us, I'm afraid. But we won't look forward to that. I only wish I could find some means of sending word to England of what goes on here, and what we're doing."

"What would be the good uv it, sorr? Sorrow a bit."

"Why do you say that?"

"Why! Because in England they're all too busy making money to attend to such things—making money, sorr, or fighting tooth and nail about education, or dreaming about football. Now if Ireland had Home Rule——"

"No politics, Barney! I don't agree with you. I'm as sure as I'm alive that if the people at home really knew how abominably the natives are treated—knew about the floggings and maimings and murders, they'd make such an outcry that either King Leopold would be forced to change his policy, or some one would step in and manage things for him. If only England and America would join hands!"

When Elbel had completed his new camp, he resumed the work far up the hill which the sortie had interrupted. Jack was still at a loss to understand what the Belgian's scheme was, and he was prevented from finding out, by the fact that every night a strong body was left on guard, as he knew by the many camp fires at the top of the ridge.

One afternoon, however, the secret was explained. One of the men placed on the look-out at the north-eastern blockhouse reported that he saw a stream of water rushing down the hill. Jack hastened to the spot with his field-glass, and was somewhat alarmed to see that the man's information was correct; water was certainly streaming down over the rocky ground, making a course that seemingly would bring it right against the fort wall.

"He's going to flood us out!" thought Jack. "He must have built an embankment across the new course of the river."

This was a manoeuvre which he had not foreseen, and one which it seemed impossible to counter. The water, gathering impetus as it flowed down the hill, would almost infallibly undermine the wall, even if it had not force enough to wash it away altogether. But as he watched, for the moment so much taken aback that he could not think of anything to be done, his consternation was changed to amusement, for about two hundred yards up the hill the water made a swerve to his right, and flowed with increasing rapidity in that direction. The slope was such that, instead of coming straight down as Elbel had evidently expected, the stream, finding the easiest course, took at this point a trend to the south-east. After all it would only wash the blockhouse on which Jack stood.

Jack instantly saw what he ought to do. Running down to the base of the stockade, he summoned a large body of workers, and set some of them to dismantle the blockhouse, the remainder to pull down the wall and build it up again several feet behind its former position, and in such a way that instead of forming the angle of a square it lay across, making a line parallel with the course of the stream.

They had hardly got to work before the full body of water was upon them. But so many men were employed, and they moved so rapidly, that only one or two logs were carried away by the current, the solidly built blockhouse serving as a dam and protecting the workers behind. The main stream fell with a roar over the steep slope on the edge of which the blockhouse stood—a slope only less precipitous than that of the cataract, now a thing of the past, at the opposite corner of the fort.

Only a few minutes later a tremendous outcry was heard from the direction of Elbel's new camp. For a moment it startled Jack. Had the enemy taken advantage of the sudden flood to organize an attack in force? But the thought had hardly crossed his mind when he burst into laughter, causing his workers to pause and look round in astonishment.

"A magnificent idea!" he said to Barney. "D'you see what has happened? The silly fellow is flooding his own camp!"

"Bedad, sorr, that's what comes uv being too clever by half."

"It comes of playing with things he knows nothing about. He's tried an engineer's job without experience and without surveying instruments. It's ticklish work interfering with the course of nature, and you never know what will happen if you set water on the run. Look at them, Barney! 'Pon my soul, it's the funniest thing I've ever seen. There's Elbel himself, do you see? scampering down the hill like a madman."

"Like a mad gorilla, sorr."

"And all his men after him! By Jove! can't they yell! He'll have to shift his quarters again, Barney."

"And sure I hope all his food is soaked and all his clothes in the wash-tub. A bath will do those greasy niggers no harm."

"We'll build up our blockhouse a few yards to the left, and be none the worse. Let's go and lend a hand."

[1] Now.

[2] Who did it?
The master of the house,
A most clever person.

CHAPTER XXII

A Message and a Meeting

Ilombekabasi had peace. Elbel was sufficiently occupied for a couple of days in constructing a third camp, which he placed still further eastward in the direction of Ilola, but still between Jack and the main river. And even when the camp was completed he gave no sign of further operations. Jack was forced to conclude that his enemy was tired of his continual failures, and would now wait inactive until reinforcements reached him.

One afternoon, about a week after the flooding of the camp, a negro was seen running up the gully. Shots rang out in the distance, and far down the gully appeared a band of Elbel's men, who relinquished the pursuit of the runner on coming within sight of the fort. The man scampered up to the hole in the stockade. He was unarmed save for the universal dagger. He cried out to be admitted; he had a message for the Inglesa; and Jack ordered him to be hauled up through the aperture.

"Me nearly lib for dead," he said panting, "me run too fast."

"Well, who are you, and what do you want?"

"Me Lofembi, sah. Me boy massa him uncle."

"What!"

"Yes, sah; me massa Martindale boy."

"Where is he?" cried Jack, feeling himself go pale with excitement at the sudden news.

"He long long in forest, sah. Come up ribber in boat; one man say young massa shut up in Ilombekabasi; old massa get out of boat, hide in forest so long for young massa to know. He plenty sick at Boma, sah; nearly gone dead. Fust small small better, sah! lib for go sick all same; talk small small, sah; no make head straight. He try write; no can hold black stick; he fit for go sleep."

"Good heavens, Barney! Poor old Uncle!"

"Sure, the man may be a liar, sorr," said Barney.

Jack gave the man a keen glance.

"My uncle tried to write, you say. What did he try to write?"

"Bonkanda to massa; oh yes! He want say he come; he want know what he fit to do. No want see bad man; no; want to come to Ilombekabasi. Plenty hard job, 'cos bad man dah." He pointed in the direction of Elbel's camp.

"If he is so very sick, how did he come from the river into the forest?"

"Four five men carry him, sah. Plenty big lump; oh yes."

"Why did he send you? Where's Nando?"

"Nando lib for sick at Leo[1]; no fit to come; him plenty sick; oh yes. Me Lofembi; me come, do talk for massa. Massa gib fing to show young massa; here he am."

He produced a gold scarf ring and handed it to Jack.

"This is my uncle's, sure enough, Barney. It's genuine. What on earth can we do? Poor old

Uncle! In his last note he said he was recovering; he must have had a relapse. How can we get him into the fort? We must bring him in somehow. It's awful to think of him lying ill in the forest without any one to look after him; and I am cooped up here!"

"Send Samba to fetch him, sorr."

"I can't, Barney," said Jack after a moment's thought. "Samba goes alone safely, but I simply can't trust him to lead a party in, especially as Uncle seems to be too bad to move. I can't see any way out of it. If I took some men out myself, and made a dash for it, the enemy would be on our track, and we should have to fight our way in against the whole lot of them. Impossible; they outnumber us so greatly."

Barney was sympathetic, but unable to offer a suggestion. Bidding him keep an eye on Lofembi, Jack went back to his hut to think the matter out by himself. He was torn with anxiety. An unlucky chance might at any moment reveal his uncle's whereabouts, and he knew what mercy Mr. Martindale might expect if he fell into the hands of Elbel. Something must be done; yet what? A dozen plans occurred to him, only to be rejected.

One thing was clear; whatever was done must be done either by Barney or himself. Mr. Martindale being incapacitated, another white man must lead his party, for the natives, unless properly led, might be seized with panic at the slightest check and bolt.

Barney he could not send. There was no finesse about him; he was a good fighter, with any amount of pluck, but the very antithesis of a scout. Jack felt that he must go himself if his uncle was to have the best chance of getting in. There was no other course that offered the same prospect of success.

What were his chances? His sortie against the enemy's camp had been a brilliant success. Since then Elbel had been practically on the defensive; he was afraid of wasting ammunition; afraid also of leaving any small body unsupported by his main force. During the past week Jack's scouts had reported night after night that no pickets had been posted as formerly around the fort, so that, except on the south-east, where Elbel's camp was, the neighbourhood was open. He could thus easily steal out at the gate in the northern wall under cover of darkness, and by making a wide detour ought to be able to bring Mr. Martindale and his party back in safety.

Yet he had qualms. Ought he in any case to leave the fort? Supposing he failed, what would happen to the hundreds of people who depended on him? Driven by force of circumstances into a life-and-death struggle with Elbel's Company, he had not ventured to look forward to its ultimate issue. The duty of the moment seemed to be to hold on, to keep the poor negroes out of the clutches of their oppressors, and leave the end with God. Could he trust Barney to continue his work if he should be removed? Ought he to think of it? Thus he pondered and puzzled, the arguments for and against chasing one another in a circle through his mind.

He had reached no conclusion when Barney came to the hut. The good fellow seemed a little uncomfortable; he stood hesitating at the entrance, his readiness of speech having apparently deserted him.

"Barney, I'm the most miserable fellow alive," said Jack, looking up.

"All but wan, sorr; all but wan. 'Tis the master who is more miserable than you or me, sorr. Think uv it; alone in the forest, wid none but black idjuts to wait upon 'm. I've been thinking mighty hard, sorr, and the end uv it is this; 'tis you that must go, sorr. Sure I can hold the fort while you are gone."

"But what if I never come back, Barney?"

"'Twould be a desp'rate hard case, sorr. But what thin? I'm an Irishman, and, bedad! 'twas for hard cases Irishmen was born. Niver a fear but I'd stick to it, sorr. We've beaten the scuts all along. And if the captain goes, sorr, sure the liftinant takes his place and does his best to fill it dacently. What would have happened if ye had got knocked on the head in that sortie uv yours? Do ye think Barney O'Dowd would have hung out a white rag and surrindered? Sorrow a bit! I'd have nailed my colours to the mast, speakin' by the card, and dared the rufn'ns to come and take 'em."

"You're a brick, Barney!" cried Jack, springing up and gripping him by the hand. "I'll go! I'll take Samba, this very night, and bring dear old Uncle in."

"That's right, sorr. And we'll nurse him back to health and strength, and make him colonel uv the reg'mint."

"Call out those men who captured Elbel's camp with me, and place them at the gate to make a dash if they hear firing. And meanwhile you man the wall and hold yourself ready to cover our entry. And, Barney, if I'm caught and Uncle doesn't come in, hold the fort as long as you can. Don't make sorties; simply sit tight. The rainy season will be on us soon, Imbono said, and Elbel's camp is so badly placed that when the rains come he will be swamped. He may then get tired of the siege and draw off. If he does, I should arrange with the two chiefs for a trek into the forest. But if Elbel still presses the siege and food begins to run short—it won't last for ever, you know—

you had better choose a dark night and make a dash out to the north-east. If you go quickly you'll get a good many hours' start before Elbel realizes what has happened; and when once in the forest you may shake off pursuit. Our rifles will form a rearguard."

"I'll do all that same, sorr. But I hope it will not be me fate to do it at all. I'd sooner be liftinant for iver, sorr."

Shortly after nightfall, Jack, Samba, and Lofembi the messenger, made their exit by the hole in the wall. Jack had wished to follow his original intention and leave by the northern gate, but Lofembi earnestly begged him not to do this, saying that he would not be able to find the way if he did not go out by the same gate that he had entered. At the moment of departure Barney gripped Jack's hand.

"The blessed angels go wid ye, sorr, and bring poor ould master back in safety."

"Good-bye, Barney. Hope for the best, and remember—hold the fort."

It was slow work moving across the broken hilly country by night; but Lofembi had previously pointed out to Samba the general direction in which they had to go, and the boy was able to keep a fairly straight course. They had to strike, said Lofembi, a path through the forest following the course of the sun. Mr. Martindale's camp was pitched close to the path, not far from where two large trees had fallen across it. In about an hour they came to the outskirts of the forest in that direction, the course being in the main the same as that taken by Jack some weeks previously on his buffalo hunt, but leaving the open country somewhat earlier. So far there had been no sign of the enemy.

Progress was even slower in the forest itself. More than once Lofembi halted in doubt; then after a whispered colloquy with Samba he started again, guiding himself by the stars seen through the tree tops. Save for these whispered conversations not a word was spoken. Jack was too much absorbed in his mission, too anxious about his uncle, to have any inclination to talk, even if the risk of coming upon a scout of Elbel's had not been present to his mind.

At length the three came upon the narrow track Lofembi had been seeking. Here they went in Indian file, the guide leading, Jack coming next, then Samba. The path was so narrow and so beset by obstructions that walking was a toil. Sometimes Lofembi swerved to one side or the other to avoid a prickly bush; sometimes they had to clamber over a fallen tree; more often the path wound round the obstacle. It seemed to Jack many hours since they started; in reality it was scarcely more than three before they came upon the two fallen trees. Lofembi stopped.

"Small small now, massa," he whispered.

He gave a long low-pitched call. From the blackness on the left came a similar call in reply. The guide moved forward, plunging boldly along a narrow path—more narrow even than that by which they had reached this spot—in the direction of the sound. Jack was about to follow him when Samba touched him on the arm.

"Samba go first," said the boy.

"No, no," said Jack kindly. "We are all right; this is my place, Samba."

His heart beat faster under the stress of his emotion as he followed Lofembi through the tangled undergrowth. How would he find his uncle? Was he very ill? Surely, surely, he was not in danger—he would not die? Beads of sweat broke out upon Jack's brow as the terrible possibility occurred to him. He went on almost blindly. Three minutes' groping in the darkness brought them to a natural clearing, in which, by the dim light of the stars, Jack saw a couple of tents, and, some little distance from them, what appeared to be a number of roughly made grass huts.

"Dis way, massa," said Lofembi, touching Jack on the arm.

"Which one?" said Jack in a low tone,

"Dat one," replied Lofembi, pointing to the nearer of the two huts.

He stepped forward into the clearing. At the same moment a score of dusky forms rose and closed in stealthily from the undergrowth around. With a little cry Samba plucked Jack by the sleeve. But almost unconsciously he shook off the detaining hand, so full of anxiety was he. His uncle must be very ill, or he would be standing by the tent to welcome him. He sprang forward, stopped, and raised the flap of the tent. By the light of a small oil lamp swinging from the top he saw a form stretched upon a camp bed.

"Uncle! uncle!" he cried, falling on his knees by the side of the prostrate figure.

A low murmur answered him. At the same moment he heard a sighing groan, as it were, from the entrance to the hut, and the sound of a heavy fall. Then the forest glade rang with fierce shouts and the crack of a rifle. Jack rose to his feet, confused by this sudden turmoil coming when his nerves were overstrung. As he half turned, a figure came out of the darkness towards him.

"Good efening, Mr. Shalloner," said a smooth voice.

Jack started back.

"Yes, it is me—Guillaume Elbel, bien entendu!"

[1] Leopoldville.

CHAPTER XXIII

Elbel Squares Accounts

Jack saw through it all now. Elbel had captured his uncle, and used him to decoy from the fort the enemy whom fair fighting and open manoeuvres had failed to dislodge. He could have shot the Belgian with his rifle where he stood, but saw in a flash how vain the action would be. Outside was a horde of savage natives, who would instantly wreak vengeance on the white men. Mr. Martindale was too weak to resist, and what he would suffer at their hands was too horrible to be thought of.

When Elbel had spoken Jack turned once more to his uncle, and kneeling down by his bedside clasped his hand. His pressure was returned but feebly. Mr. Martindale's weakness, coupled with his distress at Jack's capture, rendered him unable to speak.

"I beg you listen to me," said Elbel. "I have a varrant for the arrest of Chon Martindale, Chon Shalloner, and a third man, whose name I do not know, on a charge dat dey incite de natives to rebel against de Congo Free State. I have two of the dree; dat is vell. It vill be for your advantage, to-morrow, to send a written order to de third man to render dat fort on de hill. It vill be for your advantage at de trial. If de fort resist longer, and cause blood to spill, it vill be so much de vorse for you ven you appear before de court in Boma."

"Where is your warrant, Mr. Elbel?" asked Jack.

"Ah! I have it not viz me; of course, it is in my camp."

"I suppose you are going to take us there? You can show it to me when we get there."

"No, you meestake. I vill not take you to my camp. I vill send you both at vunce to Boma, vere you vill be tried."

"But my uncle is not in a condition to travel; you know that."

"Bah! He vas in condition to travel here; vell, he is in condition to travel back."

"But that is preposterous, Mr. Elbel. Are you absolutely inhuman? I find my uncle so ill that he cannot even speak to me. God knows how much his illness is due to you or your friends. At least you will allow him to remain until I can give him some little attention—until he regains a little strength. To do anything else will be nothing less than murder."

"Dat is not my affair," said Elbel with a shrug. "It is instructed me to send you to Boma. To Boma zerefore muss you go, and at vunce." Then, as a thought struck him, he added, "Though truly I will vait vun day, two days perhaps, if you give command to de man in de fort to render himself."

"Never!" came in a fierce whisper from the bed. Mr. Martindale had gathered his little strength for Jack's sake. "Never! We will make no terms with you. What my nephew has done he has done merely in self-defence against the acts, the illegal acts, of you and your freebooters. I am an American citizen; he is a British subject; as you, yes, and your Free State, will find to your cost."

He spoke in feeble gasps, yet with an energy that spoke of an unconquerable spirit. The exertion exhausted him, and he fell back on the bed from which he had half risen.

"Bah! Fine vords!" said Elbel. "Ver' fine vords, monsieur. You say you are American—you dink dat frighten me! Vy, I laugh. Vat good is de American or de English in de Congo Free State? Ve mock of dem. Ve have our own vays to deal viz such canaille. You vill not send order to de fort? Ver' vell; I do vizout."

"Your warrant won't hold in any case. No one can order the arrest of a man unnamed."

"You zink so? Ver' vell, it does not matter. You vill have opportunity to zink about my vords as

you promenade yourselves to Boma. So I vish you bonsoir. To attempt to escape, I tell you it is impossible. You see dat? You hab revolver, Mr. Shalloner. Be so kind to gif me dat."

Jack hesitated. But he saw that resistance was useless, and handed over the weapon.

"Danks. In de morning you vill begin your promenade to Boma. Au revoir, messieurs; au revoir Monsieur Chon Shalloner!"

He left the tent. The interview had been too much for Mr. Martindale. He lay half unconscious, and was scarcely roused when Elbel, in a couple of minutes, returned in a towering rage.

"You, Chon Shalloner!" he shouted. "You make de natives to rebel, and more, you make dem to do murder. Dat man, who I sent to the fort, he lie now outside, a dead man. Some vun dat come viz you he stab him in de back. You English hombog, I teach you. Dey shall know of dis in Boma."

Jack did not condescend to answer him, and Elbel flung out of the tent. If his messenger was dead, he had paid the penalty of his treachery. Jack could only pity the poor wretch for meeting with such an end in such a service. No doubt it was Samba's doing. Jack remembered now the groan and the fall outside. Had Samba escaped? He was anxious on the boy's behalf, but it was impossible to ascertain what had happened to him. From Elbel's manner and words he inferred that Samba was safe. And as for Elbel's indignation at the deed Jack was not impressed by it. When he thought of the murders and maimings this man was answerable for, he could find no blame for the faithful boy who had punished as his instincts taught him, the spy who had betrayed his master.

Jack was left alone with his uncle. He looked vainly round the tent for a restorative—a drug, a flask of brandy, even a cup of water. There was nothing. He bent over the still form, and touching the brow, gently, felt it burning with the heat of fever. He knew that his uncle was accustomed to keep a small phial of quinine pills in his waistcoat pocket, and searching for that he found it and persuaded the sick man to swallow a little of the medicine. Then he sat on the foot of the bed, not knowing what to do.

How fully his forebodings had been justified! It had been a mistake to leave the fort. And yet he could not rue it, for otherwise he might never have seen his uncle again. He looked at the face with the half-closed eyes; how thin it was! how pale! The ruddy hue, the rounded shape of health, were gone. Where was that bright twinkling eye that looked so shrewdly out from beneath a shaggy brow? What sufferings he must have undergone! At that moment Jack looked over the past months to the day when he so light-heartedly bade his uncle good-bye, and so cheerfully accepted the charge laid upon him. How he wished they had never been parted!

And then another thought drove out his regret. But for this parting Ilombekabasi would never have been, and several hundreds of poor black people would almost certainly have been tortured, mutilated, done to death, in the name of law. Could he have done otherwise than he had done? Had Providence, moving in mysterious ways, arranged all this—that one should suffer for the sake of many? He did not know; he could not think; his mind seemed to be wrapt in a cloud of mist, through which he saw nothing but the present fact—that his uncle lay before him, sick—perhaps unto death.

By and by a negro entered, bearing food and palm wine. Mr. Martindale could not eat, but the wine revived him.

"Jack, old boy!"

Jack knelt by the bedside, clasping his uncle's hand.

"Jack, I must tell you what happened."

"Don't, Uncle; you will distress yourself."

"No, I shall do myself no harm. If you will be patient—for I shall be slow—a little at a time, Jack. You must know. I've got pretty nearly to the end of my tether, dear boy. I shan't live to do anything for these poor niggers, but you will—you will, Jack. And I want you to vow here, at this moment, to do what I must leave undone—fight the Congo State, Jack, fight Leopold, with your hands, your tongue, your pen, here, in Europe, in America; fight him in the name of humanity and of God. Promise me that, Jack, so that if I do not live till the morning I shall at least die happy."

"God helping me, Uncle, I will."

Mr. Martindale pressed his hand. For some time there was silence, then the elder man began again.

"I must try to speak calmly, my boy; I have so little strength; but it is hard. I told you in my first letter of what I had learnt about the ways of the Congo State. You wondered, I dare say, why I never mentioned them again. You will understand why. When I got to Boma, I reported to the Governor-General, in a written memorial, the incidents that occurred as we went up the river—

the altercation with Elbel, the attempt on our canoes, the night attack on our camp, frustrated by Samba. (I can't tell you how glad I was, Jack, when you told me the boy had returned to you.) I forestalled the probable answer that Elbel had nothing to do with those attempts by pointing out that the negroes Samba saw were fully armed, and must have been under a white man's control. Even then it was illegal, for I found that men in Elbel's position, representing Concessions, are not entitled to take more than five riflemen as escort beyond the limits of their trading factories. In my memorial I said that, after these attacks on me, I should be forced in self-defence to arm a certain number of my followers, and I disclaimed responsibility for the consequences. I also reported the scene of desolation at Banonga, and the story I had heard from Samba's lips; and called upon the Governor-General to take instant action in the matter."

Jack moistened his uncle's lips, and he continued:

"I got an acknowledgment, polite enough, even pleasant, promising that these matters should be inquired into. The Governor-General added that the possession of firearms and the arming of the natives being prohibited by law, I should become liable to heavy penalties and imprisonment if the law was broken. I had luckily already sent you the rifles and ammunition; though had I not done so, I could easily have bribed an official to give me a permit to carry arms; it would have cost me five hundred francs for the licence, and as much as I chose for the bribe.

"For a week I heard no more. I was deceived by the politeness of the Governor-General's letter into believing that I was perfectly safe, and free to do, in this Free State, what I had come to do. I set about my business, and, as I told you, bought a little machinery, from a fellow named Schwab, agent for a Düsseldorf firm. But I was a marked man. One day an officer came and asked me to show my patent. I did so. The man complained that it was not properly filled up; my name was spelled with an 'e' instead of an 'i'—Martendale! I laughed at him, and he went away in a huff. Next day another fellow came and said that my patent was worthless. Since it had been granted a new arrangement had been entered into between the Concession and the State, and all the mineral rights in the district reverted to the State. I laughed at that; a patent granted by the Concession and authorized by the State could not be revoked; it had five years to run, and I meant to stick to it. They wanted to bluff me—an American!—out of it.

"But things began to go badly with me. I was practically boycotted, Jack. None of the storekeepers would supply me with anything I wanted. One of them frankly told me that to do so was as much as his life was worth. I did not believe him at first. But I found it was only too true. A storekeeper in Boma I heard of—a British subject, Jack, from the Gold Coast—had a part in showing up the rascality of some legal proceedings that had recently taken place. The officials gave the word. He was boycotted; his trade dwindled; he became bankrupt; one of his sons was driven mad by the persecution he suffered; and his troubles and worries so preyed upon the old man's mind that he took his own life.

"Then I fell ill. It was a near touch, Jack. Only the devotion of a fellow-countryman—a fine fellow from Milwaukee—saved my life. Remember his name, Jack—Theodore Canrehan; if you ever meet him, and can do him a good turn, do it for my sake. When I got on my feet again, I was amazed to find the tune changed. Everybody was as sweet as butter. The officers came and apologized to me; they regretted the unfortunate misunderstandings that had arisen; they would do all in their power to forward my business. I arranged for the dispatch of the machinery I had ordered from Europe, and started to return. I couldn't make out what had made them suddenly so attentive; thought it was because I was an American, and they had some respect for the Stars and Stripes after all. Canrehan told me that since I sailed a strong feeling had been growing in America with regard to the Congo question; and I flattered myself the State authorities weren't anxious to add fuel to the flames by provoking a real serious grievance in which an American was concerned. But it was all a trap, Jack—all a trap. I saw it too late—too late."

Hitherto Mr. Martindale had spoken slowly and calmly, husbanding his strength. But at this point his feeling overcame him.

"Don't talk any more now, Uncle," said Jack, fearing that the exertion would be too much for him. "Tell me the rest another time. Try to sleep. I will watch over you. Thank God I shall be with you in the journey to Boma. You'll pull through even now, and we shall be able to fight together."

Mr. Martindale had already fallen into a doze. Jack did his best to make his bed more comfortable, and watched him through the night, pacing round the tent for hours together to keep himself awake. From time to time his thoughts went back to the fort. What was Barney doing? What would he do when morning came and yet the absent had not returned? What would be the fate of the poor people committed to his charge? At present all was dark to Jack. It seemed that he and all connected with him were now in the fell grip of the Congo State.

As soon as it was light Elbel came into the tent.

"I hope you had good night," he said, with a grin. "You vill have breakfast, den you vill begin your promenade. Tventy-five Askari vill escort you. You vill go to de river vere Mr. Martindale left his canoes; dey are still dere. Ah! he did hide dem, but vat good? You vill go on canoes till you come to de falls; dere you vill for a time voyage overland. By and by you come to Stanleyville; dere you find steamer; de State officers vill have care of you de rest of de vay to Boma. You understan'?"

"I warn you, Mr. Elbel, that I shall hold you responsible for my uncle's safety down the river. You see for yourself he is not fit to travel. I shall take the earliest opportunity of informing the American Government of your actions—your persecution, for it is no less."

"Dat is all right," returned Elbel, grinning again. "De courts at Boma vill give immediate attention. De judges, dey are excellent. Now still vunce before you go, write de order to de vite man in your fort to render himself. It vill profit you."

"Never!" said Jack. "Go and execute your warrant."

"Ver' vell, ver' vell. It matters noding. In a half-hour de Askari vill be here. You be ready."

Jack managed to get his uncle to eat a little food. He seemed somewhat stronger and less feverish than on the preceding evening. At seven o'clock the twenty-five soldiers appeared, accompanied by eight men as carriers. Mr. Martindale recognized these as belonging to the party he had brought up the river; the rest of his men, he supposed, had been impressed by Elbel for service in his camp. It being obvious that the sick man was unable to walk, a litter had been constructed for him. He was placed on this. Four men were told off to carry it, the other four bearing food sufficient to last the whole party until they reached the canoes.

Jack had wondered whether he was to be manacled; but the prestige of the white man, not any consideration for his feelings, had prevented Elbel from going to such extremes. But as he stood behind his uncle's litter, two Askari with loaded rifles placed themselves one on each side of him.

When the party were ready to start, Elbel sauntered up, his hands behind his back, and, approaching Jack, said with a smile:

"Now, Mr. Shalloner, before ve part I have a little vat you call reckoning viz you. You strike me vunce, tvice, viz your feest. Dat is de English vay—de boxe, hein?" Elbel showed his teeth. "On de Congo ve have anoder vay—de chicotte. Vun does not soil vun's hands. So!"

He took from behind his back a hippopotamus-hide whip, and, cutting short so as to avoid the Askari close beside Jack, dealt him two cuts with his utmost strength. Jack clenched his teeth to stifle a cry as the edges of the thong cut through his thin clothes.

"Dere! Now are ve quits!"

As he spoke Jack, blazing with anger and mortification, made a fierce spring at him. But Elbel was ready: he jumped nimbly backwards, while half a dozen Askari rushed between them, and pinioned Jack's arms.

Honour was satisfied—so Elbel appeared to think, for with a grin of malicious triumph he nodded to the Askari in charge: the party might now proceed.

"You see," said Elbel, as they moved away, "if you try to escape you vill be shot. I vish you agreeable promenade."

CHAPTER XXIV

A Solemn Charge

The party set off. They marched all day, with brief intervals for food and rest. Jack was only allowed to speak to his uncle during these pauses. The sick man lay inert, with closed eyes, protected from the heat by a light covering of grass, which his bearers made and fixed above his litter. Jack watched him anxiously. He seemed no worse when they arrived at the river just before sunset. Mr. Martindale had brought up four canoes; two of these had already been appropriated by Elbel and conveyed up the river; the other two remained. They passed the night on the canoes, and in the small hours, when the natives were asleep, Mr. Martindale insisted on continuing the story broken off the night before.

"Better now, dear boy," he said, when Jack implored him to wait until he was stronger. "I shall never see Boma; Elbel knows that. He knows that in this climate a sick man cannot survive a journey of over a thousand miles. I want you to understand clearly before I go what these officials are doing. They call it the Free State!—free! No one is free but the officials! The natives, poor wretches! are not free. Never, when slavery was an institution, were there slaves in such abject misery as these slaves of the Congo. Why, they made a great to-do about slavery in my country fifty years ago, and some of the pictures in Uncle Tom's Cabin were lurid enough. But the American slave's life was Paradise compared with this hell upon earth. Trade on the Congo was to be free. Is there any such freedom? Look at my case. They give me a patent to work minerals; they let me make my prospecting trip; then when I have located the gold and ordered my machinery they revoke my patent. I make the loaf, they eat it. Oh! it was all planned from the

beginning. We have been fooled right through, Jack."

"But what of their courts, Uncle? Surely there is some redress for injustice."

"Their courts! They're all of a piece, Jack. The State grants a concession to a trading company. Half the time the State *is* the trading company; it takes up the larger portion of the shares. The Congo Free State is nothing but a big commercial speculation, and the courts dare not do anything that conflicts with its interests. Men come here, Belgians, Germans, Italians, good fellows some, honest, well-meaning; but they haven't been here long before they have to swim with the current, or throw up their careers. One poor fellow, a district judge, ventured to protest against an illegal sentence passed by a court-martial; he was broken, and hounded out of the country. In a sense he was lucky, for it is easier for such a man to get into this country than to get out of it—alive! A man who does justice and loves righteousness has no place in the Congo Free State.

"You see now why they let me go. They let me make what arrangements I pleased—engage a large party, buy a large quantity of stores; well knowing that at any moment of my journey they could arrest me and plunder my goods. And they knew of your doings up here, be sure of that. They intended to let me get into the neighbourhood of your fort and use me to decoy you out. They've done it. Oh! it was all planned in Boma. Neither you nor I will ever reach Boma if Elbel and the officials have their way. Elbel's suggestion of delaying so that we could get Barney to surrender the fort was all a part of the trick; it would make no difference to our treatment, and it would be the death-warrant of those poor negroes. Jack, I approve of all that you have done—approve with all my heart. I am proud of you, dear boy. What does it matter that I've lost my money, and my gold mine, and very likely my life too! I am thankful to Almighty God that we came to this country, glad that He has put it into our power to do some little good. I wouldn't undo any of it; I am proud that one of my blood has been called to this good work. Jack, Providence has made us responsible for the poor negroes who have trusted their lives to us. Do you remember I said at Banonga that I wasn't a philanthropist and wasn't set on starting a crusade? I spoke lightly, my boy. I would say now that if God spared my life I would spend all my strength and all my energy in a nobler work than ever mediæval crusader undertook. I shall not live to do it; but I leave it to you. Were this my last breath I would say, help the negroes of the Congo, fight the corrupt Government that enriches itself on their blood; go to the fountain-head and expose the hypocrisy of King Leopold."

"He may not know of it, Uncle. So far away he cannot check and control all the actions of his agents."

"Not know of it! How can he help knowing of it? Are not these things happening every day? And it is his business to know of it. Suppose I had a factory in the United States, and it was proved that while I was coining millions my hands were dying of overwork, or of insanitary buildings, or getting wages insufficient to keep them decently clothed and fed; wouldn't there be an outcry? Wouldn't the law step in, or if the law failed, public opinion? Where does Leopold get his dollars from? Who pays for the estates he is buying, the palace he is building, the fine public works he is presenting to Belgium? It is these poor black people. He is draining the life-blood out of the country he vowed before Almighty God to rule justly and administer wisely for the good of the people; and the cries and groans of these negroes, men like himself, are rising to Heaven, terrible witnesses of his broken vows, his callousness, his selfish apathy. Oh! I grant him good intentions to begin with. Twenty years ago he did not foresee all this; no man is a villain all at once! But it might have been foreseen. He was king of a few hundred miles of country; with a stroke of the pen he became sovereign of a State as big as Europe; and if a man has the passion for getting, unlimited opportunities of doing so will bring him to any villainy unless he has the grace of God in him."

Jack was deeply moved by his uncle's earnestness. At the same time he was concerned to see the exhaustion that followed his passionate speech. He gave him a little wine, imploring him to spare himself.

"Don't trouble, dear boy," said Mr. Martindale with a smile. "The fire is burning out; what does it matter if it burns a little more quickly? But I won't distress you; you will think over my words when I am gone."

In the morning the river journey was begun. It continued for several days, until with their arrival at the falls progress by water was interrupted, and a long portage had to be made.

It was just at this point that they met a party of Askari marching in the other direction. As soon as they came in sight the leader of Jack's escort cried—

"O etswa?"[1]

"O!" replied the leader of the approaching band.

"Where are you going?"

"To the camp of Elobela."

"What have you got in those bundles?"

"Cartridges for Elobela's guns."

"Bolotsi O! He will be glad of them. He has very few left."

"Has he killed many people?"

"No. But Lokolobolo captured nearly all his cartridges."

"Mongo! Who is Lokolobolo?"

"Here he is! An Inglesa who has built a fort and fights Elobela. But we have got him at last, and he goes with an old Inglesa to Boma. Oh! he will fight no more."

"O kend'o?"

"O!"

During the river journey Mr. Martindale had grown steadily weaker. He fought hard against his illness; he had a new motive for desiring life; and Jack, observing his occasional rallies, hoped still that he would pull through. But he was so weak when lifted from the canoe that he fainted, and Jack feared that he would not survive the day. He rallied again, and once more Jack had a gleam of hope.

The horrors of that overland march will haunt Jack's memory till he dies. For some time the Askari had been ill-using the carriers. The greater part of the stores which Mr. Martindale had taken up the river had been appropriated by Elbel, and the food left in the canoes was not sufficient for full meals for the whole party. It was the carriers who went short. They had to bear the burdens, to make frequent journeys to and fro up the steep river banks, while the Askari looked on and had the best of the food. When the portage was begun, one of the canoes was added to their load. The other was left hidden in the bush to be fetched later. Weak from lack of proper nourishment, they could go but slowly, and Jack's blood boiled as he saw them quiver, heard them shriek, under the merciless chicotte. Before the first day was ended, two of the men fell, worn out with hunger and fatigue. Jack heard shots behind him, and saw that the wretched men had been put out of their misery. On the second day another man succumbed; what little life was left in him was beaten out with the clubbed rifles of the Askari. Three men ran away during the night, preferring the perils of the forest to the certain fate that awaited them at the hands of their fellow-men. Only two carriers were now left, and since these were useless they were shot in cold blood. Jack's heart was like a stone within him. These atrocities recalled the worst horrors of the old Arab slave-raiding days; and he was unable to lift a hand to oppose them. If he had been the only white man with the party he felt that he would have risked anything in an effort to save the poor wretches; but while his uncle still lived he could do nothing that might involve his own death.

The bearers being all gone, the Askari had to take turns themselves in carrying the canoe, the remainder of their provisions, and Mr. Martindale's litter. This necessity did not improve their temper or their manners, and the litter-bearers went so carelessly over the rough ground that Jack was constrained to protest. He implored, he threatened, feeling that the only chance for his uncle was to make more frequent halts; the fatigue of constant travelling would certainly kill him. But the Askari roughly replied that they had orders to continue their journey without delay, and the march was resumed. After his protest Jack was forced to walk at a distance from the litter, and even when the caravan halted for food he was not allowed to attend his uncle. Sick at heart he plodded on, torn by his anxieties, yet still nourishing a hope that when they arrived at a station where a doctor might be found, and whence the journey would be continued by steamer, all might yet be well.

But one evening, when the halt was made, he heard his uncle faintly calling. The sound of his voice struck a chill through him. In desperation, snatching a rifle from the guard next him, he threatened to shoot any one who tried to keep him from the dying man.

"It's all up with me, old boy," said Mr. Martindale feebly, when Jack knelt by his litter. "Elbel is having his way. I shan't see another morning."

Jack gripped his hands; they were chill and clammy. A lump came into his throat; he could not speak the yearning affection that filled his heart.

"Bend down, Jack; I'm afraid I cannot make you hear. Remember—remember what I have said; it is my bequest to you—the cause of the Congo natives. Do what you can for them. Fight! It is called the Free State; fight to make it free. I cannot see the future; all is dark; I dread what may await you in Boma. But buck up, dear fellow. Barney—remember him. Go to the British consul; tell him all. Your people have generous sympathies; wake them up; wake them up! If they are roused, all this wrong will come to an end."

"I will do all I can, Uncle," murmured Jack.

"Don't mourn overlong for me. I've had a good time. And this year the best of all. I wouldn't lose it, Jack. Tell my friends I'm not sorry; I'm glad, glad to have seen with my own eyes something that's worth doing. And I have faith in the future—in my fellow-men, in God. What is it

about wicked doers? 'They encourage themselves in mischief, and commune how they may lay snares; they imagine wickedness and practise it. But God shall suddenly shoot at them with a swift arrow; yea, their own tongues shall make them fall.' How does it go on? I cannot remember. 'The righteous shall rejoice——.' Jack, are you there?"

"Yes, Uncle, I am here," replied Jack, tightening his clasp.

"Is it the fifteenth Psalm? 'He that walketh uprightly——' I cannot remember, Jack.—Is that boy Samba better? Poor little chap! No father and mother!—Barnard said there was gold; why can't he find it?—No, that's not a nugget, that's—— Only a dog, eh? I'm kind o' set on dogs...."

And so he rambled on, muttering incoherently in his delirium; and Jack did not stir, but remained cramped while the slow hours crawled on, and nocturnal insects hummed, and frogs croaked, and the leaves faintly rustled above him.

Then, as the dawn was creeping up the sky, Mr. Martindale opened his eyes. They rested on Jack's pale drawn face, and the dying man smiled.

"Buck up!" he whispered. "Remember! 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow....'"

And so he died.

[1] Are you awake? (the morning greeting)

CHAPTER XXV

A Break for Liberty

With his own hands Jack dug a grave near the brink of the river, and there he laid his uncle to rest. The Askari looked on stolidly as he gathered stones from below the bank and heaped them to form a low rude cairn. Then he went back with them to their camping-place. He could not touch the food they offered him, and when they told him the time was come to march he got up silently and moved away mechanically with the rest.

He trudged on among his captors, a prey to utter dejection, conscious of nothing but his irreparable loss. He saw nothing, heard nothing, of what was going on around him, walking automatically in a kind of stupor. His uncle was dead!—for the moment the world had for him no other fact. By degrees, as his first dazed feeling passed away, he recalled little incidents in his past life that till then had lain dormant in his memory. He remembered the first time he had consciously seen his uncle, when he was a child of four, and he was dragged in all grubby from the garden, face and hands stained with strawberry juice, to see a big man with a red face, who laughed at him, and showed him a rough yellow lump that he wore on his watch-chain. He remembered the letter when his father died; and that other letter when his mother died; and the first visit to school, when, shown into the headmaster's study, the headmaster being absent, Mr. Martindale had made friends of the dog, and was found by the great man in the act of balancing a pen on the animal's nose. He remembered too the delightful holidays, climbing in Switzerland, roaming in Normandy, gondoliering in Venice. Odd things came to his recollection, and there was not one of them but recalled some trait of character, reminded him of some past happiness.

Then as he walked his grief took on a new complexion—a longing for vengeance on the miscreant whom he regarded as directly responsible for his uncle's death—morally as culpable as if he had with his own hands committed the murder. Was this villain to remain unpunished? The thought of Elbel induced a new change of feeling. What of the natives who for so many months had looked to him for guidance and leadership? What was Barney doing? Had Samba escaped the clutches of his enemy and got back to the fort? Was the fort, indeed, still there? He remembered his promise to his uncle. At the most solemn moment of his life, under the very shadow of death, he had vowed to do all in his power to help the negroes of the Congo—and here he was, himself a prisoner among soldiers of this iniquitous government, on his way to an unknown fate.

Thus recalled to actuality, he roused himself and began to think. He had no longer his uncle to consider; that good man was beyond reach of chicanery and spite. Why should he go to Boma? Nothing good awaited him there. He would be thrown into prison on arrival—supposing he ever arrived; he would be tried, sentenced no doubt: at Boma in such cases there were none of the law's delays; he might never be heard of again. What chance was there of fulfilling his uncle's wishes there? Was not his place at the fort, at Ilombekabasi, with Barney and Imbono and Mboyo, the people for and with whom he had already toiled and fought? There at the fort was tangible good to be done; he felt an overpowering impulse to return to his friends. Elbel had been worsted; if the resistance could be still further prolonged surely the Belgian would withdraw, though it were only to gather strength for a crushing blow; and the interval might be seized to

migrate with the whole community into the forest or across the frontier.

But there was the rub. Between him and the fort there was a band of well-armed Askari and several days' journey by river and forest. Even if he escaped the former, what chance was there of success? A white man was very helpless in these African wilds—easily seen and followed, not used to fend for himself in obtaining the necessaries of life. Even Samba, forest-bred, had barely survived the perils of a solitary journey: how could a white man expect to fare so well?

Yet, so strong was Jack's longing, he resolved that, be the difficulties and dangers what they might, he would seize the barest chance of escape that offered itself. Anything would be better than to be carried on to Boma, with the terrible uncertainty, not merely regarding his own ultimate fate at the hands of an unscrupulous officialdom and a tainted judicature, but still more as to the fate of his friends at Ilombekabasi.

From that moment his whole mental attitude changed. He did not forget his grief; that pitiful scene by the river's brink could never be effaced from his mind and heart; but he resolutely set his wits to work to find an avenue of escape, and the mere effort brought relief to his sorrow. No longer was he inattentive to his surroundings. Without allowing his guards to suspect him, he was keenly on the alert, watching everything.

It was not until the midday meal that accident befriended him. The Askari came to a village which had clearly been for some time deserted—another monument, Jack supposed, to King Leopold's rule. He took refuge from the burning heat, which did not appear to incommode the negroes, in one of the empty and half-ruined huts. There he ate his meal of rancid *kwanga*—all that his guards would allow him. While he squatted on the floor eating, his eye was attracted by a bright light, the reflection of the sun on some polished surface in the wall of the hut. Out of sheer curiosity he stepped across, and drew from the interlaced wattles the head of a small axe. Its edge was very sharp, as Jack found to his cost when he drew his finger across it; and although in parts rusty, it appeared to be of very fine steel, too fine to be of native workmanship. Wondering who had been its owner, and how it came to be stuck, separate from its shaft, into the wall of a rough native hut, he slipped it into his pocket; it might prove a weapon of value to an otherwise unarmed man.

There was nothing to cause his guards to suspect him when the march was once more resumed. In an hour or two they came to a place below the series of rapids where it was safe to launch the canoe. There the party divided. The carriers being all gone, the canoe left behind could only be fetched by some of the Askari; and after some squabbling, ten of them went back, the rest promising to wait for them at a convenient spot down the river. As they paddled away, Jack gathered from the talk of his escort, in a dialect which had some slight resemblance to that of the men of Banonga, that they expected to arrive at this place, an old camping-ground of theirs by the river, before nightfall. They had placed him in the bow of the canoe, a light one suitable for portage, with no platform, and therefore nothing between him and the water but the thin side.

Keenly he watched the banks, hoping to be able at a favourable moment to turn his observations to account. But except for a few hippos half hidden in the long grass or reeds at the river-side, and here and there a crocodile basking on a rock or sandbank, its scaly back scarcely distinguishable from the soil, the river was deserted. Forest lined the banks on both sides, its continuity only occasionally broken by clearings showing signs of burnt villages. The trees were beginning to throw long shadows over the water; sunset must be fast approaching; still no means of escape had suggested itself. Yet escape, if effected at all, must be effected soon, for he did not know when, with his transference to a steamer, his immediate fate would be sealed.

Should he risk all, spring overboard, and swim for the bank? He was tempted to do so, though he could not repress a shudder as he thought of the crocodiles now beginning to wake from their afternoon nap. But he knew that as soon as he came to the surface he would be overhauled in two or three strokes of the paddles, even if the paddlers did not think his attempt to escape sufficient justification for a little Albini practice. In any case his death or capture could be a matter of only a few minutes.

But as time passed, Jack resolved that he would chance the crocodiles if he could elude his guards. He would run any risk rather than go to Boma and submit himself to the tender mercies of the Congo State officials. A crocodile, after all, might prove a more merciful enemy!

They came to a part of the river where the channel narrowed, and though the fall was not enough to deserve the name of a rapid, the increased velocity of the current and the presence of large rocks necessitated some caution on the part of the paddlers. Jack could not help hoping that the canoe would come to grief. In the confusion there might be a bare chance of escape, though, being no more than a fair swimmer, he was not blind to the added risk he would run owing to the strength of the current and the danger of being dashed against the rocks.

But the Askari, experienced voyageurs, successfully navigated this stretch of the river, and as the canoe shot safely into smoother water Jack's hopes again fell. Then a thought occurred to him: Why wait upon chance? Why not make his own opportunity? He felt in his pocket; the axe-head was still there; its edge was sharp. If the canoe did not meet with disaster from without, why not from within? He was sitting on one of the thwarts amidships; the paddlers were standing on the thwarts forward and astern of him. All the Askari were paddling except three, and these

were squatting, two at the one end of the canoe, one at the other, with their rifles between their knees. In his position Jack was almost completely screened from them. The paddlers had their rifles slung over their shoulders; the baggage was equally distributed over the whole length of the canoe.

Though built of the frailest material, the canoe was of considerable length. This was the one drawback to the plan which had suggested itself to Jack—to drive a hole in the craft at any moment when the attention of the crew seemed sufficiently engaged to give him a chance of doing so unobserved, for the size of the canoe rendered it doubtful whether any hole he might make would be large enough to sink the vessel before it could be paddled ashore. This could only be proved by making the attempt.

Time passed on; no opportunity occurred. The passage here was easy, and the paddlers did their work almost automatically. It needed no attention. Jack was almost giving up the idea when a chance suddenly came. He heard the leader of the Askari call out: "There is the gorge just ahead: soon we shall be at our camping ground. Be steady!"

The canoe went faster and faster, and in a few minutes entered a gorge strewn with jagged rocks threatening destruction at every yard. The men stopped singing—they sang at their paddles from morning till night—and shouted with excitement when the vessel escaped as by a miracle being dashed to pieces on one or other of the rocks in mid-stream. Choosing the moment when the shouting was loudest and the danger probably greatest, Jack stooped down from his thwart and, drawing the axe-head from his pocket, thrust it with all his strength into the side of the canoe near the bottom, where there was already an inch of bilge water. Working the steel to and fro, he enlarged the hole as much as he could, and then withdrew his clumsy implement; the water rushed in with a gurgling noise which must, he feared, attract the attention of the paddler just above him. But the man gave no sign; he was too intent upon his task.

A few seconds later Jack seized another moment of excitement to repeat his work on the other side of the canoe. His heart jumped to his mouth as he heard one of the men shout a word of warning; but he maintained his stooping position, thinking there was less chance of detection than if he suddenly moved. In consequence of the water rising in the bottom the second hole was made somewhat higher than the first; and as Jack watched the level of the water gradually creeping up, he felt that the gaps were not large enough to prevent the paddlers from beaching the canoe if they ran into smooth water during the next few minutes. The bark seemed to close up as soon as the axe-head was withdrawn, leaving only as a narrow slit what had been a gaping rent. A glance ahead showed smooth water within a few yards. There might be just time to make two more rapid cuts. He plunged his hand into the water, now some inches deep, and drove the steel with all his force twice into the bottom beneath his feet. As soon as the canoe left the race, the heavy going due to the water that had been shipped would at once be detected, even if none of the paddlers, indeed, should happen to glance down and see the water washing the packages. True, they might suppose that it had come over the sides of the canoe during their recent rough passage; but the mistake must soon be discovered.

Jack saw that there was little chance of the canoe sinking in midstream. What could he do? Was this, apparently his only opportunity, to be lost? He had only a few seconds to decide. He would wait until the leaks were discovered, and the canoe was headed towards the shore. Then if he dived into the river his guards would be torn between two impulses—the one to pursue him, the other to beach the canoe before she sank with them and their stores. To them the situation would be complex; they would waste time in their confusion; and with a sinking canoe beneath them they would scarcely be able to use their rifles.

Things happened almost exactly as Jack expected. When the canoe left the troubled reaches one of the Askari suddenly caught sight of the water slowly rising, and washing from side to side with every stroke of the paddles. "A leak!" he shouted, inferring that a hole had been knocked in the bottom by a rock. The leader at once cried to the men to run for the right bank. Jack's time came as the canoe was swinging round. Rising suddenly from his seat, with a vigorous shove he sent the paddler behind him rolling back upon the next man; he in his turn fell upon the next; until four of the paddlers in the after part of the canoe were floundering in the water, and the frail craft rocked almost gunwale under. The other paddlers were so much occupied in adjusting themselves to the difficulty and preventing the canoe from being swamped that they were hardly aware of what their prisoner was doing until it was too late to prevent him. While the vessel was tilted over, Jack placed one foot on the side farthest from the bank towards which they were paddling, and dived into the river.

The leader of the Askari immediately shouted to the men in the water to pursue him, pointing out the direction in which he had disappeared beneath the surface. He was making for the left bank. Glancing back when he came up, Jack saw that two men were swimming after him, and realized that he was no match for them. He was only a fair swimmer; his pursuers, drawn from one of the riverine villages of the Lower Congo, were as dexterous in the water as they were in the canoe. When Jack became aware that he was being rapidly overhauled, he gripped more tightly the axe-head which he had never let go, resolving to fight to the last rather than suffer recapture. The negroes had divested themselves of their rifles, or had lost these when thrown so suddenly into the river; and even such a clumsy weapon as an axe-head might prove very formidable to unarmed men.

In the excitement, Jack had forgotten all about the constant peril of the Congo—the crocodiles. Straining every nerve, he was wondering whether he should stop swimming before he ran the risk of being completely exhausted, since there seemed little chance of his gaining the opposite bank before his pursuers, when he was startled by a despairing scream behind. The horrible meaning of it flashed upon him; he glanced back; only one swimmer was to be seen, and he was no longer coming towards him; he had turned and with frantic haste was making for the nearest point of the bank. The second man had disappeared; the crocodile had proved a better swimmer than any. Shuddering in every limb, Jack for a moment felt his strength leaving him. As in a nightmare he seemed to see the horrid jaws of crocodiles all round him waiting to tear him limb from limb. But he recovered in a moment; and, still gripping the axe-head, he struck out desperately for the far bank, which was now, indeed, scarcely more distant than the other. He touched the sandy bottom, struggled panting up the bank, and, completely exhausted by the physical and mental strain of this day's events, crawled rather than walked to a spot where he felt himself secure at least from the dreaded reptile. For several minutes he lay with his head upon his arms, so much spent as to be almost careless of what might become of him. But, rousing himself at length, he rose and scanned the river for signs of his late escort. What was his alarm to see them hastening towards him from the opposite bank; three minutes' hard paddling would bring them within reach of him. The sight of them woke Jack fully to his danger; he turned his back on the river and plunged into the thick bushes that came almost to the water's edge, and extended into, the forest behind. With what marvellous quickness, he thought, had the Askari brought their waterlogged vessel to the bank, emptied her of water, and temporarily stopped the leaks! No doubt they had been spurred to their utmost effort by the knowledge of what awaited them if they returned to their commander with the report that the prisoner had escaped them by any means but death.

It was now late in the afternoon. Within three or four minutes the pursuers would have beached the canoe and dashed in pursuit. Jack knew that he must make the most of his few minutes' start. If he could evade them for an hour he would be concealed by the darkness. Already, indeed, it was dim and dusky in the forest shades he had now entered. There was no path; he could but plunge on where the undergrowth seemed thinnest, his general direction being as nearly as he could judge at an obtuse angle with the stream. The Askari would expect him either to follow the river, or to strike directly inland; at least he hoped that the diagonal between these two courses would not occur to them. While daylight lasted his trail would betray him, of course; but even if the men were trained forest trackers the light would in a few minutes be too bad for them to pick up his trail.

In a few minutes he heard muffled shouts behind him. The pursuers had landed. Then all was silent, save for the forest sounds now familiar to him. He moved as cautiously as the necessity for haste permitted, aware that the breaking of a twig, a stumble, any unusual sound, might bring his quick-eared enemy upon his track. But with all his care he could not avoid accidents. Here a branch of cactus would rip a great rent in his thin linen coat, with a sound that set the teeth on edge. There a low-growing creeper would trip him up, so that he fell with a crash headlong, and rose with his face bleeding from a dozen deep scratches. But he kept the axe-head always in his grasp; that was his only defence.

The fall of night found him still pressing resolutely forward; but when he could no longer see to thread his way in the close tangle of vegetation he halted, and became aware that he was dripping wet, and that he had to spend the night, soaked as he was, without shelter in the primeval forest. It would not have been a pleasant prospect even to a native inured to forest travel; the negroes indeed are careful not to be benighted far from their villages. In other circumstances, as black darkness wrapt him round, Jack might have felt not a few tremors; from Samba he had learnt something of the perils of night in densely-wooded places. But he had lately passed through experiences so trying that the visionary terrors of these gloomy depths had no power to trouble him. He sought, however, a suitable tree and climbed out of the reach of prowling beasts, hoping that he would also escape the attentions of leopards and pythons, which made no account of the lower branches.

He had never spent a more uncomfortable night. Insects stung him; caterpillars crawled over him; woodlice worried him. Dozing in spite of these annoyances, he would wake with a start and the nightmare feeling that he was falling, falling helplessly through space. His wet clothes stuck clammily to his skin; he shivered as with ague, his teeth chattered, his head was racked with pain. Stiff and sore from his narrow perch and his cramped position he clung on through the night; and when, after the long darkness, the pale dawn at last stole through the foliage, and he dropped to the ground, he moved like an old man, with aching limbs, unrefreshed, feeling the want of food, yet utterly without appetite.

But he must go on. His enemies had not discovered him; no beast had attacked him; these were positive gains. He could make no plans; all that he could do was to follow a course calculated by the sun to take him in the direction of the river, going up stream. He walked stiffly, but steadily, during the morning, picking here and there handfuls of phrynia berries—the only berries of the forest which he knew to be edible.

About midday he resolved to risk a more direct course to the river, in the hope that his pursuers, finding no trace of him, had given up the hunt. But it was easier to decide than to carry out. For all he knew he might have been wandering in a circle, and the windings of the river might make every step he took one in the wrong direction. After some hesitation he turned

somewhat to the left and trudged on, so intent upon his immediate surroundings that his range of vision was restricted to a few yards.

He noticed that the ground, as he walked, was becoming a little less thickly covered with undergrowth; but it was with a shock of alarm that, at a sudden lifting of the eyes, he saw, standing in front of him, a young straight dusky figure armed with a long rifle. Springing instinctively behind the nearest tree, he grasped the axe-head ready to do battle.

But what was this? A voice spoke to him, a voice that he knew, giving him pleasant salutation, calling him by name.

"Lokolobolo losako[1]!"

He came from behind the tree and went forward, stretching forth his hands.

"Samba!" he cried joyously.

[1] Salutation addressed to a superior.

CHAPTER XXVI

Turning the Tables

Samba at once led the way in a different direction from that lately followed by Jack, saying that he would explain his presence as they went along.

Jack had hardly reached the tent to which he had been decoyed by Elbel's messenger before Samba knew that his uneasy feeling was justified; his master had fallen into a trap. Stealing up close behind Lofembi he had plunged his knife into the man's back, and dashed into the forest. He had no difficulty in escaping from the spot; but the report of the rifle fired after him had reached Elbel's camp below the fort, and Samba found that he had to make a very wide detour to avoid the enemy's scouts. But he managed at last to get into the fort, and implored Barney to send out a party to rescue his captain. Barney was much distressed by the news, but resolutely refused to throw away lives and risk the safety of the fort in a forlorn hope of that kind. All that he would do was to allow Samba, with three other men, Makoko, Lianza, and Lingombela, to follow up Mr. Martindale and Jack, and rescue them if any chance occurred; if not, to see what became of them.

But the four had great difficulty in getting out of the fort undetected; the enemy's vigilance appeared to be doubled, and a full day elapsed before they were able to set off in the track of the prisoners. Failing to overtake the party in the forest before they embarked on the canoes, they had had to cover on foot the long distance for which the Askari were able to use the river, though they shortened the journey to some extent by cutting straight across country when the river wound.

At last, when Samba had all but given up hope, they saw a party of ten Askari coming towards them from down the river. Samba did not suspect at first that these men were connected with those he sought. But keeping well out of sight he tracked them to a spot where a canoe was concealed, and then he guessed at once that the men had been sent back to fetch a canoe left behind for want of sufficient carriers. It would be easy to keep ahead of this party, burdened as they were with the vessel; so Samba and his three companions pushed on, and soon came upon tracks of Mr. Martindale and Jack. They had noticed the newly-made grave with its stone cairn: it had puzzled them, and they did not know it was a grave until Samba pointed out that the litter had ceased to be used: there were no longer the marks of four men walking always at the same distance apart; they then concluded that the elder Inglesa had died.

They came by and by to the place where the party had re-embarked. Samba's only hope of overtaking them now was that they would certainly wait at some part of their journey until they were caught up by the other canoe; and it seemed to him that his expectation was borne out when, scouting ahead of the three, he sighted in the dusk a long canoe lying under the opposite bank in charge of three Askari. He ran back to his companions and told them to hide in the bush; then he returned to the spot, and from a safe concealment prepared to wait and watch. Night fell: the river was too broad for him to see across it; but presently he heard the sound of men approaching the canoe, and soon afterwards voices. Then all was silent. He kept up his watch for some time, half expecting to hear the sound of paddles; but concluding from the continued silence that the men would not move till the morning, he went to sleep in a tree.

Waking before dawn, he resumed his watch. In the early morning he saw eleven men land and make off in two parties into the forest, leaving three men on guard. Instantly he jumped to

the conclusion that Lokolobolo had escaped; and a daring scheme suggested itself to him. Returning to his friends, he told them what he had seen, and what he proposed. The four immediately set about building a light raft of bamboos and cane "tie," and when it was finished they carried it some distance along the bank launched it out of sight of the men in charge of the canoe' and punted themselves across to the other side. An hour later only one man remained in the enemy's canoe, and he was a prisoner.

Jack forbore to inquire what had become of the others; Samba merely said that their ammunition had been spoilt by the water. Samba and his companions were Congo natives; free from the restraining influence of the white man, it would be scarcely surprising if they took the opportunity of paying off some of the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the Askari.

From the prisoner Samba learnt the whole history of the party since the time it left Elbel in the forest. Tying the man up, Samba and his companions at once set to work to find the trail of the fugitive, and of the men who had gone in pursuit. In the morning light it was easy to a practised scout like Samba to find what he sought. He soon discovered that the two parties of Askari had failed to track their quarry, and were going haphazard through the forest. He himself then started to follow Jack up, and his three companions went forth to the canoe to await the return of the enemy. It was unlikely that the two bands would appear at the same time. If they returned separately, the three scouts in ambush would only have to deal with six men or five men, as the case might be. They were still waiting.

What would they do, asked Jack, when the enemy came back?

"Fire upon them from behind the trees," replied Samba. "Three men will certainly be killed; are not the scouts Makoko, Lianza, and Lingombela, three of the best marksmen in Ilombekabasi? If the two or the three men left do not run away, they will fight them. If they run away, they will follow them up and fire at them from behind trees."

Even as Samba spoke there came through the trees a sound as of distant firing. Samba quickened his steps; for an hour or more his master and he plunged through the forest, the boy halting every now and then to listen intently. At length whispering "Nkakayoko!"[1] he laid his hand on Jack's sleeve and gave a low call like the rough scratching sound of a forest beetle. It was answered from the right hand. Striking off sharply in that direction he led the way through a thin copse, and in a few moments the two stood at the brink of the river beside the canoe. Samba looked keenly around, whispered "Mpiko!"[2] and pointed to a low bushy tree close at hand. For a second or two Jack could see nothing but green: but then through the dense foliage he caught the glint of a rifle barrel, and behind it—yes, a black face. The man came out with a low chuckle of amusement. It was Makoko. "Bolotsi o!" he said. His forest craft had been too much for Lokolobolo.

Suddenly Samba held up his hand in warning. They listened; it must have been the flight of a forest bird.

"What was the firing?" asked Samba in a low voice.

"The killing of five men," replied Makoko.

Jack caught the last words, "Bant'atanu!" and started.

"Where are they?" he asked.

"Gone to feed the crocodiles. Three first, then two."

Again Samba raised his hand. All listened intently. Jack heard nothing; but Samba whispered, "They come!" and plucked him by the sleeve. All three hid among the trees. Two men came out from the other side—they were Lianza and Lingombela.

"They are coming—six men," said Lianza in answer to Samba's question. "Quickly! they heard the shots."

"We must shoot again from behind the trees," said Samba.

But Jack could not bear the idea of shooting down the unsuspecting wretches in cold blood.

"Perhaps we can make them surrender," he whispered.

"Lako! lako!" said the negroes indignantly.

"Yes; we will try."

Makoko and the other two men grumbled, but Samba silenced them.

"It is Lokolobolo's order," he said.

He offered Jack his Mauser, but Jack refused it with a smile, taking one of the Albinis which had been removed from the canoe. With the four he concealed himself behind the bushes. He had already noticed that all traces of the recent incidents had been carefully obliterated.

A few minutes later six Askari came from the thick wall of bush. They started and looked at one another when they saw the canoe unguarded. Then they called their comrades. Receiving no answer, they began to discuss the strange disappearance of the three men who had been left in charge. With a sign to Samba to follow him, Jack came out from behind his bush. The men ceased their chatter; their jaws dropped, they stared at their late captive in blank amazement. He spoke to them quietly, Samba translating.

"I was hiding: I come to save you from being killed. Your eight comrades are already dead. If one of you lifts his hand, he is a dead man. Behind the bushes my men wait ready to shoot you. Listen! They will answer when I call. You will see how hopeless it is to resist. Makoko!"

"Em'one!"

"Lingombela!"

"Em'one!"

"Lianza!"

"Em'one!"

"Lay down your rifles," continued Jack, "and beg for mercy."

There was but a moment's hesitation, then one of the men sullenly obeyed, and the rest, one after another, followed his example. At Jack's call the three scouts came from their hiding-place. Two of them covered the Askari with their rifles, while the third collected the surrendered Albinis and placed them in the canoe.

How Jack's position had altered! An hour or two ago he was a fugitive, practically unarmed, with nearly a score of Askari hunting him down. Now he was in command of four scouts fully armed, and in possession of a canoe and half a dozen prisoners, who had proved themselves on the journey down to be expert paddlers. But, as Samba reminded him, he had still to deal with the ten Askari who had been sent back to fetch the second canoe. They must be on their way down stream: perhaps they were near at hand. Something must be done with them. To let them pass, or to leave them behind, would be equally unwise; they would almost certainly follow up Jack and his party, perhaps find a means of sending word to Elbel in time to cut them off from the fort. The safety of himself and his men demanded that this second band should be disposed of.

To deal with them as he had dealt with the six would not be easy. They would come by water, not by land. He did not wish to kill them. What other course was open to him?

He remembered that the Askari had spoken of an old camping-place a little below the spot on which they stood. This had doubtless been fixed as the rendezvous of the whole party. The prisoners would know its exact locality. With a little luck, he thought, all the ten might be captured unharmed. He got Samba to question the sullen men. Yes, they knew the camping-ground.

"Then they must paddle us to it," said Jack.

Making sure that the holes he had cut in the canoe had been sufficiently caulked to allow of a short passage without danger, Jack embarked with all the men, and in a quarter of an hour reached the camping-ground. It was about a hundred yards back from the opposite bank, pretty well hidden from the river. A few rough grass shelters, somewhat tumbledown, and traces of former encampments, showed that it was a frequent place of call for parties going up or down. When all had landed, Jack sent Makoko and Lianza along the bank up the river to look for the oncoming of the Askari, who, though they must necessarily have moved slowly while carrying the canoe, would no doubt make rapid progress when once more afloat. The six Askari looked a little hopeful when they saw the two scouts leave; but Samba damped their spirits at once when he told them that at the slightest sign of revolt they would be shot without mercy. To make things sure, and prevent the scheme he had in mind from being foiled, Jack ordered the men to be bound hand and foot, which was very quickly done by Samba and Lingombela with the stripped tendrils of climbing plants.

It was dark before the scouts returned. They reported that the Askari had camped for the night some distance up stream, and would certainly arrive early next morning. Jack arranged that when the canoe should come in sight, only himself and two of his prisoners would be visible in the centre of the camp. The Askari would suppose that the rest of the party were out foraging—taking, as the custom is with the troops of the Free State and the Concessions, what they pleased from the black subjects of King Leopold, and paying nothing, except perhaps blows, in return. The newcomers, not expecting any change in the relations of their comrade with the white prisoner, would march unconcernedly into camp. Jack was pretty confident that if things came to this point, he would succeed in making the men surrender without fighting.

In the early morning the Askaris' paddling song was heard as they came down the river. The singing ceased; there was a shout; and Jack ordered the captured Askari by his side to call an answering greeting. Then the party came in sight, eight men in a straggling line approaching up the path. The remaining two had evidently been left behind to tie up the canoe.

The first man addressed a chaffing remark to the Askari with Jack, and then asked where the rest of the party were. The men pointed vaguely to the forest; their comrades were, in fact, there, gagged and securely bound to the trees. Half a dozen rifles were stacked in the middle of the camping ground, the newcomers placed theirs close by, and then began to chatter about trifles in the African's way.

Meanwhile Jack was keeping a keen eye on the men. The two captured Askari were obviously ill at ease. There were the rifles within a few yards of them, yet they dared not move towards them, for they knew that in the shelter of the trees behind stood Samba with the three scouts ready to shoot them down. They replied briefly to their comrades' questions; and then, in obedience to instructions given by Jack previously, suggested that the newcomers should go to a cane-brake a few yards down stream, and bring back a supply of canes for building shelters like those already erected; there were not sufficient for the whole party. The men moved off. No sooner had they disappeared than Samba and the three men came from behind the trees, removed all the rifles into the huts, and all except Samba stationed themselves in hiding on the side of the encampment opposite to that through which the Askari had just gone. Samba remained with Jack.

In a quarter of an hour the men returned. To their amazement the white prisoner went forward to meet them. Through Samba he spoke to them.

"It will not be necessary for you to build the huts."

"Why? What does the white man mean by talking to us? And who are you?"

Samba did not reply to their questions: he waited for the next words from Jack.

"There are enough empty huts here!"

"How can that be? There are ten of us, and fifteen before. The huts will not hold half of us; and who are you?"

"The fifteen are dead, or taken prisoners."

The men gaped, unable to appreciate the full import of the news. They dropped their loads of cane and looked at the boy in astonishment.

"What do you mean? What has happened? Who are you?"

"Tell them, Samba."

"I am Samba, the servant of Lokolobolo. I came down the river with other servants of Lokolobolo. We fell upon your comrades and scattered them like the leaves of the forest. We have the rifles—your rifles."

The men gave a startled glance to where the stacks of arms had been. Jack thought they paled beneath their dusky skin.

"See!" continued Samba, "if Lokolobolo lifts his hand you will all be shot. His men are there, behind the trees. You have no rifles. Of what good are knives against guns? You will be even as the men who are short with their rubber. You will be shot down before you can strike a blow. No; do not move," he said quickly, as the men appeared inclined to make a dash for the forest. "You cannot run so fast as the bullets. You know that, you men who shoot boys and women as they flee from you. Throw down your knives at Lokolobolo's feet, if you wish to live!"

The man who had acted as spokesman for his comrades obeyed without a word. The rest were but little behind him. At a sign from Jack, Makoko and the others came from their place of hiding, and tied the feet of the prisoners, in such a way that while they could walk with short steps, they were unable to run. In a few moments the two men left at the canoe were similarly disposed of.

And now Jack was in command of four armed scouts and sixteen unarmed prisoners. He at once decided to make use of the Askari as paddlers. One canoe would be sufficient; he would sink the vessel in which he had dug the holes. With sixteen men expert in the use of the paddle, he would make a rapid journey up stream.

He was about to give the order to start when it suddenly occurred to him that it would be well to assure himself first that the coast was clear. So far he had seen no natives either on river or on land since he left Elbel, save those of his own party and the band coming up with ammunition. The riverine villages had all been deserted, and the tributary down which he had travelled was at all times little frequented. But it seemed very unlikely that many more days should pass without his seeing a stranger, and when he began to think on these lines, he wondered whether perhaps Elbel himself might not have occasion for sending messengers down stream, and whether the party they had met conveying stores to Elbel's force might not be returning. Having escaped by such wonderful good fortune, it would be sheer folly to throw away his chances of getting back to Ilombekabasi by any want of caution. Accordingly he sent Makoko up the river and Samba down the river to do a little preliminary scouting.

About midday Samba came running back in a state of great excitement. He had run so fast that his legs were trembling, and sweat poured from his body. Not an hour's paddling distant, he had seen a smoke-boat and a large number of canoes coming up the river. He had never seen so many boats before, and they were crowded with men. And on the smoke-boat there were white men.

"At last!" ejaculated Jack. This, he supposed, was the Captain Van Vorst, of whom Elbel had spoken, coming up with regular troops of the State. Whoever was in command, the flotilla could portend no good to Jack or Ilombekabasi, and he saw at once that he must give up the idea of using the Askaris' canoe. He could certainly travel faster than the expedition, which must go at the pace of its slowest cargo boats; but scouting or foraging parties of the enemy might push on ahead and sight him on one of the long stretches of the river; and his men could be descried from a long distance as they made the portage. Pursuit and capture would then be almost certain.

His mind was instantly made up. His journey to the fort must be a land march, and it must be begun in all haste. He quickly gave his orders. The canoes were unloaded, and the stores and ammunition given to the Askari to carry. The vessels were then scuttled and sunk, and the whole party plunged into the forest, after a time taking a course almost the same as that which Samba had followed on his solitary journey. But before they had gone far, Jack, not disposed to leave the neighbourhood without getting more exact particulars of the advancing host, went back with Samba, leaving the rest of the party to continue their march.

Samba rapidly wormed his way through the forest back to the river bank. They reached a position, whence, unseen themselves, they could command a long reach of the river. There they waited.

Soon they heard the regular beat of the steamer's paddles; then the songs of the canoe-boys. By and by a steam launch came into view round a bend of the river. It was crowded. Far away as it was as yet, Jack could easily distinguish the white-clad figures of three Europeans on deck, amid a crowd of negroes in the tunic, pantaloons, and fez of the State troops. Clearly it was as he had feared. The Concession had followed the usual course, when the rapacity of its officials had provoked a revolt too formidable to be coped with by its own forces, and had called in the aid of the regular army. As canoe after canoe appeared in the wake of the steamer, Jack could not help a feeling of dismay at the size of the force arrayed against him. His spirits sank lower and lower as he watched. By the time the steamer came abreast of his hiding-place, the flotilla filled the whole of the stretch of river open to his view. In the still air, amid the songs and chatter of the natives, he could hear the laughter of the Europeans as they passed. He knew that only a portion of the men in this armada were fighting men; the rest were paddlers and carriers, not part of the combatant force. But a rough attempt to count the men bearing rifles gave him at least three hundred, and he started as he saw in one canoe what was clearly the shield of a machine gun. Captain Van Vorst, if it was he, undoubtedly meant business. Before the last canoe had passed their hiding-place Jack and Samba started to overtake their party. The former was deep in thought.

"We must reach the fort before them," he said.

"They go very slow," was Samba's reply.

"Yes, and the carrying of all their stores and canoes up the rapids will take many days. But we must hurry as fast as we can."

"Much chicotte for the paddlers," said Samba, with a grin.

Jack did not reply. He could not adopt the barbarous methods of the enemy; but he had not the heart to dash Samba's very natural hopes of paying back to the Askari something of what they had dealt to the carriers on the way down. Short of thrashing them he would urge them to their utmost speed. What difficulties he might meet with in regaining the fort he did not stop to consider. The thought of Barney holding his own there—had he been able to hold his own?—and of the large reinforcements coming to support Elbel, was a spur to activity. Ilombekabasi and its people were in danger; and the post of danger demanded the presence of Lokolobolo.

[1] Immediately.

[2] There.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Return of Lokolobolo

"Lokolobolo! Lokolobolo! Lokolobol'olotsi! Lokolobolo is here! Lokolobolo has come back to us! Bolotsi O! Why do we laugh? Why do we sing? Samba has found Lokolobolo! Samba has brought him back to us!"

Ilombekabasi was delirious with joy. Men and women were shouting, laughing, singing; the children were dancing and blowing strident notes upon their little trumpets; Imbono's drummer was banging with all his might, filling the air with shattering thunder. Jack quivered with feeling; his lips trembled as he sat once more in his hut, listening to the jubilant cries his arrival had evoked. It was something, it was much, that he had been able so to win the devoted affection of these poor negroes of the Congo.

Outside, the two chiefs Imbono and Mboyo were talking of the joyful event.

"Yes! wonderful! Lokolobolo is here! and with him two strange white chiefs. Wonderful! Did you ever see such a big man? I am big," said Imbono, "but I am not so big as Makole the chief of Limpoko, and one of the strange white men is bigger than he."

"It needed two ropes to draw him up from the gully," said Mboyo. "I am strong, but though I had four men to help me it was hard work. He must be a very great chief."

"And the other must be a great chief too. Did not Samba say that Lokolobolo gave him his last bottle of devil water?"

"But the big man is hurt. It is the leg. It is not so bad as Ikola's; but Ikola was shot. They have put him in Barnio's hut; the other chief is with Lokolobolo. It is good that the white chiefs have come. Now Lokolobolo will sweep Elobela down the hillside, even as a straw in the storm."

"But what of the smoke-boat that Samba says is coming with the white men in white, and the black men in cloth the colour of straw, and things on their heads the colour of fire? Will Lokolobolo be able to beat them too?"

"Lokolobolo is able to beat all Bula Matadi; and he has the other white men to help. Never fear! Lokolobolo will beat them all. We shall see. There he is, coming out of his hut with the white chief. Lokolobolo wanda!"[1]

"You must be a proud man to-day, Mr. Challoner," said the stranger.

"I am too anxious to be proud," said Jack with a smile. "I haven't the heart to stop them shouting and making a noise, but it's a pity to disturb our enemy in the camp down yonder. I shall have to go and make a speech to them, I suppose; it is more in your line than mine, Mr. Arlington. Luckily I'm not sufficiently fluent in their language to be long-winded."

They went together into the midst of the throng.

When within three marches of Ilombekabasi Jack's party had stumbled upon a wretched encampment in the forest which proved to contain two white men and three negroes. Samba came upon them first, and, startled to find white men at this spot, he was cocking his rifle, supposing them to be State officers, when one of them called to him in a Congo dialect not to shoot; he was an Inglesa. When Jack came up he found that the taller of the two men, the one who had spoken, a huge fellow with a great black beard, was a missionary named Dathan, the other being the Honourable George Arlington, with whose name Jack was familiar. Mr. Arlington was a man of mark. After a brilliant career at Cambridge he had entered Parliament, and became an Under-Secretary of State at a younger age than almost any one before him. When his party was out of office he took the opportunity of travelling in many quarters of the globe, to study at first hand the great problems which more and more demand the attention of British statesmen. Now, in his fortieth year, he was recognized as an authority on the subjects which he had so specially made his own. He had come out to make a personal study of the Congo question, and in order to secure freedom of observation had decided to enter Congo territory, not from Boma, whence he would be shadowed throughout by officials, but from British territory through Uganda. In Unyoro he had met his old college chum Frank Dathan, now a missionary engaged on a tour of inspection of his Society's work in Central Africa. Dathan, having completed his task in Uganda, was to make his way into the Congo State and visit several mission stations there. The two friends thereupon arranged to travel together.

Mr. Arlington being anxious to see a little of what was an almost unexplored part of Africa, they chose as their route the northern fringe of the great forest. But they got into difficulties when they entered country which, though not yet "administered," or "exploited," was nominally Free State territory. At the sight of white men the natives they met with one accord took to the woods. The result was that the travellers were once or twice nearly starved; many of their carriers deserted with their loads; and they both suffered a good deal from exposure and privation. To crown their misfortunes, Dathan fell with a loose rock one day when he was climbing down a steep bank to get water, and broke his leg. Arlington tried without success to set the bone, and was hurrying on in the hope of finding a Free State outpost and a doctor when Jack came upon them.

Jack at once frankly explained his position. He did not give details of his work at Ilombekabasi, but he saw no reason for concealing the circumstances which had driven him into

antagonism with the officials of the Concession. He related what had happened to his uncle, and how he had escaped from the net woven about him by Elbel; he told the strangers also what he had actually seen of the Congo Government's method of dealing with the natives. Then he asked them whether they would like to place themselves under the care of Elbel, who could, if he were disposed, send them under escort to Stanleyville, where the missionary might receive competent treatment. Both were disinclined to do this; they would prefer to keep themselves free from the Congo State or its Trusts. The alternative seemed to be to accompany Jack. This might certainly give rise to complications; Mr. Dathan especially was loth to appear to identify himself with an armed revolt against the State. Missionaries, as he told Jack, were already in bad odour with the authorities; they had told too much of what was going on. In many parts they had come to be looked upon as the natives' only defenders, and had done a little, a very little, towards mitigating the worst features of their lot. But he was still more loth even to seem to countenance Elbel's proceedings by seeking his camp; and Mr. Arlington thought that his presence in Ilombekabasi, when it became known to Elbel, might have a salutary effect on him. Ultimately, then, they decided to run the blockade with Jack into the fort.

The augmented party had had no difficulty in reaching their destination. The same general course was followed as had been arranged for the reception of Mr. Martindale's party. They halted in a copse on an eminence about six miles from the fort and above it. To reach this spot they had to make a longer circuit than either Mr. Martindale or Elbel in his first attempt to surprise Ilola. But before going farther it was necessary to discover how the land lay. Samba was obviously the best of the party for this scouting work, but he could hardly be spared if the fort happened to be too closely invested for the entrance of the whole party to be made. Jack therefore chose Makoko, a sturdy fellow and an excellent scout, scribbled a brief note to Barney, hid it in the negro's thick woolly hair, and sent him on alone. If he came safely to Ilombekabasi and it seemed to Barney possible to run the blockade, a flag was to be hoisted on one of the blockhouses. The signal would be acted on as soon as possible in the darkness.

Makoko left at nightfall. Before dawn Samba went on some two miles ahead to a place whence he could see the fort. He returned with the welcome news that a piece of red cloth was flying on the northern blockhouse. Jack waited impatiently throughout the day; as soon as it was dark Samba led the party forward. They moved slowly, partly to allow time for careful scouting, partly because Mr. Dathan had to be carried, and proved a heavy burden even for six strong Askari. No difficulties were met with; Elbel had ceased to patrol the surroundings of the fort at night, and in the early hours of the morning in pitch darkness the party marched quietly in at the gate on the north side of the fort. Jack put his own hut at Mr. Arlington's disposal. Mr. Dathan was carried to Barney's; and before hearing what had happened during his absence Jack insisted on the missionary's having his injuries attended to. Barney managed to set the broken limb, though not without causing a good deal of pain for which he whimsically apologized. Then Jack listened eagerly to his account of what had happened.

Elbel had made two serious attacks. The first was an attempt to carry the fort by assault, from the place whence he had sent his fire barrels rolling. But after the capture of Elbel's rifles and ammunition a considerable number of Jack's men who had hitherto been spearmen had been trained in the use of the Albini; so that Barney had a force of nearly ninety riflemen with which to meet the attack, half of them at least being good shots. One charge was enough for the enemy; the fire from the wall and blockhouses mowed down the advancing negroes by the score; they never reached the defences, but turned and fled to cover in the gully and behind the rocks above.

Ilombekabasi and Surrounding Country, showing the Diverted Stream and Elbel's Third Camp

Then Elbel demolished the dam he had built on the slope, and allowed the river to flow again in the channel it had cut for itself down the long incline to the eastward.

"What would he be doing that for, sorr? Seems to me he has wasted a terrible deal uv good time in putting up and pulling down. Two men I sent out as scouts niver came back, and I wondered to meself whether they'd been bagged, sorr, and had let out something that made Elbel want to play more tricks wid nature. Often did I see Elbel himself dodging round the fort wid his spyglass in his hand, and 'tis the truth's truth I let some uv the men have a little rifle practice at him. Sure he must have a cat's nine lives, sorr, for ten uv the niggers said they were sartin sure they'd hit him."

"Trying to solve our water puzzle, Barney! Go on."

There was an interval of some days; then, at daybreak one morning, while a strong demonstration, apparently the preliminary of an attack, was observed on the north and east, a body of men crept up the gully and made a sudden rush with ladders for the hole in the wall by which the scouts had been accustomed to go in and out. It was clear that Elbel's best men were engaged in this job, for Barney heard loud cries for help from the small body he had thought sufficient to leave on the western face of the fort. Rushing to the place with a handful of men, he was just in time to prevent the enemy from effecting an entrance. There was a brisk fight for two or three minutes; then the ladders placed against the wall were hurled into the gully, and with them the forlorn hope of the storming party.

"That was three days ago, sorr. And two or three uv our men declared they saw Mbota among

the enemy, pointing out the very spot where the hole is—whin it is a hole. You remember Mbota, sorr—the man who brought in his wife on his back, her wid the hands cut off. 'Twas he I sent out scouting. Sure the chicotte had been at work wid him; for niver a wan uv our men, I would swear before the Lord Chancellor uv Ireland, would turn traitor widout they were in mortal terror for their lives, or even worse."

"And you have not been attacked since?"

"No, sorr. But I've had me throubles all the same. Samba ought to be made, beggin' your pardon, sorr, high constable uv this fort."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sorr, 'cos it seems 'tis only he that can keep the peace. Would you believe it, sorr, the very next day after you were gone, Imbono's men and Mboyo's men began to quarrel; 'twas Orange and Green, sorr, and a fine shindy. Whin Samba was here, he'd make 'em laugh, and 'twas all calm as the Liffey; but widout Samba—bedad! sorr, I didn't know what in the world to do wid 'em. Sure I wished Elbel would fight all the time, so that there'd be no time left for the spalpeens here to fight wan another. But at last, sorr, a happy thought struck me; quite an intimation, as one might say. I remimbered the day when the master—rest his soul!—and you made yourselves blood-brothers uv Imbono. That was a mighty fine piece uv work, thinks I. So wan morning I had a big palaver—likambo the niggers call it, your honour." (Barney's air as he gave this information to Mr. Arlington was irresistibly laughable.) "I made a spache, and Lepoko turned it into their talk as well as he could, poor fellow; and sure they cheered it so powerful hard that I thought 'twas a mimber uv Parlimint I ought to be. Well, sorr, the end was I made Imbono and Mboyo blood-brothers, and niver a word uv difference have they had since."

"A plan that might be tried with leaders of parties at home," said Mr. Arlington with a smile.

"There's wan other thing that throubles me," added Barney. "Our food is getting low, sorr. We had such a powerful lot that wan would have thought 'twould last for iver. But in a fortnight we shall be on very short commons; we've been on half rations this week or more."

"That's bad news indeed. But we shall know our fate in a fortnight. The State troops are coming at last, Barney."

Barney pulled a long face when Jack told him about the flotilla he had seen coming up the river. But the next moment he smiled broadly.

"Sure 'twill be our salvation, sorr. There'll be a power uv food on those canoes, and 'twill come in the nick uv time to save us from famine."

"But we've got to capture it first!"

"And won't it be aisy, sorr? It won't drop into our mouths, to be sure, but there's niver a doubt we'll get it by this or that."

Jack smiled at Barney's confidence, which he could hardly share. He estimated that he had about a week's grace before the State troops could arrive, unless they made a forced march ahead of their stores, which was not very likely. He could not look forward without misgiving. Elbel's troops, strongly reinforced and commanded by an experienced military officer, would prove a very different enemy. He doubted whether it would be wise to wait the issue of a fight. Apart from the risk of being utterly crushed, there was a strong political reason against it, as Mr. Arlington did not fail to point out. Hitherto Jack had been dealing with an officer of the Société Cosmopolite, and he could argue reasonably that he was only opposing unwarranted interference. But if he resisted an armed force of the State, it became at once open rebellion.

"You render yourself liable to the punishment of a rebel, Mr. Challoner," said Mr. Arlington, "and your British nationality will not help you. You might be shot or hanged. What I suggest to you is this. When the State forces appear, let me open negotiations with them. They will probably know my name; I have a certain influence in high quarters; I could probably make terms for you."

"But the people, Mr. Arlington! You could not make terms for them. What would happen to them? They would fall into the power of their oppressors, and the old tale would be continued—illegal demands and exactions, floggings, maimings, murders. It was a solemn charge from my uncle to stand by the defenceless negroes; it is no less the dictate of humanity: we, they and I, are in the same boat, sir, and we must sink or swim together."

As it was of supreme importance to Jack to know at what rate the hostile column was moving, he sent out that night Samba, Makoko, and Lingombela with orders to report the progress of the expedition from day to day. By taking the road through the forest they should get into touch with the enemy by the time they reached the place where Mr. Martindale had left his canoes. If the scouts should find themselves unable to return to the fort they were to light a large fire on the spot whence Samba had seen Barney's flag flying, as a signal that the expedition had passed the place in question. If a small column should be coming on in advance they were to light two fires a little apart from one another. Samba was even more light-hearted than usual when he left the fort with his comrades. He seemed to feel that this was a mission of special importance, the prelude

to a final victory for Lokolobolo; for the possibility of defeat for Lokolobolo never suggested itself to any man in Ilombekabasi. Mboyo and Lukela were at the wall to bid their son goodbye. He laughed as he slipped down into the darkness.

"Ekeke e'afeka!"[2] he whispered gleefully, and hastened to overtake Makoko and Lingombela, who were already some distance up the gully.

Shortly after dawn next day the sentries reported a sound as of a large body of men moving up the hill. Jack instantly called the garrison to arms. There was a good deal of noise in the darkness above the fort. Here and there a dim light showed for a few moments, and was promptly fired at. When day broke Jack saw that the enemy had built a rough wall of stones loosely piled up, some fifty yards long and about four feet high, parallel with the north wall of the fort, one end resting on the edge of the gully. From a convenient spot in the gully, about two hundred yards above the fort, the enemy could creep to the extremity of the wall without coming under the fire of the garrison. It had evidently been erected to screen some operations going on behind it. To guard against a sortie from the fort a covering force had been placed on the hill a quarter of a mile farther up; and between the ill-fitting stones there were small gaps which would serve as loopholes for the riflemen.

During the day the enemy were hard at work digging a trench under cover of the wall. Jack wondered at first whether Elbel was going to make approaches to the fort by sap and mine, in the manner he had read of in histories of the great sieges. But another and still more disturbing thought occurred to him. Would the trench cut across the line of his conduit? Had Elbel at last fathomed the secret of his water supply? He anxiously examined the landmarks, which had been disturbed somewhat by the construction of the wall. As nearly as he could judge, the spring was a few yards south of the wall, and neither it nor the conduit would be discovered by the men digging the trench. Yet he could not but feel that Elbel's latest move was not so much an attempt to undermine the defences of the fort as to discover the source of its water supply. If he should have hit upon the fact that the water was derived, not from a well inside the walls, but from a spring outside, he would not be long in coming to the conclusion that it must be from a spot opposite the northern face; and by cutting a trench or a series of trenches across the ground in that direction he must sooner or later come upon the conduit.

The work proceeded without intermission during the whole of the day, and apparently without success, for the level of the water in the fort tank did not fall. But Elbel's activity was not stopped by the darkness. When morning dawned Jack saw that during the night an opening about five feet wide had been made in the wall, giving access to a passage-way of about the same height leading towards the fort and roughly covered with logs, no doubt as a protection against rifle fire. Only about twenty yards of this passage-way had been completed. The end towards the fort was closed by a light screen of timber resting on rollers, and sufficiently thick to be impervious to rifle fire, as Jack soon found by experiment. Evidently another trench was to be dug near the fort. To avoid the labour of building a second covering wall, Elbel had hit on the idea of a passage-way through which his men might reach the spot where he desired the new trench to be begun. Protected by the screen, they could dig a hole several feet deep, and then, too low to be hit by shots from the fort, could proceed with the trench in safety.

Jack wondered whether Elbel had not yet heard of the approach of the State forces. Such feverish activity was surely unnecessary when reinforcements were only a few days' march distant. It was Barney who suggested that Elbel had made such a mess of things hitherto that he was eager to do something, to gain a success of some kind, before the regular forces should arrive.

Under cover of the wooden screen the enemy, as Jack had expected, started to dig another trench parallel with the wall. They had no lack of labourers; as soon as one gang was tired another was ready to take its place; and the work was carried on very rapidly. With growing anxiety Jack watched the progress of the trench towards the gully. His conduit was only three feet from the surface of the ground. Judging by the fact that his marksmen never got an opportunity of taking aim at the diggers, the trench must be at least five feet deep; and if an opening were made into the gully the conduit was sure to be exposed. There was just one hope that they would fail. Jack remembered the outcrop of rock which had necessitated the laying of the pipes, for a length of some yards, several feet lower than the general level. If the enemy should happen to have struck this point there was a fair chance of the conduit escaping their search; for, coming upon the layer of rock, they would probably not guess that pipes were carried beneath it. To reassure himself, Jack called up Imbono and Mboyo and asked them if they could locate the spot where the rock occurred. Their impression agreed with his, that it must at any rate be very near the place where the enemy's trench would issue into the gully.

But Jack's anxiety was not relieved at the close of the day, for again the work was carried on all night. He thought of a sortie, but reflected that this would be taken by Elbel as an indication that he was hot on the scent. And while a sortie might inflict loss on the enemy, it would not prevent Elbel from resuming his excavations as soon as the garrison had retired again within their defences.

With great relief Jack at last heard the sound of pick-axes striking on rock. It seemed too good to be true that the enemy had come upon the exact dozen yards of rock where alone the conduit was in little danger of being laid bare. Yet this proved to be the case. In the morning

Elbel drew off his workmen, apparently satisfied, before the trench had been actually completed to the gully, that he was on the wrong track. A great load was lifted from Jack's mind. If the secret of the water supply had been discovered, he knew that the end could only be a matter of a few days.

As soon as the enemy drew off, Jack's men issued forth, demolished the wall, and filled up the trench.

Three days passed in comparative inactivity. During these days Jack had much of his time taken up by Mr. Arlington, who required of him a history of all that had happened since the first meeting with Elbel. The traveller made copious jottings in his note-book. He asked the most minute questions about the rubber traffic and the methods of the State and the Concessions; he had long interviews with Imbono and Mboyo, and endured very patiently Lepoko's expanded versions of statements already garrulous; he took many photographs with his kodak of the people who had been maimed by the forest guards, and asked Jack to present him with a chicotte—one of those captured along with the Askari. He said very little, probably thinking the more. Certainly he let nothing escape his observation.

Meanwhile Mr. Dathan was making friends of all the children. Unable to endure the stuffiness of the hut, he had himself carried on a sheltered litter into the open, where, propped up on pillows, his burly form might be seen in the midst of a large circle of little black figures, who looked at him earnestly with their bright intelligent eyes and drank in the wonderful stories he told them. Many of their elders hovered on the fringe of the crowd; and when the lesson was finished, they went away and talked among themselves of Nzakomba[3] the great Spirit Father who, as the bont' ok'ota-a-a-li[4] said, had put it into the heart of Lokolobolo to defend and help them.

Before the dawn one morning Lingombela came into the fort. He reported that the new enemy had only just finished the portage of their canoes and stores. The steamer had been left below the rapids, and the white men were embarking on canoes. There were not enough to convey the whole expedition at one time, although some had been sent down the river to meet them. Two or three had been lost through attempting to save time by dragging them up the rapids. Lingombela had himself seen this, with Samba. Samba had no doubt already told what he had seen, but he did not know about the big gun which could fire as many shots as a hundred men, for the white men had not begun to practise at a mark in their camp above the rapids until Samba had left.

"But we have seen nothing of Samba; where is he?"

"He started to return to Ilombekabasi a day before I did."

"And Makoko?"

"Makoko is still watching."

Lingombela's statement about Samba alarmed Jack. What had become of the boy? Had he fallen into the enemy's hands? It was too much to be feared. What else could have delayed him? In threading the forest none of the scouts could travel so fast as he. If he had started a day before Lingombela he should have gained at least five or six hours.

The news soon flew through the settlement that Samba was missing. Mboyo and his wife came to Jack to ask whether Lingombela had told the truth. Their troubled looks touched Jack, and he tried to cheer them.

"Samba has not arrived yet, certainly," he said, "but he may not have come direct. Something may have taken him out of his course; he would go a long way round if he thought it would be of use to us. Don't be worried. He has gone in and out safely so often that surely he will come by and by."

The negroes went away somewhat comforted. But Jack felt very anxious, and his feeling was fully shared by Barney.

"'Tis meself that fears Elbel has got him," he said. "Pat has been most uncommon restless for two days. He looks up in the face uv me and barks, whin he's not wanting anything at all. 'Tis only Samba can rightly understand all Pat says, and seems to me Pat has got an idea that something has happened to Samba."

An hour later Pat also had disappeared. He had broken his strap and run away.

[1] The highest salutation, given to a person of great dignity.

[2] The last time.

[3] God.

[4] Very tall man.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The Chicotte

A small palm, spared for the sake of its welcome shade when the rest of the ground was cleared, sheltered Monsieur Elbel's tent from the fiercest rays of the tropical sun, In the tent Monsieur Elbel, smoking a bad Belgian cigar, his camp chair tilted back to a perilous angle, his feet on a small rickety table, read and re-read with a smile of satisfaction a short official communication that had just reached him from Brussels. Owing to the retirement of the Company's principal agent, and in recognition of Monsieur Elbel's energy in doubling the consignment of rubber from his district during the past year, the Comité had been pleased to appoint Monsieur Elbel to be administrative chief of the Maranga Concession. At the same time the Comité hoped that Monsieur Elbel would see his way to deal promptly and effectively with the reported outbreak at Ilola, without incurring undue expense, and that the American who had been giving trouble, and whose patent was now revoked (with the concurrence of the State) would be persuaded of the necessity of leaving the country.

Monsieur Elbel was gratified by the news of his promotion; although it was his due by all the standards of conduct set up for the guidance of officials, whether State or Trust, charged with the exploitation of Congoland. Under no officer had the development of King Leopold's African dominions gone more blithely forward than under Monsieur Elbel. Where he and his men went they left a wilderness behind them; but the amount of rubber they collected was most gratifying; and if Maranga stock stood high it was largely through their exertions. True, in twenty years there would be no people left in Maranga, even if there were rubber to collect. But after all that was not Monsieur Elbel's concern: in twenty years he would not be on the Congo; those who came after him must find their own collectors. He and the King took short views: sufficient unto the day—they were both men of business. Yes, as a man of affairs Guillaume Elbel was hard to beat. It was no wonder that the Comité had promoted him to the vacant post; if he had been passed by, where would be the inducement to zeal, to loyal faithful service? Where indeed?

In the circumstances Monsieur Elbel was in good humour, a relaxation he rarely allowed himself. He drank the remains of his absinthe, tilted his chair back to the critical angle, and blowing a cloud of smoke skywards saw in the curling eddies visions of snug directorates in Brussels. Why not? He flattered himself there were none who knew more about the Congo than he; he could estimate to a few francs the possibilities of any district as expressed in rubber; and, what is more, he knew how to get it. With him the people always lasted as long as the rubber. There was no waste; he plumed himself on the point. *He* had never burnt a village before the rubber was exhausted, whatever might be said of other agents. For after all, his business was to promote commerce—that is, collect rubber—not mere destruction. And if he did not know his business there was nobody who could teach him. Yes—his Majesty had an eye to men of his stamp. A directorate—a few directorates—a snug place at Court—who knows? ...

Monsieur Elbel again glanced at the official letter; and again smiled and blew a ring artistically true. Then his eye caught the word "expense," and his expression changed. This Ilola difficulty would not only reduce his rubber consignments; it would mean a considerable outlay—how much he did not like to think. And then there was the column of State troops now on its way. No doubt the Concession would have to pay for that, too. Peste! if only he could finish this business before Van Vorst came up! He did not desire the presence of Van Vorst or any other State officer, if it could be avoided. For there was gold in the stream, without a doubt; and those State officials were greedy rascals; they were capable of edging him out—they had no scruples—his moral claim would go for nothing, absolutely. Yes, the fort must be captured at once before Van Vorst came up. If only he could tap the water supply it would be easy enough. It could be done; the little fool had let out so much; but how?—that was what he had to find out, and his name was not Elbel if he couldn't do it.

He rose and went to the door of the tent. A few yards away, securely tied to the trunk of the slender palm, was a negro boy. Monsieur Elbel looked at him critically as if measuring his strength. Last night, although threatened with the chicotte, the boy had refused to speak. Only once, when Elbel had offered him freedom and rewards if he would point out the source of the water in the camp above, did he open his lips, saying fiercely: "I will never tell you!"—betraying to the questioner that he had some knowledge of the secret. Now he had had twelve hours of hunger and thirst to help him to a more reasonable frame of mind. All night the cords had been eating into his wrists and ankles; he was weak from want of food, and consumed with an intolerable thirst. He stood there in the blazing sun, a listless, pitiable figure, held upright only by the thongs that bound his wrists; and Monsieur Elbel as he looked at him, felt not a little irritated. It was absurd that he should be inconvenienced; nay, more, that the development of the Concession should be delayed, and expense incurred—avoidable, unnecessary expense—expense without any return in rubber—all because this slip of a boy refused to tell what he knew.

Elbel beckoned to his servant and interpreter, standing close by, attentive and expectant.

"Tell him," he said, "that I will give him one more chance. If he will not speak he shall be thrashed with the chicotte until he does."

The man roughly grasped the boy by the shoulders and translated his master's words. The captive slowly shook his head.

"Fetch the chicotte," said Elbel sharply. "We'll see what that will do."

The man entered the tent, where the chicotte invariably lay ready to hand; and when he emerged the space in front of Elbel's quarters was filling with Askari and their followers flocking like vultures to the feast. Samba, the son of Mboyo, chief of Banonga, was to be whipped. Boloko had caught him last night: he was a clever man, Boloko. And Samba knew where the Inglesa got the water for his camp, the secret was to be cut from him by the chicotte. That was good; it would be a sight to see.

No time was lost. Elbel signed to the man as he approached, and stepping back left him a clear space to swing the whip. The negro prided himself upon his skill; as Elbel's servant, indeed, he had more opportunities of perfecting himself with this typical instrument of Congo government than falls to most. He could deliver a stroke with great delicacy, raising only a long red weal upon the skin, or if the case called for real severity could cut the offender's flesh from his body almost as neatly as with a knife.

In this case his master desired information; it was not a mere question of punishing a sullen defaulter. He would begin gently lest the prisoner should lose the power of speech and shame the executioner before his master and the crowd.

A slight convulsive shiver shook the boy's frame as the whip fell, but he clenched his teeth and no sound escaped him. The man waited for a moment.

"Will you tell?"

There was no answer.

Again the whip rose and fell, this time with a more vicious sound; it was answered by a low groan; but still to the same question there was no reply.

By slow degrees the executioner increased the vigour of his stroke. The Askari applauded, and surely he was meriting praise from his master, for after many strokes the prisoner was quite conscious, as his pallid face and staring eyes and clenched teeth clearly showed. And besides, did he not writhe and groan with every blow?

But there is no reckoning with the vagaries of the white man. The culprit's obstinate silence irritated Monsieur Elbel more and more as the punishment went on. It was intolerable that he should be defied in this way. It was a bad example to the natives. Where would the white man's authority be if this kind of thing were permitted? They would lose all respect: the collection of rubber would become a farce. Suddenly he blazed out in anger, snatched the whip from the hands of his servant, and, whirling it round his head, brought it down with all his force on the bruised and bleeding form. It cut a deep purple gash in the boy's back; but Monsieur Elbel's wrath had come too late; before the lash fell Samba had fainted.

Elbel hesitated for a moment; then, seeing that further punishment would be a mere waste of time, he gave a curt order. They cut Samba's cords and carried him away. He was to be whipped again to-morrow.

That afternoon Lepoko came to Jack with a broad grin on his face.

"Mbota come back, sah."

"That's the scout of Massa Barney's who was captured, isn't it?"

"Yussah! He come back, sah. Oh! it make me laugh plenty much. Elobela send Mbota back; he say, 'You go back, cut off Lokolobolo him head. Me gib you twenty, fousand, plenty, plenty brass rods!' Mbota say, 'All same, massa. Anyfing what massa like. Me get plenty men what help.' Den Mbota come back; he laugh, sah; Elobela plenty big fool fink him lib for hurt Lokolobolo."

"Bring Mbota to me at once."

When the man came, Jack got out of him a more lucid story than Lepoko had given. Elbel had promised freedom and large rewards if he would stir up a revolt against Jack, or assassinate him. The negro had readily promised, with no intention but to reveal the whole scheme to his beloved Lokolobolo.

Jack was still talking to the man when he heard loud cries. Running out of his hut, he found Barney clutching by the arm a strange negro, thronged about by a shouting crowd of the men of

Ilombekabasi.

"Who is he?"

"'Tis wan uv Elbel's men, sorr. Lianza caught him in the forest, and brought him in. The men are simply mad to get at him, sorr, especially since they've heard uv what Elbel said to Mbota."

"Leave him to me. I will deal with him."

The men slowly dispersed. Jack took the trembling negro to his hut and questioned him.

"Do you know anything of Samba, the son of Mboyo and nephew of Boloko, one of your master's men?"

Yes, he knew.—Was there a man in Elobela's camp who did not know?—who had not exulted when the news spread that Samba, the best of Lokolobolo's scouts, had been captured and was to pay the penalty? Surely not a man was absent when Samba suffered the torture. Had not many of them tried in vain to discover the secret which Samba would be forced to betray?

The scout described to Jack the whole pitiful scene, in the glowing language, with the telling dramatic gestures, which the negro has at command when he feels that his audience is interested. And while the man told his story Jack went hot and cold by turns—cold with sheer horror of the scene conjured up by the man's vivid words, hot with a great wrath, a burning passionate desire to seek instant vengeance upon the evildoer.

Bidding Barney keep the negro carefully under guard, he went back to his hut, at the entrance to which Mr. Arlington had been anxiously watching the scene.

"It is devilish, sir," he burst out. "Elbel not only offers rewards for assassinating me, but he uses his brutal whip on a boy, to force him to reveal the secret of our water supply. Samba is probably half-dead—he fainted under the lash but would not betray us—brave little fellow! Think of the agony he must have suffered! And he is only one; thousands have suffered in the same way before him, and are suffering to-day in one part or another of this State. Do you blame me now, sir?"

"No, I don't blame you. I am deeply sorry for the poor boy. The whole thing is an outrage upon human nature, so revolting that any action that can be taken against it is fully justified. I have been thinking over what we said the other day. It is not for me to advise; indeed, my friends at home would open their eyes at the idea of my abetting resistance to authority; but I will give you my opinion. You must hold your fort. While the banner of revolt is kept flying there is always a prospect of forcing the hand of the officials in the direction of effective reform. They have an enormous area to control—a disaffected area seething with indignation against bitter wrong. A successful revolt will encourage outbreaks elsewhere. If you can only hold out; if you can make yourself strong enough here in this remote corner to defy the authorities, it will be an opportunity of forcing the government to terms—to the granting of elementary rights of justice and liberty to its own subjects, and the throwing open of this sorely-afflicted country to free intercourse with the outside world."

"Ah! If only I can do it, sir! But I can only hold the fort now by striking a blow at Elbel before his reinforcements join him. If the forces unite, they will be strong enough to carry on a strict siege. Our food is giving out; the people have been for some time on half rations; they don't grumble, but it will have to be quarter rations soon, and then the end is not far off. We must either surrender or trek."

"If you have to trek, it would be better to do so at once, while you have food to take your party on your way."

"Yes, we must either do that or thoroughly beat Elbel. That would ease the pressure; the others would think twice before attacking us; they might even draw off until an overwhelming force could be brought against us. That would give time for us to grow more crops, and for you to go back to England, sir, and raise your voice against this atrocious government."

"I shall certainly do that. But you talk of fighting Elbel; have you thought of the risk?"

"Till my head aches with thinking. I know that failure will mean ruin. It must be a smashing blow; pin-pricks are no good; and I can't smash him without taking a large force out of the fort. If we were obliged to retreat we should be followed up; they might rush the fort, and there would be an end of everything."

"It is a difficult position. I can't help you; I am not a soldier—it seems to me you ought to be one, Mr. Challoner. I could take no active part; I should in any case be little good. I feel that you have landed me in a very awkward position," he added with a smile. "But it can't be helped now; I can only wait and see you go through with it."

At the back of Jack's mind there was another consideration which he did not mention. He could not have said how far he allowed it to count. It was the bare chance of rescuing Samba—if Samba was still alive. If it had been put to him, he would probably not have admitted it. The good

of the community could not be jeopardized by any action on behalf of an individual, whatever his claim; the circumstances were too critical. But that the fate of Samba was an additional argument in favour of the course he was on other grounds inclined to adopt there can be no doubt.

Next day the urgency of the situation was brought home to him. Two fires were seen at the appointed spot; Makoko had done his work. Five or six hours later, just after nightfall, Makoko himself came in. He reported that one white man with twenty soldiers in two canoes, with many paddlers, had started up river in advance of the bulk of the force, which had now reached camp at the head of the rapids. Jack guessed that the white man was the officer in command, probably the Captain Van Vorst of whom Elbel had spoken, coming ahead to view the position and select an encampment for his followers.

About noon on the next day there was a great sound of jubilation from the camp below. Van Vorst, if it was he, had arrived. He must have travelled night and day, the river route being so much longer than the forest one that otherwise he could hardly have reached the camp in another twelve hours. But his paddlers were no doubt pressed men from the riverine villages, costing nothing and having no rights, and a Congo State commandant in a hurry would not hesitate to drive them.

In the afternoon a negro bearing a white flag was seen approaching the fort from the south. He evidently expected to be admitted by the hole in the wall. But at Jack's bidding Lianza of the brazen throat called to him to come round to the gate on the north; it was well to observe due order and ceremony.

The man brought a note signed "Van Vorst," demanding the instant surrender of the fort. In reply Jack wrote asking for the assurance that his people, having acted throughout in self defence against the illegalities of the Société Cosmopolite, should be guaranteed liberty to depart, and immunity except against the regular legal process of the courts. In half an hour the messenger returned with a curt summons to unconditional surrender. Jack sent back a polite refusal, feeling that he had now burnt his boats.

Shortly afterwards he saw a party of three white men and about twenty State soldiers, all armed with rifles, making a tour round the position, keeping carefully under cover. Through his field-glass Jack recognized Elbel, one of his subordinates, and one of the officers he had seen on the steamer. Elbel pointed this way and that with outstretched hand, and appeared to be talking with some excitement. Occasionally they came within easy range of the fort, and Barney begged Jack to let the men fire upon them; but Jack resolutely stuck to his determination to refrain from provocation.

The party by and by reached a position above the fort, near the spot whence the abortive barrel-rolling had been started. From this place a small area of the fort enclosure was open to the view of the enemy. All at once Jack saw the strange officer take a rifle from one of the soldiers and raise it to his shoulder. Jack instantly ordered his men, who were crowding the wall, to drop down out of sight. The officer fired: there was a moment's silence; then Jack heard a great yell of rage from the men behind him. Turning, he saw an old woman lying huddled in the centre of the enclosure. Two calabashes lay near; she had been crossing the exposed portion of the area to fetch water from the tank when Van Vorst's bullet struck her. A shout of delight from the negro soldiers up the hill acclaimed the successful shot of their officer; the old woman was quite dead.

Jack went hot with rage. And Mr. Arlington, who had witnessed the officer's action, was stirred out of his usual philosophic calm.

"That is not an act of warfare, Mr. Challoner, but of sheer savagery—the act of a callous marksman showing off. It invites reprisal."

"You see how the State treats its subjects, Mr. Arlington. They have taken cover; it's too late to fire now. But it settles the matter for me. The State has fired the first shot and killed a non-combatant. I shall do my best this very night to deal the enemy a staggering blow."

CHAPTER XXIX

Reaping the Whirlwind

During the inaction of the past two days Jack had been carefully thinking out his plan. Stout-hearted as he was, he felt oppressed by the difficulties of his position. He had now four hundred men in all; scarcely a hundred of them were armed with rifles, and not more than fifty were practised shots. How could he hope to dislodge from a stockaded camp more than seven hundred, of whom some two hundred and fifty, including Van Vorst's advance guard, were riflemen? It seemed at the best a desperate hazard, but the alternative was worse, and having resolved upon his course he rejected all half measures. Some few of his own men must be left in the fort, if only to prevent a panic; but those must be the minimum—he would need every man he could muster.

He was staking all on the cast of a die; it would never do to risk failure by timorousness in using all his effective combatant strength. He would throw his whole available force against the enemy in one supreme effort to break and scatter him.

The offensive, he knew, counted for much, especially with men who had not known defeat. Where he and Barney led he felt sure they would follow. But a check might be fatal. A single well-directed volley from the enemy might sweep his little company of riflemen away, and his spearmen would then never get to close quarters.

He gave full weight to all these considerations. But having decided that the attempt must be made he devoted long hours of anxious thought to the devising of a plan that would give best promise of success. He had to do his thinking alone. Barney was a fighter, not a strategist. He could be trusted to strike hard and carry out orders to the minutest detail; he could not plan or organize. Mr. Arlington and the missionary of course must not be consulted. So that when Barney was called into Jack's hut that afternoon, it was to learn particulars of a scheme worked out by Jack alone. When he left it an hour or two later, his eyes were glowing with a new light.

"Sure 'tis me chance that has come at last!" he said to himself.

It was two o'clock in the morning. Ilombekabasi was astir. Men and boys were moving this way and that. The night was dark, but by the light of the small lamps kept burning before a few of the principal huts it could be seen that every face was tense with excitement and a subdued energy. In one spot congregated the maimed people, armed with such weapons as they could wield, for the news that a great movement was intended had spread in the camp, and every man and many of the girls and women had begged to be allowed to bear arms. Near the south-eastern blockhouse the bulk of the able-bodied men and boys were squatting, rifles and spears lying beside them. At the gate in the north wall stood twenty-five men, the picked men of the corps, the men whom Lokolobolo had twice led out to victory. There was Lepoko, all smiles and consequence. There was Makoko, hugging his rifle as though he loved it. There was Lianza of the brazen throat, and Lingombela the man of hard bargains, and Imbono, the prudent chief of Ilola, and Mboyo, solemn and silent, thinking of Samba. On the ground lay a number of bundles and bales, large and small.

A group approached the gate from Lokolobolo's hut. Lokolobolo himself, and Barnio, as the natives called him, came first, walking slowly side by side. Behind came Mr. Arlington, his strong features fixed impassively. At his side was the litter of Mr. Dathan, borne by four negroes.

"Is it quite clear?" said Jack to Barney. "You have twenty good men here, besides another twenty of the maimed who may be of use in an emergency. Batukuno will be left in command. All the rest will go with you; yes, let the boys go; they can use their knives even if they cannot throw a spear. Get them all paraded an hour before dark, ladder men first. Keep them as quiet as you can. Wait till you hear shots in the enemy's camp; that will be the signal. Then send your men out, over the stockade by the south-eastern blockhouse; they can scramble down the slope there. You had better take half of them first and form them up at the bottom. The rest can follow as soon as they see you move off. Lead them at the double straight down the hill and fling them at the stockade. The second party will be just in time to support you if the first rush is checked. But there must be no check; we daren't admit the possibility. This is your job, Barney."

"Amen, sorr. For the honour uv ould Ireland and the sake uv these poor niggers I'll do me very best."

"I know you will, old fellow."

They grip hands, looking into each other's eyes. This may be their last good-bye. One long hand-clasp, one moment of tense emotion, then, clearing his throat, Jack gives an order to his men. They stoop to their bundles, then file quietly out of the gate. Each man has a package to carry, such a package as forms part of every white man's baggage in Africa: one a trunk, another a gun-case, a third a canvas bag, others bales of various kinds. Two strong negroes at the end of the line bear, slung on ropes, a package, strangely shapeless, and to all appearance particularly heavy.

The last has gone out into the darkness. Then Jack turns once more.

"Good-bye, Mr. Arlington."

"Good-bye! Success to you."

"Good-bye, Mr. Dathan."

"God help you, my dear lad," says the missionary.

Then Jack too leaves Ilombekabasi, and the darkness swallows him up.

Towards dusk on the following evening, a party of twenty-five carriers were marching through the forest in the direction of Elbel's stockaded camp. In the midst were four men

carrying a litter. They followed the path leading from the river—the path along which Captain Van Vorst had come a few days earlier. For some time they had been shadowed by a negro bearing the arms of a forest guard. They paused for a few moments to rest, and the negro, apparently satisfied by his observations, came up and accosted them.

"You are the servants of Mutela?"

"Yes, that is so. Has Mutela arrived?"

Mutela was the native name for Van Vorst.

"Oh yes! He came two or three days ago."

"Are we on the right road?"

"Certainly. The camp is but a little way beyond us. I will lead you to it. You have heavy loads."

"Ah! Mutela is a man of riches. He has many pots, and many bottles, and very many coats for his back. And guns too; see, here is his elephant rifle. Mutela is a great hunter; a great man of war."

"True, he is a great man of war. Yesterday he killed a woman in the fort of the Inglesa. I saw it. I laughed; we all laughed; it was so funny! But who is in the litter?"

"A white officer. Oh yes! He is as great a man of war as Mutela. But he is sick; white men so easily turn sick! And he sleeps, although it is a rough road."

"Aha! It is a pity he is sick. Mutela will be sorry. Mutela is going to kill all the men in the Inglesa's fort. Lokolobolo they call him. Aha! we shall see how strong he is! See, there is the camp yonder through the trees."

When the party were still within some yards of the gate, the scout gave a hail. It was answered by a negro whose face appeared just above the stockade. By the time the leading men reached the gate it had been thrown open by one of Elbel's European subordinates, and a crowd of negro soldiers and hangers-on was collected to witness the entrance of the white officer and Mutela's baggage.

Lepoko, who had led the file, deposited his bundle just inside the gate and burst into a roar of laughter, holding his sides and bending his body in uncontrollable mirth. He was soon surrounded by a crowd of negroes, to whom he began to relate a very funny story; how Ekokoli, the daring Ekokoli, had mounted a crocodile's back just below the rapids, and had a splendid ride. The comical story set the throng laughing in chorus, and they begged to hear it again. Meanwhile, the rest of the carriers had filed in with their burdens, the litter had been set down, and the white officer, though so sick, stepped out quite briskly to greet the Belgian, whose attention was divided between the laughing negroes and his guest. At the same time the four bearers drew out from the litter a rifle apiece—for a sick man rifles surely made an uncomfortable couch!—and also half a dozen objects which to a man of Ilombekabasi would have looked suspiciously like fire-balls. From the packages which lay near the gate each of the other carriers with a single pull abstracted a Mauser or an Albini; while the two men who had staggered along at the end of the line under the weight of a clumsy heavy bundle dropped it in the gateway with a thud that suggested the fall of a rock rather than a carrier's ordinary load. It lay against the gate, preventing it from being closed.

Lepoko was already telling his story for the second time. Elbel's officer, about to speak to the sick white man, who had just stepped out of the litter, suddenly hesitated, wheeled round, and with a loud cry of alarm rushed toward the centre of the camp, where, in a large tent, Elbel was at that moment regaling Captain Van Vorst with a dinner that did much credit to his native cook. His cry passed unnoticed by the delighted negroes whom Lepoko was so humorously entertaining. But next moment they choked their guffaws, and, without waiting for the end of the story, scampered with more speed than grace after their white officer towards Elobela's tent. What had startled them? The sick man from the litter, after one hasty glance round, had suddenly fired into the air the rifle he bore. And the carriers who seemed so tired and so glad to lay down their burdens had all at once sprung into feverish activity. Dividing into two parties they had disappeared behind the huts nearest to the stockade on each side of the gateway, and if the hubbub had not been so great, an attentive listener might have heard sundry scratches that ensued upon their disappearance. But there was no one to hear. The garrison of the camp were rushing still towards the centre with loud cries; the carriers and the sick officer were no longer to be seen; and what was this? Clouds of smoke, thick, acrid, suffocating, were floating on the south wind from the huts towards Elobela's tent.

And now the camp was in an uproar. Mingled with the yells of alarm were distinct cries, "Mutela!" "Elobela!" "Lokolobolo!" And amid all the din came ever and anon the sharp piercing bark of a dog.

Monsieur Guillaume Elbel, of the Société Cosmopolite du Commerce du Congo, had just opened a second bottle of Madeira for the delectation of his guest Captain Van Vorst, of the Congo State Forces. The dinner had been a good one; the Captain had praised his cook, the best

cook on the Congo; and Monsieur Elbel was in better humour than he had been since the arrival of the State troops. He was even pleasantly boasting of the coming triumph at Ilombekabasi, and discussing what they should do with the Englishman after they had caught him, when sounds from outside so startled him that he poured the wine on to the tablecloth instead of into the glass, and interrupted himself with the sudden exclamation—

"What's that?"

He snatched up a rifle and hurried out, followed more slowly by his companion, who had seen too many camp quarrels to be greatly alarmed by this sudden outbreak. Elbel at first could distinguish nothing in the confusion. The short dusk of a tropical evening was already becoming darkness, but he could see that crowds of men were pouring out of the huts, rushing, hustling, in a state that was very like panic. And a pungent smoke saluted his nostrils; it was drifting in great whorls northwards over the camp, and surely behind it he saw here and there little red flashes of flame.

Who had fired that shot which had so shaken Monsieur Elbel's hand? He did not know; it had been a single shot; surely the camp could not be attacked, for other shots would have followed long before this. But the moment he appeared outside the tent a volley rang out, and Elbel saw that it was fired by his own men into the midst of the smoke. He was hurrying across the camp to inquire into the meaning of all this when a volley flashed from the other direction—from the very heart of the smoke. Shrieks proclaimed that some of the shots had told. "Fools!" cried Elbel, "don't you see they're screened by the smoke, whoever they are? What's the good of firing when you can't take aim? Curse that dog! I can't hear myself speak!"

Another volley flashed from the smoke. Men were dropping on every side; there were wild rushes for cover. Soon the central space was deserted, and the panic-stricken garrison fled for shelter behind the huts on the north side of the camp. While Elbel and Van Vorst were shouting themselves hoarse in a vain attempt to stem this tide of flight, the sergeant who had opened the gate had rushed to the north side, where Van Vorst's contingent were quartered, and hastily got them into some sort of order, together with those of Elbel's men who, having their huts on that side, has been less affected by the sudden alarm. Dividing the company of about a hundred men into two parties, he sent them skirmishing forward in the spaces between the huts towards the enemy he supposed to be approaching on the east and west.

That enemy, however, was not approaching. Jack had fired the huts and thrown the camp into confusion; his little party was not strong enough to turn the confusion to utter rout. Its smallness would be perceived if he led it into the open; his was a waiting game. The wisdom of his policy was soon proved. A sharp volley came from the men whom the Belgian sergeant had got together. Jack heard the man beside him groan heavily and fall to the ground; then he himself felt a stinging burning pain below the left knee. He called to his men to keep within cover, and hastily bound a handkerchief about the wound. And now the wind dropped, and the smoke which had hitherto screened his movements floated upwards. A scattering volley from the enemy reduced his band by two more men. The State troops were working round on each side of him; and the red glare from the burning huts was lighting up the whole camp. It would soon be seen how small his little company was; then one determined rush would annihilate it.

Less than four minutes had passed since he entered the gate; it seemed an age. Would Barney never come? Why was he delaying? Surely he had heard the signal shot; surely by this time he must have seen the ruddy glare! The enemy were regaining confidence; their cries of alarm were changed to yells of defiance. Elbel and Van Vorst had taken command, one on each side; each was steadily moving down from the northern stockade towards the gate. Barney, Barney, will you never come?

Hark! What is that? The cries of the enemy are suddenly drowned in a babel of yells behind them. They halt, amazed; Van Vorst shouts an order; the men wheel round and dash northwards, leaving only a few to watch the rear. The Belgian sees now the meaning of this daring scheme. What has he to gain by routing the little band behind? Before him is pandemonium; a whole host must be upon him; here is the danger to be met.

But he is too late! "Lokolobolo! Lokolobolo!" Two hundred voices roar the name. And Lokolobolo himself sees a portion of the northern stockade black with moving figures, and rifle barrels, spear heads, gleaming red in the light of the flaming huts. Towards him rushes the greater part of the garrison, their first fright trebled. These guards of the forest can fight unarmed despairing rubber collectors, but their hearts are as water when the villagers prove to be men. Let the men in uniform, the clad soldiers of Bula Matadi, fight if they will; this is no place for forest guards; the gate! the gate!

Van Vorst's handful of more disciplined men present a bolder front to the enemy. But it would need many times the number he can muster to break the wave of exultant warriors now swarming over the stockade. There is Barney! Jack sees him drop to the ground, brandishing in one hand a rifle, an ancient cutlass in the other. "Hurroo! hurroo!" he shouts. A second, no more, and then the crest of the wave breaks over the stockade into the camp.

"Barnio! Lokolobolo!" With a great roar the men of Ilombekabasi follow their leader. They are already sweeping the garrison like sea-wrack before them, when another wave comes tumbling

behind, the shrill cries of boys mingling with the deeper shouts of the men. See, they come, furiously, irresistibly! And who is this? A tall white-clad figure springs over with the movement of a hurdle-racer. It is Mr. Arlington himself, stirred for the nonce out of his habitual calmness, caught up and carried away in this roaring current.

The enemy fire once, then, though Van Vorst may rave and storm, they turn their backs and flee helter-skelter for the gate. "Lokobololo! Barnio!" The tempestuous war-cries pursue them. Struggling, yelling, they converge to the narrow gateway. It is jammed, wedged tight with human forms, squeezed by the presence of the frantic crowd behind into a solid mass of feebly struggling wretches lost to all consciousness but that of a great fear. The weaker men fall and are trampled to death; the stronger push and pull, and scramble over the fallen, mad with fright. Some win through or over, and rush with blind haste into the forest. Others, despairing of escape by that one constricted outlet, climb the palisade. Some impale themselves on the sharp-pointed stakes, and, hapless benefactors! serve as gangways for their comrades who follow.

Seeing the utter rout of the enemy, Jack had already ordered his men to cease fire. His end was gained; he had no lust for useless slaughter. But although Makoko and Lingombela and the rest with him loyally obeyed, nothing could check the storming party. They heard nothing, saw nothing, but the enemy in front. Not one of them but had a father, or mother, a wife or child, to avenge—a ruined home, a blasted life. As well attempt to bridle the whirlwind as this infuriate flood. On and on they pressed, past the spot where Jack held his men in leash; and as they ran they shot and stabbed, yelling "Barnio! Lokolobolo!" And as they were accustomed to receive no mercy, so now, in this hour of retribution, they gave none.

As Jack made his way towards the gateway, hoping to do something to ensure quarter for the fleeing wretches, he caught sight of a figure crawling painfully forth from a burning hut. At one moment he recognized the man and the man him.

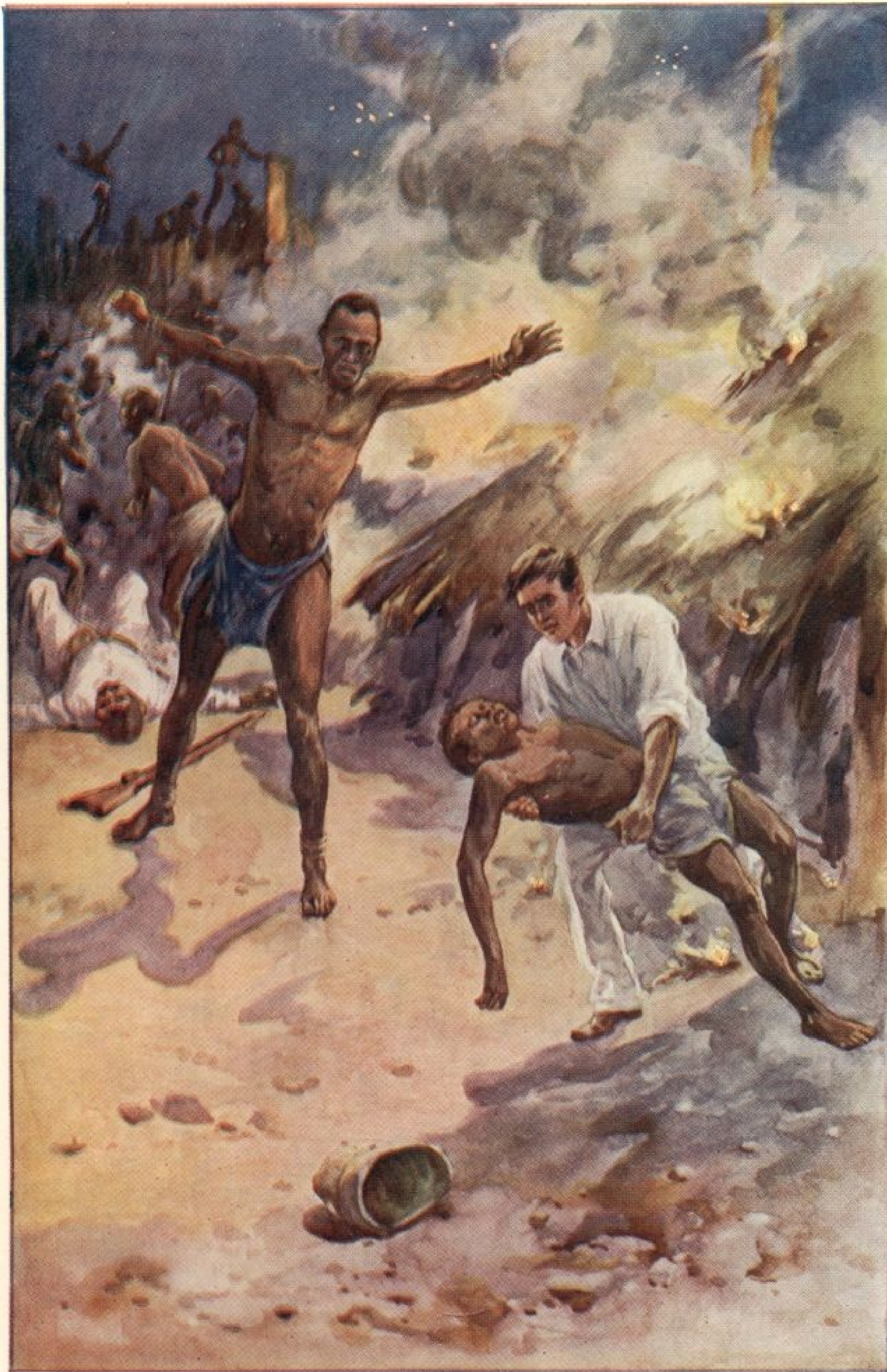
"Nando!" he cried.

"Sabe me, massa!"

"Getaway to the other end. Wait for me there. Any other men in the hut?"

"No, massa, no! only me!"

But as he turned to run Jack heard the bark which ever and anon had struck his ears during these full minutes, and felt a tug at his coat. The cloth, already tattered, gave way; but Pat caught his trousers, then ran a little way ahead, then back again, then once more towards the burning hut. Tearing off his coat, Jack wrapped it round his head and dashed in. The smoke was so dense that nothing could be seen save here and there spurts of flame. Scarcely able to breathe he flung himself on the ground and began to grope round the right of the hut. By and by his hands touched a human body, and then the shaggy coat of the terrier. Lifting the body in both arms he staggered with it to the entrance, guided by the dog's barks. He gasped and drew long breaths when once again he came into the open air; but as he laid his burden upon the ground he stumbled and fell beside it, sick and dizzy.



Samba rescued from the burning hut

Samba rescued from the burning hut

He was unconscious but for a few moments. When he came to himself and sat up, he saw that Samba lay in his father's arms. Mboyo was sobbing, rocking his body to and fro, murmuring endearing words. Pat was stretched beside him, his eyes fixed on Samba, his ears pricked forward.

"He dies, O Lokolobolo!" said Mboyo piteously, seeing Jack rise.

"No, no! Get water! Take him to the other end of the camp. I will come to you when I can."

Jack hurried off. Many of the huts were blazing; now that the fire had done its part it must be checked, or the stores and ammunition which would be invaluable in Ilombekabasi would be destroyed. Collecting such of the men as had not dashed out of the camp in pursuit of the enemy,

Jack set them to beat out the flames where they could, and to demolish one or two of the still unburnt huts that were most in danger of catching fire. Luckily the wind had dropped; there was little risk of sparks or cinders flying through the air.

Then he set some of the boys to make torches, and by their light he surveyed the camp. He shuddered as he passed over the scene of the disastrous flight and pursuit. The forms of dead and wounded lay scattered over the ground. He ordered Nando and other of Mr. Martindale's carriers who had been left in the camp to attend the wounded as well as they were able, and sternly forbade the despatching of those of the enemy who were still alive but unable through injuries to escape. Then he went towards the gate. It was with a shock that he saw, amid the black bodies crushed to death in the gateway, the white-clad form of Van Vorst. In that terrible struggle for precedence the white man's skin had not saved him. But he was the only European left in the camp; Jack looked for Elbel and his subordinate; they were nowhere to be seen.

Complete darkness had settled over the country, and put a stop to the pursuit. Jack's men began to return, at first in ones and twos, by and by in groups that grew larger as the night drew on. They came laughing and singing; once more Elobela, even aided by Mutela, had been beaten by Lokolobolo. What a night it was for the men of Ilombekabasi! And Barnio!—was it not Barnio who had led them to the stockade with that wild war-cry of his? They must not forget Barnio! and Lianza made a song as he marched back to the camp:

Barnio! Barnio!
Down from the forty
From Ilombekabasi,
Dashed in the night,
Sought Elobela,
Cruel Mutela.
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Barnio leads,
After him black men,
Hundreds and thousands,
Sweep like the wind,
Rage like the torrent,
Over the wall.
Hurroo! Hurroo!
Big clouds of smoke,
Forests of flame,
Into the midst,
Barnio! Barnio!
Over the wall,
Into the camp,
Straight for the gate
Barnio rushes,
After him black men.
Hurroo! In the gate
Thousands of black men,
Only one white man,
Cruel Mutela!
Ha! He will never,
Never whip black men,
Never kill women,
Never kill children,
Laugh again never!
Dead is Mutela!
Why do we sing?
Why do we laugh?
Whom do we praise?
Barnio! Barnio!
Lokolobolo!
Friends of Imbono,
Friends of the black men
Of Ilombekabasi.
Hurroo!
Begorra!

CHAPTER XXX

Sinews of War

Barney came back to the camp tired out. Following up the only party that seemed to have cohesion after leaving the fort—a party led by the Belgian sergeant—he had soon found himself

left far behind in the race. But his men had done their work thoroughly; they had dispersed the band, few of whom escaped.

"'Twas for this I was born, sorr," said Barney as he gripped Jack's hand. "Sure I'll be a fighter for iver more."

"You did splendidly, old fellow. I knew all was well when I heard your hurroo! But there are five hundred men roaming the country and only a score of able-bodied men in our fort. We must look after that. Get fifty fellows together and send them back under Imbono, Barney."

"And what'll ye be afther doing yourself, sorr?"

"Oh! I'm going down to the river. The job's only half done while that flotilla is intact. I'm going to have a shot at it before the enemy get over their fright. I'll take a couple of hundred men with me. You'll keep a hundred and remove all the stores and ammunition here to the fort; get the women and children to help; you can light the way with flares. When the camp's empty burn it. And look after Samba, Barney; he's here, nearly dead, poor little chap! Mboyo's got him; we'll go and see how he is getting on."

Making their way to the north side of the camp they found Samba laid on the floor of a hut, his father on one side of him, Pat on the other. The dog leapt up excitedly when he saw his master, and invited him with a yelp to come and see Samba. By the light of a torch Barney tenderly examined the boy. He was conscious, and smiled, even though he winced under the gentlest of touches.

"Ochone! Ochone!" exclaimed Barney. "'Tis the divil's own work, sorr. His poor flesh is wan jelly. By all the holy powers, if I catch that murdering ruff'n uv a fellow, that Elbel—— And I've no ointment at all at all. Bedad! but now I rimimber Mr. Arlington has a whole docthor's shop in wan uv his traps, and if he hasn't got boracic ointment among his stuff, sure I'll think a mighty deal less uv him. 'Twill take a month or more, sorr, to heal all the wounds on this poor body; but we'll do it, plase God! and make a man of him yet."

"He dies, O Lokolobolo?" said Mboyo, looking up yearningly into Jack's face.

"No, Barnio says no. He is very ill, but in a month he may be well, and Barnio says he is going to make a man of him."

"Bolotsi O! Bolotsi O!" cried the negro, slapping his thighs. "N'dok 'olo aiyoko!"[1]

He laughed and clapped his hands like a child.

"It was Pat that showed me where Samba was," said Jack to Barney. "Nando was tied up in a hut with him—he must have been captured with dear old Uncle—and the wretch saved himself by burning his ropes through and left Samba to perish in the flames. Pat dragged me to the spot."

"The darlint is worth his weight in gold," cried Barney delighted. "That's twice he has saved Samba, sorr. Black men and white men are brothers, or ought to be, and there's niver a doubt that dogs are cousins at the very least. And beggin' your pardon, sorr, I'll take a pleasure in kicking Nando whin I get a look uv him. 'Tis a little military discipline he needs, to be sure."

"You can give him that in the fort. And by the way, you'll find a lot of rifles here; the enemy either hadn't time to get hold of them or else threw them away. Arm some of our spearmen; they can tell the muzzle from the stock at any rate, and if any attempt is made to rush the fort they could do a good deal of damage at close quarters. And keep scouts out. We don't know the exact whereabouts of Van Vorst's main body, and it won't do to risk anything. But I hope you won't have any trouble."

Bidding Barney farewell, Jack called up Makoko and Lingombela, and sent them out with orders to discover the exact position of the flotilla, and to return at daybreak. An hour afterwards, with a hundred and fifty picked spearmen, sixty rifles, and a body of carriers with food for three days, he began a night march to the river. He himself was unable to walk. His wound was becoming more and more painful, but he had said nothing about it to Barney, being resolved not to spare himself while anything remained to be done to complete his work. Four men, relieved at frequent intervals, carried him in the litter of which he had made such effective use to gain an entrance to the enemy's camp. This time, he thought with a smile, there was no pretence about it.

He guessed that Van Vorst's flotilla would be found about half way between Ilola and the spot where Mr. Martindale's canoes had been hidden. It was one day's march across country, a much longer distance by the river. For some hours he followed the path on which his uncle and he had been escorted by the Askari. The recollection of that march brought sad thoughts to his mind. Lying in the litter amid his men, as the column wound its slow way along the forest track, the red glare of their torches throwing weird shadows around, he had plenty of time for melancholy reflections. The incidents of his uncle's last days were burnt into his memory. He remembered the drawn, wasted features, now pale with exhaustion, now bright with the hectic flush of fever; the quick uneasy breath; the slow labouring voice. He remembered the tale of persecution and wrong. More than all he remembered the earnest, passionate words in which the dying man had

bequeathed to him the cause of the Congo natives, and besought him to use his utmost strength on their behalf. "Dear old Uncle!" he thought; "I am trying to do what you would have wished me to do. I can't do much; this is only a small corner of the plague-ridden country; how many thousands of poor people are without even such help as I can give! But it will be something if only the few hundreds in Ilombekabasi can regain and keep a little of their former happiness; and Uncle would be pleased; he is pleased, if he knows."

Then the other side of the picture stood out sharply to his mental view. He saw the fleeing crowds of the enemy; the jammed gateway; the camp enclosure strewn with dead and wounded. Once or twice, even, his marching column came upon wounded men, too weak to crawl away into the bush, and he could do nothing for them. This terrible loss of life, this misery—was not this too due to the evil government of a monarch who, far away, in wealth and luxury and ease, spoke with two voices—one the voice of beneficence, benignity, zeal for peace and good order; the other the voice of greed, avarice, the callous demand for riches even at the price of blood? "Botofé bo le iwa! Rubber is death!"—the woful proverb haunted him like a knell: death to the dwellers in this well-favoured land, death to the minions of the power that oppressed them, death to those who, like his uncle, dared to make a stand for freedom and found themselves engulfed in the whirlpool of injustice and wrong.

As Jack approached the river, these gloomy thoughts gave way to the necessities of the moment. Lepoko, leading the column, announced that the river was very near. Then Jack ordered the torches to be put out, and the men to creep forward even more silently than they had already done. Had news of the storming of the camp been carried, he wondered, by fugitives to the flotilla? Since they had left the direct path to the river and struck obliquely towards it there had been no sign of fugitives. He supposed that the scared enemy had kept to the route they knew, and would follow the river bank until they reached the canoes. This involved many extra miles through the winding of the stream, unless the flotilla had come farther up than he thought was likely.

The principal danger was that some of Elbel's scouts, knowing the country better than the majority of the garrison, might already have taken the short cut Jack was now taking and would reach the flotilla before him. There were two white officers in charge; they might set off at once to the relief of their superior and reach the fort while Jack was still absent. Would Barney be strong enough to hold out against them?

The march was continued with brief rests throughout the night. Shortly after dawn a man sprang panting out of the thicket to the right of the path, and hurried to Jack's litter.

"O Lokolobolo!" he cried, "I have news!"

Jack saw that it was Lofundo, sub-chief of Akumbi.

"It was in the smoke and the flame, Lokolobolo. I saw Elobela, with fear in his face, climb over the fence and rush out into the night. After him I sprang—I, and Bolumbu, and Iloko, and others. It was Elobela, the cruel, the pitiless! After him, into the night! but first Iloko tired, then Bolumbu, then the others. I, Lofundo, I did not tire; no; was it not Elobela whose men ill-used and slew my people and burnt my village, and who with his own hands flogged my son? I ran and ran, hot on his trail, and in the morning light I came up with him, and saw him with fear in his face; and I had my knife; and now Elobela is dead, yonder, in the forest."

"Is it far, Lofundo?"

"A little march in the forest, Lokolobolo."

Jack had himself carried to the spot. There, beneath a tree, covered with felled branches and leaves to protect it from beasts, lay the stark body of Guillaume Elbel. Jack could not help pitying the wretch whose zeal in an evil cause had brought him to so miserable an end. But as he thought of the misery this man had caused—the ruined homes, the desolated lives: as he remembered his uncle, lying in his lonely grave, and Samba, lacerated by this man's cruel whip, pity froze within him.

"Cover him up," he said.

He waited while his men buried Elbel, there at the foot of the tree.

"Let us go!" he said; "we have work to do."

When Jack's column, according to Lepoko, was still an hour's march from the river, Lingombela, one of the advance scouts, came back with a negro in his grasp. He had captured him, said Lingombela, as he was running from the river into the forest. Jack questioned the man through Lepoko. He said that his name was Bandoka, and he had been a paddler in Mutela's flotilla, and had suffered many times from the chicotte; he showed the marks on his back. Just after daybreak several men had come rushing madly into the clearing on the river bank where the soldiers of Bula Matadi had halted for the night. There was great confusion in the camp. He had heard it said among the paddlers that there had been a fight up the river at the Inglesa's fort, and that the men of Elobela had been badly beaten. The paddlers had already heard the name of Lokolobolo. The fugitives said that Mutela was sorely in need of help, and the white officer had at

once started up the river in swift canoes, with most of the fighting men, leaving the rest to follow with the carriers. In the confusion attending the departure of the force with three days' stores, Bandoka had contrived to slip away into the forest. He would rather brave anything than endure further service with Bula Matadi.

Jack's first thought on hearing this news was that it simplified his position. The Congo officers had two days' journey before them; it was strange if he, with his lightly equipped force of men thoroughly acquainted with the country, knowing the short cuts through the forest, the fordable places on the river, could not do much to impede and harass their advance. But on subsequent reflection a still bolder course suggested itself to him. Was it possible to cut off the main body from its stores? The fighting men under their white commander had already started up the river; the stores would follow more slowly; Jack's line of march would strike the river at a point between the two portions of the enemy's force. If he could capture the stores, would he not have the main body at his mercy?

"How many fighting men are left to escort the canoes?" he asked.

"Him say no can tell. He run away plenty soon; plenty much nise, all talk one time."

In the absence of precise information Jack could only conjecture. The news brought by the fugitive from Elbel's camp was such that a force despatched in support would probably consist of at least two-thirds of the available combatant strength. The officer must be aware that a body of men that could defeat Elbel with his seven hundred mixed troops could scarcely be met with less than two hundred and fifty rifles. No doubt he would expect to be joined by some of Elbel's men; the full magnitude of the disaster would hardly be known; and like any other white commander he would be inclined to discount the alarmist reports of the fugitives. It would be safe to assume, thought Jack, that not more than a hundred rifles had been left with the stores. How many of the paddlers were also fighting men, how many impressed like Bandoka, it was impossible to guess.

"Bandoka is sure the white officers are not coming through the forest?" he asked, as the bare chance of meeting them occurred to him.

"Sartin sure, massa. Dey come in boats. Bandoka he fit to paddle in white man's canoe. 'No, no,' he say; 'me no like dat. White man lib for go too fast; me know what dat mean; dat mean chicotte!' Den he run away, sah."

"Well, I wish I knew a little more about the men with the stores."

"Know plenty more one time," said Lepoko, pointing ahead. "Dat am Makoko."

Makoko, a scout in a thousand, had brought just the news Jack most desired. He had counted the fighting men on the canoes: there were a hundred and ten with rifles and more than two hundred with spears. On each cargo canoe there was a rifleman—to encourage the paddlers, thought Jack. The flotilla had just started when Makoko left the river, at least two hours after the main body had left. One white officer had gone with the swift canoes, a second remained with the stores. The line of boats was headed by two large war canoes, each containing twenty riflemen besides the paddlers; and two similar canoes similarly manned brought up the rear.

It was clear to Jack that the enemy was doing everything possible to hasten progress. But the canoes were heavily laden, and the paddlers had the stream against them. Meanwhile Barney must be warned of the approaching expedition. Jack was not anxious about the fate of the fort. Behind the walls Barney's hundred and twenty riflemen and three times as many spearmen could easily hold their own. The enemy's machine gun, a deadly weapon in the open, would be of little use against stone walls. So, confident in Barney's ability to sit tight, Jack sent Lingombela back through the forest to give him timely notice of the troops coming towards him by the river.

The arrangements made by the officer in charge of the convoy of stores, as reported by Makoko, were well enough adapted for progress through a country in which the natives, even if hostile, were armed only with bows and arrows or spears. By keeping in mid-stream the canoes were practically out of danger from the banks, and an enemy on the water could be effectively dealt with by the leading canoes, carrying a strong force of riflemen armed with Albinis. The similar force acting as a rearguard discouraged any tendency on the part of the crews of the store-boats to bolt down stream. And each canoe had a forest guard ready with a chicotte to stimulate the paddlers' zeal.

Jack felt sure that by setting an ambush at a suitable point he could produce a panic among the guards and paddlers almost as effectual for his purpose as the panic in Elbel's camp. But he had a not unnatural shrinking from such a course. An ambuscade—concealing oneself to shoot another man down—went against the grain with him. He knew that it was fair by all the rules of warfare, and warfare had been thrust upon him by the State troops. But he preferred if possible to attain his end by other means, involving the minimum of bloodshed and suffering. The scenes in Elbel's camp and in the forest were too fresh in his memory for him to court a repetition of this wholesale destruction, even of the savages who wore the uniform of King Leopold.

The disposition of the enemy's forces suggested a plan whereby his end might be gained with little or no serious fighting. If the plan failed there still remained the alternative of an attack in force on the long-drawn-out line of the flotilla.

He had noticed, when coming up the river to Ilola with his uncle, that, about half a day's paddling from the flotilla's point of departure, the channel was divided by a small island. Only on the near side was the river navigable at this season, even by canoes; on the other side the channel was wide but shallow, thickly beset by sandbanks. By striking to the left and taking a short cut through the forest known to Makoko, the river bank opposite this island could be reached in two hours' hard marching. There would still be a good margin of time to make all necessary arrangements for carrying out his plan before the head of the convoy came into view. The men had already had a couple of hours' rest; the worst of their fatigue after the night march was gone; there was now no time to be lost, and Jack gave the order to move off under Makoko's lead.

Before midday the troops were halted opposite the island, a lozenge-shaped eyot about a third of a mile in length and a hundred yards across, covered with rank vegetation and patched with one or two clumps of large trees. On reaching the spot Jack left his litter to superintend the men's work, in spite of his stiff leg. He posted scouts in each direction, up and down the river, to guard against surprise, then set the men to cut a large number of tough creepers which abounded in the forest, and by twisting and knotting the tendrils to make a rope about eighty yards long. While this was being done with marvellous speed by the expert negroes, a few saplings were uprooted and lashed together to form a raft, too slight indeed for serious navigation, but strong enough to convey a few men at a time across the river. When the rope was finished one end was taken across to the eyot and firmly secured to one of the large trees; the other end was left for the present loose. The place where the rope entered the water on each side was carefully screened from view, and a few stones attached to it at intervals sank it beneath the surface of the stream.

Jack directed the work untiringly, encouraging the workers with praise.

"Bravo!" he cried, when all was done. "Now we'll have some chop, Lepoko."

"Plenty hungry, massa," returned the man. "Men all want to know somefing, massa."

"Well, what is it?"

"Dey say: 'Lokolobolo make us do plenty fings. What for? We lib for do anyfing for Lokolobolo; no fit to know what for.' Dat am what dey say, sah."

Jack smiled.

"Well, Lepoko, I'll tell you in confidence, and I know it won't go any further. We're going to see an exhibition of swimming."

"Me no like big talk like dat," said Lepoko, looking puzzled.

"Here's little talk, then. Men no want to swim; we want to see them swim. Savvy?"

"Me know all 'bout dat, sah," cried Lepoko delighted, and he went off to tell the men, Jack smiling at their satisfaction with an explanation that explained so little.

The whole force had a meal, keeping almost perfect silence in obedience to an impressive order from Jack. They were concealed within the forest fringe. When the meal was finished a dozen men with rifles were sent across to hide themselves amid the vegetation on the island, and all waited with rifles ready.

Presently the scout from down stream came running up with the news that the leading canoes of the flotilla were approaching a bend in the river half a mile below the eyot. The paddlers, who had apparently had a meal and a rest, were sending the canoes along at a good rate. Jack bade twelve of his men grasp the rope of creepers, and stand ready to pull when he gave the word. There was dead silence among the troops. They heard the enemy drawing near—the songs of the paddlers, the chatter of the fighting men, occasionally a yell as the chicotte fell with stinging force upon a paddler's back. Jack watched from his coign of vantage in the bush. There were the two war canoes as Makoko had described them; in the second of them was a white officer. They passed the eyot. Then came the store canoes, one after another, keeping about the same distance apart. Jack forgot to count them, for he was beyond measure delighted to see in one of them the shield of the machine gun. "What luck! What tremendous luck!" he thought. "Where the shield is the gun is sure to be." The last of the store canoes passed. Then, at a little longer interval than separated the store canoes, came the first war canoe of the rearguard, the second about a boat's length behind. Jack signed to his twelve men to be ready. Watching carefully the point at which the rope entered the water and the point on the opposite side where it reached the eyot, he waited for the first of the war canoes to approach the line. The nose of the vessel was within two or three yards of the rope when he gave his men the signal.

With desperate energy the twelve sturdy negroes hauled on the rope. Jack could not have timed the movement more fortunately. As the rope became taut and rose to the surface it struck the bottom of the canoe about a fourth of its length from the bow. The united pull of the twelve men lifted the forepart of the vessel bodily from the water; the stern dipped under, and in a moment the canoe filled and its occupants were struggling in the water.

At any other time such a feat would have provoked yells of triumph from the performers. It was a tribute to Jack's discipline that his men made no other sound than a grunt of satisfaction, which must be entirely smothered by the shouts of the men in the water. And at a word from Jack they rushed at full speed down stream with the rope, holding it a few inches above the gunwale level of the last canoe, the crew of which were frantically back-paddling to escape the mysterious fate of the other. But the paddlers had not got into their swing when the rope, stretched tight between the fastening on the eyot and the running men, overtook them. It caught them about the knees; they were swept from the thwarts, and fell towards the opposite bank; and the sudden weight on the starboard side turned the canoe completely over. Not half a minute from the time when Jack gave the first sign the whole of the rearguard was out of action. In mortal dread of crocodiles the men swam desperately for the banks, some on one side, some on the other; but as they landed they fell an easy prey to Jack's men, and were promptly hauled into the forest and tied up.

But while they were still in the water the news of the disaster had been communicated with marvellous rapidity from canoe to canoe, and reached the head of the flotilla and the white officer. Standing up and lifting his field glass to his eyes he could just see, over the intervening vessels, a capsized canoe, a number of men swimming in the river, and others moving on the bank. There was no sign of the cause of the disaster. The paddlers indeed were shouting "Lokolobolo! Lokolobolo!" in accents of terror; but the name appeared to convey nothing to the lieutenant, who was disposed to attribute the upset to a hippopotamus or a snag.

Certainly it was causing a great deal of confusion in the flotilla, and some of the paddlers, the rearguard being removed, seemed inclined to turn their canoes and head down stream. It was very annoying. Shouting to the men in the leading war canoe to paddle just enough to keep their vessel stationary against the stream, the lieutenant hurried to the scene of the accident. On the way the shouts of the paddlers became more coherent; what was this they were saying? Ilombekabasi? Absurd! But it was as well to prepare for anything that might occur, so the officer ordered his men to be ready to fire when he gave the word. At present he saw nobody to fire at.

His canoe was going rapidly on the current towards the eyot when a volley flashed from the undergrowth on the right bank, and he heard the shots strike the side of his vessel. The effect of the discharge at a range of only thirty yards was instantaneous. Jack had ordered his men to aim at or near the waterline; not a man had been hit; but the paddlers waited for no more. With one accord they sprang overboard and swam for the nearest shore, that of the eyot. One or two of the soldiers replied to the volley, aiming hap-hazard at the bank; the rest awaited the order of their officer, who, however, was either dazed by the unexpected attack or unwilling to waste ammunition by aimless firing into the bush. The boat meanwhile was drifting down the stream: a second volley bored another score of tiny holes in the thin side. The occupants were without paddlers or paddles; they had no means of beaching the vessel; and Jack, watching her progress, felt that it was only a question of minutes before, riddled like a sieve, she would have shipped enough water to sink her. Then the occupants, officer and men, would share the fate of their comrades. He sent Makoko with twenty rifles and twice as many spearmen to the nearest point where the hapless party might be expected to land; and at the same time he despatched a band of the same size up river to deal with the war canoe, which had by this time gone out of sight.

In a few minutes the lieutenant and his men struggled one after another up the bank. Those who retained their weapons were unable to use them, for they were dripping wet. Jack's men dealt with them as with the others, leaving the white officer, however, unbound. Him they led to Jack, who commiserated the crestfallen man on his unfortunate plight, and promised him excellent treatment if he made no attempt to escape.

For some time Jack's party had made no further effort to conceal themselves. The store canoes had been moving aimlessly about the river, the paddlers not knowing whether to go ahead or to retreat. At Jack's bidding Lepoko now ordered them to beach their vessels, promising that Lokolobolo would protect them, and, if they pleased, would take them into his service. They obeyed with alacrity, and soon the whole of the stores and the machine gun were in Jack's possession. He wondered why the latter had not been taken up the river with the main body, and questioning the officer, learnt that in the haste and confusion one of the parts of the gun could not be found, and but for the delay in searching for it he himself would have arrived an hour or more earlier.

The capture of the convoy had been effected so quickly that Jack felt there might still be time by a forced march to reach the fort before the arrival of the enemy's main column. Hastily selecting from the stores such food and other articles as he urgently needed, and taking care to bring with him the machine gun, he made instant preparations to return. He placed Makoko in charge of the flotilla, with a body of thirty riflemen and eighty spearmen, ordering him to drop down the river half a day's paddling and await further instructions. He arranged for a chain of messengers to keep up communication between Makoko and himself; then he set out with the bulk of his force for Ilombekabasi, sending a scout to order the men who had gone up river to join him across country as soon as they had captured the only remaining canoe.

[1] Now I am well.

CHAPTER XXXI

Summons and Surrender

Two days after, on a strip of open ground half-way between Ilombekabasi and Elbel's ruined camp, a group of six negroes were assembled. Three of them were in the uniform of the State troops; the other three were Lepoko, Imbono, and Mboyo. All were unarmed. In the midst of the group were two rough chairs such as were used by native chiefs. The southern wall of Ilombekabasi was thronged with men, women, and children eagerly surveying the scene; lower down the hill the State troops, in a rude encampment hastily constructed on the previous day, were drawn up in orderly ranks, and gazed north with equal intentness.

All at once a great cry of "Lokolobolo!" rent the air, and floated down the hill from the fort to the camp. No answering shout met it. But an officer in white left the camp and walked slowly up the slope. At the same time a tall figure in tattered garments of European cut limped out of the fort, and moved downwards. The group of negroes fell apart as the white men arrived. The latter touched their helmets in military salute; and the younger of the two smilingly motioned to the elder to seat himself on one of the chairs, he himself taking the other. They sat facing each other, and the negroes moved a few paces back on each side.

The two men formed a strange contrast: the one, a tall slim young fellow not yet nineteen, his bronzed face clean shaved, showing firm well-cut lips and an obstinate kind of chin; his nose prominent, his brown eyes large and searching, his hair black as night and somewhat unruly; not a handsome face, but a strong one, worth looking at twice and not easily forgotten: the other nearly as tall, but much broader and more stiffly built; some ten years older; lips and chin concealed by thick brown moustache and beard, blue irritable eyes blinking through big spectacles under fierce and shaggy brows.

"Instead of replying to your summons to surrender, Monsieur Jennaert," said Jack slowly in his best French, "I thought it better to meet you, so that we might clearly understand each other. I am obliged to you for so readily agreeing to my proposal."

The Belgian bowed.

"Yours, monsieur, is the third or fourth summons of the same kind. Monsieur Elbel summoned us——"

"Where is Monsieur Elbel, monsieur?"

"Monsieur Elbel, monsieur, is dead." Lieutenant Jennaert started.

"Dead, monsieur?"

"Yes, he was pursued into the forest by a man whose son he had thrashed, whose relatives his men had maimed and butchered, whose village he had burned. The man killed him. Well, as I was about to say, Monsieur Elbel summoned us more than once. At first he was much stronger than we were, both in arms and men. But when he began to back his summons by force of arms he failed,—more than once. As you know, four days ago we captured his camp for the second time and dispersed his troops, largely with the aid of rifles which had once been his."

"Yes, I know that," said Lieutenant Jennaert somewhat impatiently. "But Monsieur Elbel was not a trained soldier, and his men were only forest guards. I did not come to hear of your exploits, monsieur, but to receive your surrender. I am a soldier; my men are State troops; the case is different."

"Quite so, monsieur. I appreciate the difference between his men and yours. But you will pardon my pointing out that you are in a far more critical position than Monsieur Elbel before his camp was stormed."

"You think so, monsieur?" said the officer with an amused smile. "Would it be indiscreet to ask your reasons?"

"Not at all. I wish to be entirely frank. It is to the interest of us both."

"Assuredly, monsieur."

Lieutenant Jennaert's smile was now quite indulgent. He was at first inclined to be peremptory with this young man, who appeared to presume on the victories he had obtained over a Company's official, and a captain taken at a disadvantage, and never particularly competent, in his subordinate's opinion. But the young fellow was certainly very polite; why not humour him by letting him talk? So Jennaert smiled again. The other continued—

"Well, monsieur, what is the position? Take mine first. You see before you a fortified camp,

difficult of approach, as Monsieur Elbel could have told you, and as you can judge for yourself; well provisioned, and with a good water supply; garrisoned by four hundred or more well-armed men—all now provided with Albinis or Mausers, and a machine gun."

The officer started.

"A machine gun?"

"Yes—a machine gun."

"Monsieur Elbel made no mention of a machine gun."

"No, it is a new acquisition. But if you would like to assure yourself on the point I can convince you."

The officer hesitated. Jack turned to Lepoko.

"Run up and tell Mr. Barney to show the big gun on the blockhouse."

Lepoko ran away.

"It is very hot, monsieur," said Jack pleasantly. "The rains, I am told by my friends the chiefs here, are long overdue. I am afraid you would have found your journey rather more difficult if it had been a little later, with the river in flood.—Ah! there it is!"

A number of men had hoisted the gun on to the edge of the parapet, in full view of the group below.

"You see, monsieur, we are well provided. A machine gun, you will admit, is even more useful within walls than without. Now as to your position. You have under your command some three hundred men trained—more or less. Whether as a military force they are better than our men can only be decided if unfortunately you determine to put the matter to the test. But consider your risks. Two days ago we captured your stores."—The officer jumped.—"Your rearguard is in our hands, and that was your machine gun."—The officer stared.—"You are at least three weeks from your base, with perhaps two days' provisions in hand, no reserve of ammunition, and, as I said, the rains overdue. Yonder country, during the rains, is a swamp."

Lieutenant Jennaert turned pale. His messengers sent back to hurry on the dilatory convoy had strangely failed to return. But recovering himself, with a feeble attempt to smile he said—

"You are joking, monsieur. You permit yourself a ruse. Ah! ah! I am not to be entrapped in that way."

"Pardon me, monsieur. You shall have the fullest assurance as to the truth of what I am saying. Lepoko, ask Mr. Barney to send out the white officer."

The Belgian was now looking very uncomfortable. This was a strange turning of the tables; his summons to surrender had been completely forgotten. Jack had no need to kill time by keeping up the conversation, for in a minute or two the lieutenant captured in the river left the fort under an armed guard and walked quickly down.

"Beuzemaker!" exclaimed Lieutenant Jennaert under his breath.

"Yes, monsieur—Monsieur Beuzemaker."

Lieutenant Beuzemaker smiled ruefully as he joined the group. He gave a rapid narrative of the capture of the convoy.

"It only remains, therefore," said Jack, "for you to decide upon your course, monsieur. May I make you a proposal? You shall surrender your arms and ammunition except a dozen rifles. I will supply you with canoes to take your men down the river, and provisions for a fortnight. Within ten days you should enter a district where more food can be obtained. As you know, the country hereabouts has been made almost a desert by your people."

But this was too much. Was it he, Lieutenant Jennaert, who was being called upon to surrender? He rose in a fury.

"Never! The thing is absurd! Monsieur, I take my leave. Beuzemaker!——"

He stopped, biting his lips.

"Monsieur Beuzemaker is my prisoner," said Jack suavely, rising. "He will accompany me back to my camp. Of course, if you accept our terms, we will release all the prisoners."

The Belgian turned away in a rage. The meeting broke up; the two parties went their several ways. Jack, as he walked back to the fort, hoped that on thinking the matter over the officer would see the wisdom of compliance. The alternative was starvation. He must see that it would be no easy matter to storm the fort, and that Jack had only to sit tight for a few days. The State

troops, none too well disciplined at the best, would soon be clamouring for food. With a starving soldiery, an active well-fed enemy on his rear, and a swarm of scouts cutting off his foraging parties, he must see the impossibility of making his way back through several hundred miles of country inhabited by tribes only waiting an opportunity to rise against their oppressors. So that when Barney met him as he re-entered the fort, and asked eagerly, "Well, sorr, and did the patient swallow the pill?" he smiled as he shook his head, saying—

"Not yet, Barney. But he *will* swallow it, bitter as it is."

"Or his men will swallow him, bedad!"

And a few hours later a negro soldier marched up the hill with a white flag. Lieutenant Jennaert's note was very brief.

MONSIEUR,—

J'agrée vos conditions.

JENNAERT,
Lieutenant dans l'armée de l'État du Congo.

CHAPTER XXXII

The Dawn of Freedom

It was a fortnight later. Ilombekabasi was the scene of great activity. Gangs of negroes were busy carrying, hauling, stones of all shapes and sizes from the dry bed of the stream that once flowed past the fort; other gangs were building a wall above the original northern wall of the fort, a few yards beyond the spring whence the water supply was derived. On the cultivable land on the west and east men and women were digging, ploughing, planting, hoeing, for in some parts seed sown only two weeks before was already sprouting. Barney O'Dowd superintended the mason work, sporting a red fez taken from one of the slain Askari and dry-cleaned by a process of his own. In his mouth was his old short clay pipe, in which, after long deprivation, he was smoking a mixture made by himself from tobacco grown on a bed in front of his hut. It was not shag, he said, nor twist, but it made a betther smoke than cavendish, and sure 'twould give a man a little comfort till the rale thing could be grown. The agriculturists were directed by Imbono. An air of cheerful industry pervaded the whole settlement.

When the State troops under Lieutenant Jennaert had disappeared, Jack determined, after a breathing space, to enlarge the fort and to plant new crops. The enlargement was prompted not merely by the wish to have the source of the water supply within the wall, but by the expectation that the defeat of Bula Matadi would cause an increase of the population. And, in fact, within a week of Jennaert's departure, natives from distant parts to which the news had penetrated came flocking into Ilombekabasi to join the community which looked up to Lokolobolo as its invincible chief.

Looking round upon the cheerful faces of the people; observing their willingness to work, and eagerness to please; watching the happy family life they led when unmolested and free from anxieties, Jack felt that his toil had not been in vain, and was immeasurably glad that Providence had laid this charge upon him. If only his uncle had lived to see this day!

Jack found that his feelings were shared by Mr. Arlington and his friend the missionary. They had awaited the issue of his hazardous enterprise with more anxiety than they cared to admit, and while they hailed his success with cordial congratulations, they were scarcely less troubled about the future. The Congo State could not permit this leaven of revolt to spread; it would certainly organize an expeditionary force of sufficient strength to crush Jack and his people; and then would not their lot be infinitely worse than it had ever been?

"Even so we shall have had some months of happiness, and set an example," said Jack, talking things over with his friends the day before they left Ilombekabasi. "But I hope for better things. We may have the rains upon us any day now; the country for miles around will be one vast morass; we shall be safe in our castle for six months, perhaps. And what may not be done in six months, Mr. Arlington?"

"You mean?"

"I mean if you and Mr. Dathan will hurry home and tell what you have seen and know. Mr. Arlington, you are no longer a member of Parliament, I believe?"

"No. The House of Commons is no longer what it was."

"Surely it is what men like you choose to make it, sir. If you would go home, stand at a bye-election, and return to the House, what an immense influence a man with your record might wield! Do you know what I would do in your place, sir? You do not mind my speaking out?"

"Not a bit. I am deeply interested."

"Well, sir, I would badger the Foreign Secretary; I would move the country until England moved the world."

"Go on the stump like Gladstone?"

"Why not, sir? Isn't the cause of the negroes every bit as good as the cause of the Bulgarians or Macedonians or Armenians? Nay, ten times better, because they're more helpless and suffer under a Christian King! And you would succeed, sir."

"I haven't Gladstone's power of moving the masses."

"What does that matter? The facts don't need any eloquence to back them, sir. I don't mean that you are not eloquent," he added with a smile. "I haven't heard you speak, but I have read your speeches; and if you tell what you have seen here, the country must listen, and something will surely be done. Why, if you go to my old school and speak to the fellows in the schoolhouse, I'll back there's not a boy there but will want to rush off here by the first train, to lend a hand!"

"Upon my word, Mr. Challoner, I think you'd better come back with us and do the stumping yourself."

"No, no," said Jack, his face flushing. "I cannot leave these people. My place is here, and here I'll stick until I'm driven out, or until Leopold is brought to book."

"Well, I'll do what I can. I promise you that. Perhaps I've ploughed the lonely furrow long enough. What do you say, Dathan? Shall we join hands in this? We rowed in the same boat at Trinity; we kept the head of the river. This boat's rather low down now, but d'you think we could make a bump?"

"We'll make a shot for it, George. And please God, we like Bishop Latimer, will light such a candle in England as shall not be put out until this wrong is crushed and right is done."

Jack felt more than satisfied. If his countrymen had not grown strangely deaf, surely they would listen to these two—ay, and do more than listen.

"You leave to-morrow?" he said.

"Yes. My leg won't carry me yet, but with a canoe and a litter I can make shift to get along until we reach the Nyanza. Can you lend me an interpreter?"

"Lepoko is a good fellow. I think I can spare him now. We'll see what he says."

He sent for the man, and explained that he wished him to accompany the travellers during the first part of their journey.

"Me plenty sorry, massa," said Lepoko. "Me no fit to go. What for? Me comfy heah! No lib for go talk talk for nudder massa. What for? Nando go to Boma with old massa; what den? He come back, get cotched, chicotte, feel plenty bad. No, no, sah; Lepoko know all 'bout dat. Lepoko go long long, do anyfing for massa; he lib for lub Lokolobolo, no nudder massa dis time. Why, me hab got wife in Ilombekabasi; what for leabe wife? No good at all; dat what Bula Matadi make black man do, leabe wife, leabe pickin, go 'way all 'lone 'lone. Make black man sick inside, sah; feel awful bad. No, no, I tell massa. Nando go. He know Inglesa plenty fine; he hab no got wife; he die of shame 'cos he leabe Samba in fire hut; no one lub Nando now. Oh yes, sah! Nando go: me tell him one time."

After this breathless speech, Lepoko ran off to find his brother. Nando at first was by no means disposed to leave the fort on so long and hazardous a journey. But at last he was persuaded, though on bidding Jack good-bye he said earnestly—

"Me nebber, nebber, nebber lib for hab nudder brudder what talk Inglesa: oh no!"

One afternoon a few days after this, one of the look-outs on the south-eastern blockhouse reported that he saw a crowd of people emerging from the forest a couple of miles away. Hurrying to the spot, Jack took a long look through his field-glasses and made out that the approaching throng was composed of natives, men, women, and children, the women being laden with babies and bundles. When the crowd came within earshot of the fort, a negro stepped forward, and, lifting his hands to his mouth, vociferated—

"Yo! Yo!"

"Answer him, Lianza," said Jack to the man of the brazen throat.

"I am here," shouted Lianza.

"Is that Ilombekabasi?"

"It is Ilombekabasi."

"And Lokolobolo?"

"And Lokolobolo."

"I am Lokua. My chief is Makole. We come from Limpoko to see Lokolobolo."

"Lokolobolo says that Makole and Lokua may enter, but no more."

"I am going."

"Are you going?"

"O!"

The negro returned to his company, who were now squatting in a series of circles just above the site of Elbel's ruined camp. He presently returned with a negro in chief's array, a head taller than himself.

The two negroes were admitted. Makole stood before Jack, a bundle of palm leaves in one hand. They exchanged greetings.

"I am proud to see Lokolobolo," said Makole. "I come from Limpoko. All my people have come with me, my four wives, my children, all my people. We have heard of the great things done by Lokolobolo in Ilombekabasi, and how he beat Elobela and Mutela and other servants of the Great White Chief who eats up the black men. We come to ask Lokolobolo to let us be his people. I am Makole, the chief; I have four wives and many children; but I say I will be Lokolobolo's servant; all my people shall be his servants, if he will take us into Ilombekabasi and let us live in peace."

"Why do you wish to leave Limpoko?" asked Jack.

"We do not wish to leave Limpoko. But what can we do, O Lokolobolo? The rubber is done; we have no more of it; day by day the servants of the Great White Chief beat us and kill us because we cannot fill our baskets; Limpoko will soon be a wilderness. We come before we are all gone, and we beg Lokolobolo to hear our entreaty."

"Shall we admit Makole?" asked Jack of Imbono, who had come to his side.

"Makole is a tall man, a great chief. We will be blood brothers and live together."

"You may bring your people in, Makole. But I warn you it may not be to live in peace. We have offended Bula Matadi; Bula Matadi will come with a great host to destroy us. All who live in Ilombekabasi must not look for ease and peace, but for work and war. Your people must share with the rest; they must build their own huts, till the fields, repair the walls, learn to scout and to fight in our way. It is not peace, Makole."

"I praise Lokolobolo! I trust Lokolobolo! I will do all he says, and my people shall learn all that he teaches," cried the chief, slapping his thighs. Then, unwrapping the bundle of palm leaves, he displayed a shrivelled hand, and said—

"This is my gift to Lokolobolo."

"What is this, Makole?" asked Jack, shuddering.

"It is the hand of Boloko, who whipped us and killed us, who can say how many? We met him as we came through the forest, and my young men killed him, and I bring his hand to Lokolobolo to show that he is dead, and will trouble us no more."

"But we do not deal with our enemies thus," said Jack.

The chief looked surprised.

"It is the way of the servants of the Great White Chief," he said. "They kill us, and cut off our hands, and take them to their chiefs, and the chiefs are pleased and pay brass rods for them. I thought Lokolobolo would be pleased."

"Lokolobolo is Inglesa," said Lepoko. "It is only Bula Matadi that pays for the hands of black men. Give it to Mboyo; he is Boloko's brother. Boloko hated Mboyo, he hated Samba; Mboyo will be pleased."

"Bury it at once, out of sight," said Jack, "Bring your people in, Makole. Lepoko, take him to Mr. Barney; he will show him where to build his huts."

All Ilombekabasi flocked to the gates to see the entrance of this new contingent. They came in laughing, singing, dancing, the mothers eagerly asking where was Lokolobolo that they might point him out to their little ones. But Lokolobolo was not to be seen.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Conclusion

Jack had turned sadly from the sight of this joyous entry, and made his way towards the largest of the huts—the hut built for Mr. Martindale. There Samba lay—had lain since Barney, with a woman's tenderness, had carried him from Elbel's camp to the beloved Ilombekabasi which he had thought never to see again. Little indeed he saw of the fort and of what was passing there as he lay, day by day, on his simple bamboo bed; for though his wounds slowly healed, not all the loving care lavished upon him by his parents and by Barney, who spent every spare hour at his bedside—not the constant companionship of Pat himself—brought back strength to his slowly wasting form.

Still, he was always cheerful. The ready smile lit up his face as Lokolobolo appeared in the narrow doorway. Barney rose as Jack entered and made room for him at the head of the bed.

"How are you now, Samba?" asked Jack, taking his hand.

"Better, master, better," answered the boy, his voice scarcely audible.

"That's right. Getting a little appetite, eh? Must eat, you know, if you're to grow strong."

"See my *kwanga*," said the mother, coming forward. "He eats no more than a bird."

"It is nice, mother; I will eat more by and by. I am so tired now."

"Poor little fellow! You are in no pain?"

"No, master, no pain; only tired."

"Cheer up! You will feel better in the morning."

He pressed the boy's hand and turned to leave with Barney. At the door Mboyo overtook him.

"He will not go yet to the Great Spirit, O Lokolobolo?" he whispered anxiously.

"We cannot tell, Mboyo. All we can do is to tend him well. Hope for the best."

"Poor bhoy!" said Barney as they went away; "'tis mighty little betther he is, sorr, I'm fearing. 'Twould tax the strength uv a horse to get over it, widout docthors an' all."

As they walked across the camp, here a man, there a woman, paused in their work to ask Lokolobolo how Samba was. Children came up—Lofinda, for whom Samba had shaped a tiny gun; Lokilo, proud of his little fishing-rod, Samba's gift; Isangila, wearing a necklace of dried maize he had made for her—and asked shyly when Samba would come out and play with them again. Some brought offerings of food specially prepared, delicate fish and rare fruits, the choicest spoil of forest and stream for miles around. Everybody loved the boy; and Jack loved him with a particular affection. Over and above his winning ways, Samba stood for so much to Jack, who, in thoughtful moods, seemed to see him as the spirit of the negro race, the embodiment of all that was best in the black man, the representative of millions of his kind, helpless pawns in a royal game of beggar my neighbour. It was Samba whose woful plight had first brought home to his heart the terrible realities of the rubber slavery; it was Samba who had been the means of founding Ilombekabasi; to him was due the torch of freedom lit at last in this stricken land—a torch that Jack, in his heart of hearts, dared to hope would never be extinguished. Surely the conscience of Christendom was awakening! Pray God the awakening came not too late!

A great silence lay upon Ilombekabasi. To a stranger beyond the walls the place might have seemed deserted, so still it was, with none of the cheerful bustle that marks the beginning of a new day. Men and women were gathered in little knots; they talked in whispers; some were sobbing; the eyes of most were dim with tears. Even the children were subdued and quiet; they forgot their play, staring at their elders with puzzled, solemn eyes. Why was the world so sad to-day? Was it because Samba was going away? Surely he would come back to them; he had come back before.

Samba was leaving Ilombekabasi.

Four persons stood by the little bamboo bed. At the foot a dog crouched, whimpering. Father and mother bent in mute agony over their son; Lukela, the fountain of her tears dried through long weeping, hovering above her boy as though by sheer power of love to guard him from the dread visitant already at the threshold; Mboyo rocking himself to and fro in the abandonment of sorrow. And the two white men bowed their heads in silent sympathy and grief. They knew that

the end was very near.

Jack felt a great lump in his throat as he gazed at the still form, lying with outstretched arms, too weak to move. Poor little fellow! Was this the end of the bright young life, so full of promise? He thought of the days of health, when the boy with happy face went hither and thither, eager to do some service for his beloved master, no matter how hard or how perilous. He thought of the dangers Samba had faced for his parents' sake, and the brightness he had brought into their lives and the lives of hundreds of his people. He thought with agony of the terrible scene when Samba, rather than say a word to the undoing of those he loved, had endured the tortures inflicted by the inhuman agent of a detestable tyranny. And now the end was at hand! The blithe spirit was departing, the poor body done to death by the greed of a Christian King. "Botofé bo le iwa! Rubber is death!" The words rang in Jack's ears; would they were the knell of this despotism, this monstrous "system" that bought wealth with the price of blood!

The end came soon. Samba moved his hand, and turned his eyes, and murmured "Pat!" The watchers barely caught the word, but the dog sprang up, and went to the bed, and nestled his head on the boy's shoulder. Samba murmured his pleasure, a happy smile lit up the brave young eyes, and then the light faded, and went out. Samba had left Ilombekabasi.

They buried him next day in the forest he knew and loved so well, with the ceremonies of his people, and as befitted the son of a chief.

All the people of Ilombekabasi, men, women, and little children, followed him to the grave. They laid by his side the few possessions of the boy—his rifle, his knife, his tin, his wooden spear. And some of his comrades, Makoko and Lingombela and Lianza and Lepoko, fired a salute over him and left him there among the trees.

That night, sitting in Jack's hut, Barney talked of the past and the future.

"Poor ould master came here for gold, sorr. All the gold in all the world is not worth little Samba's life. Whin the master looks down out uv Paradise and sees the people here, I know what he'll say, just as if I heard 'm. He'll say: 'I was niver a philanthrophy, niver did hould wid that sort uv thing. But I'm rale glad that bhoy uv mine wint out wid me in time to make a few poor black people happy. Poor craturs! God bless 'em!' Sure, sorr, black people have got their feelings—same as dogs."

THE END

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Bookman: "A story about a gallant young middy could not have a more alluring sub-title than 'A Hundred Years Ago.' On his way to join the *Fury* the gallant midshipman discovered a hotbed of smuggling at Luscombe, and unearthed a spy of Napoleon's. Jack's first fight with the smugglers ended disastrously, and he soon found himself in a French prison. Thence he made a daring escape, recaptured the *Fury*, and picked up a fine prize ship on his way back to Portsmouth. The characters in the story are drawn with originality and humour, especially that fine seaman Babbage.... Finally Jack triumphs all along the line, and his gallantry is rewarded by his appointment to join the *Victory*. Boys will expect to hear more of Jack Hardy, and of what he did at Trafalgar."

Athenaeum: "Herbert Strang is second to none in graphic power and veracity.... Here is the best of character sketching in bold outline."

Speaker: "A greater than Henty."

School Guardian: "Mr. Herbert Strang fills in stories for boys the place of the late Mr. Henty."

Tribune: "Herbert Strang's former books 'caught on' with our boys as no other books of adventure since Henty's industrious pen fell from his hand."

Dublin Express: "It has become a truism to say that the mantle of Henty has descended to Herbert Strang, and indeed in some respects Mr. Strang surpasses Henty."

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BY HERBERT STRANG

Kobo

A STORY OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR

Athenaeum: "In Kobo, Herbert Strang has provided much more than a good boys' book for the Christmas market. Whilst readers of *Tom Burnaby* will not be disappointed of an ample meal of stirring adventures and hard war fights, readers of a more serious turn will find an excellent picture of Japanese life and character, ... not to mention some vivid sketches of modern naval warfare."

Spectator: "An excellent story, such as one might expect to have from the author of that capital book, *Tom Burnaby*.... 'With a Japanese, duty comes inexorably first.' This, indeed, is the key-note of the whole story. This principle of action dominates Bob's friend, and it dominates the story."

Saturday Review: "Last year a new name of great promise appeared in the list of writers of boys' books. This year the promise shown by Mr. Herbert Strang in *Tom Burnaby* is more than borne out by *Kobo* and *Boys of the Light Brigade*.... He shares the late Mr. Henty's knowledge of history and war; he is less encyclopaedic in his descriptive methods perhaps than was Henty, though he gives the same air of verisimilitude to his chapters by means of maps and charts ... he has an admirable style, and a sense of humour which he handles with the more effect because he never turns a situation into broad farce."

Academy: "For vibrant actuality there is nothing to come up to Mr. Strang's *Kobo*."

Daily Telegraph: "This vivid story owes not a little of its attractiveness to its many picturesque touches of local colour."

Pall Mall Gazette "Mr. Herbert Strang, whose splendid story, *Tom Burnaby*, proved so brilliantly successful last year, has written another that will rank as its equal for vivid interest."

Westminster Gazette: "An adventure story after a boy's own heart."

*   *   *   *   *

BY HERBERT STRANG

Brown of Moukden

Athenaeum: "Herbert Strang may be congratulated on another first-rate book.... Characterization is a strong feature, ... and Ah Lum, the literary chief of the brigands, is a memorable type."

Spectator: "Mr. Strang has very rightly taken up again the subject in which his story of *Kobo* achieved such a success last year.... The story is very skilfully constructed.... Of particular scenes we may single out for mention the episode of the railway train, ... a most effective piece of narrative.... The relief of humorous passages and situations has been given, and without stint.... Ah Lum, the spectacled brigand chief, with all the wisdom of Confucius and Lao-Tze at his finger tips, is a most amusing person.... *Brown of Moukden* is certainly a success."

Academy: "Related with the same spirit and intimate knowledge of the East that made *Kobo* a marked success."

Church Times: "The incident of the locomotive race down the Siberian Railway is, for breathless interest, the equal of anything we know of in the whole range of juvenile fiction.... The book will hold boy readers spellbound."

Army and Navy Gazette: "When Mr. Henty died boys were disconsolate, for they had lost a real friend; but now we have Mr. Herbert Strang most capably taking his place. He was welcomed as showing great promise in *Tom Burnaby*, but he did better in *Kobo*, that strong story of the earlier pages of the Russo-Japanese War, and now he has done better still in *Brown of Moukden*."

Gentlewoman: "Mr. Herbert Strang may really be said to be the successor of the late Mr. Henty, and parents and others on the look-out for desirable boys' books must be grateful to him each

year for an excellent story at Christmastide.... This is the literature we want for young England."

Journal of Education: "Mr. Strang's former books have led us to expect great things from his pen, and these volumes prove him to be in the foremost rank of writers of boys' books. They are thoroughly healthy in tone, full of stirring adventures; and in each case linked to history in a manner that is never oppressive, and adds considerably to the interest of the story."

* * * * *

BY HERBERT STRANG

Boys of the Light Brigade

A STORY OF SPAIN AND THE PENINSULAR WAR

Spectator: "Mr. Strang's name will suffice to assure us that the subject is seriously treated, and a better subject could hardly be found.... Altogether a capital story."

Professor Oman (Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford, and Author of *A History of the Peninsular War*): "Pray accept thanks from a historian for having got historical accuracy, combined with your fine romantic adventures."

Outlook: "Let us be thankful for a boy's book really worth reading."

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Standard: "It is a book which no boy will be able to put down when once started."

The Adventures of Harry Rochester

A STORY OF THE DAYS OF MARLBOROUGH AND EUGENE

Academy: "*Tom Burnaby* and *Kobo*—the best books of their season—have a worthy successor in *The Adventures of Harry Rochester*."

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Army and Navy Gazette: "The descriptive power and characterization are quite remarkable."

Dundee Advertiser: "In some essentials, such as constancy in bold action, this well-studied and finely-coloured tale is superior to any written by the lamented Henty. With the need of some one to take Henty's vacant place has come the man."

* * * * *

BY HERBERT STRANG

Tom Burnaby

Field-Marshal Lord Wolseley: "It is just the sort of book I would give to any schoolboy, for I know he would enjoy every page of it."

Sir A. Conan Doyle: "... I think it is a really excellent picture of African life."

Mr. J. L. Paton, Head-master of Manchester Grammar School: "... It is worth reading and thoroughly wholesome. I wish it all success."

Dr. R. P. Scott, Secretary of the Head-masters' Association: "... I have read the book from cover to cover, and found it thoroughly interesting, vivid, healthful, and helpful. I can cordially recommend it to boys, and will do so whenever opportunity offers."

Pall Mall Gazette: "That splendid story *Tom Burnaby*."

Educational News: "The stirring pages of *Tom Burnaby*."

Literary World: "... Mr. Strang ... has put as much work into this story as one finds in a really good novel; the little bits of useful information that he sprinkles through it are palatable and readily digestible, and the 'atmosphere' (if one may mix one's metaphors) 'rings true.'"

Mark Lane Express: "... Mr. Strang has come to the front rank with a bound...."

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Dundee Advertiser: "... as good as the plot is the way in which the author conveys a living impression of the region and its inhabitants."

Glasgow Evening News: "... a masterpiece in the Henty manner."

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