

# With Edged Tools

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN  
Author of "The Sowers," "Raden's Corner," "From  
One Generation to Another," Etc.

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glanced and stared into the Englishman's steady glance.

"What," he blurted—"what if I know where simalacine grows like a weed? What if I could supply the world with simalacine at my own price? Eh-h-h! What of that, Mr. Meredith?"

He threw himself suddenly back and wiped his dripping face. There was a silence, the great African silence that drives educated men mad and fills the imagination of the poor heathen with wild tales of devils and spirits.

"Then Jack Meredith spoke without moving.

"In your man," he said, "with a few more details."

Victor Durnovo was lying back at full length on the hard, dry mud, his arms beneath his head. Without altering his position, he gave the details, speaking slowly and much more quietly. It seemed as if he spoke the result of long pent up thought.

"We shall want," he said, "at least £2,000 to start it, for we must have an armed force of our own. We have to penetrate a cannibal country of the fiercest devils in Africa. It is a plateau, a little plateau of two square miles, and the negroes think that it is haunted by an evil spirit. When we get there we shall have to hold it by force of arms, and when we send the stuff down to the coast we must have an escort of picked men. The bushes grow up there as thick as gooseberry bushes in a garden at home. With a little cultivation they will yield twice as much as they do now. We shall want another partner. I know a man, a soldierly fellow, full of fight, who knows the natives and the country. I will undertake to lead you there, but you will have to take great care of me.



"Yes," said the Englishman, "yes, go on."

You will have to have me carried most of the way. I am weak, devilish weak, and I am afraid of dying, but I know the way there, and no other man can say as much. It is in my head here; it is not written down. It is only in my head, and no one can get it out of there."

"No," said Meredith in his quiet, refined voice—"no, no one can get it out. Come, let us turn in. Tomorrow I will go down the river with you. I will turn back, and we can talk it over as we go downstream."

### CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT Meredith proposed to do was to enter into a partnership with Victor Durnovo, and when the purpose of it was accomplished to let each man go his way. A month later Victor Durnovo was in London. He left behind him in Africa Jack Meredith, whose capacities for organization were developing very quickly.

There was plenty of work for each to do. In Africa Meredith had undertaken to get together men and boats, while Durnovo went home to Europe for a threefold purpose. First, a visit to Europe was absolutely necessary for his health, shattered as it was by too long a sojourn in the fever ridden river beds of the west coast. Secondly, there were rifles, ammunition and stores to be purchased and packed in suitable cases. And, lastly, he was to find and enlist the third man—"the soldierly fellow, full of fight," who knew the natives and the country.

This, indeed, was his first care on reaching London, and before his eyes and brain were accustomed to the roar of the street life he took a cab to Russell square, giving the number affixed to the door of a gloomy house in the least frequented corner of the stately quadrangle.

"Is Mr. Guy Osgard at home?" he inquired of the grave manservant.

"He is, sir," replied the butler, stepping aside.

Osgard came forward and shook hands. His manner was not exactly effusive. The truth was that their acquaintanceship in Africa had been of the slightest, dating from some trivial services which Durnovo had been able and very eager to render to the sportsman.

"I'm all right, thanks," replied Durnovo. "I only landed at Liverpool yesterday. I'm home on business. I'm buying rifles and stores."

all things appertaining to the wild life of the forests were music in his ears. Durnovo was no mean diplomatist. He had learned to know man within a white or colored skin. The effect of his words was patent to him.

"You remember the simalacine?" he said abruptly.

"Yes."

"I've found it."

"I've found you have! Sit down." Durnovo took the chair indicated.

"Yes, sir," he said, "I've got it. I've laid my hand on it at last. I've always been on its track. That has been my little game all the time. I did not tell you when we met there, because I was afraid I should never find it and because I wanted to keep quiet about it."

Guy Osgard was looking out of the window across to the dull houses and chimneys that formed his horizon, and in his eyes there was the longing for a vaster horizon, a larger life.

"I have got a partner," continued Durnovo, "a good man, Jack Meredith, son of Sir John Meredith. You have, perhaps, met him."

"No," answered Osgard, "but I have heard his name, and I have met Sir John, the father, once or twice."

"He is out there," went on Durnovo, "getting things together quietly. I have come home to buy rifles, ammunition and stores."

He paused, watching the eager, simple face.

"We want to know," he said quietly, "if you will organize and lead the fighting men."

Guy Osgard drew a deep breath.

"Then there is to be fighting?"

"Yes," said Durnovo; "there will be fighting. We must fight our way there and we must hold it when we get there. But so far as the world is concerned, we are only a private expedition exploring the source of the Ogowe."

"The Ogowe?" and again Guy Osgard's eyes lighted up.

"Yes. I do not mind telling you that much. To begin with, I trust you. Secondly, no one could get there without me to lead the way."

"How long will it take?" asked Guy. Durnovo tugged at his strange, curtain-like mustache. His mouth was hidden. It was quite impossible to divine his thoughts.

"Three months to get there," he answered at length, "one month to pick the land, and then you can bring the first crop down to the coast and home, while Meredith and I stay on at the plateau."

"I could be home again in eight months?"

"Certainly. We thought that you might work the sale of the stuff in London, and in a couple of years or so, when the thing is in swing, Meredith will come home. We can safely leave the cultivation in native hands when once we have established ourselves up there and made ourselves respected among the tribes."

"I suppose," Guy said after a pause, "that there is the question of money?"

"Yes; Meredith and I have talked that over. The plan we fixed upon was that you and he each put a thousand pounds into it; I put five hundred. For the first two years we share the profits equally. After that we must come to some fresh arrangement should you or Meredith wish to give up an active part in the affair. I presume you would not object to coming up at the end of the year with a handy squad of men to bring down the crop under escort?"

"No," responded Osgard after a moment's reflection. "I should be able to do that."

"I reckon," continued the other, "that the journey down could be accomplished in two months, and each time you do the trip you will reduce your time."

"Yes," replied Osgard simply. "You may do that."

"Of course," Durnovo went on, with the details which he knew were music in Osgard's ears—"of course we shall be a clumsy party going up. We shall have heavy loads of provisions, ammunition and seeds for cultivating the land up there."

"Yes," replied Guy Osgard absently. In his ears there rang already the steady plash of the paddle, the weird melancholy song of the boatman, the music of the wind amid the forest trees.

Durnovo rose briskly.

"Then," he said, "you will join us? I may telegraph to you to Meredith that you will join us?"

"Yes," replied Osgard simply. "You may do that."

"There is no time to be lost," Durnovo went on. "Every moment wasted adds to the risk of our being superseded. I sail for Loango in a fortnight. Will you come with me?"

"Yes."

When Durnovo had gone Guy sat down and wrote to Lady Cantourne accepting her invitation to spend a few days at Cantourne Place, on the Solent. He explained that his visit would be in the nature of a farewell, as he was about to leave for Africa for a little big game hunting.

Miss Millicent Chyne was walking on the sea wall at the end of the garden with Guy Osgard. One of the necessary requirements of a modern educational outfit is the power of looking perfectly at home in a score of different costumes during the year, and, needless to say, Miss Chyne was perfectly fitted in this art. The manner in which she wore her sailor hat, her blue serge and her neat brown shoes conveyed to the onlooker, and especially to the male of that species (we cannot in conscience call them observers), the impression that she was a yachtswoman born and bred. Her delicate complexion was enhanced by the faintest

roses upon her cheeks, and her eyes were dark and deep, and her hair was a rich brown, and her nose was straight and well shaped, and her lips were full and soft, and her smile was sweet and winning, and her voice was clear and melodious, and her manners were perfect and refined, and her education was thorough and complete, and her accomplishments were numerous and varied, and her character was noble and generous, and her heart was true and loyal, and her soul was pure and holy, and her life was a life of duty and devotion, and her death was a death of peace and glory, and her memory was a memory that would live forever in the hearts of those who knew her.

"This is not chery," Jack Meredith observed to his servant as they found themselves deposited on the beach within a stone's throw of the French factory.

"No, sir, not chery, sir," replied Joseph. He was very busy attending to the landing of his personal effects and had only time to be respectful. It was Joseph's way to do only one thing at a time, on the principle no doubt that enough for the moment is the evil thereof. His manner implied that when those colored gentlemen had got the baggage safely conveyed out of the boats on to the beach it would be time enough to think about Loango.

It had been arranged by letter that Jack Meredith should put up, as his best exposed tent, at the small bungalow occupied by Maurice Gordon and his sister. Gordon was the local head of a large trading association; some what after the style of the old East India company, and his duties partook more of the glory of a governor than of the routine of a trader.

Of Maurice Gordon's past Meredith knew nothing beyond the fact that they were schoolfellows; strenuously brought together on the deck of a coasting steamer. Maurice Gordon was not a reserved person, and it was rather from a lack of opportunity than from an excess of caution that he allowed his new found friend to go up the Ogowe river knowing so little of himself—Maurice Gordon of Loango.

On reaching the bungalow Meredith was pleasantly surprised. It was pretty and homelike, surrounded by a garden wherein grew a strange profusion of homely English vegetables and tropical flowers.

Joseph happened to be in front, and as he neared the veranda he suddenly stopped at the salute; moreover, he began to wonder in which trunk he had packed his master's dress clothes.

An English lady was coming out of the drawing room window to meet the travelers. She nodded in answer to the servant's salutation and passed on to greet the master.

"My brother has been called away suddenly," she said. "One of his sub-agents has been getting into trouble with the natives. Of course you are Mr. Meredith?"

"I am," replied Jack, taking the hand she held out; it was a small white hand—small without being frail or diaphanous. "And you are Miss Gordon, I suppose? I am sorry Gordon is away, but no doubt we shall be able to find somewhere to put up."

"You need not do that," she said quietly. "This is Africa, you know. You can quite well stay with us, although Maurice is away until tomorrow."

"I am not ashamed of it," he said, "and I do not see why I should not say it to you—or to any one else, so far as that goes."

"No, never!" she cried, really frightened. "To me it does not matter so much. But to no one else—no, never! Aunt Marian must not know it—nor Sir John."

"I cannot see that it is any business of Sir John's. Of course, Lady Cantourne would have liked you to marry a title; but if you cared for me she would be ready to listen to reason."

In which judgment of the good lady he was no doubt right, especially if reason spoke with the voice of £3,000 per annum.

"Do you care for me?" he asked, coming a little closer.

There was a whole world of gratified vanity and ungratified curiosity for her in the presence of this strong man at her elbow. It was one of the supreme triumphs of her life, because he was different from the rest. He was for her what his first tiger had been for him. The danger that he might come still nearer had for her a sense of keen pleasure. She was thoroughly enjoying herself, and the nearest approach that men can experience to the joy that was hers is the joy of battle.

"I cannot answer that—not now."

And the little half shrinking glance over her shoulder was a low minded, unmaidenly invitation. But he was in earnest, and he was, above all, a gentleman. He stood his ground a yard away from her.

"Then when," he asked, "when will you answer me?"

She stood with her back turned toward him, looking out over the smooth waters of the Solent, where one or two yachts and a heavy black schooner were creeping up on the tide before the morning breeze. She drummed reflectively with her fingers on the low stone wall. Beneath them a few gulls whirled and screamed over a shoal of little fish. One of the birds had a singular cry, as if it were laughing to itself.

"You said just now," Millicent answered at length, "that you were not sure yourself—not at first—and therefore you cannot expect me to know all at once."

"You should know at once," he argued gravely, "if it were going to be 'no.' If you do not say 'no' now, I can only think that it may be 'yes' some day. And—he came closer; he took the hand that hung at her side, conveniently near—and I don't want you to say 'no' now. Don't say 'no'! I will wait as long as you like for 'yes.' Millicent, I would rather go on waiting and thinking that it is going to be 'yes,' even if it is 'no' after all."

She said nothing, but she left her hand in his.

"May I go on thinking that it will be 'yes' until I come back?"

"I cannot prevent your thinking, can I?" she whispered, with a tender look in her eyes.

"May I write to you?"

"Well—I—I—Now and then," she pleaded. "Not often. Just to remind you of my existence."

She gave a little laugh, which he liked exceedingly and remembered afterward.

"If you like," she answered.

At this moment Lady Cantourne's voice was heard in the distance calling them.

"There!" exclaimed Millicent. "We must go at once. And no one—no one, mind—must know of this."

"No one shall know of it," he answered.

CHAPTER IX.

THOSE who for their sins have been to Loango will scarcely care to have its beauties recalled to memory. And to such as have not visited the spot one can only earnestly recommend a careful avoidance.

Suffice it to say, therefore, that there is such a place, and the curious may find it marked in larger type than it deserves on the map of Africa, on the west coast of that country and within an inch or so of the equator.

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CHAPTER X.

AT this moment a servant came in with lamps and proceeded to close the windows. She was quite an old woman—an Englishwoman—and as she placed the lamps upon the table she scrutinized the guest after the manner of a privileged servant. When she had departed Jack Meredith continued his narrative with a sort of deliberation which was explained later on.

"And," he said, "that is why I came to Africa—that is why I want to make money. I do not mind confessing to a low greed of gain, because I think I have the best motive that a man can have for wanting to make money."

He said this meaningly and watched her face all the while.

"A motive which any lady ought to approve of."

She smiled sympathetically.

"I approve and I admire your spirit."

She rose as she spoke and moved toward a side table, where two lighted candles had been placed.

"My motive for talking so barefacedly about myself," he said as they moved toward the door together, "was to let you know exactly what I mean and why I am here. It was only due to you on accepting your hospitality. I might have been a criminal or an escaped embezzler. There were two on board the steamer coming out and several other shady characters."

"Yes," said the girl; "I saw your motive."

aged servant was waiting to show him his room.

"No one knows," Victor Durnovo was in the habit of saying. "What is going on in the middle of Africa."

And on this principle he acted.

"Ten miles above the camping ground where we first met," he had told Meredith, "you will find a village

where I have my headquarters. There is quite a respectable house there, with—a woman to look after your wants. When you have fixed things up at Loango and have arranged for the men to meet my steamer, take up all your men to this village—Masa is the name—and send the boats back. Wait there till we come."

In due time the telegram came, via St. Paul de Loand, announcing the fact that Osgard had agreed to join the expedition and that Durnovo and he might be expected at Masa in one month from that time. It was not without a vague feeling of regret that Jack Meredith read this telegram. To be at Masa in a month with forty men and a vast load of provisions meant leaving Loango almost at once. And, strange though it may seem, he had become somewhat attached to the dreary west African town. The singular cosmopolitan society was entirely new to him; the life, taken as a life, almost unique. He knew that he had not outstayed his welcome. Maurice Gordon had taken care to assure him of that in his bolsterous, hearty manner, savoring more of Harrow than of Eton, every morning at breakfast.

Jack took a seat on the porch and began to search for his cigar in the pocket of his jacket. Jocelyn went to the front of the veranda and watched her brother mount his horse. When she came to the back of the veranda a little later she was thinking about her brother Maurice, and it never suggested itself to her that she should not speak her thoughts to Meredith, whom she had not seen until three weeks ago. She had never spoken of Maurice behind his back to any man before.

"Does it ever strike you," she said to Jack, "that Maurice is the sort of man to be led astray by evil influence?"

"Yes, or be led straight by a good influence, such as yours."

He did not meet her thoughtful gaze. He was apparently watching the retreating form of the horse through the tangle of flower and leaf and tendril.

"I am afraid," said the girl, "that my influence is not of much account."

Meredith, turning upon her with a half cynical smile.

"Yes," she answered simply.

Before speaking again he took a pull at his cigar.

"Your influence," he said, "appears to me to be the making of Maurice Gordon. I frequently see serious flaws in the policy of Providence, but I suppose there is wisdom in making the strongest influence that which is unconscious of its power."

"I am glad you think I have some power over him," said Jocelyn, "but at the same time it makes me uneasy, because it only confirms my conviction that he is very easily led. And suppose my influence, such as it is, was withdrawn; suppose that I were to die, or what appears to be more likely, suppose that he should marry."

"Then let us hope that he will marry the right person. People sometimes do, you know."

She smiled with a strange little flicker of the eyelids. They had grown wonderfully accustomed to each other during the last three weeks. Here, it would appear, was one of those friendships between man and woman that occasionally set the world agog with curiosity and skepticism. But there seemed to be no doubt about it. He was over thirty, she verging on that prosaic age. Both had lived and moved in the world. To both life was an open book, and they had probably

CHAPTER X.

THE short equatorial twilight was drawing to an end, and all nature stood in silence, while night crept up to claim the land where her reign is more autocratic than elsewhere on earth. There was a black night above the trees, and a blacker beneath.

A sportsman was abroad. He was creeping up the right hand bank of a stream, his only chance lying in the noise of the waters which might serve to deaden the sound of broken twig or rustling leaf.

This sportsman was Jack Meredith, and it was evident that he was bringing to bear upon the matter in hand that intelligence and keenness of perception which had made him a person of some prominence in other scenes

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Foot of Kent-St., LINDSAY

"I am," she admitted, with some surprise, "I wonder how you knew? I am afraid of him."