THE LOST DIAMONDS OF THE ORANGE RIVER.

I sat down on a rock and lit a pipe, just to think it over and settle my rather highly strung nerves. The Paarl as I could now see, was a unique formation of crystal-spar, singularly rounded upon its face. It and the glorious canopy of hanging stalactite above it must have been reft bare by some mighty convulsion that had anciently torn asunder these mountains, leaving the ravine in which we stood.

As we drank from our water-bottles and ate some of the dried flesh and biscuits we had brought with us, I noticed Klaas's keen little eyes wandering inquiringly round the base of the precipice in our front. He seemed puzzled; and as we finished our repast and lit our pipes again he said: "The hole in the rock that leads from this kloof to the diamonds should be over there"—pointing before him; "but I can't quite make out the spot, the bushes have altered and grown so, since I was here as a boy years and years ago."

We got up and walked straight for the point he had indicated, and reached the foot of the precipice. The Bushman hunted hither and thither in the prickly jungle with the fierce rapidity of a tiger-cat; but, inasmuch as he was sometimes prevented from immediately approaching the rock-wall, he appeared unable to hit off the tunnel that led, as he had formerly told me, to the valley beyond. Suddenly, after he had again disappeared; he gave a low whistle; a signal to approach, to which I quickly responded. Quietly pushing my way towards him, I was astonished to see within a small clearing, a thick and high thorn-fence, outside of which Klaas stood. Inside this circular kraal was a low round hut, formed of boughs and branches strongly and closely interlaced. Klaas was standing watching intently the interior of the hut, which seemed to be barred at its tiny entrance by a pile of thorns lying close against it.

What could it mean, this strange dwelling, inaccessible as it seemed to human life? Klaas soon found a weak spot in the kraal fence, and pulling down some thorns we stepped inside and approached the hut. Here too, Klaas pulled away the dry mimosa-thorns from the entrance, and was at once confronted by a tiny bow and arrow, and behind that by a fierce little weazened face. Instantly, my Bushman poured forth a torrent of his own language, redundant beyond expression, with those extraordinary clicks of which the Bushman tongue seems mainly to consist. Even as he spoke, the bow and arrow were lowered, the little head appeared through the entrance, and the tiniest, quaintest, most ancient figure of a man I had ever beheld stood before us. Ancient, did I say? Ancient is hardly a meet description of his aspect, As he stood there blinking like an owl in the fierce sunlight his only covering a little skin kaross of the red rhe-bok fastened over his shoulders, he looked indeed coeval with the rocks around him. I never saw anything like it. Poor little oddity, dim though his eyes were waxing, feeble though his shrivelled arm, dulled though his formerly acute senses, he had, with all the desperate pluck of his race, been prepared to do battle for his hearth and home!

In his own tongue, Klaas interrogated this antediluvian Bushman and then suddenly, as he was answered by the word 'Ariseep, a light flashed across his countenance. Seizing his aged countryman by the shoulders, he turned him round and carefully examined his back. Lifting the skin kaross and rubbing away the coating of grease and dirt that covered the right shoulder, Klaas pointed to two round white scars just below the blade-bone, several inches apart. Then he gave a leap into the air, seized the old fossil by the neck, and shrieked into his ears the most wonderful torrent of Bushman language I have ever heard. In his turn the old man started back, examined Klaas intently from head to foot, and in a thin pipe jabbered at him almost as volubly.

Finally, Klaas enlightened me as to this comical interlude. It seemed incredible; but this old man, 'Ariseep by name, was his grandfather, whom he had not set eyes on since long years before the Boer commando had broken into his tribal fastness, slain his father and mother and other relatives, and carried himself off captive, The old man before us had somehow escaped in the fight; had crept away; and after years of solitary hiding in the mountains around, had somehow penetrated to this grim and desolate valley, where he had subsisted on Bushman fare—snakes, lizards, roots, gum, bulbs, fruit, and an occasional snared buck or rock-rabbit; these and a little rill of water that gushed from the mountain side hard by supplied him with existence. Here he had lingered for many years alone and isolated.

After nearly an hour's incessant chatter, during which I believe Klaas had laid before his monkey-like ancester an epitomised history of his life, he told the old man we wished to get through the mountains, and that he had lost the tunnel of which he had known as a boy. 'Ariseep, who, it seems, in the years he had been there had explored every nook and cranny of the valley, knew at once what he meant, and quickly pointed out to us, not one hundred paces away, a dense and prickly mass of cactus and euphorbia bush. Here, after half an hour's hewing and slashing with our hunting-knives, we managed to open a pathway; and at last a cave-like opening in the mountain, about seven feet in diameter, lay before us. The old man, however, gave us warning that snakes abounded, and might not impossibly be encountered in the twenty-minutes' crawl, which as Klaas had told me, it would take to get through. This opinion was not of a nature to fortify me in the undertaking, yet, rather than leave the diamonds unexplored, I felt prepared to brave the terrors of this uncanny passage.

It was now three o'clock; the sun was marching steadily across the brassy firmament on his eastward trek, and we had no time to lose.

"In you go, Klaas," said I; and, nothing loth, Klaas dived into the bowels of the mountains, I at his heels. For five minutes, by dint of stooping and an occasional hands-and-knees creep upon the flooring of the tunnel, sometimes on smooth sand, sometimes over protruding rock and rough gravel we got along very comfortably. Then the roof of the dark avenue, for it was pitch dark now—suddenly lowered, and we had to crawl along. It was unpleasant, I can tell you, boxed up like this beneath the heart of the mountain. The very thought seemed to make the oppression a million times more oppressive. Even Klaas, plucky Bushman though he was, didn't seem to relish the adventure, and spoke in a subdued and awe-stricken whisper. Sometimes since, as I have thought of that most gruesome passage, I have burst into a sweat nearly as profuse, though not so painful as I endured that day. At last, after what seemed to me hours of this painful crawling and Egyptian gloom, we met a breath of fresher air; the tunnel widened and heightened, and in another five minutes we emerged into the blessed sunlight. Little Klaas looked pretty well "baked," even in his old leather crackers, leather trousers and flannel shirt. As for myself, I was literally streaming; every thread on me was as wet as if I had plunged into a river. We lay panting for a while upon the scorching rocks, and then sat up and looked about us.

If the Paarl Kloof, as Klaas called it, whence we had just come had been sufficiently striking, the mighty amphitheatre in which we lay was infinitely more amazing. Imagine a vast arena almost completely circular in shape, flat and smooth, and composed, as to its flooring, of intermingled sand and gravel reddish yellow in colour. This arena was surrounded by stupendous walls of the same ruddy-brown rock we had noticed in Paarl Kloof, which here towered to a height of close on a thousand feet. In the centre of the red cliffs, blazing forth in splendour, ran a broad band of the most glorious opalescent rock-crystal, which flashed out its rays of coloured light as if to meet the fiery kisses of the sun. This flaming girdle of crystal, more beautiful a thousand times than the most gorgeous opal, the sheen of a fresh-caught mackerel, or the most radiant mother-of-pearl, I can only compare in splendour to the flashing rainbows formed over the foaming falls of the Zambesi, which I have seen more than once. It ran horizontally and very evenly round at least two-thirds of the cliff-belt that encircled us. It was a wonderful, an amazing spectacle, and I think quite the most singular of the many strange things, and they are not few, I have seen in the African interior.

Well, we sat gazing at this crystal rainbow for many minutes, till I had somewhat feasted my enraptured gaze. Then we got up, and at once began the search for diamonds. Directly I saw the gravel, especially where it had been cleansed in the shallow channels by the action of rain and flood, I knew at once we should find "stones;" it resembled almost exactly the gravel found in the Vaal River diggings, and was here and there strongly ferruginous and mingled with red sand, and occasionally lime. I noticed quickly that agates, jaspers and chalcedony were distributed pretty thickly, and that occasionally the curious band-doom stone, so often found in the Vaal River with diamonds, and indeed often considered by diggers as a sure indicator of "stones," was to be met with. In many places the pebbles were washed perfectly clean, and lay thickly piled in hollow water-ways. Here we speedily found a rich harvest of the precious gems. In a feverish search of an hour and a half, Klaas and I picked up thirty-three fine stones, ranging in size from a small pigeon's egg to a third of the size of my little finger-nail. They were all fine diamonds, some few, it is true, yellow or straw coloured, others of purest water, as I afterwards learned; and we had no difficulty in finding them, although we wandered over not a twentieth part of the valley. I could see at once from this off-hand search that enormous riches lay spread there upon the surface of the earth; beneath, probably was contained fabulous wealth. I was puzzled at the time, and I have never had inclination or opportunity to solve the mystery since, to account for the presence of diamonds in such profusion. Whether they were swept into the valley by early floodings of the Orange River through some aperture that existed formerly, but had been closed by volcanic action; or whether, as I am inclined to think the whole amphitheatre is a vast upheaval from subterraneous fires of a bygone period, is to this hour an unfathomed secret. I rather inclined to the latter theory, and believe that, like the Kimberley "pipe," as diggers call it, the diamondiferous earth had been shot upwards funnel-wise from below, and that ages of floods and rain-washing had cleansed and left bare the gravel and stones I had seen upon the surface.

From the search we had had, I made no doubt that a fortnight's careful hunting in this valley would make me a millionaire, or something very like it. At length I was satisfied; and as the eastering sun was fast stooping to his couch with a light heart and elastic step I turned with Klaas to depart. The excitement of the "find" had quite banished the remembrance of that awful tunnel-passage so recently encountered.

"We'll go back now, Klaas," said I, "sleep in your grandfather's kraal, and get to the wagon first thing in the morning."

At half-past five we again entered the tunnel. It was a nasty business, when one thought of it again, but it would soon be over. As before, Klaas went first, and for half the distance all went well. Suddenly, as we came to a sandy part of the tunnel, there was a scuffle in front, a fierce exclamation in Bushman language, and then Klaas called out in a hoarse voice; "A snake has bitten me!" What a situation! Cooped up in this frightful burrow, face to face with probably a deadly snake, which had already bitten my companion. Almost immediately, Klaas's voice came back to me in a hoarse guttural whisper: "I have him by the neck, sieur; it is a puff-adder, and his teeth are sticking into my shoulder. If you will creep up and lay hold of his tail, which is on your side of me, we can settle him; but I can't get his teeth out without your help."

Crawling forwards, and feeling my way with frightened benumbed fingers, I touched Klaas's leg; then softly moving my left hand, I was suddenly smitten by a horrible writhing tail. I seized it with both hands and finally gripped the horrid reptile, which I felt to be swollen with rage, as is the brute's habit, in an iron grasp with both hands. Then I felt, in the black darkness, that Klaas took a fresh grip of the loathsome creature's neck, and, with an effort, disengaged the deadly fangs from his shoulder. Immediately, I felt him draw his knife, and, after a struggle, sever the serpent's head from its body. The head he pushed away to the right as far out of our course as possible; and then I dragged the writhing body, from him, and shuddering, cast it behind me as far as possible.;

At that moment I thought for the first time in my life I must have swooned. But quickly I bethought me of poor faithful Klaas, sore stricken; and I called to him in as cheerful a voice as I could muster: "Get forward, Klaas, for your life as hard as you can, and, please God, we'll pull you through." Never had I admired the Bushman's fierce courage more than now. Most men would have sunk upon the sand and given up life and hope. Not so this aboriginal. "Ja, sieur; I will loup," was all he said.

Then we scrambled onward, occasionally halting as the deadly sickness overtook Klaas. At last the light came, and as my poor Bushman grew feebler and more slow, I found room to pass him, and so dragged him behind me to the opening. Here I propped him for a moment on the sand outside with his back to the mountain, and loudly called "Ariseep!" while I got breath for a moment.

The sun was sinking in blood-red splendour behind the mountains, and the kloof and rock-walls were literally aglow with the parting blush of day. Nature looked calm and serenely beautiful, and hushed in a splendour that ill accorded with the agitating scene there at the mouth of the tunnel. All this flashed across me as I called for the old man. Klaas was now breathing heavily, and getting dull and stupified. I took him in my arms and carried him to 'Ariseep's kraal, whence the old man was just emerging. At sight of his grandfather, Klaas rallied, and rapidly told him what had happened; and the old man at once plunged into his hut for something. Then Klaas's eyelids drooped, and he became drowsy and almost senseless. In vain I roused him, and tried to make him walk, and so stay the baleful effects of the poison, now running riot in his blood. He was too far gone. 'Ariseep now reappeared with a small skin-bag, out of which he took some dirty looking powder. With an old knife he scored the skin and flesh around Klaas's wound, and then rubbed in the powder. I had no brandy or ammonia to administer, and therefore let the old Bushman pursue his remedy, though I felt somehow it would be useless. So it proved; either the antidote, with which I believe Bushmen often do effect wonderful cures, was stale and inefficacious, or the poison had got too strong a hold. My poor Klaas never became conscious again, though I fancied eagerly that he recognized me before he died, for his lips moved as he turned to me once. At last, within an hour and a half from the time he was bitten, he lay dead.

So perished my faithful and devoted henchman, the stoutest, truest, bravest soul that ever African sun shone upon. We placed him gently in a deep sandy hollow, and over the sand piled heavy stones to keep the vermin from him. Then laying myself within 'Ariseep's kraal, I waited for the slothful dawn. As it came, I rose, called 'Ariseep from his hut, and bade farewell to him as best I could, for we neither of us understood one another. I noticed bye-the-bye, that no sign of grief seemed to trouble the old man. Probably he was too aged, and had seen too much of death to think much about the matter.

The rest of my story is soon finished. I made my way back to camp, told my men what had happened, and, indeed, took some of them back with me to Klaas's grave, and made them exhume his body, to satisfy themselves of the cause of death; for these men are sometimes very suspicious. Then we covered him again securely against wandering beasts and birds.

I trekked back to the old Colony, sold off my things, and went home. The diamonds I had brought away realized in England twenty-two thousand pounds. I have never dreamt of going to the fatal valley again. Nothing on earth would tempt me, after that ill-starred journey, heavy with the fate of Klaas and the Bechuana boy Amazi. As for the tunnel, I would not venture once more into its recesses for all the diamonds in Africa, even if they lay piled in heaps at the other end of it. Part of the twenty-two thousand pounds I invested for some relatives; the balance that I kept, sufficed, with what I already possessed, for all possible wants of my own. Then I came back to my dearly loved South Africa for the last time,; and a few years later made the journey to the Chobe River, from which you rescued me in the thirst-land."

Such was the story related to us by the transport rider. Our narrator wound up by telling us that Mowbray had further imparted to him the exact locality of the diamond valley; but he added: "I have never yet been there, nor do I think that for the present it is lokely I shall. Some day, before I leave the Cape, I may havve a try, and trek down the Orange River; but I don't feel very keen about that secret passage, after poor Mowbray's experiences."

(The End.)

HE ALWAYS DOES.

Chorus of Excited Voices—Heavens! A boat wrecked, you say? And none of its occupants escaped?

Life-Saver, grimly—Only the fellow who rocked it.

DAWN.

(BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.)

CHAPTER I.

"You lie; you always were a liar, and you always will be a liar. You told my father how I spent the money."

"Well, and what if I did? I had to look after myself I suppose. You forget that I am only here on sufferance, whilst you are the son of the house. It does not matter to you, but he would have turned me out of doors," whined George."

"Oh! curse your fine words; it's you who forgot you swab. Ay, it's you who forget that you asked me to take the money to the gambling-tent, and made me promise that you should have half of what we won, but that I should play for both. What, are you beginning to remember now—is it coming back to you after a whole month? I am going to quicken your memory up presently, I can tell you; I have got a good deal to pay off, I'm thinking. I know what you are at; you want to play cuckoo, to turn "Cousin Philip" out that "Cousin George" may fill the nest. You know the old man's soft points, and you keep working him up against me. You think that you would like the old place when he's gone—ay, and I dare say that you will get it before you have done, but I mean to have my penn'orth out of you now, at any rate;" and, brushing the tears of anger that stood in his brown eyes away with the back of his hand, the speaker proceeded to square up to George in a most determined way.

Now Philip with his broad shoulders and his firm-knit frame, would, even at eighteen, have been no mean antagonist for a full grown man; much more than he look formidable to the lanky, overgrown stripling crouching against the corner of the wall that prevented his further retreat.

"Philip, you're not going to strike me, are you, when you know you are so much stronger?"

"Yes, I am, though; if I can't match you with my tongue, at any rate I will use my fists. Look out."

"Oh, Philip, don't! I'll tell your father."

"Tell him! why, of course you will, I know that; but you shall have something to lie about this time," and he advanced to the attack with a grim determination not pleasant for his cousin to behold.

Finding that there was no escape, George turned upon him with so shrill a curse that it even frightened from his leafy perch in the oak above the tame turtle-dove, intensely preoccupied as he was in cooing to a new-found mate. He did more than curse; fought like a cornered rat and with as much chance as the rat with a trained fox-terrier. In a few seconds his head was as snughly tucked away in the chancery of his cousin's arm as ever any property was in the court of that name, and, to speak truth, it seemed quite possible that, when it emerged from its retreat, it would, like the property, be much dilapidated and extensively bled.

Let us not dwell upon the scene; for George it was a very painfulone, so painful that he never quite forgot it. His nose, too, was never so straight again. It was soon over, though to one of the parties the time went with unnatural slowness.

"Well, I think you've had about enough for once," soliloquized Philip, as he critically surveyed the writhing mass on the ground before him; and he looked a very handsome lad as he said it.

His curly black hair hung in waving confusion over his forehead, and flung changing lights and shadows into the depths of his brown eyes, whilst his massive and somewhat heavy features were touched into a more active life by the light of that pleasing excitement which animates nine men out of every ten of the Anglo-Saxon race when they are engaged on killing or hurting some other living creature. The face, too, had a certain dignity about it, a little of the dignity of justice; it was the face of one who feels that, if his action has been precipitate and severe, it has at any rate been virtuous. The full but clear-cut lips also had their own expression on them, half serious half comical; humor, contempt, and even pity were blended in it. Altogether Philip Caresfoot's appearance in the moment of boyish vengeance was pleasing and not uninteresting.

Presently, however, something of the same change passed over his face that we see in the sky when a cloud passes over the sun; the light faded out of it. It was astonishing to note how dull and heavy—ay, more, how bad it made him look all in a breath.

"There will be a pretty business about this," he murmured, and then, administering a sharp kick to the prostrate and groaning form on the ground before him, he said, "Now, then get up; I'm not going to touch you again. Perhaps, though you won't be in quite such a hurry to tell lies about me another time, though I suppose that one must always expect a certain amount of lying from a half-bred beggar like you. Like mother, like son, you know."

This last sentence was accompanied by a bitter laugh, and produced a decided effect on the groveling George, who slowly raised himself upon his hands, and lifting his head, looked his cousin full in the face.

It was not the ghastly appearance of his mangled and blood-soaked countetenance that made Philip recoil so sharply from the sight of his own handiwork—he had fought too often at school to be chicken-hearted about a little blood-shed, and, besides, he knew that his cousin was only knocked about, not really injured—but rather the intense and almost devilish malignity of the expression that hovered on the blurred features and in the half-closed eyes. But no attempt was made by George to translate the look into words, and indeed Philip felt that it was untranslatable. He also felt dimly that the hate and malice with which he was regarded by the individual at his feet were of a more concentrated and enduring character than most men have power to originate. In the lurid light of that one glance he was able, though he was not very clever, to pierce the darkest recesses of his cousin's heart, and to see his inmost thoughts, no longer through a veil, but face to face. And what he saw was sufficient to make the blood leave his ruddy cheek, and to fix his eyes into an expression of fear.

Next second George dropped his head on to the ground again, and began to moan in an ostentatious manner, possible in order to attract some one whose footsteps could be plainly heard proceeding slowly down a shrubbery-path on the other side of the yard wall. At any rate that was the effect produced; for next moment, before Philip could think of escape had he wished to escape, a door in the wall was opened, and a gentleman, pausing on the threshold, surveyed the whole scene, with the assistance of a gold-mounted eye-glass, with some evident surprise and little apparent satisfaction.

(To be Continued.)

M'SWAT'S FRONT DOOR.

It Is the Cause of an Earnest Conversation Between Billiger and Lobelia.

"I tell you I locked that front door myself! I know I locked it!" The voice of Mr. McSwat was stern, high-pitched and menacing.

"You were the last to go to bed, weren't you?" demanded Mrs. McSwat.

"I was."

"And you locked the door, did you?"

"Once more I tell you I did."

"Sure of it, are you?"

"How many more times have I got to tell you I locked that door the last thing before I started upstairs?"

"Well, I found it unlocked this morning."

"I can't help that, madam."

"I have no doubt, Billiger," said Mrs. McSwat, with a praiseworthy attempt to say it soothingly, "that you think you locked it, but the fact remains—"

"The fact remains exactly as it was before!" he roared. "I don't think any thing about it. I know it."

"Did you come down stairs in the night and unlock it?"

"I am not in the habit of walking in my sleep."

"I am not asking you about your habits. Did you come down in the night and unlock that front door?"

"I did not."

"Well, I was the first one who came down this morning and I found the door unlocked. How do you explain that, Billiger?"

"I don't explain it at all. See here, Lobelia! Are you trying to make me out a liar?"

"I am not trying to make you out anything. All that I am trying to do is to get at the facts."

"What difference does it make, I should like to know?"

"No difference, only I should like to find out——"

"Do you find the house upside down? Has anything been stolen?"

"No. There isn't a sign that anybody has been in the house. That's what makes it so hard to understand."

"Don't try to understand it. Let it go."

"But——"

"Has it occurred to you that perhaps you didn't find that door unlocked when you came downstairs?"

"Do you think I don't know when I find a door unlocked. Be a little careful how you——"

"I have no doubt, Lobelia, you think you found that door unlocked, but the fact remains that just before I went upstairs I——"

"The fact remains exactly as I said it did. See here, Billiger, are you trying to make me out a liar?"

"I am not trying to make out anything. I am only defending myself against an implied charge of falsehood. When I lock a door I know it. You have got into a chronic way of contradicting everything I say. When I tell you, Lobelia, that it thundered and lightened in the night I presume you will try to find some excuse for disputing it."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to tell me it thundered and lightened last night?"

"I certainly do."

"Well, I certainly do not believe that."

"You don't," snorted Mr. McSwat. "Will you please give me"—here he became desperately calm—"some sane, decent, respectable reason for not believing it?"

"Certainly, Billiger," responded Mrs. McSwat, with her accustomed sweetness. "I refuse to believe that it thundered and lightened last night because I was awake at the time——"

"Well?"

"Ana I know it lightened and thundered."

Whereupon Billiger went up into the garret and made loud, profane remarks to the dust-covered, moth-eaten garments that hung from the nails in the rafters, looking wan and ghostlike in the gray, gloomy twilight of the early morning."

HIS EXPERIENCE.

On the whole, said the aged weather prophet. I have found that the safest course is to predict bad weather.

How so? asked the neophyte.

Because people are much more ready to forgive you if the prediction does not come true.

MUTUAL BENEFIT.

Did your husband's wheel-trip do him good?

Yes; and it did me good, too. I didn't have to help him clean his wheel for three weeks.