

THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."

By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

CHAPTER II.

A fat, unwholesome-looking creature, half native, half Belgian, waddled across the open space towards the hut in which the two strangers had been housed. He was followed at a little distance by two sturdy natives bearing a steaming pot which they carried on a pole between them. Trent set down his revolver and rose to his feet.

"What news, Oom Sam?" he asked. "Has the English officer been heard of? He must be close up now."

"No news," the little man grunted. "The King, he send some of his own supper to the white men. They got what they want," he said. "They start work mine soon as like, but they go away from here." He not like them about the place! See!"

"Oh, that be blowed!" Trent muttered. "What's this in the pot? It don't smell bad."

"Rabbit," the interpreter answered tersely. "Very good. Part King's own supper. White men very favored."

Trent bent over the pot which the two men had set upon the ground. He took a fork from his belt and dug it in.

"Very big bone for a rabbit, Sam," he remarked, doubtfully.

Sam looked away. "Very big rabbits round here," he remarked. "Best keep pot. Send men away."

Trent nodded, and the men withdrew.

"Stew all right," Sam whispered confidentially. "You eat him. No fear. But you got to go. King beginning get angry. He say white men not to stay. They got what he promised, new they go. I know King—know this people well! You get away quick. He think you want be King here! You got the papers—all you want, eh?"

"Not quite, Sam," Trent answered. "There's an Englishman, Captain Francis, on his way here up the Coast, going on to Walgetta Fort. He must be here to-morrow. I want him to see the King's signature. If he's a witness these niggers can never back out of the concession. They're slippery devils. Another chap may come on with more rum and they'll forget us and give him the right to work the mines, too. See!"

"I see," Sam answered; "but him not safe to wait. You believe me. I know tam niggers. They take two days get drunk, then get devils, four—raving mad. They drunk now. Kill any one to-morrow—perhaps you. Kill you certain to-morrow night. You listen now!"

Trent stood up in the shadow of the overhanging roof. Every now and then came a wild shrill cry from the lower end of the village. Some one was beating a frightful, cracked drum which they had got from a trader. The tumult was certainly increasing. Trent swore softly, and then looked irresolutely over his shoulder to where Monty was sleeping.

"If the worst comes we shall never get away quickly," he muttered. "That old carcass can scarcely drag himself along."

Sam looked at him with cunning eyes.

"He not fit only die," he said softly. "He very old, very sick man, you leave him here! I see to him."

Trent turned away in sick disgust. "We'll be off to-morrow, Sam," he said shortly. "I say! I'm beastly hungry. What's in that pot?"

Sam spread out the palms of his hands.

"He all right, I see him cooked," he declared. "He two rabbits and one monkey."

Trent took out a plate and helped himself.

"All right," he said. "Be off now. We'll go to-morrow before these towseley-headed beauties are awake."

Sam nodded and waddled off. Trent threw a biscuit and hit his companion on the cheek.

"Here, wake up, Monty!" he exclaimed. "Supper's come from the royal kitchen. Bring your plate and tuck in!"

Monty struggled to his feet and came meekly towards where the pot stood simmering upon the ground.

"I'm not hungry, Trent," he said, "but I am very thirsty, very thirsty indeed. My throat is all parched. I am almost uncomfortable. Really I think your behavior with regard to the brandy is most unkind and ungenerous; I shall be ill, I know I shall. Won't you—"

"No, I won't," Trent interrupted. "Now shut up all that rot and eat something."

"I have no appetite, thank you," Monty answered, with sulky dignity.

"Eat something, and don't be a silly ass!" Trent insisted. "We've a hard journey before us, and you'll need all the strength in your carcass to land you in Buckomari again. Here, you've dropped some of your precious rubbish."

Trent stooped forward and picked up what seemed to him at first to be a piece of cardboard from the ground. He was about to fling it to its owner, when he saw that it was a photograph. It was the likeness of a girl, a very young girl apparently, for her hair was still down her back, and her dress was scarcely of the orthodox length. It was not particularly well taken, but Trent had never seen anything like it before. The lips were slightly parted, the deep eyes were

brimming with laughter, the pose was full of grace, even though the girl's figure was angular. Trent had seen as much as this, when he felt the smart of a sudden blow upon the cheek, the picture was snatched from his hand, and Monty—his face convulsed with anger—glowered fiercely upon him.

"You infernal young blackguard! You impertinent, meddling blockhead! How dare you presume to look at that photograph! How dare you, sir! How dare you!"

Trent was too thoroughly astonished to resent either the blow or the fierce words. He looked up into his aggressor's face in black surprise.

"I only looked at it," he muttered. "It was lying on the floor."

"Looked at it! You looked at it! Like your confounded impertinence, sir! Who are you to look at her! If ever I catch you prying into my concerns again, I'll shoot you—by Heaven I will!"

Trent laughed sullenly, and, having finished eating, lit his pipe.

"Your concerns are of no interest to me," he said shortly; "keep 'em to yourself—and look here, old 'un, keep your hands off me! I ain't a safe man to hit let me tell you. Now sit down and cool off! I don't want any more of your tantrums."

Then there was a long silence between the two men. Monty sat where Trent had been earlier in the night at the front of the open hut, his eyes fixed upon the ever-rising moon, his face devoid of intelligence, his eyes dim. The fire of the last few minutes had speedily burnt out. His half-sodden brain refused to answer to the sudden spasm of memory which had awakened a spark of the former man. If he had thoughts at all, they hung around the brandy bottle. The calm beauty of the African night could weave no spell upon him. A few feet behind, Trent, by the light of the moon, was practising tricks with a pack of greasy cards. By and by a spark of intelligence found its way into Monty's brain. He turned round furtively.

"Trent," he said, "this is slow! Let us have a friendly game—you and I."

Trent yawned.

"Come on, then," he said. "Single Poker or Euchre, eh?"

"I do not mind," Monty replied affably. "Just which you prefer."

"Single Poker, then," Trent said.

"And the stakes?"

"We've nothing left to play for," Trent answered gloomily, "except cartridges."

Monty made a wry face. "Poker for love, my dear Trent," he said, "between you and me, would lack all the charm and excitement. It would be, in fact, monotonous! Let us exercise our ingenuity. There must be something still of value in our possession."

He relaxed into an affection of thoughtfulness. Trent watched him curiously. He knew quite well that his partner was dissembling, but he scarcely knew to what end. Monty's eyes, moving round the grass-bound hut, stopped at Trent's knapsack which hung from the central pole. He uttered a little exclamation.

"I have it," he declared. "The very thing."

"Well!"

"You are pleased to set an altogether fictitious value upon that half bottle of brandy we have left," he said. "Now I tell you what I will do. In a few months we shall both be rich men. I will play you for my I.O.U. for fifty pounds, fifty sovereigns, Trent, against half the contents of that bottle. Come, that is a fair offer, is it not? How we shall laugh at this in a year or two. Fifty pounds against a tumblerful—positively there is no more—a tumblerful of brandy."

He was watching Trent's face all the time, but the younger man gave no sign. When he had finished, Trent took up the cards, which he had shuffled for Poker, and dealt them out for Patience. Monty's eyes were dim with disappointment.

"What!" he cried. "You don't agree! Did you understand me? Fifty pounds, Trent! Why, you must be mad!"

"Oh, shut up!" Trent growled. "I don't want your money, and the brandy's poison to you! Go to sleep!"

Monty crept a little nearer to his partner and laid his hand upon his arm. His shirt fell open, showing the cords of his throat swollen and twitching. His voice was half a sob.

"Trent, you are a young man—not old like me. You don't understand my constitution. Brandy is a necessity to me! I've lived on it so long that I shall die if you keep it from me! Remember, it's a whole day since I tasted a drop! Now I'll make it a hundred. What do you say to that? One hundred!"

Trent paused in his game, and looked steadfastly into the eager face thrust close to his. Then he shrugged his shoulders and gathered up the cards.

"You're the silliest fool I ever knew," he said bluntly, "but I suppose you'll worry me into a fever if you don't have your own way."

"You agree?" Monty shrieked.

Trent nodded and dealt the cards.

"It must be a show after the draw," he said. "We can't bet, for we've nothing to raise the stakes with!"

Monty was breathing hard and his

fingers trembled, as though the age of the swamps was already upon him. He took up his cards one by one, and as he snatched up the last he groaned. Not a pair.

"Four cards," he whispered hoarsely. Trent dealt them out, looked at his own hand, and, keeping a pair of queens, took three more cards. He failed to improve, and threw them upon the floor. With frantic eagerness Monty grovelled down to see them—then with a shriek of triumph he threw down a pair of aces.

"Mine!" he said. "I kept an ace and drew another. Give me the brandy!"

Trent rose up, measured the contents of the bottle with his forefinger, and poured out half the contents into a horn mug. Monty stood trembling by.

"Mind," Trent said, "you are a fool to drink it and I am a fool to let you. You risk your life and mine. Sam has been up and swears we must clear out to-morrow. What sort of form do you think you'll be in to walk sixty miles through the swamps and bush, with perhaps a score of these devils at our heels? Come now, old 'un, be reasonable."

The veins on the old man's forehead stood out like whipcord.

"I won it," he cried. "Give it me! Give it me, I say."

Trent made no further protest. He walked back to where he had been lying and recommenced his Patience. Monty drank off the contents of the tumbler in two long, delicious gulps! Then he flung the horn upon the floor and laughed aloud.

"That's better," he cried, "that's better. What an ass you are, Trent! To imagine that a drain like that would have any effect at all, save to put life into a man! Bah! What do you know about it?" Trent did not raise his head. He went on with his solitary game, and, to all appearance, paid no heed to his companion's words. Monty was not in the humor to be ignored. He flung himself on the ground opposite to his companion.

"What a slow-blooded sort of creature you are, Trent!" he said. "Don't you ever drink, don't you ever take life a little more gaily?"

"Not when I am carrying my life in my hands," Trent answered grimly. "I get drunk sometimes—when there's nothing on and the blues come—never at a time like this though."

"It is pleasant to hear," the old man remarked, stretching out his limbs, "that you do occasionally relax. In your present frame of mind—you will not be offended I trust—you are just a little heavy as a companion. Never mind. In a year's time I will be teaching you how to dine—to drink champagne, to—by the way, Trent, have you ever tasted champagne?"

"Never," Trent answered gruffly. "Don't know that I want to either."

Monty was compassionate. "My young friend," he said, "I would give my soul to have our future before us, to have your youth and never to have tasted champagne. Phew! the memory of it is delicious!"

"Why don't you go to bed?" Trent said. "You'll need all your strength to-morrow!"

Monty waved his hand with serene contempt.

"I am a man of humors, my dear friend," he said, "and to-night my humor is to talk and to be merry. What is it the philosophers tell us?—that the sweetest joys of life are the joys of anticipation. Here we are, then, on the eve of our triumph—let us talk, plan, be happy. Bah! how thirsty it makes one! Come, Trent, what stake will you have me set up against that other tumblerful of brandy?"

"No stake that you can offer," Trent answered shortly. "That drop of brandy may stand between us and death. Pluck up your courage, man, and forget for a bit that there is such a thing as drink."

Monty frowned and looked stealthily across towards the bottle.

(To be continued.)

What a High Explosive Is.

The shell question for the British army concerns the supply not of shrapnel, but of shell containing high explosive. These high-explosive shells are strong steel cases with a fuse, usually placed in the base. The charge employed may be either lyddite—which is a preparation of picric acid—or tri-nitrotoluol.

The metal in the shell is fairly thick. The explosion is very violent, and has a thoroughly destructive effect upon anything near the point where the shell explodes—concrete walls, entanglements, steel shields for the trenches, or for guns. The French and Germans use these shells to prepare the way for assaults on hostile trenches, demolishing with them all obstacles.

Shrapnel are quite different projectiles, and are serviceable against infantry in the open or lightly entrenched. They are thin steel cases containing a very small charge of low or moderate power explosive, which opens the cases and liberates a large number of bullets in them. These cover an oval area as they scatter and kill unprotected men. Shrapnel are useless against fortified positions, strongly-built houses, or deep and well-planned entrenchments.

According to tradition, the seven deadly sins are: anger, pride, gluttony, lust, avarice, envy, and sloth.

There are nearly four thousand known languages, or dialects, in the world.

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Vermin Proof Fences.

Protection is the prime requisite for increasing the number of birds in any area, and the results of protection are in direct proportion to the amount given. Besides insuring birds against every form of persecution by human kind, we must defend them from various natural foes. The most effectual single step is to surround the proposed bird sanctuary with a vermin-proof fence. Such a fence should prevent entrance either by digging or by climbing, but will serve its greatest use if it can not be climbed, and is, therefore, cat-proof. If it is impracticable to build an impenetrable fence, the next best device is to put guards of sheet metal on all nesting trees and on poles supporting bird houses. This should be done in any case where squirrels or snakes are likely to intrude, as it is usually impracticable to fence out these animals. Tree guards should be six feet or more above ground. Attacks by hawks, owls, crows, jays or other enemies are best controlled by eliminating the destructive individuals.

Well Prepared Soil.

Soil well pulverized before the crop is planted is much more productive than cloddy land or any land left with an uneven surface, because the plantfood already in the land is made more accessible and the little root feeders which literally fill the ground can better gather nourishment from both earth and air. Land thoroughly plowed and thoroughly pulverized before planting is not only rendered more fertile from a natural viewpoint, but is in far better condition to receive whatever artificial fertilizing one may wish to apply.

Put This in Your Scrapbook.

A breeder told his county institute that he always found it profitable to keep the following mixture in a dry place, where his hogs could always help themselves. One wagon load of coal ashes, 100 pounds of salt, 50 pounds of sulphur, twenty pounds of copperas, one barrel of lime. A little charcoal and soft coal might help.

Making a Tree Comfortable.

In planting a tree to make it grow—and there should be no other aim—the tree should be made just as comfortable in its new environment as possible. If the land is wet it should

be drained, for trees will never thrive with wet feet. The best results are obtained by preparing the land the previous year for the setting of the trees. Clover or cowpeas plowed under in the fall will make humus the following year and keep the soil about the roots. Trees will often do well in poor soils and unfavorable conditions if good soil is placed about their roots, so that they get a good start the first year or so. After they once become established they can do considerable towards taking care of themselves.

The Farmer's Friend.

The dietary of a toad contains 77 per cent. of insects and the remainder is composed of spiders, crustacea and worms. Having an amazingly active tongue, he captures much of his food on the wing. There is every reason why farmers and gardeners should encourage and protect the toad. European gardeners often purchase toads, considering their vigilance in hunting insects well worth a trifling outlay. Toads become very tame when treated with consideration, and as they never do any harm, beyond occasionally excavating a little cave for midday retirement in a favorite flower bed, while destroying a vast amount of insect life, there is every reason why they should be welcome guests.

Starving the Belgians.

It is reported in Rotterdam that the German military authorities in several of the Belgian provinces, in an effort to force the civilians to work for the army of occupation, have withheld food supplies sent in by the commission for the relief of Belgium.

In Malines the supply of food is said to have been stopped because the mechanics refused to work in the railroad shops. At Courtrai the workers are reported to have been deprived of food because of their refusal to work in barbed wire factories, while similar action was taken at Roubaix on the refusal of the workers to make sandbags for trenches.

General von Bissing, Governor of Belgium, has issued a decree providing for the expropriation of the grain crops for the feeding of the civilian population. The decree, it is stated, aims at preventing a speculative advance in prices, and at an equable distribution of supplies.

St. Lawrence Sugar

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