

THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."

By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

CHAPTER IV.

Trent moved forward and greeted the newcomer awkwardly. "You're Captain Francis," he said. "We've been waiting for you."

The statement appeared to annoy the explorer. He looked nervously at the two men and about the hut.

"I don't know how you got to hear of my coming, or what you want with me," he answered brusquely. "Are you both English?"

Trent assented, waving his hand towards his companion in introductory fashion.

"That's my pal, Monty," he said. "We're both English right enough."

Monty raised a flushed face, and gazed with bloodshot eyes at the man who was surveying him so calmly. Then he gave a little gurgling cry and turned away. Captain Francis started and moved a step towards him. There was a puzzled look in his face—as though he were making an effort to recall something familiar.

"What is the matter with him?" he asked Trent.

"Drink!"

"Then why don't you see that he doesn't get too much?" the newcomer said sharply. "Don't you know what it means in this climate? Why, he's on the high-road to a fever now. Who on this earth is it he reminds me of?"

Trent laughed shortly.

"There's never a man in Buckomari—no, nor in all Africa—could keep Monty from the drink," he said. "Live with him for a month and try it. It wouldn't suit you—I don't think."

He glanced disdainfully at the smooth face and careful dress of their visitor, who bore the inspection with a kindly return of contempt.

"I've no desire to try," he said; "but he reminds me very strongly of some one I knew in England. What do you call him—Monty?"

Trent nodded.

"Never heard any other name," he said.

"Have you ever heard him speak of England?" Francis asked.

Trent hesitated. What was this newcomer to him that he should give away his pal? Less than nothing! He hated the fellow already, with a rough, sensitive man's contempt of a bear's, and manners far above his own.

"Never. He don't talk."

Captain Francis moved a step towards the huddled-up figure breathing heavily upon the floor, but Trent, leaning over, stopped him.

"Let him be," he said gruffly. "I know enough of him to be sure that he needs no one prying and ferreting into his affairs. Besides, it isn't safe for us to be dawdling about here. How many soldiers have you brought with you?"

"Two hundred," Captain Francis answered shortly.

Trent whistled.

"We're all right for a bit, then," he said, "but it's a pretty sort of a picnic you're on, eh?"

"Never mind my business," Captain Francis answered curtly; "what about yours? Why have you been hanging about here for me?"

"I'll show you," Trent answered, taking a paper from his knapsack. "You see, it's like this. There are two places near this show where I've found gold. No use blowing it about down at Buckomari—the fellows there haven't the nerve of a kitten. This cursed climate has sapped it all out of them, I reckon. Monty and I clubbed together and bought presents for his Majesty, the boss here, and Monty wrote out this little document—sort of concession to us to sink mines and work them, you see. The old buffer signed it like winking, directly he spotted the rum, but we ain't quite happy about it; you see, it ain't to be supposed that he's got a conscience, and there's only us saw him put his mark there. We'll have to raise money to work the thing upon this, and maybe there'll be difficulties. So what we thought was this. Here's an English officer coming; let's get him to witness it, and then if the King don't go on the square, why, it's a Government matter."

Captain Francis lit a cigarette and smoked thoughtfully for a moment or two.

"I don't quite see," he said, "why we should risk a row for the sake of you two."

Trent snorted.

"Look here," he said; "I suppose you know your business. You don't want me to tell you that a decent excuse for having a row with this old Johnny is about the best thing that could happen to you. He's a bit too near the borders to civilization to be a decent savage. Sooner or later some one will have to take him under their protection. If you don't do it, the French will. They're hanging round now, looking out for an opportunity. Listen!"

Both men moved instinctively towards the open part of the hut and looked across towards the village. Up from the little open space in front of the King's dwelling-house leaped a hissing bright flame; they had kindled a fire, and black forms of men, stark naked and wounding themselves with spears, danced around it and made the air hideous with discordant cries. The King himself, too drunk to stand, squatted upon the ground with an empty bottle by his side. A breath of wind brought a strong, noxious odor to the two men

who stood watching. Captain Francis puffed hard at his cigarette.

"Ugh!" he muttered; "beastly!"

"You may take my word for it," Trent said gruffly, "that if your two hundred soldiers weren't camped in the bush yonder, you and I and poor Monty would be making sport for them to-night. Now come. Do you think a quarrel with that crew is a serious thing to risk?"

"In the interests of civilization," Captain Francis answered, with a smile, "I think not."

"I don't care how you put it," Trent answered shortly. "You soldiers all prate of the interests of civilization. Of course it's all rot. You want the land—you want to rule, to plant a flag, and be called a patriot."

Captain Francis laughed. "And you, my superior friend," he said, glancing at Trent, gaunt, ragged, not too clean, and back at Monty—"you want gold—honestly if you can get it, if not—well, it is not too wise to ask. Your partnership is a little mysterious, isn't it—with a man like that? Out of your magnificent morality I trust that he may get his share."

Trent flushed a brick-red. An angry answer trembled upon his lips, but Oom Sam, white and with his little fat body quivering with fear, came hurrying up to them in the broad track of the moonlight.

"King he angry," he called out to them breathlessly. "Him mad drunk angry. He say white men all go away, or he fire bush and use the poisoned arrow. Me off! Got bearers waiting."

"If you go before we've finished," Trent said, "I'll not pay you a penny. Please yourself."

The little fat man trembled—partly with rage, partly with fear.

"You stay any longer," he said, "and King him send after you and kill on way home. White English soldiers go Buckomari with you?"

Trent shook his head.

"Going the other way," he said, "down to Wana Hill."

Oom Sam shook his head vigorously.

"Now you mind," he said; "I tell you, King send after you. Him blind mad."

Oom Sam scuttled away. Captain Francis looked thoughtful. "That little fat man may be right," he remarked. "If I were you I'd get out of this sharp. You see, I'm going the other way. I can't help you."

Trent set his teeth.

"I've spent a good few years trying to put a bit together, and this is the first chance I've had," he said; "I'm going to have you back me as a British subject on that concession. We'll go down into the village now if you're ready."

"I'll get an escort," Francis said. "Best to impress 'em a bit, I think. Half a minute."

He stepped back into the hut and looked steadfastly at the man who was still lying doubled up upon the floor. Was it his fancy, or had those eyes closed swiftly at his turning—was it by accident, too, that Monty, with a little groan, changed his position at that moment, so that his face was in the shadow? Captain Francis was puzzled.

"It's like him," he said to himself softly, "but after all the thing's too improbable."

He turned away with a shade upon his face and followed Trent out into the moonlight. The screeching from the village below grew louder and more hideous every minute.

CHAPTER V.

The howls became a roar, blind passion was changed into purposeful fury. Who were these white men to march so boldly into the presence of the King without even the formality of sending an envoy ahead? For the King of Bekwando, drunk or sober, was a stickler for etiquette. It pleased him to keep white men waiting. For days sometimes a visitor was kept waiting his pleasure, not altogether certain as to his ultimate fate, for there were ugly stories as to those who had journeyed to Bekwando and never been seen or heard of since. Those were the sort of visitors with whom his ebon Majesty loved to dally until they became pale with fright or furious with anger and impatience; but men like this white captain, who had brought him no presents, who came in overwhelming force and demanded a passage through his country as a matter of right were his special detestation. On his arrival he had simply marched into the place at the head of his column of Hausas without ceremony, almost as a master, into the very presence of the King. Now he had come again with one of those other miscreants who at least had knelt before him and brought rum and many other presents. A slow, burning, sullen wrath was kindled in the King's heart as the three men drew near. His people, half-mad with excitement and debauch, needed only a cry from him to have closed like magic round these insolent intruders. His thick lips were parted, his breath came hot and fierce whilst he hesitated. But away outside the clearing was that little army of Hausas, clean-limbed, faithful, well drilled and armed. He choked down his wrath. There were grim stories about those who had yielded to the luxury of slaying these white men—stories of villages razed

to the ground and destroyed, of a King himself who had been shot, of vengeance very swift and very merciless. He closed his mouth with a snap and sat up with drunken dignity. Oom Sam, in fear and trembling, moved to his side.

"What they want?" the King asked.

Oom Sam spread out the document which Trent had handed him upon a tree-stump, and explained. His Majesty nodded more affably. The document reminded him of the pleasant fact that there were three casks of rum to come to him every year. Besides, he rather liked scratching his royal mark upon the smooth white paper. He was quite willing to repeat the performance, and took up the pen which Sam handed him readily.

"Him white man just come," Oom Sam explained; "want see you do this."

His Majesty was flattered, and, with the air of one to whom signing of treaties and the concessions is an everyday affair, affixed a thick, black cross upon the spot indicated.

"That all right?" he asked Oom Sam.

Oom Sam bowed to the ground. "Him want to know," he said, jerking his head towards Captain Francis, "whether you know what means?"

His forefinger wandered aimlessly down the document. His Majesty's reply was prompt and cheerful.

"Three barrels of rum a year."

Sam explained further. "There will be white men come digging," he said; "white men with engines that blow, making holes under the ground and cutting trees."

The King was interested. "Where?" he asked.

Oom Sam pointed westward through the bush.

"Down by creek-side."

The King was thoughtful. "Rum come all right?" he asked.

Oom Sam pointed to the papers.

"Say so there," he declared. "All quite plain?"

The King grinned. It was not regal, but he certainly did it. If white men come too near they must be shot carefully and from ambush. He leaned back with the air of desiring the conference to cease. Oom Sam turned to Captain Francis.

"King him quite satisfied," he declared. "Him say all explained before—he agree."

The King suddenly woke up again. He clutched Sam by the arm, and whispered in his ear. This time it was Sam who grinned.

"King, him say him signed paper twice," he explained. "Him want four barrels of rum now."

Trent laughed harshly.

"He shall swim in it, Sam," he said, "less he shall float down to hell upon it."

Oom Sam explained to the King that, owing to the sentiments of affection and admiration with which the white men regarded him, the three barrels should be made into four, whereupon his Majesty bluntly pronounced the audience at an end and waddled off into his Imperial abode.

The two Englishmen walked slowly back to the hut. Between them there had sprung up from the first moment a strong and mutual antipathy. The blunt savagery of Trent, his apparently heartless treatment of his weaker partner, and his avowed unscrupulousness, offended the newcomer much in the same manner, as in many ways he himself was obnoxious to Trent. His immaculate fatigue-uniform, his calm superciliousness, his obvious air of belonging to a superior class, were galling to Trent beyond measure. He himself felt the difference—he realized his ignorance, his unkept and uncared-for appearance. Perhaps, as the two men walked side by side, some faint foreshadowing of the future showed to Trent another and a larger world where they two would once more walk side by side, the outward differences between them lessened, the smouldering irritation of the present leaping up into the red-hot flame of hatred. Perhaps it was just as well for John Francis that the man who walked so sullenly by his side had not the eyes of a seer, for it was a wild country, and Trent himself had drunk deep of its lawlessness. A little accident with a knife, a carelessly handled revolver, and the man who was destined to stand more than once in his way would pass out of his life for ever. But in those days Trent

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PRACTICAL FARMING



Prevent Soil Erosion.

One of the gravest problems of the farmers of to-day who are living on hilly lands is how to prevent soil erosion. Much of the washing of farm lands can be prevented by plowing deep, so as to make a subterranean reservoir for the storage of precipitation. The water penetrates readily through the loose soil, and its movement through the underlying soil is very much slower than over the surface. Frequent crops of clover or grass which are plowed under make the surface soil spongy with humus and retard the washing of the soil. All hilly lands liable to wash should have a cover crop during the winter. A warranty deed will not keep the soil of the careless farmer from washing away.

Oat Hay.

If, for any reason, you will be short of hay this season or a wind has smashed the oats down so you can't bind them, why not make them into oat hay?

Cut when in the early milk stage of the grain and cure as you would other hay. Barley and rye can be used in the same way to help out a short hay crop.

A ton of oat hay contains 86 pounds of digestible protein and a ton of red clover 133 pounds—only 50 pounds in favor of the clover, so you see this makes a very good hay for growing stock or dairy cows.

Feeding Geese.

Geese require plenty of green food, which they pluck from the growing plants and plenty of water as a swimming pool during the summer. When they have this, the old geese and ducklings that are past four weeks old, will not need to be fed during the summer. A feed of moistened meal once a day hastens their growth, but where there is plenty of herbage green and fresh, from which they can pluck their food, it will not be necessary to feed them, providing there is plenty of water for them to swim in.

Our Bird Friends.

Nothing has a more potent attrac-

tion for birds during hot weather than drinking and bathing places. The birds' water supply should be a pool not more than a few inches deep, the bottom sloping gradually toward the edge. Both bottom and edge should be rough, so as to afford a safe footing. A giant pottery saucer is an excellent device or the pool may be made of concrete or even metal, if the surface is roughened.

The bird bath may be elevated or on the ground if in an open space where skulking enemies can not approach too near. A water supply is appreciated in winter as well as summer.

A Good Side Line.

A profitable side line of farming is to raise a few nice sheep every year for men who are willing to pay a bit extra for the sake of improving their stock. To do this, one should have good stock and good pastures and good barns, as well as a good man to care for them.

In disposing of such stock, be fair about it. A reasonable profit is all right. If you try to overdo the matter you will break down, and be driven out of the business.

Cause of Bad Habits.

Feather eating and feather pulling are caused by confining the fowls and leaving them idle. To prevent their getting the vice or to cure them when they have acquired the habit, give them plenty of green food and meat scraps and give them plenty of exercise by making them work for their food. Keep them busy. Rub the fowls that have been plucked with carbolated vaseline.

Protect the Birds.

The birds eat millions of insects that, if left alone, would destroy millions of dollars' worth of fruits and grain. Of course, some kinds of birds are pests, but you need not have many of those kinds on your farm if you will spend a little time studying birds. Study their habits of feeding and nesting. Prepare homes for only the helpful kinds, the ones that feed chiefly on insects and worms.

knew nothing of what was to come—which was just as well for John Francis.

To be continued.)

Using Japanese Bandages Now.

The triangular bandage first introduced by the Japanese during the Russo-Japanese war is now being widely used in the European war. It has been found that bandages of this type are suitable for binding up wounds in any part of the body and that one can be carried by each sol-

dier without inconvenience. The Germans improved it by printing on the bandage itself in sterilized ink, various figures showing how it is to be applied. The British War Office then adopted the idea, and every British soldier now carries one of the printed bandages in a special pocket of his tunic. This bandage is often applied without assistance by the wounded soldier.

There is a law in Nebraska requiring hotel proprietors to furnish bedsheets nine feet in length.



MAKING READY FOR A "WHITE ARM" ATTACK.

French troops preparing for an attack on the enemy with bayonets or "white arms" as they are popularly called. Recent despatches say that the French are replacing the bayonets with knives, as bayonets are difficult to handle in the trenches.