

THE GOLDEN KEY

Or "The Adventures of Ledgard."

By the Author of "What He Cost Her."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was then perhaps that Trent fought the hardest battle of his life. The start was made with only a dozen Kru boys, Trent himself, stripped to the shirt, laboring amongst them spade in hand. In a week the fishing boats were deserted, every one was working on the road. The labor was immense, but the wages were magnificent. Real progress was made and the boy's calculations were faultless. Trent used the cable freely.

"Have dismissed Cathcart for incompetency—road started—progress magnificent, he wired one week, and shortly afterwards a message came back—

"Cathcart cables resigned—scheme impossible—shares dropping—wire reply."

Trent clenched his fist, and his language made the boy, who had never heard him violent, look up in surprise. Then he put on his coat and walked out to the cable station. "Cathcart lies. I dismissed him for cowardice and incompetence. The road is being made, and I pledge my word that it will be finished in six months. Let our friends sell no shares."

Then Trent went back, and, hard as he had worked before, he surpassed it all now. Far and wide he sent ever the same inquiry—for labor and stores. He spent money like water, but he spent from a bottomless purse. Day after day Kru boys, natives, and Europeans down on their luck, came creeping in. Far away across the rolling plain the straight belt of flint-laid road-bed stretched to the horizon, one gang in advance cutting turf, another beating in the small stones. The boy grew thin and bronzed, Trent and he toiled as though their lives hung upon the work. So they went on till the foremost gang came close to the forests, beyond which lay the village of Bekwando.

Then began the period of the greatest anxiety, for Trent and the boy and a handful of others knew what would have sent half the natives flying from their work if a whisper had got abroad. A few soldiers were drafted down from the Fort, arms were given out to all those who could be trusted to use them, and by night men watched by the great red fires which flared along the path of their labors. Trent and the boy took it by turns to watch, their revolvers loaded by their side, and their eyes ever turned towards that dark line of forest whence came nothing but the singing of night birds and the calling of wild animals. Yet Trent would have no caution relaxed, the more they progressed the more vigilant watch they kept. At last came signs of the men of Bekwando. In the small hours of the morning a burning spear came hurtling through the darkness and fell with a hiss and a quiver in the ground, only a few feet from where Trent and the boy lay. Trent stamped on it hastily and gave no alarm. But the boy stole round with a whispered warning to those who could be trusted to fight.

Yet no attack came on that night or the next; on the third Trent and the boy sat talking and the latter frankly owned that he was nervous. "It's not that I'm afraid," he said, smiling. "You know it isn't that! But all day long I've had the same feeling—we're being watched! I'm perfectly certain that the beggars are skulking round the borders of the forest there. Before morning we shall hear from them."

"If they mean to fight," Trent said, "the sooner they come out the better. I'd send a messenger to the King only I'm afraid they'd kill him. Oom Sam won't come! I've sent for him twice."

The boy was looking backwards and forwards along the long line of disembowelled earth.

"Trent," he said suddenly; "you're

a wonderful man. Honestly, this road is a marvellous feat for untrained labor, and with such rotten odds and ends of machinery. I don't know what experience you'd had of road-making."

"None!" Trent interjected. "Then it's wonderful!"

Trent smiled upon the boy with such a smile as few people had ever seen upon his lips.

"There's a bit of credit to you, Davenant," he said. "I'd never have been able to figure out the levelling alone. Whether I go down or not, this shall be a good step upon the ladder for you."

The boy laughed. "I've enjoyed it more than anything else in my life," he said. "Fancy the difference between this and life in a London office. It's been magnificent! I never dreamed what life was like before."

Trent looked thoughtfully into the red embers.

"You had the mail to-day," the boy continued. "How were things in London?"

"Not so bad," Trent answered. "Cathcart has been doing all the harm he can, but it hasn't made a lot of difference. My cables have been published, and our letters will be in print by now, and the photographs you took of the work. That was a splendid idea!"

"And the shares?" "Down a bit—not much. Da Souza seems to be selling out carefully a few at a time, and my brokers are buying most of them. Pound shares are nineteen shillings to-day. They'll be between three and four pounds a week after I get back."

"And when shall you go?" the boy asked.

"Directly I get a man out here I can trust and things are fixed with his Majesty the King of Bekwando! We'll both go then, and you shall spend a week or two with me in London."

The boy laughed. "What a time we'll have!" he cried. "Say, do you know your way round?"

Trent shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he said. "You'll have to be my guide."

"Right you are," was the cheerful answer. "I'll take you to Jimmy's, and the Empire, and down the river, and to a match at Lord's, and to Henley if we're in time, and I'll take you to see my aunt. You'll like her."

Trent nodded. "I'll expect to," he said. "Is she anything like you?"

"Much cleverer," the boy said, "but we've been great chums all our life. She's the cleverest woman I ever knew, earns lots of money writing for newspapers. Here, you've dropped your cigar, Trent."

Trent groped for it on the ground with shaking fingers.

"Writes for newspapers?" he repeated slowly. "I wonder—her name isn't Davenant, is it?"

The boy shook his head. "No, she's my mother's cousin, really—only I call her Auntie, we always got on so. She isn't really much older than me, her name is Wendermott—Ernestine Wendermott. Ernestine's a pretty name, don't you think?"

Trent rose to his feet, muttering something about a sound in the forest. He stood with his back to the boy looking steadily at the dark line of outlying scrub, seeing in reality nothing, yet keenly anxious that the red light of the dancing flames should not fall upon his face. The boy leaned on his elbow and looked in the same direction. He was puzzled by a fugitive something which he had seen in Trent's face.

Afterwards Trent liked sometimes to think that it was the sound of her name which had saved them all. For, whereas his gaze had been idle at first it became suddenly fixed and keen. He stooped down and whispered some-

thing to the boy. The word was passed along to the sleeping men, and one by one they dropped back into the deep-cut trench. The red fire danced and crackled—only a few yards outside the flame-lit space came the dark forms of men creeping through the rough grass like snakes.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The attack was a fiasco, the fighting was all over in ten minutes. A hundred years ago the men of Bekwando, who went naked and knew no drink more subtle than palm wine had one virtue—bravery. But civilization pressing upon their frontiers had brought Oom Sam greedy for ivory and gold, and Oom Sam had brought rum and strong waters. The nerve of the savage had gone, and his muscle had become a flaccid thing. When they had risen from the long grass with a horrid yell and had rushed in upon the hated intruders with couched spears only to be met by a blinding fire of Lee-Metford and revolver bullets their bravery vanished like breath from the face of a looking-glass. They hesitated, and a rain of bullets wrought terrible havoc amongst their ranks. On every side the fighting men of Bekwando went down like ninepins—about a dozen only sprang forward for a hand-to-hand fight, the remainder, with shrieks of despair, fled back to the shelter of the forest, and not one of them again ever showed a bold front to the white man. Trent, for a moment or two, was busy, for a burly savage, who had marked him out by the light of the gleaming flames, had sprung upon him spear in hand, and behind him came others. The first one dodged Trent's bullet and was upon him, when the boy shot him through the cheek, and he went rolling over into the fire, with a death-cry which rang through the camp high above the din of fighting, another behind him Trent shot himself, but the third was upon him before he could draw his revolver and the two rolled over struggling fiercely, at too close quarters for weapons, yet with the thirst for blood fiercely kindled in both of them. For a moment Trent had the worst of it—a blow fell upon his forehead (the scar of which he never lost), and the wooden club was brandished in the air for a second and more deadly stroke. But at that moment Trent leaped up, dashed his unloaded revolver full in the man's face, and, while he staggered with the shock, a soldier from behind shot him through the heart. Trent saw him go staggering backwards and then himself sat down, giddy with the blow he had received. Afterwards he knew that he must have fainted, for when he opened his eyes the sun was up, and the men were strolling about looking at the dead savages who lay thick in the grass. Trent sat up and called for water.

"Any one hurt?" he asked the boy who brought him some. The boy grinned, but shook his head. "Plenty savages killed," he said, "no white man or Kru boy."

"Where's Mr. Davenant," Trent asked suddenly. The boy looked round and shook his head. "No seen Mr. Dav'nant," he said. "Him fight well though! Him not hurt!"

Trent stood up with a sickening fear at his heart. He knew very well that if the boy was about and unhurt he would have been at his side. Up and down the camp he strode in vain. At last one of the Kru boys thought he remembered seeing a great savage bounding away with someone on his back. He had thought it was one of their wounded—it might have been the boy. Trent, with a sickening sense of horror, realized the truth. The boy had been taken prisoner.

Even then he preserved his self-control to a marvellous degree. First of all he gave directions for the day's work—then he called for volunteers to accompany him to the village. There was no great enthusiasm. To fight in the trenches against a foe who had no cover nor firearms was rather a different thing from bearding them in their own lair. Nevertheless, about twenty men came forward, including a guide, and Trent was satisfied.

They started directly after breakfast and for five long hours fought their way through dense undergrowth and shrubs with never a sign of a path, though here and there were footprints and broken boughs. By noon some of the party were exhausted and lagged behind, an hour later a long line of exhausted stragglers were following Trent and the native guide. Yet to all their petitions for a rest Trent was adamant. Every minute's delay might lessen the chance of saving the boy, even now they might have begun their horrible tortures. The thought inspired him with fresh vigor. He plunged on with long, reckless strides which soon placed a widening gap between him and the rest of the party.

By degrees he began to recollect his whereabouts. The way grew less difficult—occasionally there were signs of a path. Every moment the soft, damp heat grew more intense and clammy. Every time he touched his forehead he found it dripping. But of these things he recked very little, for every step now brought him nearer to the end of his journey. Faintly, through the midday silence he could hear the clanging of copper instruments, and the weird mourning cry of the defeated natives. A few more steps and he was almost within sight of them. He slackened his pace and approached more stealthily until only a little screen of bushes separated him from the village, and, peer-

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Calf Diphtheria.

Calf diphtheria is due to a specific infection, and is always a serious matter. The trouble may appear with calves from three to five days old. Such calves refuse to drink milk or suck. They show more or less discharge of saliva from the mouth. These patches gradually develop into ulcers covered with a dead, granular or cheesy mass, which does not peel easily from the raw surface underneath. There is considerable rise of temperature and an offensive odor from the mouth. The trouble may easily extend to neighboring parts, to the lining membrane of the nose, and then there appears a yellowish discharge. In some cases the lining membrane of the digestive tract is similarly affected and then there is tendency to diarrhoea. Little pigs show similar symptoms.

So far as now known the germ is a normal inhabitant of the intestines of healthy hogs and cattle and probably always virulent. When the disease is prevalent, the virus is, of course, scattered everywhere. Very young animals are most easily and most seriously affected, but cases have been reported in calves and pigs six or eight months old, and even occasionally in adult cattle and adult hogs.

The sores may be cleaned with two per cent. creolin in warm water, and then treated with Lugol's solution, applied twice a day to the ulcers. Permanganate of potash may also be used, two ounces to each gallon of water; made up fresh each time, as the mixture cannot be kept from day to day. Either treatment should be given to valuable animals about twice a day for from four to six days. Frequent and thorough disinfection of calf-pens and calf-yards is one of the first essentials in management.

Unsafe Lanterns.

The season of shortened daylight brings its own peculiar fire dangers. One of these is the use of the lantern about farm buildings. Of recent years, owing to competition, a low-priced lantern, which is a serious fire menace, has been placed upon the market. Instead of being securely screwed on the oil reservoir, the burner is simply slipped on, with the result that if the

ing through them, he saw a sight which made his blood run cold within him.

They had the boy! He was there, in that fantastic circle bound hand and foot, but so far as he could see, at present unhurt. His face was turned to Trent, white and a little scared, but his lips were close-set and he uttered no sound. By his side stood a man with a native knife dancing around and singing—all through the place were sounds of wailing and lamentation, and in front of his hut the King was lying, with an empty bottle by his side, drunk and motionless. Trent's anger grew fiercer as he watched. Was this a people to stand in his way, to claim the protection and sympathy of foreign governments against their own bond, that they might keep their land for misuse and their bodies for debauchery? He looked backwards and listened. As yet there was no sign of any of his followers and there was no telling how long these antics were to continue. Trent looked to his revolver and set his teeth. There must be no risk of evil happening to the boy. He walked boldly out into the little space and called to them in a loud voice. (To be continued.)

lantern is upset, the burner comes off and the oil is allowed to run out upon the lighted wick. The result is either an explosion or a serious blaze and unless speedily checked, damage to life and property.

Poultry and Fruit.

If the hens have the run of an orchard they will not render as good service in protecting the trees from injurious insects as they will if confined in yards around the trees. While the orchard should be utilized, it gives much opportunity to the fowls to work over a large surface, which may to a certain extent lessen their vigilance around the trees. The old maxim is "Bring your chickens to your tree, keep them there, and they will destroy more insects than in any other way." The suggestion is a good one if not inflicting extra expense for fencing, but it is possible that some kind of movable fence should answer the purpose, as the fowls need not be confined except early in the season.

Pride in the Country.

We hear the term "civic pride" in the city. It applies just as much to the country resident. It means the pride that causes you to keep your premises clean and sightly and presentable to the stranger or passerby. And then you yourself might get some pleasure out of a well-kept farm.

Measured by the common standard, keeping your farm tidy actually adds dollars to its value and to the value of the products you have for sale. Let's clean up and stop breeding trouble on our farms.

BACTERIA-TREATED PEAT.

Jack's Beanstalk May Be Made to Grow Again.

Jack's celebrated beanstalk is likely to be rivalled by Prof. W. B. Bottomley, who has astonished agriculturists in London with plants grown in peat treated with bacteria. He believes that the same process can be applied to wheat growing as well.

Professor Bottomley, of King's College in the Strand, has been conducting his experiments on the roof of his college building in the very heart of London. The method by which he doubles and trebles the sizes of plants and their fruit was the result of a long line of experiments. He started inoculating the soil with a culture of bacteria obtained from the root of leguminous plants. Soil so treated, it was found, greatly increased the nitrogenous matter in the earth and produced more nodules on the roots. Peat was found to be the best medium for the bacteria.

From 18 plants fed on the bacteria-treated peat, Professor Bottomley cut 72 cucumbers weighing a pound each after a 20 days' growth. Sixteen pounds of tomatoes were taken from one vine.

"There are thousands of acres of peat in Ireland which could, by bacterial treatment, be converted into a rich manure and at least double the productiveness of the soil," said the professor. "Incidentally, it would give Ireland a new industry, for its practical inexhaustible supplies of peat would provide all that is required for the rest of the United Kingdom."

The Government has made a grant for continuing the experiments.

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