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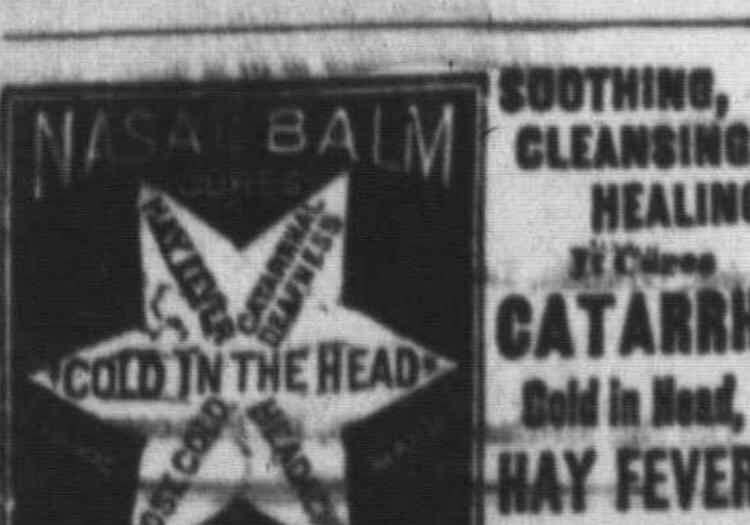
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MISCELLANEOUS.

U.M. M. C. P. & S. O.,

DOUGLAS H. COLE,



CHAPTER I.



remained of it were a few strictly local and miniature whirlwinds, which would suddenly up on the road itself, and twist and twirl fiercely round, raising a mighty column of dust fifty feet or more into the air, where it hung long after the cause of it passed, and then slowly dissolved as its particles floated

track of one of these desultory and inexplicable whirlwinds, was a man on horseback. The man looked limp and dirty, and the horse limper and dirtier. The hot wind had taken all the bones out of them, as the Kaffirs say, which was not very much to be wondered at, seeing that they had been journeying through it for the last four hours, without Suddenly the whirlwind, which had been traveling along pretty smartly halted, and the dust, after turning round began to dissolve in the accustomed fashion The man on the horse halted, too, and contemplated it in an absent kind of way. "It's just like a man's life," he said aloud to his horse, "coming from nobody knows where, nobody knows why, and making a little of dust on the world's highway, and then passing away and leaving the dust to fall to the ground again, and be trodden under foot and forgotten."

The speaker, a stout, well set up, rather ugly man, apparently on the wrong side of 30, with pleasant blue eyes and a reddish, peaked beard, laughed a little at his own sententious reflection, and then gave his jaded horse a tap with the sjambock in his hand.

"Come on, Blesbok," he said, "or we shall never get to old Croft's place to-night. Jove! I believe that must be the turn, and he pointed with his whip to a little rutty track that turned from the Wakkerstroor main road and stretched away toward curious, isolated hill with a large flat top, that rose out of the rolling plain some four miles to the right. "The old Boer said the sec turn," he went on, still talking to himsel "but perhaps he lied. I am told that an Englishman a few miles wrong. table topped hill, about half an hour's ride

John Niel to himself as he slowly eantered has to come to, my boy, so you had better make the best of it."

Just then his cogitations were interrupted for on the farther side of a gentle slope there suddenly appeared an extraordinary sight, Over the crest of the rise of land, now some four or five hundred yards away, a pony with

Low, broad brow, crowned with soft, yellow she was young-about 20-tall, and finely formed. Presently he got a little better, and



OF THE DEAD BIRD. knocked about), took her hand and began to chafe it between his own. It was a well formed hand, but brown, and showed signs of doing plenty of hard work. Soon she

opened her eyes, and he noted with satisfaction that they were very good eyes, blue in color. Then she sat up and laughed a "Well, I am silly," she said; "I believe "It is not much to be wondered at," said John Niel, politely, and lifting his hand to

take off his hat, only to find that it had gone

in the fray. "I hope you are not very much hurt by the bird?" "I don't know," she said, doubtfully. "But I'm glad that you killed the skellum since. He killed a boy last year and I told uncle he ought to shoot him then, but he would not, because he was such a beauty." "Might I ask," said John Niel, "are you

"Yes, I am-one of them. There are two of us, you know; and I can guess who you are you are Capt. Niel, whom uncle is expecting to help him with the farm and the

"If all of them are like that," he said, point ing to the dead bird, "I don't think that shall take kindly to ostrich farming." She laughed, showing a charming line of teeth. "Oh, no," she said, "he was the only bad one-but, Capt. Niel, I think you will find it fearfully dull. There are nothing but Boers here, you know. There are no English people nearer than Wakkerstroom." "You overlook yourself," he said, politely

for really this daughter of the wilderness had a very charming air about her. "Oh," she answered, "I am only a girl, you know, and, besides, I am not clever. Jess. now-that's my sister-Jess has been at school at Cape Town and she is clever. I was at Cape Town, too, but I didn't learn much there. But, Capt. Niel, both the horses have place, you know). Can you walk?"

all right. It was silly to faint, but he kicked danced a little on the grass to show him. "My word, though, I am sore! You i my arm, that's all; that is, if you don't

ourself in this place?" "Why do you ask!"

"Yes," put in Bessie, "the savage brute twist round; the girths may be loose."

Thus adjured, John, with the help of the Zulu, clambered into his saddle, an example that the lady quickly followed, and they once more set off through the gathering darkness. Presently he became aware that they were passing up a drive bordered by tall blue gums, and next numute the backing of a large dog and the sudden appearance of lighted windows told him that they had reached the house. At the door-or, rather, opposite to it, for there was a veranda in front-they stopped and got off their horses. As they did so, out of the house there came a shout of welcome, and presently in the doorway, showing out clear against the light, appeared a striking and, in its way, most pleasant figure. rather, he had been very tall. Now he was nuch bent with age and rheumatism. His long white hair hung low upon his neck, and fell back from a prominent brow. The top of the head was quite bald, like the tonsure of a priest, and shone and glistened in the lamplight, and round this oasis the thin white locks fell down. The face was shriveled like the surface of a well kept apple, and, like an apple, rosy red. The features were aquiline and well marked, the eyebrows still black and very bushy, and beneath them shone a pair of gray eyes, as keen and bright as hawks'. But for all its sharpness, there was nothing unpleasant or fierce about the face. On the contrary, it was pervaded by a remarkable air of good nature and shrewdness. For all the rest, the man was dressed in rough tweed clothes, tall riding boots, and held a broad brimmed Boer hunting hat in his hand. Such was the outer man of old Silas Croft, one of the most remarkable men in the Transvaal, as John Niel first saw him. "Is that you, Capt. Niel?" roared out the

stentorian voice. "The natives said you were coming. A welcome to you! I am glad to see you-very glad. Why, what is the matter with you?" he went on as the Zuiu Mouti ran to help him off his horse. "Matter, Mr. Croft?" answered John:

"why, the matter is that your favorite ostrich has nearly killed me and your niece here, and that I have killed your favorite os-

Then followed explanations from Bessie, during which he was helped off his horse and into the house. "It serves me right," said the old man. "To think of it now, just to think of it! Well, Bessie, my love, thank God that you escaped-ay, and you, too, Capt. Niel. Here, you boys, take the Scotch cart and a couple of oxen, and go and fetch the brute home. We may as well have the feathers off him, at any rate, before the assvogels (vultures) tear

After he had washed himself and tended his injuries with arnica and water, John managed to get into the principal sitting room, where supper was waiting. It was a very pleasant room, furnished in European style, and was carpeted with mats made of springbuck skins. In the corner was a piano, and by it a bookcase, filled with the works of standard authors, the property, as John

rightly guessed, of Bessie's sister, Jess. Supper went off pleasantly enough, and after it was over the two girls sang and played while the men smoked. And here a fresh surprise awaited him, for after Bessie, from her mauling, had played a piece or two creditably enough, Jess, who so far had been nearly sment, sat down to the plane. She did not do this willingly, indeed, for it was not yet hoping through its despair, echoed in its every line, and love-unending love-hovered over the glorious notes-nay, descended upon them like a spirit and made them his. up rang her wild, sweet voice, thrilling at heaven's gate, and then it fell, swiftly as an eagle falls, quivered and was dead,

when the notes died away. He looked



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