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KING SOLOMON'S MINES

A VERY THRILLING STORY.

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(By H. Rider Haggard.)

CHAPTER I.
 I MEET SIR HENRY CURTIS.

It is a curious thing that at my age—fifty-five last birthday—I should find myself taking up a pen to try and write a history. I wonder what sort of a history it will be when I have done it, if I ever come to the end of the trip! I have done a good many things in my life, which seems a long one to me, owing to my having begun so young, perhaps. At an age when other boys are at school, I was earning my living as a trader in the old colony. I have been trading, hunting, fighting, or mining ever since. And yet it is only eight months ago that I made my pile. It is a big pile now I have got it—I don't know yet how big—but I don't think I would go through the last fifteen or sixteen months again for it; no, not if I knew that I should come out safe at the end, pile and all. But then I am a timid man, and don't like violence, and am pretty sick of adventure. I wonder why I am going to write this book: it is not in my line. I am not a literary man, though very devoted to the Old Testament and also to the "Ingoldsby Legends." Let me try and set down my reasons, just to see if I have any.

First reason: Because Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good asked me to. Second reason: Because I am laid up here at Durban with the pain and trouble of my left leg. Ever since that confounded lion got hold of me I have been liable to it, and its being rather bad just now makes me limp more than ever. There must be some poison in the lion's teeth, otherwise how is it that when your wounds are healed they break out again, generally, mark you, at the same time of year that you got your mauling? It is a hard thing that when one has shot sixty-five lions as I have in the course of my life, that the sixty-sixth should chew your leg like a quid of tobacco. It breaks the routine of the thing, and putting other considerations aside, I am an orderly man and don't like that. This is by the way.

Third reason: Because I want my boy, Harry, who is over there at the hospital in London studying to become a doctor, to have something to amuse him and keep him out of mischief for a week or so. Hospital work must sometime pall and get rather dull, for even of cutting up dead bodies, there must come satiety, and as this history won't be dull, whatever else it may be, it may put a little life into things for a day or two while he is reading it.

Fourth reason and last: Because I am going to tell the strangest story that I know of. It may seem a queer thing to say that, especially considering that there is no woman in it—except Foulata. Stop, though; there is Gaganoola, if she was a woman, and not a fiend. But she was a hundred at least, and therefore not marriageable, so I don't count her. At any rate, I can safely say that there is not a petticoat in the whole history. Well, I had better come to the yoke. It's a stiff place, and I feel as though I were bogged up to the axle. But 'suffes, suffes,' as the Boers say (I'm sure I don't know how they spell it), softly does it. A strong team will come through at last, that is if they ain't too poor. You will never do anything with poor oxen. Now to begin.

I, Allan Quatermain, of Durban, Natal, gentleman, make oath and say—that how I began my deposition before the magistrate, about poor Khiva's and Ventvogel's sad deaths; but somehow it doesn't seem quite the right way to begin a book. And, besides, am I a gentleman? What is a gentleman? I don't quite know, and yet I have had to do with niggers—no, I'll scratch that word "niggers" out, for I don't like it. I've known natives who are, and so you'll say, Harry, my boy, before you're done with this tale, and I have known mean whites with lots of money and fresh out from home, too, who ain't.

Well, at any rate, I was born a gentleman, though I've been nothing but a poor traveling trader and a hunter all my life. Whether I have remained so I know not, you must judge of that. Heaven knows I've tried. I've killed many men in my time, but I have never slain wantonly or stained my hand in innocent blood, only in self-defense. The Almighty gave us our lives, and I suppose he meant us to defend them, at least I have always acted on that, and I hope it won't be brought up against me when my clock strikes. There, there, it is a cruel and wicked world, and for a timid man I have been mixed up in a deal of slaughter. I can't tell the rights of it, but at any rate I have never stolen, though I once cheated a Kafir out of a herd of cattle. But then he had done me a dirty turn, and it has troubled me ever since into the bargain.

Well it's eighteen months or so ago since I first met Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, and it was in this way. I had been up elephant hunting beyond Bamangwato, and had had bad luck. Everything went wrong that trip, and to top up with I got the fever badly. So soon I was well enough I trekked down to the Diamond Fields, sold such ivory as I had, and also my wagon and oxen, discharged my hunters, and took the post-cart to the Cape. After spending a week in Cape Town, finding that they overcharged me at the hotel, and having seen everything there was to see, including the botanical gardens, which seemed to me likely to confer a great benefit on the country, and new Houses of Parliament, which I expect will do nothing of the sort, I determined to go on back to Natal by the Dundek, then lying in the docks waiting for the Edinburgh Castle due in from England. I took my berth and went aboard, and that afternoon the Natal passengers from the Edinburgh Castle transhipped, and we weighed and put out to sea.

Among the passengers who came on board there were two who excited my curiosity. One, a man about thirty, was one of the biggest-chested and longest-armed men I ever saw. He had yellow hair, a big yellow beard, clear-cut features, and large gray eyes set deep in his head. I never saw a finer-looking man, and somehow he reminded me of an ancient Dane. Not that I know much of ancient Danes, though I remember a modern Dane who did me out of ten pounds; but I remember once seeing a picture of some of those gentry, who I take it, were a kind of white Zulus. They were drinking out of big horns, and their long hair hung down their backs, and as I looked at my friend standing there by the companion-ladder, I thought that if one only let his hair grow a bit, put on one of those chain shirts on to those great shoulders of his, and

(Continued on page 7.)

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