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A MOST ATTRACTIVE STORY.

Hurrying from this dreadful scene to the further side of the koppe, we found Sir Henry (who still held a bloody battle-axe in his hand), Ignosi, Infadoos, and one or two of the chiefs in deep consultation.

"Thank Heaven, here you are, Quatermain! I can't quite make out what Ignosi wants to do. It seems that, though we have beaten off the attack, Twala is now receiving large reinforcements, and is showing a disposition to invest us, with a view of starving us out."

"Yes; especially as Infadoos says that the water supply has given out."

"My lord, that is so," said Infadoos; "the spring cannot supply the wants of so great a multitude, and is failing rapidly. Before night we shall all be thirsty. Listen, Maemuzahn. Taou art wise, and hast doubtless seen many wars in the hands from whence thou comest—that is, if, indeed, they make wars in the stars. Now tell us, what shall we do? Twala has brought up many fresh men to take the place of those who have fallen. But Twala has learned a lesson; the hawk does not think to find the heron ready; but our beak has pierced his breast; he will not strike at us again. We, too, are wounded, and he will wait for us to die; he will wind himself round us like a snake round a tree, and fight the fight of 'sit down.'"

"I hear you," I said.

"So, Maemuzahn, thou seest we have no water here, and but a little food, and we must choose between these three things—to languish like a starving lion in his den, or to strive to break away toward the north, or—and here he rose and pointed toward the dense mass of the foe—to launch ourselves straight at Twala's throat. Incubu, the great warrior—for to-day he fought like a buffalo in a net, and Twala's soldiers went down before his axe like corn before the hail; with these eyes I saw it. Incubu says 'Charge,' but the Elephant (Incubu) is ever prone to charge. Now what says Maemuzahn, the wily old fox who has seen much and loves to bite his enemy from behind? The last word is in Ignosi's hand; for it is a king's voice to speak of war; but let us hear thy vote, too, of him of the transparent eye."

"What sayest thou, Ignosi?" I asked.

"Nay, my father," answered our quondam servant, who now, clad as he was in the full panoply of a savage war, looked every inch a warrior king. "Do thou speak, and let me, who am but a child in wisdom beside thee, hearken to thy words."

"Thus adjured, I, after taking hasty counsel with Good and Sir Henry, delivered my opinion briefly to the effect that, being trapped, our best chance, especially in view of the failure of our water supply, was to initiate an attack upon Twala's forces, and then I recommended that the attack should be delayed at once, "before our wounds grow stiff," and also before the sight of Twala's overpowering force caused the hearts of our soldiers "to wax small like fat before a fire." Otherwise, I pointed out, some of the captains might change their minds, and making peace with Twala, desert him, or even betray us into his hands.

This expression of opinion seemed, on the whole, to be favorably received; indeed, among the Kikuanas my utterances met with a respect which has never been accorded to them before or since. But the real decision as to our course lay with Ignosi, who, since he had been recognized as rightful king, could exercise the almost unbounded rights of sovereignty, including, of course, the final decision on matters of generalship, and it was to him that all eyes were now turned.

At length after a pause, during which he appeared to be thinking deeply, he spoke: "Incubu, Maemuzahn, and Bougwian, brave white men, and my friends; Infadoos, my uncle, and chiefs; my heart is fixed. I will strike at Twala this day, and set my fortunes on the blow, ay, and my life; my life and your lives also. Listen; thus will I strike. Ye see how the hill curves round like a green toward us within the curve?"

"We see," I answered.

"Good; it is now midday, and the men eat and rest after the toil of battle. When the sun has risen and traveled a little way toward the dark, let thy regiment, my uncle, advance with one other down to the green tongue. And it shall be that when Twala sees it shall hurl his force at it to crush it. But the spot is narrow, and the regiments can come against thee one at a time only; so shall they be destroyed one by one, and the eyes of all Twala's army shall be fixed upon a struggle the like of which has not been seen by living man. And with these my uncle shall go Incubu my friend, that when Twala sees his battle-axe flashing in the first rank of the Grays' heart may grow faint. And I will come with the second regiment, that which follows, see, so that if ye are destroyed, as it may happen, there may yet be a king left to fight for; and with me shall come Maemuzahn the wise."

"It is well, oh king," said Infadoos, apparently contemplating the certainty of the complete annihilation of his regiment with perfect calmness. Truly these Kikuanas are a wonderful people. Death has no terrors for them when it is incurred in the course of a duty.

"And whilst the eyes of the multitude of Twala's regiments are thus fixed upon the fight," went on Ignosi, "behold, one third of the men who are left alive to us (i.e., about six thousand) shall creep along the right horn of the hill and fall upon the left flank of Twala's force, and one third shall creep along the left horn and fall upon Twala's right flank. And when I see that the horns are ready to toss Twala, then will I, with the men who are left to me, charge home in Twala's face, and if fortune goes with us the day will be ours, and before Night drives her horses from the mountains the mountains we shall sit in peace at Loos, and Infadoos, do thou prepare that the plan be carried out; and stay, let my white father Bougwian go with the right horn, that his shining eye may give courage to the men."

The arrangements for attack thus briefly indicated were thus set in motion with a rapidity that spoke well for the perfectness of the Kikuanas military system. Within little more than an hour's action had been served out to the men and dismounted, the three divisions were formed, the plan of attack explained to the leaders, and the whole force, with the exception of a guard left with the wounded, now numbering about eighteen thousand men in all, was ready to be put in motion.

Presently I saw a group of hands with Sir Henry, and I saw I

"Thank-you, you're boss," he said. "I am off with the right wing according to orders; and so I have come to shake hands in case we should not meet again, you know," he added, significantly.

We shook hands in silence, and not without the exhibition of as much emotion as Englishmen are wont to show.

"It is a queer business," said Sir Henry, his deep voice shaking a little, "and I confess I never expect to see to-morrow's sun. As far as I can make out, the Grays, with whom I am to go, are to fight until they are wiped out in order to enable the wings to slip round unawares and outflank Twala. Well, so be it; at any rate, it will be a man's death! Good-bye, old fellow. God bless you! I hope you will pull through and live to collar the diamonds; but if you do, take my advice and don't have anything more to do with pretensions!"

In another second Good had wrung us both by the hand and gone; and then Infadoos came up and led off Sir Henry to his place in the fore-front of the Grays, whilst, with many sighs, I departed with Ignosi to my station in the second attacking regiment.

CHAPTER XIV. THE LAST STAND OF THE GRAYS.

In a few minutes the regiments destined to carry out the flanking movements had tramped off in silence, keeping carefully under the lee of the rising ground, in order to conceal the movement from the keen eyes of Twala's scouts.

Half an hour or more was allowed to elapse between the setting out of the horns or wings of the army before any movement was made by the Grays and the supporting regiment, known as the Buffaloes, which were destined to bear the brunt of the battle.

Both of these regiments were almost perfectly fresh, and of full strength, the Grays having been in reserve in the morning, and having lost but a small number of men in sweeping back that part of the attack which had proved successful in breaking the line of defense, on the occasion when I charged with them and got knocked silly for my pains. As for the Buffaloes, they had formed the third line of defense on the left, and as the attacking force at that point had not succeeded in breaking through the second, had scarcely come into action at all.

Infadoos, who was a wary old general, and knew the absolute importance of keeping up the spirits of his men on the eve of such a desperate encounter, employed the pause in addressing his own regiment, the Grays, in poetical language; in explaining to them the honor that they were receiving in being put thus in the fore-front of the battle, and in having the great white warrior from the stars to fight with them in their ranks, and in promising large rewards of cattle and promotion to all who survived in the event of Ignosi's arms being successful.

"Behold your king!" ended old Infadoos, pointing to Ignosi; "go fight and fall for him as is the duty of brave men, and cursed and shameful forever be the name of him who shrinks from death for his king, or who turns his back to his enemy. Behold your king! chiefs, captains, and soldiers; now to your homages to the sacred snake, and then follow on that Incubu and I may show ye the road to the heart of Twala's forces."

There was a moment's pause, then suddenly there rose from the serried phalanxes before us a murmur, like the distant whisper of the sea, caused by the gentle tapping of the handles of six thousand spears against their holders' shields. Slowly it swelled, till its growing volume deepened and widened into a roar of rolling noise, that echoed like a thunder against the mountains, and filled the air with heavy waves of sound. Then it dispersed and slowly died away into nothing, and suddenly our crashed the royal salute.

Ignosi, I thought to myself, might well be a proud man that day, for no Roman emperor ever had such a salutation from gladiators "about to die."

Ignosi acknowledged this magnificent act of homage by lifting his battle-axe, and then the Grays filed off in a triple line formation, each line containing about one thousand fighting men, exclusive of officers. When the last line had gone some five hundred yards, Ignosi put himself at the head of the Buffaloes, which regiment was drawn up in a similar three-line formation, and gave the word to march, and off we went, I needless to say, uttering the most heart-felt prayers that I might come out of that job with a whole skin. Many a queer position have I found myself in, but never before in one quite so unpleasant as the present, or one in which my chance of coming off safe was so small.

By the time we reached the edge of the plateau the Grays were already half-way down the slope ending in the tongue of grass-land that ran up into the bend of the mountain, something as the frog of a horse's foot runs up in the shoe. The excitement in Twala's camp on the plain beyond was very great, and regiment after regiment were starting forward at a long swinging trot in order to reach the root of the tongue of land before the attacking force could emerge into the plain of Loos.

This tongue of land, which was some three hundred yards in depth, was even at its root or widest part not more than one hundred and fifty paces across, while at its tip it scarcely measured sixty. The Grays, who, in passing down the side of the hill and on to the tip of the tongue, had formed in column, on reaching the spot where it broadened out again re-assumed their triple line formation, and halted dead.

Then we—that is, the Buffaloes—moved down the tip of the tongue and took our stand in reserve, about one hundred yards behind the last line of the Grays, and on slightly higher ground. Meanwhile we had leisure to observe Twala's entire force, which had evidently been reinforced since the morning attack, and could not now, notwithstanding their losses, number less than forty thousand, moving swiftly toward us. But as they drew near the root of the tongue they hesitated, having discovered that only one regiment could advance into the gorge at a time, and that there, some seventy yards from the mouth of it, unassailable except in front, on account of the high walls of bowlder-strewn ground on either side, stood the famous regiment of Grays, the pride and glory of the Kikuanas army, ready to hold the way against their forces as the three Romans once held the bridge against thousands. They hesitated and finally stopped their advance; there was no eagerness to cross spears with those three lines of grim warriors who stood so firm and ready. Presently, however, a tall general, with the customary head-dress of nodding ostrich-plumes came running up, attended by a group of chiefs and orderlies, being, I thought, none other than Twala himself, and gave an order, and the first regiment raised a shout, and charged up toward the Grays, who remained perfectly still and silent till the attacking troops were within forty yards, and a volley of bollox or throwing-knives, came rattling among their ranks.

(To be Continued.)

Congress adjourned to-day sine die.

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