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KING SOLOMON'S MINES

A MOST ATTRACTIVE STORY.

CHAPTER XIX. IGNOZI'S FAREWELL.

Ten days from that eventful morning found us once more in our old quarters at Loo; and, strange to say, but little worse for our terrible experience, except that my stubby hair came out of that cave about three shades grayer than it went in, and that Good never was quite the same after Fouant's death, which seemed to move him very greatly.

I am bound to say that, looking at the thing from the point of view of an oldish man of the world, I consider her removal was a fortunate occurrence, since, otherwise, complications would have been sure to ensue.

The poor creature was no ordinary native girl, but a person of great, I had almost said stately, beauty, and of considerable refinement of mind.

But no amount of beauty or refinement could have made an entanglement between Good and herself a desirable occurrence; for, as she herself put it, "Can the sun mate with the darkness, or the white with the black?"

I need hardly state that we never again penetrated into Solomon's treasure-chamber. After we had rested from our fatigues, a process which took us forty-eight hours, we descended into the great pit in the hope of finding the hole by which we had crept out of the mountain, but with no success.

To begin with, rain had fallen, and obliterated our spoor; and what is more, the sides of the vast pit were full of anti-bear and other tracks. It was impossible to say to which of these we owed our safety.

We also, on the day before we started back to Loo, made a further examination of the wonders of the stalactite cave, and, drawn by a kind of restless feeling, even penetrated once more into the Chamber of the Dead; and, passing beneath the spear of the white Death, gazed with sensations which would be quite impossible for me to describe.

At last we were in the cave, and the mass of rock which had shut us off from escape, thinking the while of the precious treasures beyond, or the mysterious old hag whose flattened fragments lay crushed beneath it, and of the fair girl of whose tomb it was the portal.

I gazed at the "rock," for, to examine as we would, we could find no traces of the joint of the sliding door; nor, indeed, could we see the secret, nor, utterly lost, that worked it, though I tried for an hour or more. It was certainly a marvelous bit of mechanism, characteristic, in its massive and yet inimitable simplicity, of the age which produced it; and I doubt if the world has such another to show.

At last we gave it up in disgust, though, if the mass had suddenly risen before our eyes, I doubt if we should have screwed up courage to step over Gagozi's marked remains, and once more enter the treasure-chamber, even in the sure and uncertain hope of uninitiated diamonds.

And yet I could have cried at the idea of leaving all that treasure, the biggest treasure probably that has ever in the world's history been accumulated in one spot.

But there was no help for it. Only dynamite could force its way through five feet of solid rock, and we left it. Perhaps in some remote unborn century, a more fortunate explorer may hit upon the "Open Sesame," and flood the world with gems. But, myself, I doubt it.

Somewhat, I seem to feel that the millions of pounds' worth of gems that lie in the three coffers will never shine round the neck of an earthly beauty. "They and Fouant's bones will keep good company till the end of all things."

With a sigh of disappointment we made our way back, and next day started for Loo. And yet it was really very ungrateful of us to be disappointed; for, as the reader will remember, I had, by a lucky thought, taken the precaution to fill the pockets of my old shooting-coat with gems before we left our prison-house. A good many of these fell out in the course of our roll down the side of the pit, including most of the big ones, which I had crammed in on the top. But, comparatively speaking, an enormous quantity still remained, including eighteen large stones fairly big, and about one hundred and forty carats in weight.

My old shooting-coat still held enough treasure to make a fortune, if not millions, at least exceedingly wealthy men, and yet to keep enough stones each to make the three finest sets of gems in Europe. So we had not done so badly.

On arriving at Loo, we were most cordially received by Ignozi, whom we found well, and busily engaged in consolidating his powers, and reorganizing the remnants which had suffered most in the great struggle with Twaia.

He listened with breathless interest to our wonderful story, but when we told him of our old Gagozi's fruitfulness he grew thoughtful.

"Come hither," he called to a very old induna (councillor), who was sitting with others in a circle round the king, out of ear-shot. The old man rose, approached, saluted and seated himself.

"Thou art old," said Ignozi.

"Ay, my lord the king!"

"Tell me when thou wast little, didst thou know Gagozi the rich-doctor?"

"Ay, my lord the king!"

"How was she then - young, like thee?"

"Not so, my lord the king! She was even as now; old and dried, very ugly, and full of wickedness."

"She is no more, she is dead."

"So, oh, king! then a curse is taken from the land."

"Koom! I go, black puppy, who tore out the old dog's throat. Koom!"

"Ye see, my brothers," said Ignozi, "this was a strange woman, and I rejoice that she is dead. She would have let ye die in the dark place, and mayhap afterward she had found a way to slay me as she found a way to slay my father, and set up Twaia, whom her heart loved, in his place. Now go on with the tale; surely there never was the like!"

After I had narrated all the story of our escape, I, as we had agreed between ourselves that I should, took the opportunity to address Ignozi as to our departure from Kukuanaaland.

"And now, Ignozi, the time has come for us to bid thee farewell, and start to seek once more our own land. Behold, Ignozi, with us thou hast a servant, and now we leave thee a mighty king. If thou art grateful to us, remember to do even as they didst promise; to rule justly, to respect law, and to put none to death without a cause. So shalt thou prosper. To-morrow, at break of day, Ignozi, will thou give us an escort who shall lead us across the mountains? Is it not so, O king?"

Ignozi covered his face with his hands for a while before answering.

"My heart is sore," he said, at last; "your words split my heart in twain. What have I done to ye, Inebou, Macumazahn, and Bougan, that ye should leave me desolate? Ye who stood by me in rebellion and in battle, will ye leave me in the day of peace and victory? What will ye do - wives? Choose from out the land! Ye place to live in? Behold, the land is yours as far as ye can see. The white man's houses? Ye shall teach my people how to build them. Cattle for beef and milk? Every married man shall bring ye an ox or cow. Will game to hunt? Does not the elephant walk through my forests, and the river-horse sleep in the reeds? Would ye make war? My traps (tridents) wait for you. It there is anything more that I can give, that will I give ye."

"Nay, Ignozi, we want no these things," I answered; "we would seek our own place."

"Now do I perceive," said Ignozi, bitterly, and with flashing eyes, "that it is the sorrow that ye love more than me, your friend. Ye have the stones, now would ye go to Natal and see as the moving black water and sail down, and be rich, as it is the custom of a white man and a white man. But ye shall see the sorrow that ye seek. Death shall it be to him who sees his foot in the ocean of the desert."

"I have spoken, white men; ye can go."

I laid my hand upon his arm. "Ignozi," I said, "tell us, when thou didst wander in Zululand, and among the white men in Natal, did not time heart turn to the land thy mother told thee of, thy native land, where thou didst see the light, and play when thou wast little, the land where thy place was?"

"It was even so, Macumazahn."

"Then thus do our hearts turn to our land and to our own place."

Then came a pause. When Ignozi broke it, it was in a different voice.

"I do perceive that thy words are, now as ever, wise and full of reason, Macumazahn; that which lies in the air ives not to run a dog the ground, the white man loves not to live on the level of the black. Well, ye must go, and leave my heart sore, because ye will be as dead to me, since from where ye will be no tidings can come to me."

"But listen, and let all the white men know my words. No other white man shall cross the mountains, even if any man live to guns and rum. My people shall fight with the spear, and drink water, like their forefathers before them. I will have no praying-men to put fear of death into men's hearts, to stir them up against the king, and make a pain for the white men who follow to run on. If a white man comes to my camp, I will push him back; if a hundred come I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me. None shall ever come for the shining stones; no, not an arm, for if they come I will send a regiment and fill up the pit, and break down the white columns in the caves and in the land with rocks, so that none can and where the way to my place is lost. But for ye three, Inebou, Macumazahn, and Bougan, the path is always open; for ye, Ignozi, ye are dearer to me than aught that breathes."

"And ye would go, Infadoos, my uncle, and my Induna, shall take thee by the hand and guide thee, with a regiment. There is, as I have feared, another way across the mountains that he said, another way. Farewell, my brothers, brave white men. See ye no more for I have no heart to bear it. Hence, I make a decree, and it shall be published from the mountains to the mountains, your names, Inebou, Macumazahn, and Bougan, shall be as the names of dead kings, and he who speaks them shall die. So shall your memory be preserved in the land forever."

This extraordinary and negative way of showing intense respect is by no means unknown among African people, and the result is that, if, as is usual, the name in question has a significance, the meaning has to be expressed by an idiom or another word. In this way a memory is preserved for generations, or until the new word supplants the old one.

"Go now, ere my eyes rain tears like a woman's. At times when ye look back at the path of life, or when ye are old, and gather yourselves together to crouch before the fire, because the sun has no more heat, ye will think of how we stood shoulder to shoulder in that great battle that thy wise words planned, Macumazahn; of how thou wast the point of that horn that galled Twaia's flank, Bougan; whilst thou stood in the ring of the Grays, Inebou, and then went down before thee as like corn before a sickle; ay, and of how thou didst break the wild bull's (Twaia's) strength, and bring his pride to dust. Fare ye well forever, Inebou, Macumazahn, and Bougan, my lords and my friends."

He rose, looked earnestly at us, for a few seconds, and then threw the corner of his sarong over his head, so as to cover his face from us.

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Feb. 23.

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