

SHE: A HISTORY OF ADVENTURE.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.

CHAPTER IV.—THE SQUALL.



OW different is the scene that I have now to tell from that which has just been told!

and the familiar volumes on the shelves, and in their place there rises a vision of the great calm ocean gleaming in shaded sil ver lights beneath the beams of the full African moon.

The Arab at the tiller holds up his hand, and says one word: "Simba!" (lion).

"To-morrow, by ten o'clock," I say, "we ought, if the captain is not out in his reckoning, which I think very probable, to make this mysterious rock with a man's head and begin our shooting."

"And begin our search for the ruined city and the Fire of Life," corrected Leo, taking his pipe from his mouth and laughing a little.

"Nonsense!" I answered. "You were airing your Arabic with that man at the tiller this afternoon. What did he tell you? He has been trading (slave-trading, probably) up and down these latitudes for half of his iniquitous life, and once landed on this very 'man' rock. Did he ever hear anything of the ruined city or the caves?"

"No," answered Leo. "He says that the country is all swamp behind, and full of snakes, especially pythons, and game, and that no man lives there. But then there is a belt of swamp all along the east African coast, so that does not go for much."

"Yes," I said, "it does—it goes for malaria. You see what sort of an opinion these gentry have of the country. Not one of them will go with us. They think that we are mad, and upon my word I believe that they are right. If ever we see old England again I shall be astonished. However, it does not greatly matter to me, at my age, but I am anxious for you, Leo, and Job. It's a Tom Fool's business, my boy."

"All right, Uncle Horace. So far as I am concerned, I am willing to take my chance. Look! What is that cloud?" and he pointed to a dark blotch upon the starry sky, some miles astern of us.

"Go and ask the man at the tiller," I said. He rose and stretched his long legs, and went. Presently he returned.

"He says it is a squall, but it will pass far on one side of us." Just then Job came up, looking very stout and English in his shooting suit of brown flannel, and with a sort of perplexed appearance upon his honest round face that had been very common with him since he got into these strange waters.

"Please, sir," he said, touching his sun hat, which was stuck on to the back of his head in a somewhat ludicrous fashion, "as we have got all those guns and things in the provisions in the lockers, I think it would be best if I got down and slept in her. I don't like the looks"—here he dropped his voice to a portentous whisper—"of these black gentry; they have such a wonderful thievish way about them. Supposing now, that some of them were to slip into the boat at night and cut the cable, and make off with her? It would be a pretty go, that would."

The whole-boat, I may explain, was one that we had had built at Dundee, in the north of England, and brought with us, as we knew that this coast was a net-work of creeks, and that we might require something to navigate them with. She was a beautiful boat, thirty feet in length, with a center-board for sailing, copper-bottomed to keep the worms out of her, and full of water-tight compartments. The captain of the dhow had told us that when we reached the rock, which he knew well, and which appeared to be identical with the one described upon the sherd and by Leo's father, he would not probably be able to run up to it on account of the shallows and breakers, so we had employed three hours that very morning, whilst we were totally becalmed, the wind having dropped at sunrise, in transferring most of our goods and chattels to the whale-boat, placing the guns, ammunition, and preserved provisions in the water-tight lockers specially prepared for them, so that when we did sight the fabled rock we should have nothing to do but step into the boat and run her ashore. Another reason that induced us to take this precautionary step was that Arab captives are apt to run past the point that they are making, either from carelessness or owing to a mistake in its identity. Now, as sailors will know, it is quite impossible for a dhow which is only rigged to run before the monsoon to beat back against it. Therefore we got our boat ready to row for the rock at any moment.

"Well, Job," I said, "perhaps it would be as well. There are lots of blankets there, only be careful to keep out of the moon, or it may turn your head or blind you."

"Lord, sir! I don't think it would much matter if it did; it is that turned already with the sight of these blackmoors and their filthy, thieving ways. They are only fit for muck, they are; and they smell bad enough for it already."

Job, it will be perceived, was not attached to the manners and customs of our dark-skinned brothers.

Accordingly we hauled up the boat by the tow-ropes till it was right under the stern of the dhow, and Job bundled into her about as gracefully as a sack of potatoes. Then we returned and sat down on the deck again, and smoked and talked in little gusts and jerks. The night was so lovely, and our brains were so full of suppressed excitement of one sort and another that we did not feel inclined to turn in. For nearly an hour we sat thus, and then, I think, we both dozed off. At least I have a faint recollection of Leo sleepily explain-

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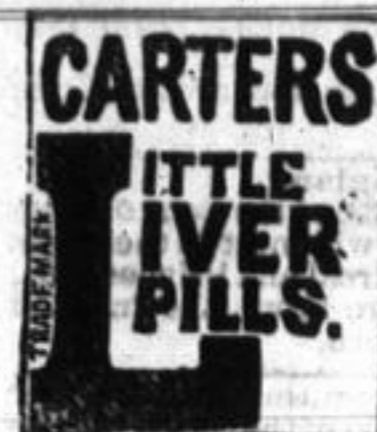


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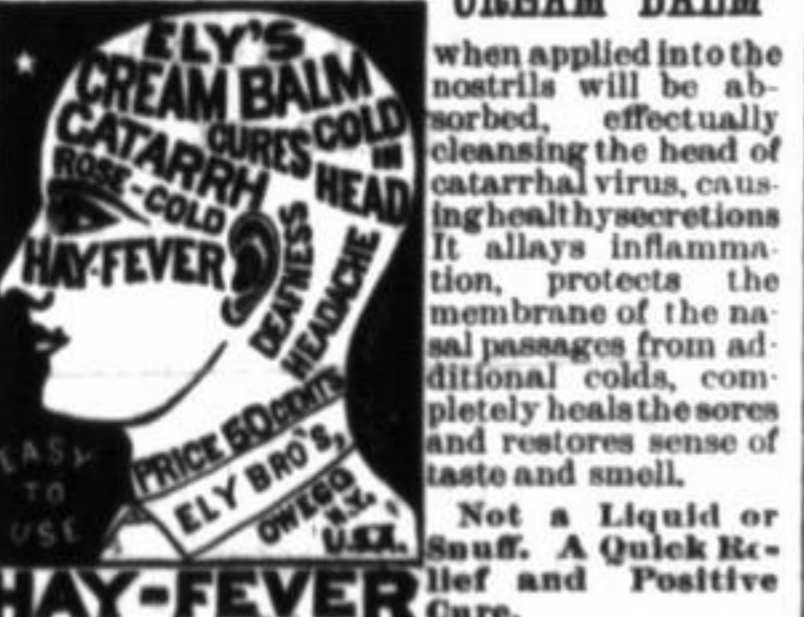
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