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ALLAN QUARTERMAIN

A FROWNING CITY.

By H. Rider Haggard, Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," etc.

CHAPTER I.—THE CONSUL'S YARN

A week had passed since the death of my poor boy Harry, and one evening I was in my room, walking up and down and thinking, when there came a ring at the outer door. Going down the steps, I opened it myself, and in came my old friends, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain John Good, R.N. They entered the vestibule and sat themselves down before the wide hearth, where I remember a particularly good fire of logs was burning.

"It is very kind of you to come round," I said, by way of making a remark; "it must have been heavy walking in the snow."

They said nothing, but Sir Henry slowly filled his pipe and lit it with a burning ember. As he leaned forward to do so, the fire got hold of a grassy bit of pine, and flared up brightly, throwing the whole scene into strong relief, and I thought what a splendid-looking man he was. Calm, powerful face, clear-cut features, large gray eyes, yellow beard and hair—altogether a magnificent specimen of the higher type of humanity. Nor did his form belie his face. I have never seen wider shoulders or a deeper chest. Indeed, Sir Henry's girth is so great that, though he is six feet two high, he does not strike one as a tall man. As I looked at him I could not help thinking what a curious contrast my little dried up self presented to his grand face and form. Imagine to yourself a small, withered, yellow-faced man of sixty-three, with thin hands, large brown eyes, a head of grizzled hair, cut short and standing up like a half-worn scrubbing brush—total weight, in my clothes, one hundred and thirty-two pounds—and you will get a very fair idea of Allan Quartermain, or by the natives "Macumazahn anglic,"—he who keeps a bright lookout at night, or in vulgar English, a sharp fellow, who is not to be taken in.

Then there was Good, who is not like either of us, being short, dark, stout—very stout—with twinkling black eyes, in one of which an eyeglass is everlastingly fixed. I say stout, but it is a mild term; I regret to state that of late years Good has been running to stomach in a most disgraceful way. Sir Henry tells him that it comes from idleness and overfeeding; and Good does not like it at all, though he cannot deny it. We sat for a while, and then I got a match and lit the lamp that stood ready on the table; for the half-light began to grow dreary, as it is apt to do when one has just one short week ago buried the hope of one's life. All this time, Curtis and Good had been silent, feeling, I suppose, that they had nothing to say that could do me any good, and content to give me the comfort of their presence and silent sympathy; for it was only their second visit since the funeral. And it is, by the way, from the fact of the presence of others that we really derive support in our dark hours of grief, and not from their talk, which often only serves to irritate us. Before a bad storm the game always held together; but they cease their calling.

They sat and smoked, and I stood by the fire also smoking, and looking at them. At last I spoke. "Old friends," I said, "how long is it since we got back from Kuanaland?"

"Three years," said Good. "Why do you ask?"

"I ask because I think that I have had a long enough spell of civilization. I am going back to the wild."

Sir Henry laid his head back in his arm-chair and laughed one of his deep laughs. "How very odd," he said; "eh, Good?"

Good beamed at me mysteriously through his eyeglass, and murmured, "Yes, odd—very odd."

"I don't quite understand," said I, looking from one to the other; for I dislike mysteries.

"Don't you, old fellow?" said Sir Henry. "Then I will explain. As Good and I were walking up here we had a talk."

Sir Henry laid his head back in his arm-chair and laughed.

have you got one?" "I have," said Good, solemnly. "I never do anything without a reason; and it isn't a lady—at least, if it is, it's several."

"I looked at him again. Good is so over poweringly frivolous. 'What is it?' I said. 'Well, if you really want to know, though I'd rather not speak of a delicate and strictly personal matter, I'll tell you. I'm getting too fat.'

"Shut up, Good," said Sir Henry. "And now, Quartermain, tell us where do you propose going to?"

"I lit my pipe, which had gone out, before answering. 'Have you people ever heard of Mt. Kenia?' I asked. 'Don't know the place,' said Good. 'Did you ever hear of the Island of Lamu?' I asked again. 'No. Stop, though—Isn't it a place about three hundred miles north of Zanzibar?'

"Yes. Now listen. What I have to propose is this. That we go to Lamu, and thence make our way about two hundred and fifty miles inland to Mt. Kenia; from Mt. Kenia on inland to Mt. Lekakisera, another two hundred miles, or thereabouts, beyond which no white man has, to the best of my belief, ever been; and then, if we get so far, right on into the unknown interior. What do you say to that, my hearties?"

"It's a big order," said Sir Henry, reflectively. "You are right," I answered, "it is; but I take it that we are all three of us in search of a big order. We want a change of scene, and we are likely to get one—a thorough change. All my life I have longed to visit those parts, and I mean to do it before I die. My poor boy's death has broken the last link between me and civilization, and I'm off to my native wilds. And now I'll tell you another thing; and that is, that for years and years I have heard rumors of a great white race that is supposed to have its home somewhere up in this direction, and I have a mind to see if there is any truth in them. If you fellows like to come, well and good; if not, I'll go alone."

"I'm your man, though I don't believe in your white race," said Sir Henry Curtis, rising and placing his arm upon my shoulder. "Ditto," remarked Good; "I'll go into training at once. By all means let's go to Mt. Kenia and the other place with an unpronounceable name, and look for a white race that does not exist. It's all one to me."

"When do you propose to start?" asked Sir Henry. "This day month," I answered, "by the British India steamboat; and don't you be so certain that things don't exist because you do not happen to hear of them. Remember King Solomon's Mines."

Some fourteen weeks or so had passed since the date of this conversation, and this history continues on its way in very different surroundings. After much deliberation and inquiry we came to the conclusion that our best starting-point for Mt. Kenia would be from the neighborhood of the mouth of the Tana river, and not from Mombasa, a place over one hundred miles nearer Zanzibar. This conclusion we arrived at from information given to us by a German trader whom we met upon the steamer at Aden. I think that he was the dirtiest German I ever met; but he was a good fellow, and gave us a great deal of valuable information. "Lamu," said he, "you go to Lamu—Oh ze beautiful place! and he turned up his fat face and beamed with mild rapture. "One year and a half I live there and never change my shirt—never at all."

And so it came to pass that on arriving at the island we disembarked with all our goods and chattels, and, not knowing where to go, marched boldly up to the house of Her Majesty's Consul, where we were most hospitably received.

men for personal servants and hunters, and to hire boaters from village to village. It will give you an infinity of trouble; but, perhaps, on the whole, it will prove a cheaper and more advantageous course than engaging a caravan, and you will be less liable to desertion. (To be Continued).

When baby was sick, we gave her Castoria. When she was a child she cried for Castoria. When she became Miss, she clung to Castoria. When she had children, she gave them Castoria.

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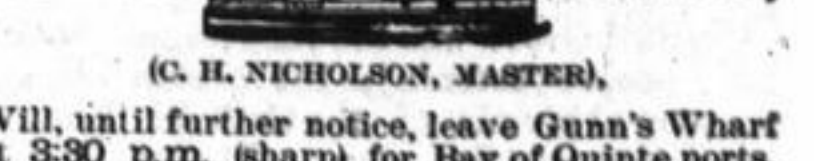
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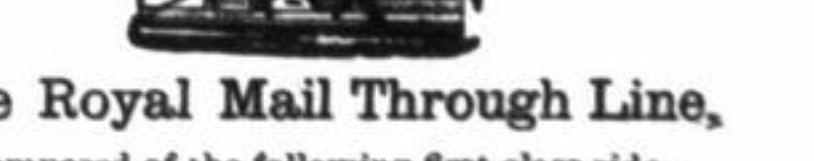
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