

ALLAN QUATERMAIN ;

A FROWNING CITY.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "She," "Dawn," etc. Published by the ROSK PUN LISHING COMPANY, and for sale by all the Book-sellers. Copyrighted.

CHAPTER XVIII.—WAR! WAR! WAR!

Telling Umlopogaas to wait, I dashed into my chambers and went out at once to Sir Henry's room, where I had deposited his store of food for wood. It was a great watch to see his face as he heard I had been smoking a pipe while he was away. "Great heavens!" he said, "have I been smoking a pipe while you have been nearly maniac?—and all through me? What a head I have a minute ago! It would have served me right if Umlopogaas had cut her down in the act."

"Ay," said the Zulu. "Fear not; I should have slain her ere she struck. I was but waiting the moment."

After he had told his tale Umlopogaas went off unaccompanied to get his morning meal, and Sir Henry and I fell to talking.

At first he was very bitter against Good, who, he said, was no longer to be trusted, having despoiled the loved Sorais to escape by some secret stair, when it was his duty to have handed her over to justice. Indeed, he spoke in the most unmeasured terms on the matter.

"Really, my dear fellow," I said at length, "one would never think, to hear you talk, that you were the man who had an interview with this same lady yesterday, and found it rather difficult to resist her fascinations, notwithstanding your ties to one of the loveliest and most loving women in the whole world. Now suppose that it was Nyleptha who had tried to murder Sorais and you had caught her, and she had plied me with you, would you have been so very eager to hand her over to an open shame, and to death by fire? Just look at the matter through Good's eye-glasses for a minute before you denounce an old friend as a scoundrel."

He listened to this jobation submissively, and then frankly acknowledged that he had spoken harshly.

While we were pondering, and wondering what was to be done—for the whole subject was a thorny one—I suddenly heard a great clamor in the courtyard outside, and distinguished the voices of Umlopogaas and Alphonse, the former cursing furiously, and the latter yelling in terror.

Hurrying out to see what was the matter, I was met by a ludicrous sight. The little Frenchman was running up the courtyard at an extraordinary speed, and after him sped Umlopogaas like a great greyhound.

Just as I came out he caught him, and, lifting him right off his feet, carried him some paces to a beautiful but very dense flowering shrub, which bore a flower not unlike the geranium, but was covered with short thorns. Next, despite his howls and struggles, he with one mighty thrust plunged poor Alphonse head first into the bush, so that nothing but the calves of his legs and his heels remained in evidence. Then, satisfied with what he had done, the Zulu folded his arms and stood grimly contemplating the Frenchman's kicks, and listening to his yells, which were awful.

"What art thou doing?" I said, running up. "Wouldst thou kill the man? Pull him out of the bush."

It appeared that Alphonse habitually cooked Umlopogaas' porridge, which the latter ate for breakfast in the corner of the courtyard, just as he would have done at home in Zululand, from a gourd and with a wooden spoon. Now Umlopogaas had, like many Zulus, a great horror of fish, which he considered a species of water-snake. So Alphonse, who was fond of playing tricks as a monkey, and who was also a consummate cook, determined to make him eat some. Accordingly, he grated up a quantity of white fish very finely, and mixed it with the Zulu's porridge, who swallowed it nearly all down in ignorance of what he was eating. But, unfortunately for Alphonse, he could not restrain his joy at this sight, and came capering and peering round, till at last Umlopogaas, who was very clever in his way, suspected something, and, after a careful examination of the remains of his porridge, discovered "the buffalo heifer's trick," and, in revenge, served him as I have said.

This incident was unimportant enough in itself, but I narrate it because it led to serious consequences. As soon as he had stanchied the bleeding from his scratches, and washed himself, Alphonse went off, still cursing, to recover his temper, a process which I knew from experience would take a very long time. When he had gone, I gave Umlopogaas a jobation, and told him that I was ashamed of his behavior.

"Ah, well, Macumazahn," he said, "you must be gentle with me, for here is not my place. I am weary of it; weary to death of eating and drinking and sleeping and giving in marriage. I love not this soft life in stone houses that takes the heart out of a man, and turns his strength to water, and his flesh to fat. I love not the white robes and the delicate women, the blowing of trumpets and the flying of hawks. When we fought the Masai at the kraal yonder, ah, then life was worth the living, but here is never a blow struck in anger, and I begin to think I shall go the way of my fathers and lift Inkosikasi no more," and he held up the ax and gazed at it in sorrow.

"Ah," I said, "that is thy complaint, is it? Thou hast the blood-sickness, hast thou? and the Woodpecker wants a tree. And at thy age, too! Saams on thee, Umlopogaas!"

"Ay, Macumazahn, mine is a red tree, yet it is better and more honest than some. Better is it to slay a man in fair fight than to suck out his heart's blood in buying and selling, and usury after your white fashion. Many a man have I slain, yet is there never a one that I should fear to look in the face again; ay, many are there who once were friends, and whom I should be right glad to snuff with. I mine; each to his own people and in the fit bush country, and so it is with me, Macumazahn. I am rough, I know it, and when my blood is warm I know not what I do, but yet will thou be sorry when the night swallows me, and I am utterly lost in the blackness, for in thy heart thou lovest me, my father, Macumazahn the fox, though I be naughty, but a broken-down Zulu was dog—a chief, for whom there is no room in his own kraal, an outcast and a wanderer in strange places; ay, I love thee, Macumazahn, for I have smooched away together, and there is that broken in that cannot be seen, and yet is too strong for breaking."

"Ay, old wolf," I said, "thine is a strange love. Thou wouldst smite me to the earth if I stood in thy path to sorrow."

A human love there all the same when the blow had gone fairly home. Is there any chance of some fighting here, Macumazahn?" he went on, in an insinuating voice. "Methought that what I saw last night did show that the two great Queens were vexed one with another. Else had the 'Lady of the Night' not brought that dagger with her."

I agreed with him that it showed that more or less pique and irritation existed between the ladies, and told him how things stood, and that they were quarrelling over Incubu.

"Ah, is it so?" he exclaimed, springing up in delight; "then will there be war as surely as the rivers rise in the rains—war to the end. Women love the last blow as well as the last word, and when they fight for love they are pitiless as a woman le buffalo. See thou, Macumazahn, a woman will swim through blood to her desire, and will think nothing of it. With these eyes I have seen it once, and twice also. As for Macumazahn, we shall see the place of the cross burning yet, and hear the battle cries come ringing up the street. After all, I have no quarrel for nothing. Can this fight, think yet?"

Just then Sir Henry joined us, and Good arrived, too, from another direction, looking very pale and hollow-eyed. The moment Umlopogaas saw the latter he stopped his bloodthirsty talk and greeted him. "Ah, Bougwana," he cried, "greeting to thee, Inkooos, thou art surely weary. Didst thou hunt too much yesterday?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he went on: "Listen, Bougwana, and I will tell thee a story; it is about a woman, therefore will thou hear it, is it not so?"

"There was a man and he had a brother, and there was a woman who loved the man's brother and was beloved of the man. But the man's brother had a favorite wife and loved not the woman, and he made a mock of her. Then the woman, being very cunning and fierce-hearted for revenge, took counsel with herself and said to the man, 'I love thee, and if thou wilt make war upon thy brother I will marry thee.' And he knew it was a lie, yet because of his great love of the woman, who was very fair, did he listen to her words and made war. And when many people had been killed, his brother sent to him, saying, 'Why slayest thou me? What hurt have I done unto thee? From my youth up have I not loved thee? When thou wast little did I not nurse thee, and have we not gone down to war together and divided the cattle, girl by girl, ox by ox, and cow by cow of me and my mother?'"

"Then the man's heart was heavy, and he knew that his path was evil, and he put aside the tempting of the woman and ceased to make war on his brother, and lived at peace in the same kraal with him. And after a time the woman came to him and said, 'I have lost the past, I will be thy wife.' And in his heart he knew that it was a lie, and that she thought the evil thing, yet because of his love that he take her to wife."

"And the very night that they were wed, when the man was plunged into a deep sleep, did the woman arise and take his ax from his hand and creep into the hut of his brother and slay him in his rest. Then did she sink back like a large lioness and pace the thong of the ox back upon the wrist and go her way."

"And at the dawning the people came shouting, 'Lousta is slain in the night, and they came unto the hut of the man and there he lay asleep, and by him was the red ax. Then did they remember the war and say, 'Lo! he hath of a surety slain his brother,' and they would have taken and killed him, but he rose and fled swiftly, and as he fled he slew the woman."

"But death could not wipe out the evil she had done, and on him rested the weight of all her sin. Therefore is he an outcast and his name a scorn among his own people; for on him, and him only, resteth the burden of her who betrayed. And, therefore, does he wander afar, without a kraal and without an ox or a wife, and therefore will he die afar like a stricken buck and his name be as cursed from generation to generation, in that the people say that he slew his brother, Lousta, by treachery in the night-time."

"I see our Zulu paused, and I saw that he was deeply agitated by his own story. Presently he lifted his head, which he had bowed to his breast, and went on: "I was that man, Bougwana. O! I was that man, and now hark thou! Even as I am so wilt thou be—a fool, a play-thing, an ox of burden to carry the evil deeds of another. Listen! When thou didst creep after the 'Lady of the Night' I was hard upon thy track. When she struck thee with the knife in the sleeping-place of the White Queen, I was there also; when thou didst let her slip away like a snake in the stones, I saw thee, and I knew that she had bewitched thee, and that a true man had abandoned the truth, and he who aforetime loved a straight path had taken a crooked way. Forgive me, my father, my words are sharp, but out of a full heart are they spoken. See her no more, or shalt thou go down with honor to the grave. Else because of the beauty of a woman that weareth as a garment of fur shall thou be even as I am, and perchance with more cause. I have said."

Throughout this long and eloquent address Good had been perfectly silent, but when the tale began to shape itself so aptly to his own case, he colored up, and when he learned that what had passed between him and Sorais had been verisimile, he was evidently much distressed.

"I must say," he said, with a bitter little laugh, "that I scarcely thought that I should live to be taught my duty by a Zulu, but it just shows what we can come to. I wonder if you fellows can understand how humiliated I feel, and the bitterest part of it is that I deserve it all. Of course I should have handed her over to the guard, but I could not, and that is a fact. I let her go and I promised to say nothing more, it is the shame to me. She told me that if I would side with her she would marry me and make me king of this country; but, thank goodness, I did find the heart to say that even to marry her I could not desert my friends. And now you can do what you like; I deserved it all. All I have to say is that I hope you may never love a woman with all your heart and then be so sorely tempted of her." And he turned to go.

"Look here, old fellow," said Sir Henry, "just stop a minute. I have a little tale to tell you, too." And he proceeded to narrate what had taken place on the previous day between Sorais and himself.

"This was a finishing stroke to poor Good. It is not pleasant to any man to learn that he has been made a fool of; but when the circumstances are as peculiarly atrocious as in the present case it is about as bitter a pill as anybody can be called on to swallow."

"Do you know," he said, "I think that between you and your fellows have about worked a cure," and he turned and walked away, and I for one felt very sorry for him. Ah, if the moths would always carefully avoid the candle, how few burned wings there would be!

It was a bold stroke for her to make, and it appealed to the imagination, but human nature in Zu-Vendis, as elsewhere, loves that which is bold and not afraid to break a rule, and is, moreover, peculiarly susceptible to appeal to its practical side.

And so the people cheered till the roof rang, but "Sorais of the Night" stood there with downcast eyes, for she could not bear to see her sister's triumph which robbed her of the man whom she had hoped to win, and in the awfulness of her jealous anger she trembled and turned white like an aspen in a royal race is always a beautiful sight, but such beauty and such rage I never saw combined before, and I can only say that the effect produced was well worthy of the two.

"And thinkest thou, Nyleptha," she cried, in notes which pealed through the great hall like a clarion, "thinkest thou that I, a Queen of the Zu-Vendi, will brook that this base outlander shall sit upon my father's throne, and rear up his breeds to fill the place of the great House of Starway? Never! never! while there is life in my bosom and a man to follow me and a spear to strike with. Who is on my side? Who?"

"Now, hand thou over this foreign wolf, and those who came to prey here with him, to the doom of fire, for have they not committed the deadly sin against the Sun? or Nyleptha, I give thee war—red war! Ay, I say to thee that the path of thy passion shall be marked out by the blinding of thy tows and watered with the blood of those who cleave to thee. On thy head rest the burden of the dead, and in thy ears ring the groans of the dying and the cries of the widows and those who are left fatherless forever and forever."

"I tell thee I will tear thee, Nyleptha, the White Queen, from the throne, and that thou shalt be hurled—ay, hurled, even from the topmost stair of the great way to the foot laerof, in that thou hast covered the name of the house of him who built it with black shame. And I tell ye, strangers, all save thou, Bougwana, whom, because thou didst do me a service, I will save alive if thou wilt leave these men and follow me." (here poor Good shook his head vigorously, and ejaculated "Can't be done" in English), "that I will wrap you in sheets of gold and hang you yet alive in chains from the four golden trumpets of the four angels that fly east and west, and north and south, from the giddy pinnacles of the Temple, so that ye may be a token and a warning to the land. And as for thee, Incubu, thou shalt die in yet another fashion that I will not tell thee now."

She ceased, panting for breath, for her passion shook her like a storm, and a murmur ran through the hall. Then Nyleptha answered calmly and with dignity: "I'll would it become my place and dignity, oh sister, so to speak as thou hast spoken and so to threaten as thou hast threatened. Yet if thou wilt make war then will I strive to bear up against thee, for if my hand seem soft yet shalt thou find it of iron when it grips thine armies by the throat. Sorais, I fear thee not. I weep for that which thou wilt bring upon our people and on myself; but for myself I say I fear thee not. Yet thou, who but yesterday did strive to win my lover and my lord from me, whom to-day thou dost call a 'foreign wolf,' to be thy lover and thy lord," (here there was an immense sensation in the hall), "thou who but last night, as I have learned but since thou didst enter here, didst creep like a snake into my sleeping-place—ay, even by a secret way, and wouldst have foully murdered me, thy sister, as I lay asleep—"

"It is not false," said I, producing the broken point of the dagger and holding it up. "Where is the haft from which this flew, Sorais?"

"It is not false," cried Good, determined at last to act like a loyal man. "I took her by the Queen's bed, and on my breast the dagger broke."

"Who is on my side?" cried Sorais, shaking his silver spear, for she saw that public sympathy was turning against her. "What, Bougwana! thou comest not?" she said, addressing Good, who was standing close to her, in a low, concentrated voice. "Thou pale-souled fool, for a reward thou shalt eat out thy heart with love of me and not be satisfied, and I thou mightest have been my husband and a king! At least I hold thee in chains that cannot be broken."

"Hark! hark!" she cried. "Here, with my hand upon the sacred stone that shall endure, so runs the prophecy, till the Zu-Vendi set their necks beneath an alien yoke, I declare war to the end. Who fol Jows Sorais of the Night to victory and honor?"

"I instantly the whole concourse began to cheer."

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