ALONE IN THE WILDERNESS

BY

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Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter One

Tis Justice, not Revenge

"Call it not revenge, my brother; say it is but an act of justice, stern justice, and I am with you."

"Allah is great, Allah is good," replied the Arab whom his companion had addressed as brother.

They were both talking in their own language, a language at once so forcible and flowery, that all attempts to render it into English ends but in a poverty-stricken paraphrase.

"Yes, Allah is good."

The difference between the two speakers was very remarkable. They were brothers only by courtesy.

One sat on the edge of a kind of wooden sofa or dais; in front of him was a small table of Hindoo manufacture, on which there stood a brown earthenware water chatty, some glasses, and a bottle of sherbet (Note 1). He was fair in skin, delicate in complexion, with a mild and almost benevolent aspect. He was unarmed, and though he wore the usual dress of an Arab gentleman, over all he wore a cloak of green camel's hair, probably denoting him to be a scion of the great prophet.

The other Arab was tall, stately, swarthy, nay, but almost black. He was armed cap-a-pie, and ever as he spoke he strode rapidly up and down the floor of the room. A large apartment it was, in an upper room of a great square flat-roofed house in Brava, a village or town close by the sea, and some distance north of the line.

The room had no signs of luxury or even comfort about it, and no more furniture than a gaol. The walls were of clay, and unadorned except by creeping lizards; the one little window looked out towards the ocean, and a long reef of rocks that lay like a gigantic breakwater—from north to south—about a mile out.

There were a few clouds in the sky that looked like gigantic ostrich feathers; now and then these would flit across the sun, casting patches of green shade on the otherwise blue sea.

That a breeze was blowing, or had been blowing far away out, and far away eastwards, was evident enough, even on the beach at Brava, for here the breakers were as tall as trees, they came curling onwards with the fleetness of desert horses, with the strength of a thousand cataracts, then broke on the sands with a noise like thunder, retreating again in a chaos of brown froth, with a hurtling, sucking sound, as if they would fain draw the very town itself into their grasp.

On the beach itself "the boys" were at play.

What was their play? What was their game? Was it football, tip-cat, or modest marbles? Not quite.

Just behold them in imagination, as I have done in reality. There cannot be fewer than a hundred of those boys scattered in groups all along the shore. Tall, lank, sharp-featured lads of all ages, from twelve to twenty. Naked they are except for the smallest of cummerbunds, and the sun is glittering on their well-greased skins.

Black? No, not quite black, rather of the colour of tarnished copper, their mouths are small and cruel-like, their features sharp and well-defined, their eyes twinkling with ill-concealed cunning and malice, and their heads surmounted by great hassocks of hair, in which clay has been mixed to make it stand well out. They use clay for the same purpose as ladies of civilisation used the perfumed bandoline.

They are Somali Indians, of the lowest caste, if, indeed, there be any caste among them.

Here are two engaged in what seems a mortal combat, a deadly duel. They are standing confronting each other at a distance of some twenty or thirty paces. Each is armed with a little round shield, made from the hardened skin of a water buffalo's hump, and studded with big brass nails. Each holds in his hand a long and deadly-looking spear—not a broad-bladed one, this latter being only used for hand-to-hand fighting. The game is that each may hurl his spear at the other when and how he pleases. The other has either to dodge it or receive its point on the small strong shield. The quick, rapid, snake-like movements of the body, and the strange but graceful attitudes assumed, are truly wonderful to behold. The agility of these Indians, their skill in parrying and strength in hurling these deadly spears if once witnessed can never be forgotten.

But wounds are not unfrequent, and on rare occasions a spear may pierce the body of a friendly antagonist. Blood is staunched by styptics, which Arab merchants vend them, and if a lad is slain, he does not obtain the comfort of a coroner's inquest, he is simply buried in the sand, or even exposed on the beach itself. Then at night wild dogs come and quarrel and fight over his remains, crabs creep up out of the sea to the awful feast, and what the dogs and crabs leave is speedily disposed of by colonies of ants. So the bones are picked clean enough; for a time they lie bleaching in the sun, till the tide comes up and gradually buries them in the soft sand.

Look again. Here are some half a dozen younger boys—guiltless of clothing of any sort; they have been playing in the sea, dashing in under the breakers with the speed of eels, and coming up far beyond in smooth but rolling water, disappearing under the surface, and remaining under for long minutes, bobbing up again, riding in upon the very curling sharp crests of the breakers themselves, and being floated and rolled up upon the beach in the smother of surf and spume, laughing, yelling, and turning head over heels with delight. And now they are fighting with bones, or pelting each other with them, laughing and yelling as loudly as ever.

Just one other tableau. Two tall youths engaged in a frenzied combat with Somali swords, terrible-looking long knives, as broad almost as a spade. The swiftness of stroke and parry or shield is truly marvellous; but at last, as if by a single accord, the awful knives and eke the shields are cast aside, and they clutch each other with deadly grip and fierce: they fight for the throats. See, they are both rolling on the sand, but one at last is victorious, his talonlike, long bony fingers have closed upon his adversary's neck. He beats his head against the sand, till eyeballs and tongue protrude, then he slowly rises, and retreats a pace or two, still with his eyes on his supposed foe. He feels backwards with his hand till he touches a sword, he seizes it, and with a yell springs forward again and stands triumphant over his fallen fellow, the deadly knife just grazing his neck. Will he strike? No, for here the combat ends. By and by the vanquished Indian lad will gasp and sigh, and presently rise, slowly and feebly, and creeping seawards, refresh himself with a dip beneath the waves.

But to return to the room where the Arabs are.

"They do tell me at Zanzibar," said the dark and soldier Arab, "that in Europe they place machines beneath the waves, which, if a ship do but strike, she is blown to death and destruction. Could we not import these? Money would not be wanting, and you, Mahmoud, have the key to good foreign society. Oh I fancy the glory of blowing up a British cruiser—!"

“Talk not thus,” was the reply, “nor let us even dream of forsaking the form in which our fathers fought. With sword and spear, and Allah’s help, they conquered the North, they overran the West, and laid even the might of Spain in the dust. Let us bide our time. Long has it been dark, but the dawn will come. A prophet will arise. He will conquer the world in Allah’s name, and every man, woman, or child who adopts not the true faith will be put to the knife.”

“Oh! these will be glorious times, Mahmoud.”

“Gloat not over them, Suliemon. It is still with the spirit of revenge you speak. Think of future wars and executions as but necessities, the darkness of the inevitable clouds, that will be dispelled by the glorious rising sun of peace and joy.”

“Revenge,” muttered Suliemon, through his set teeth. “Curb not my feelings, Mahmoud. They are just. Think what I have suffered from British cruisers. Thrice have they run me on shore, twice have they burned my dhows. To-day I would be wealthy but for them. Curses on them, I say!” he thundered, half drawing his sword, and sending it ringing back into the sheath again.

“Stay, brother, stay; I will not sit and hear such exclamations. Allah is good, but tempt him not, or he may leave you to a fate worse than that which befel your own brother in Zanzibar.”

“Yes, my brother was hanged, hanged at the hands of those infidel dogs. Oh! Mahmoud, Mahmoud, can you wonder if I sometimes forget myself, forget your teaching, and loose grip of our religion? My wife, too, Mahmoud, chased on shore—death by jungle fever. Would you have me forget that also, Mahmoud?”

“Yes,” said Mahmoud, solemnly; “I’d have you forget even that.”

Suliemon was standing by the little window, gazing seawards, and as Mahmoud spoke the last word—

“Look, look!” he shouted, or almost yelled. “It is she—it is my dhow—deep, deep, in the water—scudding northwards before the breeze; they are going to beach her ere she sinks—Allah! Allah be praised! I’ll have my wish!”

He girded his sword-belt more tightly as he spoke, and, without even a word of farewell to Mahmoud, rushed out, and down the Stone stairs. They ended in a little narrow lane which conducted him to the sands.

At once, on his appearance, all games were stopped. The boys dropped their bones, the young men sheathed their swords and shouldered their spears, and next minute he was surrounded. They knew by the face of their warlike chief he had something of much importance to communicate.

His words were brief and to the point. “Fifty of you I want,” he said. “You, Saleedin,” he continued, “will be captain. Be well-armed, bring irons and surf-boats, and carry with you water, boiled rice, and dates. Bid your friends farewell, the journey may be a long one.

“Saleedin, keep along on the brow of the hill, but keep the boys out of sight behind, keep abreast of yonder dhow, and when she is beached come quickly to me: I shall be on the shore.”

Right well had the captain of the double-masted slave dhow—captured by the Bunting—played his game. Right well and right cleverly.

As speedily as possible the dhow had been put in charge of Harry Milvaine; probably three hours had scarcely elapsed ere she and the gunboat parted company.

Knowing well that he could rely on his men, Harry retired about eleven o’clock to the beautiful saloon, and having caused Doomah, the Arab interpreter and spy who was acting steward, to light the lamps, he threw himself on a couch and gave way to thought. He did not feel at all inclined to sleep, and somehow or other, he, to-night, felt under the shadow of a cloud of melancholy. He could not account for it, he was seldom otherwise than light and bright and happy.

Being a Highlander, he was naturally somewhat superstitious.

“I would give worlds,” he said to himself, “to know what is doing at home to-night, and to be sure that my dear mother and father are well. Dear old father, sitting even now, perhaps, smoking his everlasting meerschaum behind his Scotsman. And mother—reading. Oh! would I could sit beside her for a moment, and tell her how often her boy thinks of her!”

Then all the events of his young days rose up before his mind—his governess and Towsie Jock; he laughed, melancholy though he was, when he thought of that night in the tree—his garden, his summer-house, and pets, and his dear friend Andrew.

He touched a gong and Doomah appeared.

“Are you sleepy?”

“No, sir, I not sleepy.”

“Then come and tell me a story—the story of your life.”

“Ah! dat is not mooch, sir. Plenty time I be in action. I have many wounds from Arab guns.”

“Because you’re a spy, you know.”

“A spy, sir! Not I, sir. No, I am interpreter; I fight in de interests of de Breetish Queen of England.”

“Well, well, have it so.”

“Pah! I no care dat mooch for de Arabs. Pah! When dey catch me den dey kill me. What matter? Some day all die. I am happy, I have one, two, tree wife, and dey all love Doomah, ebery one mooch more dan de oder. And when I go home I shall marry Number 4. Ha! ha!”

Doomah kept talking to Harry till all his melancholy had almost if not quite gone.

It was now about four bells in the middle watch, and Harry was thinking of sleep, when the curtain was drawn aside and Nicholls the bo’s’n entered. He was Harry’s lieutenant.

“Sorry to say, sir, the ship is leaking like a sieve, sir.”

“That is bad news, Nicholls,” said Harry, starting up.

“It be, sir; but what makes matters worse is that I believe she is scuttled.”

“But there were no signs of leakage before we parted with the Bunting.”

“No, indeed, sir, these rascally slaver Arabs know what they are about. The scuttling was filled up with paper, sure to come out after she had a few hours of way on her.”

“This is serious indeed. Think you—can we keep her afloat till we reach Zanzibar?”

“If we could pump, yes.”

“Well, rig the pump.”

“It is gone, sir. Doubtless thrown overboard.”

“That is indeed serious, Mr Nicholls.”

By daybreak the breeze had freshened considerably, but veered a bit, and was now dead ahead. The water had gained so much that the slaves had all to be taken on deck. Bailing was kept up, but seemed to do comparatively little good.

Harry walked up and down the deck for some time in deep thought. At last he called Mr Nicholls.

“Put her about,” he said, “she’ll make less water, then we will try to run for Magadoxa. We know the Parsee merchant there. And the Somalis are civil.”

“As civil,” said Nicholls, “as Somalis can be, when you are not standing under the lee of British bayonets. Trust a Somali and make friends with a fiend.”

The dhow went round with terrible flapping of her enormous sails, and much creaking of blocks, her great wings almost dragging the vessel on her beam ends.

But she went fast enough now. Dhows do fly before the wind, and, water-logged though this vessel was, her speed was marvellous.

She was far out at sea, however, and soon had to be hauled closer to the wind in order to gain the shore.

By midday they were about fifteen miles south of Brava, but the wind was falling, and the dhow now fast filling. They staggered past the ancient little town, but all hopes of reaching Magadoxa soon fled, and it became evident to every one that they must soon beach her or sink.

The coast here is most dangerous, owing to the number of sunken rocks, and to the long stretches of shallow water—water on which the breakers sometimes run mountains high, as the saying is, but where between the waves the bottom was everywhere close to the surface. Only the native surf-boats could get over shoals like these.

Looking for a place on a lee-shore on which to beach a vessel is sad work, and trying to the nerves; you may pass a fairly good spot, thinking to come to a better; you may go farther and fare worse.

Harry's, however, was a decided character, and when he came, some ten miles to the north of Brava, to a spot where the breakers did not seem to run extremely high—

"Here it must be, Nicholls. Stand by to lower both our boats."

"Starboard, as hard as she'll go."

Up went the tiller, round came her head, and a minute afterwards she struck with such fearful violence on a coral rock, that her masts, none of the strongest, went thundering over the side.

"We must try to save the slaves first, Nicholls."

"That will we, sir. Never a white man should cease to work until these poor abject creatures are safely on shore."

"Bravo! Nicholls. Well spoken, my brave man! I will not forget you when opportunity offers."

Harry cast his eyes shorewards, the breakers were thundering on the beach, but no one was visible except a solitary armed Arab.

"Lower away the boats. Gently."

The dhow was already bumping fearfully on the reef and rapidly going to pieces.

To stand on deck without clinging to bulwarks or rigging was impossible. The condition of the slaves was now pitiable in the extreme. They were huddled together, buried together, one might say, in one long cluster, dying, smothering each other, and drowning in the lee scuppers, for the sea was breaking clean over the wrecked and dismasted dhow.

Our fellows—bold blue-jackets—took them one by one as they came; they had almost to lift them down into the boats, so utterly prostrated with fear were they.

At last a boat got clear away.

Hardly had they left the dhow's side, when high over the moaning and cries of the poor negroes, high over the sound of roaring tumbling waves and broken hissing water, arose

a shout of triumph, and looking in the direction from which it proceeded, Harry could see the previously all but deserted beach swarming with armed and naked Indians.

The boat rode in on the top of a breaker, and was speedily seized and hauled up high and dry. The men were roped and thrown on their backs, and the slaves placed in a corner among rocks and guarded by spear-armed Somalis.

Then surf-boats were launched, and speedily got alongside the dhow.

Thinking nothing about his own safety, Harry was nevertheless glad to see that the slaves were being taken off, and saved from a watery grave, whatever their ultimate fate might be.

His men and himself were rowed on shore in the last boat that left that doomed slave dhow.

In this boat sat that grim dark Arab I have introduced to the reader at the commencement of this chapter.

For some time he sat sternly regarding Harry. The young Highlander returned the gaze with interest.

“Would you not like,” he said at last, “to know your fate?”

“No. And if it be death, I know how to face it.”

“It is death. It is justice, not revenge. I am Suliemon. I was captain of that dhow. Now you know all and can prepare.”

Like his poor men, Harry was bound hands and feet and placed by their side, fully exposed to the fierce glare of the tropical sun.

How very long the day seemed! But the evening came at last. Then great fires were lighted on the beach, the flare falling far athwart the waves, and giving the breaking waters the appearance of newly drawn blood.

The scene was wild in the extreme; only the pen of a Dickens and the pencil of a Rembrandt could have done justice to it. The trembling group of slaves—the waves had sadly thinned their ranks—lying, squatting, or standing on the sands, the poor white men, with pained, sad faces, the rude cords cutting into ankles and wrists, the wild

gesticulating armed Indians, and the tall figure in white gliding, ghostlike, here, there, and everywhere.

One of the boats belonging to the Bunting was now carried to the rear, and on his back across the thwarts, still bound, Harry was placed. Dry wood was piled beneath him. Dry wood was piled all round the boat.

He shut his eyes and commended himself to Heaven. Even then he thought of his poor father and mother far away in their bonnie Highland home, and he prayed that they might never know the fate that had befallen him.

The Indians formed themselves into a fiendish circle, and danced, yelling, around him, brandishing sword and spear.

But the dark Arab commanded silence.

“Your hour has come,” he said, solemnly.

“This,” he added, “is justice, not revenge.”

Note 1. What is called sherbet on the Eastern shore of Africa is a fruit syrup of most delicious flavour and odour. It is mixed with water and drunk as a beverage. Certainly a great improvement on the eau sucre of our ancestors.

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Chapter Two.

Harry is Made a Slave—The Journey Inland—Escape.

As he spoke these dread words the dark-skinned Arab seized a lighted torch from an Indian, and was about to apply it to the pyre, when his arm was struck upwards, and the torch alighted harmlessly on the soft sand.

It was Mahmoud who had struck the blow.

For a moment the two men stood confronting each other. Even Mahmoud now had a drawn sword in his hand.

“For his worthless life,” cried the latter, “I care not, but for your eternal welfare, brother, I do. I have saved you from a deadly sin. Take not thus rashly away the life you cannot give.”

“Back!” he shouted to the Somali Indians, and they shrank cowering and silent before the wrath of this strange being whom they called a prophet.

With a sharp knife he now severed Harry’s cords, and bade him stand up.

“You are my prisoner,” said Mahmoud in good English; “you are my slave. If you make no attempt to escape, you shall be comparatively free; attempt to fly, and—”

He tapped the hilt of his sword as he spoke, and Harry knew only too well what was meant.

He passed a sleepless night until within an hour or two of morning, when he dozed off into a pained and dreamful slumber, from which he was roused at daybreak by Mahmoud himself. To his great surprise and grief, the beach was almost deserted. Some armed Indians still lay near the white ashes of the dead fires, but his men, the other Arab, and all the rest of the Somalis were gone.

“Eat,” said Mahmoud, “you have far to go.” He placed a dish of fragrant curry before him as he spoke, and Harry partook of it mechanically.

“Where am I to be taken to?” he inquired of this warlike priest.

“Ask nothing,” was the reply. “I have saved your life, be thankful to Allah. Prepare to march.”

Surrounded by armed, grinning Somalis, many bearing parcels on their heads, with Mahmoud trudging on in front, the journey was commenced, straight away across the sandy hills, where only here and there some little tuft of grass or some pale green weed was growing.

At the top of the ridge Harry, in spite of his guard, paused for a moment to look back. Never, he thought, had the sea looked more lovely. Save where in whitish yellow patches the coral shoals were showing, the whole surface, unrippled by a wavelet, was of a deep cerulean blue. Here and there a shark’s fin made the water tremble, and here and there a white bird floated.

“Oh,” he thought, “could he only be as free as one of those happy sea-birds! But never again,” he sighed; “no, never again!”

Even in the morning the sun was fiercely hot, but towards noon it became almost insupportable, and Harry was glad indeed when green things appeared at last, and the halt was made in the shade of a little forest land—a kind of oasis in a barren desert. Here was a cool spring and a few cocoanut trees.

Some of the Somalis climbed these as one climbs a ladder, holding on like monkeys to little stirrup-like steps that ran all up one side of the trees. They then cut and threw down some of the greenest, and Harry, in grief though he was, was glad enough to regale himself on the proffered fruit. They were filled principally with “milk,” for the nut itself was hardly yet formed, otherwise than as a transparent jelly.

It may interest some of my young readers to know how the water or milk of the cocoanut is got at, after the great nut has been thrown to the ground by the monkey-like boy in the tree.

Cocoanut trees grow all over the tropical world, and their appearance must be familiar to every one—immensely tall stems with feathery-like tops formed of great palmate leaves. The stems are hardly as thick as an ordinary larch, and they are seldom altogether straight. Close to the tree-top, and in under the leaves, as if to hide from the blazing sun, grow the nuts. When large enough for use one or two are culled. The nut itself is covered by the thick, green husk—that which Sally scrubs the kitchen floor with at home here in England; it is young now, however, but tough enough. The “nigger” at the tree-foot, who has been very careful to look after his own nut while the fruit came

tumbling down, now thrusts a stake pointed at both ends into the ground; against the protruding point he strikes the top of the cocoanut with all his force again and again till he has forced open a portion of husk. Then his knife comes into play, and presently he has quite cut away the top of the husk and nut as well, for the shell is still soft. Then he hands you the cool green cup, and before drinking you look inside and see only water with just a little clear jelly adhering to the inside of the shell. You drink and drink and drink again—there is probably about a pint and a quarter of it. Oh, how sweet, how cold—yes, cold—how delicious it is! Probably after you have drunk all the water, you may care to eat some of the jelly, which you scoop out with your knife the best way you can. Well, you will confess when you try it that you never really tasted cocoanut before. Neither Christmas pudding, nor custard, nor anything ever you ate in life is anything to be compared to it.

Yes, the cocoanut tree is well suited to the climate in which it grows; it is a God-gift to the native and to travellers from foreign lands. I may add that it is chiefly near the sea you find the cocoanut tree, for it is a thirsty soul. And no wonder. Look at those broad, green leaves expanded to the sun, from which the sap must be constantly evaporating.

When cruising on the shores of Africa in open boats, towards evening we used to look out for a part of the coast, where we saw cocoanut trees rearing their nodding heads high in air. There we used to land, certain that we would find native huts and human beings at the foot of them, from whom we could buy fowls to make our cock-a-leekie soup and stew, previously to pulling off from the shore and lying at anchor to wait the coming morn.

All this is a digression, still I have no doubt it will be found interesting to some, and the others are welcome to skip it.

After a few hours of grateful rest, on went the caravan, Mahmoud himself at its head, trudging steadily, sturdily along, his eyes for the most part cast on the ground, and leaning on his spear. He never deigned to address a word to Harry—not that Harry cared much for that, for his back was turned to the sea, he was leaving all he cared for in the world, and going into exile, going he knew not whither. His prospects were as dreary as the scenery around him, and what is more heartless to behold than a barren plain stretching away apparently to the illimitable, without hill and with hardly rising ground, stunted bushes here and there, and beneath one's feet the everlasting scrubby, "benty," half-scorched grass? He thought this day would never end, that the sun would never decline towards the hazy horizon. But it did at last. It went round and stared them in the face; then it seemed to sink more rapidly, and finally—all a blaze of purple red—it went down.

The short twilight was occupied by Mahmoud and his yellow-skinned minions in preparing for the night's bivouac.

Wood was collected, a clearing was found on which to build a fire, and by and by supper was cooked.

Then Mahmoud retired to prayers!

He took a little carpet, and, going to a distance away, knelt down, then threw himself on his face in a devotion which I doubt not was sincere enough. We ought not to despise the Mahometan religion, nor any religion, for any religion is better than none. Oh! woe is me for the boy or girl who retires to bed without having first felt grateful for the past, and commended his or her soul to Him for the night!

Harry Milvaine did not forget to pray.

No, he did not; and, like a Scotch boy, he always concluded his devotions with our Lord's Prayer; but ah! how hard he thought it to-night to breathe those words, "Thy will be done"! It seemed that Heaven itself had deserted him.

For Harry was very low in spirits.

Whither did his thoughts revert? Home, of course. It was a pleasure to think of the dear ones far away, even although something seemed to whisper to him that he would never see them more.

Presently he fell into a kind of stupor. He had collected the withered grass in his immediate neighbourhood and formed it into a sort of pillow, and on this his head lay.

When he awoke—if he really had been asleep—the moon was shining very bright and clearly, the camp-fire had died to red shining embers, around it in various positions lay the Somali Indians, not far off was Mahmoud himself, while beside Harry's grass pillow, leaning on his rifle, stood the sentinel. This rifle had belonged to one of Harry's own men, so had the belt and well-filled pouch.

Harry raised himself on his elbow.

The sentinel never moved. There was a deep, death-like stillness over all the place, broken only now and then by the eldritch laugh of some prowling hyaena.

For a moment thoughts of escape came into Harry's mind. He was unfettered; he was, indeed, on a kind of parole. In so far only as this: the Arab Mahmoud had told him he should be free from fetters unless he attempted to escape; if he did so, he would either be shot down at once, or, if captured alive, manacled as a slave. Harry's answer had been bold enough.

"I accept parole," he had said, "on those conditions, and if I attempt to escape you may shoot me."

He sat up now and looked about him. The sentinel moved a few paces off and stood ready. But hearing his prisoner cough, and observing his perfect nonchalance, he stood at ease once more. Harry threw himself back. He shuddered a little, for dew was falling, and the night air was chill. Instead of sleeping it was his purpose now to think, but his thoughts soon resolved themselves into confused and ugly dreams, in which scenes on board ship were strangely mixed up and jumbled with those of his life at home and at school.

When he awoke again it was broad daylight, and all the camp was astir.

He ate his breakfast of boiled rice and dates in silence, and shortly after this a start was made.

Another long weary day.

Another weary night.

What the caravan suffered most from was the want of water. It was small in quantity and of such wretched quality, being thick, dark, and smelling, that Harry turned from his short allowance in loathing and disgust.

The route was ever inland, day after day. Knowing what he did of the country, Harry thought it strange they were following no direct road or caravan path. Sometimes they bore a little south, at other times almost directly north.

It was evident enough, however, that Mahmoud, their bold and stern leader, knew what he was about, and knew the country he was traversing, for he never failed to find water, without which a journey in this strange land is an impossibility.

The thought of escaping—the wish to escape—grew and grew in Harry's mind till it formed itself into a fixed resolve.

He would have carried it out at the earliest moment had he deemed it prudent, but there was the want of water to be considered. What good escaping, only to perish miserably in the wilderness? He would wait till the country became less barren.

The caravan in its route inland forded more than one broad stream. By the banks of these they sometimes journeyed for many miles, rested by day or camped at night.

Where, Harry often wondered, were his poor men? What fate was theirs, and what would his own fate be?

That he was to be sold into slavery, he had little, if any, doubt; and the truth was rendered more patent to him one evening by overhearing a conversation in Swahili between two of the Somalis. It referred to him, and mention was repeatedly made of the name of a great chief called ’Ngaloo, a name he had never heard before.

“Perhaps,” thought Harry, “my men, too, are being driven to this king’s country, though by a different route.”

But this was improbable. Had he believed it at all likely he would have gone on patiently with his captors, and have shared the fortune of the poor fellows, whether that might be death or slavery.

No, he determined to escape.

His chance came sooner than he had anticipated.

The caravan was encamped one night by the banks of a stream—a deep and ugly stream it was, its banks bordered by gigantic euphorbia trees or shrubs, so shapeless and ugly, that betwixt Harry and the moonlight they looked living uncanny things, and it needed but little imagination on his part to make them wave their arms and make motions that were both fantastic and fiend-like.

Harry was lying with his eyes half-shut looking at them when suddenly the sentinel bent down and gazed for a moment earnestly into his face. Suspecting something, but not knowing what, he pretended to sleep, breathing heavily, with an occasional sob or sigh, but ready to spring in a moment if foul play were meant.

The sentinel now left his side and strode away on tiptoe—though with many a stealthy backward glance—around the sleeping caravan. He went so far as to touch several of the Somali Indians with his foot. But when a Somali does sleep it takes a deal to rouse him.

Seemingly satisfied, he came back and had one other look at Harry, then walked straight away to the river's brink.

He was only going to quench his thirst after all, but well he knew that to have been found but five yards from his post would have cost him his life. No wonder he was careful. Harry's mind was made up in a moment, and more quickly than lightning's flash. How fast one must think on occasions like the present! He sprang lightly but silently to his feet the very moment he saw the Somali deposit his rifle and shot-belt on the bank and bend down towards a pool.

Next minute Harry, exerting all his young strength, had seized and flung him far into the stream.

A plash by night in an African river is but little likely to awake any one encamped by its banks. So far Harry was safe, but would the Indian give the alarm?

He did not wait to think, he only snatched up the weapons and the shot-belt and darted away like a red deer swiftly along the riverside. He wondered to hear no shout.

The truth is, the Somali sentinel feared to give it; to him it would have meant death, whatever it might be to Harry.

But looking round shortly, he was hardly surprised to find he was hotly pursued by the sentinel. He ran on for about two hundred yards farther, and, on looking round again, he noticed that the Somali was fast gaining on him. So Harry stopped.

His Highland blood was up.

"I won't run from one man," he said, "neither will I kill him; I'll give him a throw, though, if he likes, after the manner of Donald Dinnie."

So he stood and waited.

He had not long to wait. The Indian had divested himself of the linen jacket he wore, and next moment confronted him, panting, but with gleaming eyes and on murder intent. That is, murder if he could manage it quietly.

"Halt!" cried Harry, in Swahili, as he came to the charge. "No farther, or you die!"

The rest of his speech to the Somali he continued, partly in Swahili, partly in English, the former language being rather meagre in phraseology. But this is the gist of what he did say:

"I could kill you if I liked. It would be mean, however. Now take your time and get your breath, then if you like I'll give it to you English fashion."

He paused, and the Somali stood there glaring and foaming with fury.

After a minute—

"Time's up," said Harry, and, taking two or three paces to the rear, he threw rifle and shot-belt on the ground; then, pointing to them—

"Touch these, my friend, if you dare," he said.

No two biddings did the Somali require. He sprang towards the rifle as springs the jungle cat on its prey. Harry's blow was finely planted, and I am sure that Indian must have imagined, for the time being, that there were considerably more stars in the sky than ever he had seen before.

He rose and flew at Harry. He flew but to fall, and he rose and rose again, only to fall and fall again!

Harry could not help admiring his pluck.

He was conquered at last, though.

Then, getting up, half stunned, from the grass, he extended his arms towards Harry.

"Kill me," he said, "kill me, but not thus. Kill me with the English sword, for if I go back to my people without my prisoner, they will kill me with fire."

"Come to think of it, my good fellow," said Harry, "there need be no killing in the matter. You can't go back. Come with me. The tables are turned: you shall now be the slave, I the master. I will be good and kind to you if you are faithful; if not, I will let the daylight into you."

The reply of the savage was affecting enough. He bowed himself to the earth first; then, still on his knees, took Harry's right hand and bent his head until his brow touched it.

“That will do, my good fellow. I don’t care for palaver, you know. But let us have action. Now you shall prove how far you are willing to serve me. Go back to your fellows, a rascally crew they are, and fetch another rifle and more ammunition, and just a little provisions if you can.”

The Somali knew what he meant, even if he did not understand precisely all that was said.

He was up and away in a moment.

Harry Milvaine waited and listened. He thought the time would never pass. Would the Somali be true or be treacherous? He might rouse his sleeping companions, and, while he was still standing here in the broad staring light of the moon, stealthily surround and re-capture him.

The very thought made him change his ground. He drew himself away under the shade of some mimosa trees and waited there.

At last a single figure, armed with a rifle and carrying a bag, drew up in the clearing that Harry had left, and looked about him in some surprise. It was Harry’s ex-foe.

Harry soon joined him.

“You have stayed long,” he said.

“I have plenty of ammunition, something to eat, and the rifle, and—”

“Well, and what else?”

“Nothing else,” said the Indian, showing a row of teeth like alabaster; “I have floated all the rest of the ammunition down stream.”

“You are clever, but hark! did you not hear some sound? I believe they are stirring.”

“No, no, that was a lion miles away.”

“Come, then, lead on.”

“Which way?”

“West. They are sure to think I have gone in the direction of the coast.”

“Come, then.”

And away went Nanungamanoo. And by daybreak they were many, many miles from the camp of Mahmoud.

Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Three.

A Chapter of Surprises—A Mysterious Pack, and a Mysterious Appearance.

Danger sharpens one's wits. It makes the old young again, and the young old—in judgment.

Harry was no fool from the commencement, and he now reasoned rightly enough, that Mahmoud with his savage caravan, as soon as he missed the runaways, would naturally conclude that they had gone back towards the coast.

This, however, was precisely the thing that Harry had no present intention of doing. And why? it may be asked. Ought he not to be glad of the freedom he had once more obtained, and make the best of his way to some friendly village or town by the sea-shore? Perhaps; but then Harry was a wayward youth. He was wayward and headstrong, but on this occasion I think he had right on his side.

"I cannot and will not return," he said to himself, "without making some effort to find my poor fellows—if, indeed, they be still alive. Besides, this is a strange and a lovely land, and there are strange adventures to be met with. I must see a little of it while I am here."

You will notice, reader, that hope was already throwing its glamour over the poor lad's mind. He dearly loved nature, but while being dragged away as a prisoner, although some parts of the country through which he passed had been charming enough, he could not bear to gaze on their beauty while he was a slave.

Flowers grew in abundance on many parts of the plains; they grew in patches, in beds of gorgeous colour, here, there, and everywhere—pale blue, dark blue, yellow, crimson, and modest brown; they carpetted the ground, and even trailed up over and beautified the stunted scrub bushes. As Burns hath it, these flowers—

"Sprang wanton to be pressed."

At another time their sunlit glory would have dazzled him, now they had seemed to mock him in his misery, and he had crushed them under foot.

Great birds sailed majestically and slowly overhead, or flew with that lazy indifference peculiar to some of the African species, ascending some distance, then letting themselves fall again, putting no more exertion into the action of flight than was absolutely necessary, but sauntering along through the air, as it were. Never mind, they were happy, and Harry had hated them because they were so happy—and free. Long after the caravan had left the coast, sea-birds even came floating round them.

"Come away, Harry!" they seemed to scream. "Come away—away—away!"

They were happy too. Oh, he had thought, if he could only be as free, and had their lithesome, lissom wings!

Monster butterflies like painted fans, browns, vermilions, and ultramarines hovered indolently over the flowers. How they appeared to enjoy the sunshine!

Even the bronzy green or black beetles that moved about among the grass or over the bare patches of ground had something to do, something to engross their minds, thoroughly to the exclusion of every other consideration in life.

As for the lovely sea-green lizards with broad arrows of crimson on their shoulders, they simply squatted, panting, on stones, or lay along reed-stalks, making the very most of life and sunshine; while as for the giant cicadas, their happiness considerably interfered with the business of their little lives, because they were so very, very, very happy that they had to stop about every two minutes to sing.

But now, why Harry was free and as happy as any of them—at present, at all events.

As he trudged along in the moonlight he could not help making a little joke to himself.

"Go back!" he said, half aloud. "No, Scotchmen never go back."

Well, then, Mahmoud, after retreating for some distance towards the coast, would no doubt resume his journey. Of this Harry felt sure enough, because Nanungamanoo told his new master, before they had gone very far that night, that the Arab priest was on his way to a far distant country, quite unknown to any other trader, there to purchase a gang of slaves from a king, who would sell his people for fire-water.

"The scoundrels!" said Harry.

"Yes, sahib."

“Both I mean; both king and priest. I’d tie them neck to neck and drown them as one drowns kittens.”

“Yes, sahib.”

“And no one else knows of this territory?”

“No white man, sahib.”

“The villain! A little nest of his own that he robs periodically. A happy hunting-ground all to himself. So you think Mahmoud will shortly come on this way?”

“Sure to, sahib.”

Harry considered a short time, then—

“Well, Nanungamanoo, my good fellow, it won’t do to get in front of him. He would soon find our trail.”

“Yes, sahib, and kill us with fire.”

“Would he now? That would not be pleasant, Nanungamanoo. By the way, Nanungamanoo, what an awful name you have! Excuse me, Nanungamanoo, but we must really try to find you a shorter. Do you understand, Mr Nanungamanoo? We’ll boil that name of yours down, or extract the essence of it and let you have that. But touching this pretty priest, this amiable individual, who hesitates not to buy poor slaves for rum, although he is far too good to fight for them. He’ll be along this way in a day or two. Now I greatly object to be hurried, especially when I am out upon a little pleasure trip like the present—ha! ha! I don’t think for a moment that either an Arab or any of you Somali fellows are half so clever at picking up a trail as your genuine North American backwoods Indian; but then, you know, even an Arab or a Somali couldn’t go past the mark of an old camp-fire without smelling a rat. Do you understand, Mr Nanungamanoo?—bother your name, it’s a regular twice-round the clock business!”

“I understand,” replied Nanungamanoo, “much that you say even in English.”

“Well, Mr Nanungamanoo, if you behave yourself and are long with me, I’ll put you to school and teach you myself—good English. But,” continued Harry, “we must have this angelic Mahmoud on ahead of us. So if you can find a place to hide, we will let him pass and give him a fair start. For, as you say that you know this route well, and no other, we must be content to keep it for some time to come at all events.”

“Yes, sahib; and I know the place to hide. Come.”

“I’ll follow as fast as you like, Mr Nanungamanoo. But, first and foremost, just let us see what you have in that bundle of yours—to eat, I mean. I haven’t really felt so genuinely hungry since I was taken prisoner. My eyes! Nanungamanoo, what a size your bundle is! You seem to have looted the whole camp.”

The Somali laid down the burden and prepared to open it. It was wrapped in a kind of coarse blue-striped cloth, much admired by certain tribes of savages.

They had reached a patch of high clearing in the jungle, the moon was shining very brightly, so, although there were lions about, there was very little fear of an attack, these gentry much preferring to catch their foes unawares and by daylight.

The Somali undid his bundle precisely like a packman of olden times, showing off the wares he had for sale.

“This is the food,” he said.

“What! dry rice? Why, my good fellow, I’m not a fowl.”

“Fowl—yes, yes,” cried Nanungamanoo, the first words he had spoken in English. “Here is fowl and rice curry.”

“Ha! glorious!” cried Harry. “Capitally cooked too, done to a turn, tastes delicious. Have a bit yourself, old man. No doubt Mahmoud had intended this for his own little breakfast. I feel double the individual now, Nanungamanoo,” said Harry, after he had done ample justice to the viands of his late lord and master, “double the individual. Now suppose we proceed to investigate still further the contents of your mysterious pack? That’s the ammunition, is it? A goodly lot too! But what is in that other pack? There are wheels within wheels, and packs within packs, my clever Nanungamanoo. You are afraid to touch it—to open it. Give it to me, I will.”

So saying he quickly undid the lashing.

“Why,” he continued in astonishment, as he lifted the things up one by one, “my own best uniform jacket—two pairs of white duck pants—my Sunday-go-meeting pairs—one—two—three—four flannel shirts, my best ones too—a pair of canvas shoes—a packet of new uniform buttons, and a yard of gold lace—three cakes of eating chocolate, and a box of cough drops that old Yonitch gave me as a parting gift. Why, Nanungamanoo, as

sure as we're squatting here, and the moon shining down over us both, that old thief has been and gone and robbed my sea-chest! I see his little game, Nanungamanoo: he was taking these things of mine away into the interior to that happy hunting-ground of his, to swop them away along with myself to the drunken old king for slaves. Yes, and they would have stripped me of the uniform I now wear, and given me an old cow's hide instead with the horns stuck over my brow and the tail hanging down behind. Oh! Mr Mahmoud, but I have spoiled your fun. But there they are, goodness be praised, and I must not be too hard on old Mahmie after all, for he did save my life."

Nanungamanoo laughed a sneering laugh.

"You were too valuable to burn," he said.

"Do you really suppose then, my worthy Nanungamanoo, that Mahmoud looked upon the matter as a commercial transaction?"

"Now you speak Hindustanee. I do not know."

"Never mind, make up the bundle again, and let us trudge. From the position of the moon it must be getting on towards morning."

Nanungamanoo held up three fingers and proceeded with his work.

"Three o'clock, is it? Well, heave round, let us up anchor and be off."

After re-establishing his valuable pack, Nanungamanoo carefully collected the bones of the feast and threw them under a bush, and was proceeding to obliterate the marks they had made on the withered grass by raising it again with his foot, when a twig cracked in a neighbouring thicket. Both Harry and Nanungamanoo speedily clutched their rifles.

Almost immediately after a black and nearly naked figure emerged slowly into the moonlight, and stood at some little distance, holding up one arm across his face as if to protect it from the blow of the bullet Nanungamanoo would have fired, but Harry thrust his arm up.

Then Raggy Muffin advanced.

"Golla-mussy, massa! What for you want to shoot poor Raggy?"

"But, Raggy," cried Harry, "in the name of mystery how came you here?"

“I came, massa, to cut your cords ob bondage, all same as de little mouse cut de cords ob de great big lion.”

“But where did you come from, Raggy? Sit down, poor boy, your cheeks are thin, sit down and pick a bone.”

“No, no, massa, not here, not here. Dey am all alive in Mahmoud’s camp, I can ’ssure you ob dat.”

“You came through there?”

“I came to cut your cords ob bondage, massa.”

“Well?”

“Well, den I see dat de bird hab flown.”

“Yes, Raggy.”

“Den I pick up ebery ting I see lying about handy, massa. Den I follow your trail.”

“Ha! ha! ha! So you’ve been looting too, have you? Well, Raggy, get your parcel and let us be off. Lead on, Nanungamanoo.”

“La! massa,” said Raggy, grinning all over, “suppose I hab one long name like dat nigger, I cut it all up into leetle pieces, and hab one for ebery day in de week.”

The march was now recommenced.

The Somali trode gingerly on ahead, picking his way through the flowery sward, as if afraid to leave the slightest trail.

Harry and Raggy came up behind.

It was evident the Somali was now making a détour; at all events they shortly found themselves at the river, which was here broad and shallow. This they forded, taking care to keep their packs and rifles dry.

Into a weird-looking bit of forest they now plunged.

A weird-looking forest indeed. Every tree seemed an ogre in the moonlight. Yet the air was heavily odorous with the sweet breath of some species of mimosa bloom, and the ground was for the most part free from undergrowth.

The forest grew darker and darker as they proceeded, and they could hear a lion growl in the distance. He was far away, yet Harry clutched his rifle and drew little Raggy close up to his side.

He was not sorry when the moonlight shone down on them once more through the branches of a baobab tree. Here they stopped to breathe.

On again, and now the way began to ascend, still in the forest, and still comparatively in the gloom.

Up and up and up they went. It was quite a mountain for this district. At last the trees and then the bushes deserted them; then they were on the bluff, and Harry turned round to look.

Why, away down yonder—close under them it appeared—they could see the blazing camp-fire of Mahmoud's caravan.

"Are we not too near, Nanungamanoo?"

"No. They will not stir till daylight Arabs are not brave at night. When they do start they will go towards the sun. We will wait and watch and see."

And so it fell out, for no sooner had the clouds begun to turn bright yellow and crimson than the stir commenced in the camp.

Somalis ran hither and thither, it is true.

The babel of voices was terrible.

Mahmoud himself was here, there, and everywhere, and the whacks he freely dealt his soldiers with a bamboo cane were audible even to our friends on the hill-top. But when all was said and done, the caravan started back towards the coast, and in a few minutes there was silence all over the beautiful landscape.

Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Four.

In African Wilds—Adventure with a Lion.

A little way down the hill, and looking towards the north, was a cave in the rocks, and a cool delightful corner our friends found it, soon as the sun "got some weigh" on him, and his beams no longer slanted over the plain.

While Raggy was eating his modest breakfast Harry went some distance apart, and, taking out a little Book—it was a gift from his mother—he read a portion where a leaf was turned down.

Seems funny that a boy should carry a Bible with him, does it not? Well, reader, I can tell you this much: I have known many and many a sailor boy do so, and I never found that they were a bit the worse for it.

Mind you this, I have no patience with superstition, and I do hate cant; nor do I for a moment mean to say that our Book acts as a kind of amulet: but putting the matter in a plain, practical, common sense kind of a way, you and I have both immortal souls, you know, and we want to be guided how to save them. Well, the Book tells us the way. But that is not all. In times of danger—and a sailor comes across these pretty often—a blink into the Bible often gives a fellow heartening. You open it probably at the very passage that does so, and, even if you do not, you know where to find such passage.

And this does do good. Oh! I have proved it over and over again. I have a little old Book there that I have carried about the world for years and years. It has many a dog's-ear, but they are intentional, for each one marks a passage, and to every dog's-ear a story is attached. All point to little crumbs of comfort I have had in scenes of danger or even pestilence—here and there in many lands. Some day, if spared, I mean to write the story of this particular old Book of mine, and I do not think it will be devoid of interest to those who may care to peruse it.

But there! I am digressing, and I humbly beg my readers pardon; it was all owing to Harry's getting away, in behind that bit of tangled scrub, in order to perform his morning devotions. Well, the truth is he did feel very, very grateful to be free.

But stay, will he be able to retain that freedom? And this brings me back to my tale.

He went back to the place where he had left Raggy enjoying the leg of a fowl.

The boy was sitting near the mouth of the cave.

“Enjoyed it, Raggy?”

“Ah!” and Raggy smacked his lips and rolled his eyes, “he am plenty much sweet, massa.”

“There’s a wing there too, Raggy. There you are, have that.”

“Tank you, massa. You am bery good, massa.”

I dare say Raggy would have eaten a whole fowl had it been offered to him. After all African fowls are not very big, nor very fat; but very matter-of-fact and self-possessed—that is their moral character.

I have gone into an African village in the evening, just as the fowls were all going to roost in the trees, my object being to buy half a dozen for the pot. As soon as the natives were convinced that the white man had not come to eat a baby, but that he really wanted to buy “tuck-tuck-chow-chow,” and had copper money in his hand to pay for the dainty, then all hands would turn out, and such a hunt you never saw, and such fluttering of wings and skraiching. I have felt sorry for the fowls.

When I got what I wanted, the rest of the “tuck-tucks” would go quietly to roost again as if nothing had happened. I envy such equanimity.

I remember that two fowls got loose in the boat once. It was blowing stiff, and the white spray was dashing over us. Well, any other birds would have jumped overboard. Not so these African fowls. They simply got on the gun’ale, and, as soon as the squall was over, coolly commenced to arrange their feathers. This regard for personal appearance in a scene of such danger—for they must have known they were going to pot—is something that one does not know whether most to admire or wonder at.

Having fully satisfied the needs of nature, Raggy was prepared to give some little account of his adventures. Briefly they were as follows, and in Raggy’s own language.

“You see, massa, befoh de sun rise on dat drefful night on de shore, de Somali Indians, all plenty well-armed, plenty big knife, plenty spear and gun, dey come and wake all our poor blue-jackets. ‘Come quiet,’ dey say; ‘suppose you make bobbery, den we kill you

quick.' Dey tak us all away behind de sandhills, and I tink first and fohmost dey am goin' to obfuscate us."

"Suffocate us you mean, Raggy."

"All de same meaning, massa. But dey tie our arms till de blood tingle all down de fingers, and dey tie us roun' de neck till we all feel chickey-chokey, and our eyes want to bust and relieve demselves. Den away we all go. I look back, and see dat poor massa not follow, and my heart am bery sad. Ober de hills and de plains we walk. Poor white man's feet soon get tire and blister all, and in two tree day dey walk all de same's one chicken on de stove-top. Dey Somalis and de big Arab—he one bad, bad man—dey talk. Dey not tink I understand what dey say. Dey speak ob where dey am going to de country ob King Kara-Kara, to sell all de men for slabes and get a tousand niggers foh 'em. Den dey speak ob you. You, dey say, am wo'th de lot Raggy heah all, and listen, and tink, and I want to set you free. One day one man he fall sick—one ohdinary seaman, massa, name is Davis—he fall bery, bery sick. Den de Arab soldier look at him and look at him. You nebah get well, he say. Den he take him by de two leg and pull him along de grass to a bush; and oh! it was drefful, massa, to heah poor Davis crying for mussy 'cause he hab a wife and piccaninnies at home, he tole 'em. No mussy in dat Arab's eye. No mussy in his heart, he take de ugly spear and stab—stab—stab—Poor Davis jes say 'Oh!' once or twice, den he die. Plenty oder men sick after dis, but dey not lie down. Dey jes walk on weary, weary. Byemby we come to wells. Den de men get better. But Raggy hab eno' ob dis. He steal away at night. How de lion roah in de jungle, and how de tiger (the leopard is frequently so called in Africa) jump about, and de wild hyaenas come out in de moonlight and laugh at poor Raggy. Raggy's heart bery full ob feah. But he no say much. Suppose dey only laugh, dat not hurt much. Suppose dey bite, den Raggy die. I walk and walk foh days. I not hab much food. But I catch de mole and de mouse, I eatee he plenty quick. Den byemby I come to Mahmoud's trail, and I follow on and up till one day I see de caravan on de hill, den I lie and sleep till night Massa knows all de rest."

"Yes, Raggy, I know all the rest, and very grateful I am for your pluck, and all that, and if ever we get back again, I'll report your good and brave conduct, and you'll be well rewarded. Perhaps they'll make you a captain, Raggy."

"Massa is joking."

"You go home now at once?" the boy asked, after a pause.

"Oh! no, Raggy. That would not be doing my duty. I'm going inland, and I'm going to try to find and redeem, or rescue our poor fellows. It would not be plucky nor brave to go back without them—at all events without trying to find them. Now, Raggy, as we are

sure, if spared, to be some considerable time together, I wish you to do me the favour to teach Nanungamanoo to speak English."

"De yeller nigger wi' de long name, massa?"

"That is he, Raggy—Nanungamanoo."

"Oh! lah! massa, I teachee he plenty propah, and suppose he no speak good, I give him five, six, ten stick all same as de schoolmastah ob de Bunting switchee me."

"You better not try," said Harry, laughing, "or you may find yourself in the wrong box. But here," he cried aloud, "Nanungamanoo, where are you?"

Next moment Nanungamanoo stood silently before him awaiting his commands.

"You've got too long a name, Nanungamanoo."

"Yes, sahib."

"Well, we'll shorten it. We'll call you Jack. It's free and easy."

Jack expressed his pleasure to have an English name, so Jack he became.

"On all 'occasions of ceremony or state,' as the Navy List says, Jack, we will resort to your original designation, and you will be Nanungamanoo again."

For three days and nights Harry and his merry men occupied the cave on the hillside.

At the end of this time they had the satisfaction one evening of seeing a red light gleaming on the western horizon. It was the reflection of the camp-fire of the returning caravan.

Early next morning, almost as soon as sunrise, Mahmoud and his followers passed through the forest at the foot of the hill. Harry could even hear them talking, so close were they.

He had the rifles loaded and everything ready to give them a warm reception should they dare to ascend. But they did not. They went through the forest and on their way across a broad sandy plain.

When they had quite disappeared beyond the horizon, Harry gave a sigh of relief. The danger was, comparatively speaking, over for a time. He would now give them a few days' start, then go on behind, for Jack assured him this caravan route was the only practical way into the interior.

Every night the lions could be heard growling and roaring with that awe-inspiring cough, which they emit, in the woods around the hill. It was well they had a cave to sleep in, for to have lit fires on the hill-top would have ensured the return of Mahmoud and his savage Somalis, and they would have been captured. But a sentinel was set—and Harry took the post time about with Raggy and Somali Jack.

Was Jack really to be trusted? The answer to this is, that the faithfulness of a Somali Indian will be sold to the highest bidder, just like a picture at an auction mart, but it may in time be cemented to the purchaser if he is worthy of it. I have always found that there is a great deal of similarity betwixt the human nature as displayed by Indians and white men, which only proves that the world is much the same all over.

I must add, however, that white men as a rule treat savages with less ceremony and far less justice than they would mete out to one of their own dogs at home. Take an example. Some scoundrelly white trader has been murdered (it is called "murdered," but I should say "killed") by some islanders of the Pacific. This trading fellow had been on shore—probably not sober—abusing the hospitality held out to him, bullying and swaggering, and doing deeds that, if committed in this country, would secure for him a lengthened period of penal servitude. The worm turns at last and resents. The trader calls his men and a fight ensues; the savages are victorious, the white men slain. By and by in comes a British man-o'-war and demands the surrender of the murderers by the chief or king. Perhaps he does not even know them, refuses to give them up, and therein ensues a wholesale butchery of men, women, and children, and the burning of towns and villages.

I have known this happen over and over again, and I have asked myself, Who is to blame? Certainly not the so-called savages.

Well, boy-readers, if ever any of you happen to be away abroad, in Africa or the Pacific, and have a native as a servant, take my advice: treat him as a human being and a fellow-creature, and you will have no cause to complain, but quite the reverse.

Harry had a good long talk with Jack; he told him he should let him go away any time he wished, but that if he did stay he would have no cause to repent it.

Once more Jack took Harry's hand in both his and bent himself down until his brow touched it, and our hero was satisfied.

On leaving the hill—which, by the way, Harry took possession of in the Queen's name, and called it Mount Andrew, to show he had not forgotten his old friend in the Highlands—they journeyed on through the forest and followed in the very footsteps of Mahmoud's caravan, across plains, through woods, through rivers and mountain glens, camping every night where Mahmoud had camped, and lighting a fire in the very same spot. The fire was very necessary now, and it had to be kept up all night, for they were in a country inhabited by and given up to, one might say, wild beasts.

Here were lions in scores, hyaenas and jungle-cats.

So all night long these animals made the bush resound with their cries.

Sometimes Harry found it almost impossible to sleep, so terrible was the quarrelling and din. He fell upon a plan at last that in some measure remedied the infliction—that of leaving the bullock or two, or the deer or hartebeest slain for food, a good two or three miles behind. Where the carrion is, there cometh the kite; and so it was in this case—to some extent at all events.

The store of rice that Jack had looted from Mahmoud's camp very soon was done, but they did not want for provisions for all that.

There were fruits of so many kinds, and roots that they dug up, or rather that Jack dug up and roasted in the camp-fire. Then there were plantains, which are excellent cooked in the same primitive style. Some of the forest trees were laden with fruit; the danger lay in eating too much of it. Many of these fruits were quite unknown to Harry, but he was guided by his best man, Jack. With so much fruit, salt was hardly missed, though at first Harry thought it strange to eat meat without it.

Slices from the most tender portions of the animals killed were cut and carried along with them, and towards evening, when the bivouac ground was chosen, and the fire of wood gathered and kindled by Jack and Raggy, the former set to work to prepare the supper.

The roots, yams principally, were simply buried among the fiery ashes, but a far more artistic method was adopted in grilling the steak: a triangle of green wood was built over the fire as soon as it had died down to red embers, across the triangle bars were fastened, and on this were hung the pieces of juicy flesh. When the bars were nearly

burned through, and the wooden triangle itself falling to pieces, then the steak was cooked.

They had fresh air and exercise, and consequently the appetite of mighty hunters. It is hardly necessary, therefore, to add that they really enjoyed their dinners. Fruit followed, then water, which was not always good.

The country they traversed now, though a hilly and fertile one, was, strange to say, deserted.

Still, this is not so strange when we remember that in all probability it has been depopulated by the Arab slaver. Indeed, many parts of the forest gave evidence of having been ravished by fire.

Bravery, I take it, is not a very uncommon quality in the human breast of any inhabitant of our British islands, yet he is the bravest man who knows his danger and still does not fear to face it. In the matter of danger, where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise. Your first-voyage sailor will retain his presence of mind and coolness, at times when old seafarers are pale with the coldness of a coming evil. Why? Because he does not know the worst. This is not bravery. It is—nothing.

If, however, one is so positioned as to know there is danger, but remains in ignorance as to its amount or extent, then he has a bold heart who can quietly meet or court it. I have hinted before in this tale of mine that I claim for my wayward boy, Harry, no extraordinary qualities of mind, and that he had his faults just as you have, reader; so now I need not apologise for him when I confess to you that in the wild African jungle there were many times that his heart beat high with fear. Especially was this so at first. All bold, brave natures are finely strung and sensitive. Harry's was. He did not like the dangers of the darkness, and he dreaded snakes. At the commencement, then, of his wanderings on the dark continent he expected to see one whenever a bunch of grass quivered or moved, though only a mole might have been at the bottom of it. And I believe at night he heard sounds and saw sights in the bush and on the plains, that had no existence except in his own fervid imagination.

However, a month or two of nomad life hardened him. He noticed that even serpents do not go out of their way to bite people, and that you have only to observe a certain amount of caution, then you may put your hands in your pockets and whistle.

As far as that goes, I believe you might put your hands in your pockets and go whistling up to a lion "on the roam." My illustrious countryman, the great General Gordon, did this or something very like it once. I would not, nor would I advise you to do so, reader;

but I have to say, as regards my hero, Harry, that familiarity bred in him a contempt for danger that led him to grief.

I will tell you the story after making just one remark. It is this—and happy I would be this minute if I thought you would lay it to heart and remember it. We are apt to pray to our Father to keep us from evil, and then, when something occurs to us, some accident, perhaps, turn round and murmur and say—

"Oh! my prayers have not been heard. God loves me not."

How know you, I ask, that He in His mercy has not allowed this little misfortune to befall us in order to save us from a greater?

Harry was carelessly walking one evening—he was waiting for dinner—in a grove of rugged euphorbias. The evening was very beautiful, the sun declining in the west towards a range of high hills which they had that day passed. There was a great bank of purple-grey clouds loftier than the hills; these were fringed with pale gold, else you could not have told which was mountain and which was cloud. There was also a breeze blowing, just enough to make a rustling sound among the cactuses and scrub. This it was probably that prevented Harry from hearing the stealthy footsteps of an enormous lion, until startled by a roar that made the blood tingle in his very shoes.

There he was—the African king of beasts—not twenty yards away—crouched, swishing his tail on the grass, and preparing for a spring.

Harry stood spellbound.

Then he tried to raise his rifle.

"No, you don't," the lion must have thought. For at that very moment he sprang, and next Harry was down under him.

He remembered a confused shout, and the sharp ring of a rifle. Then all was a mist of oblivion till he found himself lying near the camp-fire, with Jack kneeling by his side holding his arm.

"I'm not hurt, am I?" said Harry.

"Oh, massa, you am dun killed completely," sobbed little Raggy. "All de blood in you body hab run out. You quite killed. You not lib. What den will poor Raggy do?"

It was not so bad as Raggy made out, however. But Harry's wounds were dreadful enough, back and shoulder lacerated and arm bitten through.

Harry had made it a point all the journey since leaving the hill he called Mount Andrew to camp each night on the same place Mahmoud had left days before, and to build the fire in the self-same spot, and on departing in the morning to leave nothing behind that could tell the Arab's sharp-eyed Somalis the ground had been used.

It was well he had taken this precaution, for now he was wounded and ill, and must remain near this place for weeks at least.

Jack, the Somali, was equal to the occasion.

He went away to the forest, and was not long in finding a site for the invalid's camp.

Like that upon Mount Andrew, it was on a hill or eminence, from which the country eastwards could be seen for many, many miles. And here also was a shelter under a rock from the direct rays of the sun.

Next day, and for several days, poor Harry tossed about on his couch in a raging fever.

But Jack proved an excellent surgeon, and Raggy the best of nurses. The former applied cooling and healing antiseptic leaves to Harry's wounds, and bound them tenderly up with bundles of grass, while the latter hardly ever left his master's couch, except to seek for and bring him the most luscious fruit the forest could afford.

Long, long weary weeks passed away, but still Harry lay there in his cave on the hillside too weak to stand, too ill to move.

Between them his two faithful servants had built him a hut of branches and grass, which not only defended him against the sun, but against the rain as well—for the wet season had now set in. Thunders rolled over the plains and reverberated from the mountain sides, and at times the rain came down in terrible "spatters" that in volume far exceeded anything Harry could ever have dreamt of.

But the rain cooled and purified the atmosphere, and seemed to so revive Harry, that his wounds took on what surgeons call the healing intention.

Raggy was a joyful boy then, and honest Jack, the Somali—for he had proved himself honest by this time—was doubly assiduous in his endeavours to perfect a cure.

One afternoon, while Jack was talking to his master, Raggy, who had been in the forest, ran in breathless and scared.

“Golly-mussy!” he cried, “dey come, dey come. Where shall we hide poor massa? Dey come, dey come.”

Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Five.

The Return of the Caravans—Night in the Forest—The Dying Slave Boy.

Mahmoud had not found the slave-dealing king in quite so good a temper on this journey. The reason was not far to seek. A brother potentate, who dwelt just beyond a range of mountains to the east of him, had by some means or other possessed himself of two white slaves—Greeks they were, and had been brought from very far north. This king was his greatest enemy—near neighbours though they were—and many and deadly were the combats that used to rage among the hills. In fact, their two imperial highnesses lived in a state of continual warfare. Sentinels of both parties were placed day and night on the highest mountains, to spy out the actions of the opposite kingdoms. It was no unusual thing for these sentinels to get to lighting on their own account, and when they did they never failed to chew each other up, though not quite so much so as the Kilkenny cats, of which, as you know, nothing was left but two little morsels of fluff, one tooth and one toe-nail—but very nearly as bad as that. The rival kings did not care a bit; they looked upon the affair as a natural dénouement, and set more sentinels, while the vultures gobbled up whatsoever remained of the last.

But this rival king beyond the hills owned those white slaves, and the king, who loved rum, was very jealous and greatly incensed in consequence. Thrice he had made war upon him with a view of possessing himself of the coveted Greeks, and thrice had he been hurled back with infinite slaughter.

Then Mahmoud had come to him, and the king stated his case while he drank some rum, and Mahmoud promised that next time he returned he would bring him one or more white slaves, that would far outshine those possessed by the king beyond the hills, whose name, by the way, was King Kara-Kara.

But behold Mahmoud had returned, and no white slave with him! Harry, as we know, having escaped.

No wonder, then, that King ’Ngaloo had raged and stormed. This he did despite the fact that the Somalis were called to witness that it was no fault of Mahmoud’s, and that their prisoner had really and truly escaped. King ’Ngaloo had serious thoughts of ordering the priest Mahmoud to instant execution, but was so mollified at the sight of the other gifts brought him that he forgave him.

These gifts were many and varied. Rum came first, then beads, blue, crimson, white and black, and of various sizes, then jack-knives and daggers, white-iron whistles, a drum of large dimensions, a concertina, and a pair of brass lacquered tongs. These last two gifts were the best fun of all, for King 'Ngaloo, squatting in the middle of his tent floor with his wives all round him or near him, would sip rum and play the concertina time about. His playing was peculiar. After he had finished about half a bottle of the fire-water he began to feel his heart warm enough to have some fun, on which he would jump up and with his brass tongs seize one of his wives by the nose, drawing her round and round the tent, she screaming with pain, he with laughter, till one would have thought all bedlam was let loose.

Yes, the king was pacified, and Mahmoud was allowed to depart, with an addition to his caravan of one hundred poor victims who were to be dragged away into slavery.

He went away much sooner than he had intended had he been successful in getting more slaves. And besides, the truth is, Mahmoud was a little afraid that the king might take it into his head to pull him round the tent with the tongs, and Mahmoud had a profound respect for his nose.

I really think it was a pity the king did not do so.

Only it was evident the king had other thoughts in his head, for one day he jumped up, and after practising the tongs exercise on his prime minister for five minutes, he held the instrument of torture aloft and snapped it wildly in the air.

"Teiah roota Kara-Kara yalla golla," he shouted, or some such words, "I'll never be content till I seize Kara-Kara by the nose, and the tongs shall be made red-hot for the purpose."

"I'd send and tell him so," that is what Mahmoud had suggested.

"Dee a beeseeta—I'll do so," said the king.

And away the messenger was sent to King Kara-Kara.

The messenger obeyed his instructions, and King Kara-Kara took much pleasure in cutting off his head, but as this was no more than the messenger had expected there was not much harm done.

But, and it is a big "but," had King 'Ngaloo only known that at the very time Mahmoud was in his camp or village, his "brother" Suliemon was in that of the rival potentate, and

that he had sold him the unfortunate men of the Bunting, Mahmoud would not have been allowed to depart, unless he could have done so without his head. For both Mahmoud and his "brother" were excellent business men, and were not at all averse to playing into each other's hands.

Before Mahmoud had left the town of this African potentate he was allowed to choose his slaves. He chose, to begin with, a day on which King Kara-Kara had imbibed even more rum than usual. Indeed, he was so absurdly tipsy that he could not hold the tongs.

He was determined to see that he was not cheated for all that, and so, supported on one side by his prime minister, and on the other by one of his priests, the chief executioner, sword in hand, coming up behind, he waddled out to the great square in which the poor unhappy souls, men and women, from whom Mahmoud was to make his choice were drawn up.

The first thing the king did after getting outside was to give vent to an uncontrollable fit of laughing. Nobody knew what he was laughing at, nor, I dare say, did he himself. But he suddenly grew serious, hit his prime minister on the face with his open palm, and asked why he dared laugh in his august presence.

Though his nose bled a little, the minister said nothing; he was used to all the king's little eccentricities, and this was one of them.

After he had got into the square, the king desired to be informed what the meeting was all about.

"Execution, isn't it?" That is what he said in his own language.

"That fellow Mahmoud's white head is coming off, isn't it? Turban and all? Turban and all, ha! ha! ha! I told him I would do it. And I will."

No wonder Mahmoud had trembled in his sandals.

But King 'Ngaloo was soon put right.

Then Mahmoud made his choice.

He hesitated not to tear asunder mother and child, husband and wife, sister and brother. It was merely a case of youth and strength with him.

When he had finished, the slaves were at once chained together, and soon after, having bidden farewell to this pretty king, the march was commenced.

There was weeping and wailing among the new-made slaves, and there was weeping and wailing among those left behind.

But what cared Mahmoud?

As they marched away, while 'Ngaloo's warlike tom-toms were beating, and his chanters sounding, a music that was almost demoniacal, the poor captives as with one accord cast a glance around them at the village—which, savage though it was, had been their home—but which they would never, never see again. Just one wild despairing glance, nothing more. Then heavily fell the lash on the naked shoulders of the last pairs, and on they went.

"Dey come, dey come!" cried Raggy, in despair.

Yes, they were coming—Mahmoud's caravan and his wretched slaves. They were soon in sight, looking just the same as when last seen, only with that dark and mournful chained line between the swarthy spear-armed Somalis.

Harry prayed inwardly that they might pass on. They did not, but stopped to bivouac on the old camping ground.

And yet our hero could not help admitting to himself that his adventure with the lion that had delayed his journey had really been meant for his good. It had saved his life to all appearance, for Mahmoud had returned far sooner than even Jack—who knew the road and the work before his old master—could have dreamed of.

This only proves, I think, reader, that we are shortsighted mortals, and that our prayers may truly be answered, although things may not turn out just as we would have desired them.

In the morning Mahmoud seemed in no hurry to leave, and the day wore on without very much stir in his camp. It was an anxious day for Harry and his companions, just as it had been a long and anxious night. They never knew the moment the sharp-sighted Somalis might find their trail and track them to their cave on the hill.

The recent rains alone probably prevented so great a catastrophe, else beside that camp-fire a scene of blood would have been enacted that makes one shudder even to think about.

In the afternoon there rushed into Mahmoud's camp, wildly waving his spear aloft, one of the Somali spies. Then the commotion in the camp grew intense. Mahmoud shortly after left the place all alone, and in less than twenty minutes returned with his so-called brother Suliemon.

This very spot there was the rendezvous for these slave-dealers on their return from their expedition. Behind Suliemon came a vast crowd of chained slaves. There could not have been less than a thousand. How tired they appeared! No sooner was the order to halt given, than they threw themselves on the grass, just as weary sheep would have done returning from a fair.

There was no movement that night, so Harry and his merry men had to lie close like foxes in their lair.

Next morning, however, as early as daybreak, the whole camp was astir, and for nearly two hours the shouting and howling, the firing of guns and cracking of whips were hideous to hear. The scene near the camp-fire was like some awful pandemonium.

But by ten o'clock, as nearly as Harry could judge, every one had gone, and silence once more reigned over forest and plain.

Our hero breathed more freely now, yet it would have been madness for any of them to have ventured forth even yet. Some loitering Somali might have seen him and given instant alarm.

Strange to say, the excitement appeared to have almost restored Harry to health. He no longer felt weak, and he longed to be away on the road again.

He knew enough of the climate, however, not to venture for a week or two longer, for a man needs all the nerve and strength that the human frame can possess to battle against the odds presented to him on such a journey as that which he was now making.

The day wore away, the sun set in a cloudscape of indescribable glory, the short twilight succeeded, then the stars peeped out through the blue rifts in the sky.

After a supper of fruit and roasted yams, Harry lay down on his couch of grass and fell into a dreamless sleep.

When he awoke, the stars were still shining and the sky was far more clear. A brightly burning scimitar of a moon was declining towards the horizon, and not far from it, to

the west and north, the well-known constellation of Orion. Yonder also, blinking red and green, was the great Mars himself.

But it was not to study the stars that Harry had crept out of the tent, but to breathe fresher air, for there was no wind to-night. Not a branch stirred in the forest, not a leaf moved. The wild beasts had been scared far away, only now and then a lion roared, and the screams of the wild birds filled up the intervals. Dreadfully eerie they are to listen to on a night like this, and in such a lonely scene.

“Eeah—eee—ah—eeah—eeah—ah!” screamed one bird.

“Tak—tak—tak—tak!”—cried another.

“Willikin, willikin, willikin, willikin?” shrieked a third.

Then there are mournful unearthly yells and groans that would make the heart of a novice stand still with dread. He would feel convinced foul murder was being done in the gloomy depths of the forest. (It is possible the monkeys take their part in producing the cries one hears by night in forests of the tropics.)

But Harry could sleep no more.

The sentries were being relieved. Raggy had just turned up, and Somali Jack was about to turn in.

“Let us take a stroll down by the camp-fire,” said Harry. “I feel I must stretch my legs, night though it be.”

Together they went as far as the old camping ground, and were about to leave when a pained and weary groan fell on Harry’s ear.

He soon discovered whence it issued. From the lips of a poor half-naked dark figure, lying stabbed and dying on the grass.

All this he could see by the light of moon and stars. He sat down beside the poor creature and took his head on his lap. The white eyes rolled up towards him, the lips were parted in a grateful smile.

One word was all he said or could say.

“What is it, Jack?” asked Harry. “Interpret, please.”

“It only says thanks, sahib.”

“Run for water, Raggy.”

The dying slave boy drinks just one gulp of the water. Again the white eyes are turned towards Harry, again the lips are parted in a smile—and then he is still.

For ever still.

Perhaps it is because Harry was nervous and ill; but he cannot prevent a gush of tears to his eyes as he bends over this murdered boy.

“What a demon’s heart the man must have to commit a sin like this!”

Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Six.

The Land of Depopulation—In a Beast-Haunted Wilderness—A Mystery—A Strange King.

Three months have elapsed since the night Harry found the dying slave lad on the grass, near the old camp-fire Harry is as strong now as ever. Nay, he is even stronger. He has had a birthday since then, and now in his own mind calls himself a man.

He is a man in heart at all events, a man in pluck and a man in manliness.

The trio—Somali Jack, Raggy, and Harry—are very friendly now.

Only once did Jack allude to that night when they fled from Mahmoud's camp. It is in terms of admiration and in broken English.

"You give me proper trashing that night. I think I feel your shut hand on my nose now. Wah-ee! he do make him smart, and my eyes all fill with water hat hat ha!"

Yes, Jack could afford to laugh now, for Harry was not a bad master to him.

Somali Jack is happier, and, to use his own words—

"I have one stake in de world now. I all same as one Arab, I have a soul. You, master, have said so. I believe what my master says. Of course I believe what he tell me. I not all same as one koodoo—die on de hill and rot. No, I float away, away, away, past de clouds, and past de stars to de bright land of love, where Jesu reigns. Oh yes, Somali Jack is happy and proud."

The trio are now in an unknown land.

It might be called the Land of Depopulation, for long ago the few natives that slavery left have died or fled away. There is hardly a vestige of the remains of their villages, only here and there a kind of clearing with what appears to be a hedge around it. But if you pulled away the creepers on top of this you would find old rotten palisades—indication enough that those poor creatures had made some vain attempts at defending themselves against the inroads of the Arab invader.

Harry had not long continued in the caravan route that led to the land of the drunken king. The sights he came upon every now and then while following it were sickening. It was quite evident that of the hundred slaves whom Mahmoud had chosen, at least twenty had fallen by the way, in rather less than three weeks, and been left to perish in the bush or on the grass beneath a blazing sun.

He would have followed the more southern route, and endeavour to find out the whereabouts of his fellows, but such a proceeding would have been absurdly impracticable. A white slave is thought worth a thousand black at some of the courts of African kings. He could not have redeemed his men, and to have attempted to rescue them in any other way would have only ended in failure, and in slavery to himself and companions. No, there was at present no hope. But he had more than one plan which he meant to try when a chance should occur.

For the three months past they had had plenty of sport, and a world of adventures far too numerous to mention. Harry, however, had only a very scant supply of ammunition, and but little likelihood of obtaining any further supply. Every cartridge was therefore carefully hoarded, and only used either for the purpose of protection against wild beasts or to secure themselves food.

As to this latter they managed in a great measure without firing a shot. For, first and foremost, Somali Jack had a most nimble way of catching fish. He did it by getting into shallow streams, sometimes diving in under the water and dragging a fish out from under bank or rock where it had sought shelter.

Then he could twine grass ropes; these were stretched along in certain likely places, near which Jack concealed himself, spear in hand, all alert and ready. The other part of this peculiar hunt was performed by Harry and the boy Raggy. They managed, and that very successfully, as a rule, to chase wild deer, of which there were so many different sorts and sizes, down towards the clever Somali. In their headlong hurry one at least was almost sure to trip over the rope and fall. In a moment Jack was up and on him, and next minute—there was something good for dinner.

I wish I could describe to you one-thousandth part of all the curious things Harry noticed in natural history, not only among the larger animals, but among the smaller, namely, the birds, and among the smallest—the creeping creatures of the earth.

I wish I could describe to you a few of the lovely scenes he witnessed in this beast-haunted wilderness: the landscapes, the cloudscapes, the lovely sunsets, the wilderies of fruit and flower, and the scenes among the mountains, some of which, high, high up in the air, were even snow-capped, and ever at sunrise assumed that pearl-pink hue with

purple shadow which once witnessed can never be forgotten in life. The scenes by river and lake were also most enchanting at times.

But do not think these wanderers had it all their own way. No, they went with their lives in their hands, and these lives were very often in jeopardy.

Poor little Raggy was once tossed by a herd of buffaloes. I say a herd of buffaloes advisedly, for really they seemed nearly all to have a fling at him. The last one pitched him up into a tree, where, for a time, he was an object of the most profound interest to a band of chattering apes. They could not conceive who or what the new arrival was, nor where he had come from.

Well, then, Somali Jack had to climb up and shake the branch to dislodge Raggy's apparently dead body, while Harry stood under to catch it and break the fall.

But Raggy was not dead. Not a bit of him; and presently he got up and scratched his poll and gazed about him like a somnambulist.

"Am de buffaloes all gone, massa?" he inquired.

"The buffaloes, Rag? Yes, and it seems to me you are made of indiarubber; why, they played lawn tennis with you."

"Well, massa," said Raggy, "it was some fun to de buffaloes anyhow, and it not hurt Raggy much."

Another day Harry had narrowly escaped being killed by a rhinoceros. Quiet enough these animals are at times, but whatever other travellers may say, I advise you to keep out of their track when they lose temper.

Somali Jack was one day posted behind his rope when down thundered a small herd of giraffes. Over went number three. Out came Jack and attacked him, but, like the witch in Tam o' Shanter—

"Little wist he that beast's mettle."

One kick sent Jack flying yards and yards away; the blow alighted on his chest, and, strange to say, the blood sprang from his nose and mouth.

Jack said nobody could hit so hard as a giraffe unless his master, and he never tried again to spear a—

"Roebuck run to seed."

They had now many rivers to cross and miles on miles to walk sometimes before they could find a ford. But the current seldom ran very strong. The worst of it was that often, even after they found the ford and got over, there was a marsh to cross, worse than any bog in old Ireland.

Many of these marshes were infested with crocodiles. Oh, how innocent these brutes can appear, basking in the sunshine on the banks, or lying in shallow streams with nothing out and up except their hideous heads!

Yonder, for example, is one immense skull, not far from the bank. He is asleep, is he not? Go a little closer. He never moves. You feel sure he is good-natured, and that the crocodile is a much-libelled reptile. Go closer still and look at him. Ugly enough he is, but so innocent-looking! You would like to smoothe him, wouldn't you, little boy?

Snap! Where are you now? It is sincerely to be hoped that your mamma has another good little boy like you to supply your place, for you will never be seen again.

And your great "good-natured" crocodile is very playful now, and goes away swishing through the water to tell all the other crocodiles how very happy he feels, because he has a little boy in his stomach.

They came, at length, to a range of rugged hills which it took them a whole day to get across. They encamped at night in a dreary glen, and had to keep a great fire burning until the sun rose over the mountains, for this glen seemed to be the home par excellence of the lions. These monsters, many of which they saw, were the largest they had yet fallen in with.

They were evidently filled with resentment at the daring invasion of their territory, and made not only night hideous with their threatening and growling, but sleep quite impossible.

Harry was glad enough to continue the journey next day as early as possible, but they had not got far before a terrible thunderstorm made all pedal progression quite impossible for the time being. It was well they were pretty high up among the hills, for with the thunder and lightning came a wind of hurricane force; they could hear the great

trees smashing in the forest beneath them, and noticed scores of wild beasts seeking sheltered corners in which to hide till the violence of the storm should abate.

Another night in this mountain forest; another night among the wild beasts.

Next day was bright and fine, but not for hours after did the sun appear, owing to the mists that were rising all over the land.

On the evening of that same day they came to the margin of what appeared at first to be a broad rolling river. There were a few native canoes on it.

One immensely large dug-out was soon observed coming towards them, so it was evident they were already seen. In the stern sheets, when it came near enough, Harry could descry a single figure sitting under the broad canopy of an umbrella.

No one else in the boat, and the figure astern not moving a muscle!

“How is it done?” said Harry to himself. “It is a mystery. Can these savages have invented electricity as a motor power?”

Nearer and nearer came the boat, but the mystery was as far from being explained as ever.

The individual who sat in the boat was a portly negro, very black, very comely and jolly-looking. He was dressed from the shoulders to the knees in a loose blue robe of cotton cloth. This appeared to be simply rolled round the loins and then carried over the shoulder. On his head he wore a skin hat with the hairy side out and a long tail hanging down behind it. Round his neck was a string of lions’ tusks, in his ears immense copper rings, in one hand a broad-bladed spear, and in the other a long shield of hide studded with copper nails.

The umbrella was a fixture behind him.

While Harry and his companions were still gazing at this singular being with a good deal of curiosity, not unmixed with apprehension, the prow of the boat touched land, and immediately the motor power was explained. This was, after all, only a big hulking negro who had been wading behind and pushing with his head. He had not come here unguarded, however. For dozens of armed canoes now made an appearance, and took up a position in two rows, one at each side of what was undoubtedly the royal barge.

The king stepped boldly on shore, and nodded and smiled to Harry in the most friendly way.

“Good morning,” said Harry, nodding and smiling in turn; “fine day, isn’t it?”

Of course the king could not reply, but leaning on his spear he walked three times round Harry and his companions, then three times round Harry alone. It was pretty evident he had never seen a white man before.

Then he touched Harry’s clothes, and felt all along them as one smoothes a dog. Then he said:

“Lobo! Lobo!” (Strange, or wonderful.)

He next proceeded to an examination of Harry’s face. He wetted the end of his blue robe in the lake and tried to rub the bloom off Harry’s cheeks.

“I don’t paint,” Harry said, quietly.

“Lobo!” said the king again.

Harry’s buttons now fixed the king’s attention.

He pulled the jacket towards him and tried to cut one off with the end of his spear.

Then Harry smacked his fingers for him, and the king started back with a fierce look in his eye.

“Lobo! Lobo!” he cried, excitedly.

“Keep your fingers to yourself, then,” said Harry.

But thinking he had gone too far, he immediately cut two buttons off and presented them to this queer king.

His majesty was all smiles again in a moment. He intimated his pleasure and gratitude in a neat little speech that Harry could make neither head nor tail of, but was glad to find that little Raggy could translate it even more freely than Somali Jack.

For from somewhere near these regions Raggy had originally come. So he told Harry; he also said, “I ’spect I has a mudder livin’ hereabouts some-wheres.”

“Would you know her, Raggy, if you saw her?”

“I not know her from any oder black lady,” replied Raggy, grandly; “’sides,” he added, “dis chile Raggy hab no wish to renew de ’quaintance.”

The warriors in the king’s canoes sat as motionless as if they had been made out of wood, and then tarred over and glued to their seats. They looked friendly, but it was quite evident they would take their cue from his majesty, and were just as ready to drown Harry in the lake as to give him a welcome.

“Peace at any price is the best policy in this case,” said Harry. “Eh, Raggy, what say you?”

“Suppose massa want to fight, den Raggy fight; suppose we fight, dey gobble us all up plenty quick; suppose we not fight, den dey make much of us and give us curry and chicken.”

“All right, Raggy, we’ll go in for the curried chicken. Tell this sable king that we have come a long long way to see him, and to give him some presents, and that we then want to pass through his country and go on our way in peace.”

All this Raggy duly translated, and Harry strongly suspected that he added a little bit of his own to it. But this is a liberty that interpreters very often take.

The king was laughing. The king was pleased. He pointed to the boat and led the way towards it and without a moment’s hesitation Harry stepped on board, and in another minute they were all away out in the open lake.

Alone in the Wilderness by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Seven.

Amazons—The Lake of the Hundred Isles—The Feast of Flowers.

When the king's barge left the shore, shoved slowly along by the head of the big hulking negro, Harry, of course, had not the faintest notion whence he was being taken.

Perhaps he was just a trifle reckless. He was so at most times, but in this case I imagine he was in the right. For the worst thing one can do on meeting strange savages is to show mistrust or fear of them. If you mistrust them, they at once suspect you, and the consequences may sometimes be anything but pleasant.

It was not long before our hero found out that it was indeed a lake, and not a broad river, on which he was embarked, and that it was studded with about a hundred islands, over all of which this black host of theirs was evidently the potentate.

He landed on one of the largest of them, and on a kind of rude pier where nearly a hundred armed amazons were drawn up to receive their lord and his guests.

Harry afterwards found out that he kept ten amazons for every island, but they all lived near the royal residence, and were his especial body-guard. Fierce-looking, stalwart hussies they were, with knives in their girdles, spears in their hands, and leather-covered shields, that were nearly as big and wide as barn doors.

Over these shields they grinned and glared in a way that was really hideous. They rolled their eyes round and round incessantly, as if they had been moved like clock-work. Perhaps, thought Harry, they go in for eye-drill in this queer country. The reason of this optical movement, he was afterwards told, was to prove to the king that danger could come to him from no direction without their seeing it.

These amazons were dressed in sacks of cocoa-cloth, and wore tippets of skins not unlike those of your dandy coachmen in Hyde Park. From their legs and arms, behind and below, feathers stuck out, and as head-dresses their own hair was done up into an immense dome, which stood straight up and was adorned with the feathers of the red ibis.

All this Harry took in at a glance as he walked on behind the king, through an avenue of most splendid trees, towards his palace.

I must dismiss the palace with a single sentence. It was not unlike a haycock of immense size, with a door in the side, or like the half of a cocoanut turned upside down. It was in an enclosure, in the very middle of the island, and near it were the huts of the king's amazons, the whole being defended by a strong palisade of roughly hewn wood.

The huts of his other warriors—and every one appeared to be a warrior in this island—were outside the fort and different in shape and appearance. They were, if anything, more elaborately built, and had verandahs supporting their roofs, which only proved that his majesty was a man of simple tastes, and preferred looking after the well-being of his subjects rather than his own.

One of the largest tents in the enclosure was set aside for Harry and his companions. It contained a dais-bed, covered with grass matting, an immense grass-stuffed pillow, and mats on the floor besides.

He had not been long in this tent ere an unarmed amazon entered, bearing a huge leafen basket, laden with the most delicious fruit, the perfume of which filled the whole room. She also brought and placed near it a huge pitcher of water.

This was all very gratifying, and Harry began to wonder where this strange king learned all his civility and hospitality, and he really felt a little sorry now that he had taken the liberty of smacking his majesty on the fingers when he was attempting to cut off a button.

"How, on the other hand," he asked himself, "have this curious people escaped the raids and ravages of the plundering slaver Arabs?"

Perhaps the Arabs had not yet found them out, or, having found them out, deemed it impossible to attack them, so well protected were they by water.

Nothing was done to-day by Harry except to wander about all over this lovely island.

Indeed, the adjective "lovely" but poorly expresses the wealth and beauty of flower and foliage that met his gaze at every turn.

It seemed a veritable garden of Eden. It must have been miles in extent, yet the king assured him he might wander everywhere, and he would find neither wild beast nor loathsome dangerous reptile.

His majesty went to his tent and did not appear again that day, nor was he visible until late into the next.

Harry was walking about making friends with the cocks and hens, the goats and the pigs, and with several charmingly plumaged birds of the guinea-hen species, when he was summoned into the king's presence.

The dusky monarch was seated in the middle of his tent on a mat. So black was he, and so dark was the hut, that, coming right in from the glare of the noonday sun, it was some time before Harry could see him or anything else. He heard the king's hearty laugh, however, and went towards it.

He was beckoned to a mat on the floor, and fruit was handed to him.

Then the royal host began to show all the inquisitiveness of a child, and evinced so much curiosity that Harry could not answer his questions fast enough. But he delighted him greatly by saying that at home he too lived on an island.

The king was exceedingly tickled, though, when told through Raggy that we were subjects to a queen.

He laughed so immoderately that he was obliged to lie back and roll on his mat, and for quite three minutes could say nothing but "Lobo! Lobo! Lobo!"

In the midst of all this pleasant discourse two amazons entered, and helped the king to rise.

He said something which Raggy translated, "Come on for true."

They went on "for true," and soon found themselves in a grove and under a canopy of grass-cloth. On the green-sward they all squatted down to a banquet, the like of which Harry had not seen for many days.

It was not served on china, you may be sure, and there were no forks, only knives. The plates were of yellow-brown clay, and as soft as a brick. In the centre was a huge dish of curried rice; before each of his guests was placed a curried fowl. Then there were floury and well-cooked yams, sweet potatoes and plantains, and a large chattee of water.

Raggy ate up his fowl every bit, so did Somali Jack. Harry failed on his last drumstick, and the king laughed again, and cried, "Lobo! Lobo!"

Then there was more wandering about the island, and another banquet or fried fish and fruit on their return.

All the time Harry and Jack stuck to their rifles. One never knows what savages may turn out to be, and had anything occurred they were determined to sell their lives as dearly as possible.

Next day, and next, and next, were simply repetitions of the first, with this difference—that the king took his guests round his islands in his barge, rowed now by five dark-skinned boatmen on each side, and this will give you some idea of the size of it.

Every evening after supper, sitting out under the stars, the king being only dimly visible as a kind of shape, Harry had to tell stories of all the kings and potentates and countries in the world.

He got a little tired at last, and found it better and easier to invent tales of imagination, based upon the stories he had read, such as the novels of Cooper and Walter Scott, than to stick to plain geography and pure history. This pleased this strange king even better, and he was constantly saying, "Lobo!" during Harry's recitals.

I dare say, however, that Raggy, through whom, as a medium, the stories had to pass, embellished them somewhat on his own account.

Among the gifts from Somali Jack's packet that Harry presented to his majesty was a shirt and a pair of pyjamas. These he wore until they were black, albeit Harry had several times suggested that they should be washed.

A whole month flew by. Very quickly indeed the days went too, for the air made Harry lazy, and he felt as if he had eaten the lotus leaf. He roused himself at last, and, fearful that he might be outstaying his welcome, he told the king he must go.

"Go! did you not come here to stay and talk to me for ever and ever? Go! No, no! Lobo! Lobo!"

It began gradually to dawn upon Harry that he really and virtually was a prisoner in these friendly islands. He certainly could not leave them without his majesty's permission. To steal a boat and try to escape was out of the question, the amazons with the rolling eyes would effectually prevent this.

So he stayed on quietly another month. Then, firm in the belief that a constant drop will wear away a stone, he began persistently to tease the king into letting him go on his journey.

The king would promise one day, and retract the next.

Three months passed away, then four. Harry was getting desperate. At the risk of giving mortal offence he refused to tell any more stories. And his majesty got so sad and morose that he felt grieved to see him.

“I will let you go,” he said at length, “if you will promise to return and bring me more gifts.”

Harry gladly promised that he would do everything in his power to come back that way.

The king had most minutely examined the rifles, but hitherto not a shot had been fired. Ammunition was far too valuable.

But one day Harry determined to give the king a treat. He took his rifle, and pointing to a great vulture that was slowly floating around the village, fired, and to his own surprise brought it down.

But the consternation among the natives was intense. It was a strange, superstitious dread, and if they could have turned pale with fear I feel sure they would have done so. Harry had made thunder and lightning, smoke and flame, and killed an evil bird. No wonder the king capsized on his back on the mat, and said “Lobo!” more than a dozen times!

But Harry explained everything to him, and his majesty was satisfied.

The day before Harry’s departure from the Lake of the Hundred Isles was devoted to feasting and dancing. The king even proposed killing one or two of his subjects in honour of the occasion.

Harry would not hear of this.

“Well,” the king said, “he would put them up at a distance, and his guest should bring them down, with his rifle.”

“No, no, no,” laughed Harry; “kill hens and we can eat them, but not human beings.”

It was such a drowsy island this that Harry never thought of turning out of bed till about eight o'clock.

When he got up next day, and went forth to breathe the balmy morning air, the sight that was presented to him made him open his eyes wide with astonishment. It was like a scene of enchantment.

The king's hut, and every other hut, and even the palisade around this camp, was completely covered with flowers of the most gorgeous hues and sweetest perfume, while all the ground was deeply bedded with green leaves and boughs. Even the shields and spears of the amazons were decorated with flowers, and they wore garlands around their necks and heads. Near the king's tent sat a few musicians, beating low on tom-toms, and singing a dreamy kind of a chant.

It was late before the king put in an appearance; he did so at last, however, and very pleased he seemed when he gazed about him. Then his eye sought Harry's; he was anxious to know if he was also pleased with—

The Feast of Flowers.

Harry hastened to assure him that he was more than pleased, he was delighted.

Would the queen of his country be pleased if she were here? That was his next question, and he laughed as he put it till his sides shook again. The answer was, "Undoubtedly."

I do not intend to give a complete description of all the performances of the day—they were far too numerous. Suffice it to say that there was a grand procession of warriors, headed by the flower-bedecked amazons; after the soldiers came the king's butchers or executioners; and next a crew of naked natives, bearing a pig, a goat, and several cocks and hens for the slaughter. The goat looked rather astonished and kicked a little at times; the cocks looked boldly unconcerned; but the pig was a lusty one, he was not content with kicking and biting, but he screamed so loudly that the sound, or bleating one might call it, of the chanters was hardly heard. All this, accompanied by the beating of tom-toms and the occasional unearthly yells of the amazons, made up a concert that it is far beyond my powers of description to give the reader any correct notion of.

The animals were slain. The amazons danced around the hole into which the creatures' blood had been poured, frequently dipping their fingers therein and besmearing their faces, which certainly did not improve their grim beauty.

Then the procession returned to the king's enclosure, and more wild dancing was carried on, much to the delectation of his majesty.

Suddenly he wheeled round to the mat where Harry and Raggy were squatted.

"Can you dance?" said the king. "Yes, you must dance."

When Raggy translated his majesty's words Harry could not keep from laughing aloud.

The idea, he thought, of his leading one of those bloody-faced amazons through a mazy dance, or of his dancing in her majesty's uniform to please a savage king!

"No," he said, "he could not dance; but Raggy would."

Raggy whispered something to his master, and the reply was—

"So you have, Raggy; I had quite forgotten. Go and fetch it."

Raggy was back in less than a minute with a German concertina, which he had looted from Mahmoud, and which had been intended for King 'Ngaloo.

The effect of Harry's playing on this instrument was magical. There was a half-frightened silence at first, succeeded by murmurs of delight.

"Lobo! Lobo!! Lobo!!!" cried the king, emphatically, and when Harry finished he smoothed the back of his hand with one finger, as if he had been a pet rat, and Harry could have sworn he saw tears in the poor man's eyes.

"Now, Raggy," cried Harry, striking into a hornpipe, "now for your breakdown."

Raggy required no second bidding, and I am sure no stage nigger ever could have gone through one half the capers Raggy did, in that wonderful breakdown of his.

During the dance the king's face was something to behold and wonder at, his excitement was intense, and when Raggy finished he had simply to begin again. So it was "encore" and "encore" till the poor boy fairly sank on the ground panting from exertion, and the king shouted "Lobo! Lobo! Lobo! Lobo!"

To change the programme, Harry commenced to sing "Rule Britannia," and somewhat to his surprise, while the king beat time with his hand on his knee, several of the amazons joined the chorus and actually followed the tune.

The amazons after this took chains of flowers and threw over Harry's head till he was nearly choked.

The concert ended at last and feasting began, and after this the king was led away and deposited on a couch of leaves and flowers, and at once went off to sleep.

"And no wonder," said Harry to himself, "for he has picked the bones of a couple of fowls, and eaten nearly half a goat."

Next morning his majesty was up betimes, and as bright as a lark.

He was full of business. There was Harry's boat to get ready, and also his own, for he meant to send his guest away in state.

"Ask or me anything," he said to Harry, "and I will give it if you promise to return."

"I will assuredly return," replied Harry, "if the Great Father spares me."

"And now, when I think of it, I shall be for ever grateful to you for your hospitality. Will you add to it by lending me two of your people to help me as carriers on my march?"

The answer was made in the following way. The king ran rapidly along the ranks of his amazons, and dragged out two of the sturdiest, whom he almost flung into Harry's arms.

Harry stepped back laughing.

"Oh, no, your majesty," he said, "not the ladies, please."

"Lobo! Lobo!" said his majesty.

The boat in which Harry and his companions embarked for the distant eastern shore, was bedded with beautiful flowers, and when he bade the king goodbye on the shore he took away with him three sturdy islanders to act as guides, and to help to carry his guns and packages.

These last contained a supply of rice sufficient to last the little expedition for many months.

When he reached the hill-top and looked back, lo! there on the beach still stood the honest king. Once more adieus were waved; then Harry and his people went down over the mountain side, and bore away to the West.

It was when in bivouac that night, halfway up a hill, with the moon and stars shining in a clear blue sky and brilliantly reflected in a little lake down beneath, that Harry remembered that all the time he had been a guest of the island king, he had never spoken to either him or his people of the good tidings of the Gospel.

He felt his face burn red as he thought of his neglect. But he vowed to himself that if spared to return he would try to make amends for such thoughtlessness.

“You should sow good seed when you can,” something seemed to whisper to Harry; “the ground may be rough, the soil may be hard, but good seed often makes good soil for itself.”


Freeditorial