Haviland's Chum Vol.II

By

Bertram Mitford

Haviland's Chum Vol.II

Chapter Seventeen.

The Scream in the Forest.

“How much further to this village of yours, Somala?”

“We are there now, Sidi. What you call one hour’s march.”

“Always that ‘one hour’ story!”

And the speaker turns away somewhat shortly. The question, put in a kind of mongrel Swahili dialect, was put shortly and with a touch of impatience, for the torrid equatorial heat makes men irritablewhite men, at any rateand the first speaker is a white man. The second is a negroid Arab, hailing from the island of Pemba.

Through the moonlit forest the long file of men is wending, like a line of dark ghosts. There are perhaps three score of them, and most of them carry loads. Some few do not, and of such are the two who have been conversing.

“But,” rejoins the Arab, “it may be written that when we arrive there we shall find no village. Mushâd’s people have been busy of late, and this village lies in his return path.”

“I don’t care whether we find any village or not, so long as we find the water,” is the reply. “What do you say, doctor?”relapsing into AngloSaxon, as he turns to another man, the only other white man of the party.

“Why, that it’s time we did find some. This swamp water is awful bad drinking stuff.”

Under the broad moon it is almost as light as day, and as this strange band emerges into an open space its concomitant elements can be seen to advantage. The man who had first spoken, and who seems to be its leader, is tall, supple, and erect, with straight, regular features; the lower part of the bronzed face is hidden by a thick brown beard, not guiltless even here in these wilds of some attempt at trimming. This, together with his alert and weatherbeaten appearance, gives him a much older look than his actual years, for he is quite a young man. The other, he addressed as “doctor,” and whose speech is dashed with just a touch of the brogue, is much older. He is a man of medium height, with a quiet refined face, and his hair is just turning grey. Both are armed with a doublebarrelled express rifle, revolver of heavy calibre, and sheath knife. The Arab,

Somala, and a few others are also armed with Martini rifles; but the bearers of the loads, who are composed of half a dozen nationalities, carry no firearms, though each has a sheath knife of some sort strapped round himlong or short, straight or curved or doubleedged, but all wickedlooking weapons enough.

The line swings along at an even, wirypaced walk, to the croon of some wild, weird melody. Then, as, the open space passed, they reenter the forest shade, they stop short, the whole line telescoping togetherloads colliding, and men falling with them in confusion. For, from the sombre, mysterious depths in front comes a most horrible and appalling sound.

A scream, so awful in its longdrawn intensityso fraught with terror and energy and despairsurely such a cry could never have issued from a human throat. Louder and louder it peals through the grim midnight shades, as though some unknown and gigantic monster were in the last throes of a despairing struggle with countless and overwhelming assailants. Of those who hear it, the superstitious natives huddle together, and trembling in every limb, too scared even to bolt, stand bunched like a flock of bewildered sheep. All save a few, that is, for those immediately in attendance on the leaders come of more virile nationality. Even the two white men are conscious of a wave or superstitious fear thrilling through their veins, possibly the result of climate and condition.

“Sidi,” whispers Somala, impressively, indicating the direction whence proceeds the horrible sound, “the village is yonder. Mushâd has been there, and that is the voice of the dead.”

“Not so. It is the voice of some one or something very much alive,” answers the leader. “And I intend to find out all about it. Eh, doctor?”

“Why, of course.”

“Those who are men and not cowards, come with me,” says the leader, shortly.

Not a man of his armed followers hangs back. Even the frightened porters, in terror at being left to themselves in this demonhaunted place, will not stay behind; for, like all natives of an inferior sort, the presence of a resolute white man is to them a potent rallying influence.

Soon the forest opens out again, and there, in the moonlight before them, lie the thatched roofs of a considerable village. Again peals forth that awful, bloodcurdling scream, proceeding right from among those primitive dwellings.

“Come along! Let’s make a dash for it!” warns the leader, under the natural impression that some human victim is being barbarously done to death at the hands of its inhabitants. His swarthy followers do not share this opinion, their own pointing to the supernatural, but they will go with him anywhere.

Even as they advance, quickly but cautiously, the leaders are wondering that no volley of firearms or spears greets them. There is something of lifelessness about the place, however, which can be felt and realised even before they are near enough for the scattered skulls and bones to tell their own tale. Now they are through the stockade, and now, rising from right in front of them, peals forth that awful scream once more, and with it a most horrible chorus of snapping and growling and snarling. And rounding the corner of one of the primitive buildings the whole explanation lies before them. A weird and terrible sight the broad moonlight reveals.

In front of one of the huts is a human figure. Yet, can it be? It is that of a man of tall and powerful build, his body covered with blood, his clothing in rags, his hair and beard matted and streaming, his rolling eyes starting from their sockets. In each hand he brandishes a short white club, consisting, in fact, of the legbone of a human being, as he bounds and leaps, yelling his horrible, maniacal scream; while around, on three sides of him, a densely packed mass of beasts is swaying and snarling, now driven back by the sheer terror of his maniacal onslaught, then surging forward, as the man, ever keeping his rear secured by the hut door, retires again.

But it is an unequal combat that cannot last. Even the prodigious strength and courage of the assailed cannot hold out against the overwhelming numbers and boldness of the assailants.

Then the tables are turnedand that with a suddenness which is almost laughable. Their approach unperceived, these timely rescuers simply rake the closely packed mass of hyaenas with their fire. The cowardly brutes, driven frantic with the suddenness and terror of this surprise, turn tail and flee, many rolling over and over each other in their rout, leaving, too, a goodly number on the ground, dead or wounded. The latter the natives of the party amuse themselves by finishing off, while their leaders are turning their attention to the rescued man.

“I say, old chap, you’ve had a narrow squeak for it,” says the younger of the two. “We seem to be only just in time. Good thing you yelled out as you did, or we shouldn’t have been that.”

The other makes no reply. Gazing vacantly at his rescuers, he continues to twirl his gruesome weapons, with much the same regularity of movement as though he were practising with Indian clubs prior to taking his morning bath.

“How did you get here?” goes on the leader, with a strange look at his white companion.

“Eh? Get here? Ran, of course.”

“Ran?” taking in the woeful state to which the unfortunate man had manifestly been brought. “Why did you run? Who was after you?”

“The devil.”

“Who?”

“The devil.”

“Butwhere are your pals? Where are the rest of you?”

“Pals? Oh, dead.”

“Dead?”

“Rather. Dead as herrings, the whole lot. Fancy that!”

The coolness with which the man makes this statement is simply eerie, as he stands there in the moonlight, a horrible picture in his bloodstained rags. More than a doubt as to his sanity crosses the minds of at any rate two of his hearers. Nor do his next words tend towards in any wise dispelling it.

“They were killed, the whole lot of them. Cut up, by Jove! I’m the only man left alive out of the whole blessed crowd. Funny thing, isn’t it?”

“Rather. Who killed them, and where?” And there is a note of anxiety in the tone of the question.

“We were attacked by Rumaliza’s people couple of days’ march back. They surprised us, and I am the only one left alive. But, I say, don’t bother me with any more questions. I’m tired. D’you hear? I’m tired.”

“I expect you are. Well, come along and join us. We’re going to camp down yonder by the water. You’ll want a little overhauling after the cutting and wounding you seem to have gone through, and here’s the very man to overhaul youDr Ahern,” indicating his white comrade.

But the response to this friendly overture is astounding.

“Oh, go away. I don’t want you at all. I didn’t ask you to come, and I don’t want you here bothering me. When I do I’ll tell you.” And without another word the speaker turns and dives into the hut again. The two left outside stare blankly at each other.

“A clear case for you, doctor. The chap’s off his chump. Say, though, I wonder if there’s anything in that yarn of his about being attacked by Rumaliza’s people.”

“Might easily be. We’ll have to keep a bright lookout, if any of them are around. But we must get him out.”

“We must.”

The same idea was in both their minds. It was not a pleasant thing to have to creep through that open door with the probability of being brained by a powerful maniac waiting for them in the pitchy darkness beyond.

“I’ll strike a light,” says the younger of the two men. And, taking out his matchbox, he passes quickly through the aperture, at the same time striking a couple of wax vestas.

The object of his search is lying in a corner. Beside him, gleaming whitely, are two fleshless skeletons. There is a third, all battered to pieces. It is a weird and gruesome spectacle in the extreme.

But the unfortunate man’s dispositions seem scarcely aggressive as they bend over him. He does not move.

“He’s unconscious,” pronounces the doctor. “That simplifies matters. Pick up that end of him, and we’ll carry him out.”

Chapter Eighteen.

After Ten Years.

“I say! Was I very ‘dotty’?”

“Pretty well. But that’s only natural under the circs.”

“Talk much, and all that sort of thingeh, did I?”

“Oh, yes. The usual incoherencies. But that’s nothing. We’re used to it. In fact, we now and then take a turn at it ourselves when this beastly upcountry fever strikes us. Eh, doctor?”

“We do,” answered Dr Ahern, turning away to attend to the unpacking and examination of some scientific specimens, but not before he had added:

“I wouldn’t talk too much if I were you. It won’t hurt you to keep quiet a little longer.”

A fortnight had gone by since the rescue of the solitary fugitive when in his last and desperate extremity; and, indeed, nothing but the most careful tending had availed to save his life even thenthat, and his own constitution, which, as Dr Ahern declared, was that of a bull. Several days of raging and delirious fever had delayed the expedition at the place where it had found him, and then it had moved on again, though slowly, carrying the invalid in an improvised litter. At last the fever had left him, and his wounds were healing; by a miracle and the wonderful skill of the doctor he had escaped bloodpoisoning.

The latter’s back turned, the convalescent promptly started to disregard his final injunction.

“I say,” he went on, lowering his voice, “it won’t hurt me to talk a little, will it?”

The other, his tall frame stretched upon the ground, his hat tilted over his eyes, and puffing contentedly at a pipe, laughed.

“I don’t know. Doctor’s orders, you see. Stillwell, for one thing, we’ve been wondering, of course, who you are, and how you got into the hobble we found you in.”

“Well, I’m Oakley, and I’ve been inland a year and a half in the planthunting line.”

“That so? I’m Haviland, and I’ve been up rather more than two years in the bughunting line, as the Americans would call it. Ornithology, too.”

“So! Made a good haul?”

“Uncommonly. We’ve got some specimens here that’ll make our names for us.”

“Let’s see them,” said the other eagerly. “I wasam, in factkeen on beetles, but I’m professionally in plants now.”

And then these two enthusiasts set to work comparing notes. They clean forgot about the circumstances of their meeting or knowing more about each other; forgot recent perils and the brooding mysteries of the wilderness, as they hammered away at their pet subject, and talked bird and beetle to their hearts’ content. In the midst of which a displeased voice struck in:

“I’d like to ask if that’s what you call keeping quiet, now.”

Both started guiltily.

“My fault, doctor,” said Haviland. “I let him go on. He’s in the same line as ourselves, you know.”

“Is he? He’ll be in a different line from any of us if he gets thinking he’s all right before he is. Sure, the constitution of a bull won’t pull a man through everythingnot quite.”

The patient accepted this grave rebuke with a smile, and lay still. He had not yet put these friends in need in full possession of the facts of his misfortunes, but there was plenty of time for that.

Ten years had gone by since last we saw Haviland, in imminent danger of expulsion from Saint Kirwin’s, and which it is probable he only escaped through a far greater grief than thatthe death of his father; and for the most part of that period his career has been pretty much as we find him nowa wandering one, to wit. He had not returned to Saint Kirwin’s, for the potent reason that the parson had left his family in somewhat of straits, and the eldest member thereof was old enough, at any rate, to do something for himself. This had taken the form of a bank clerkship, obtained for him by an uncle. But to the young lover of Nature and the free open air and the woods and fields, this life was one that he loathed. It told upon his health at last, and realising that he would never do any good for himself in this line, the same relative assisted him to emigrate to South Africa. There he had many ups and downsmostly downsand then it occurred to him to try to

turn his muchloved hobby into a profession. He obtained introductions to one or two scientific men, who, seeing through the genuineness of his gifts, offered him employment, sending him as assistant on scientific expeditions, and finally entrusting the leadership of such entirely to his hands. And he succeeded wonderfully. He had found his line at last, and followed it up with an entire and wholehearted enthusiasm.

Yet such expeditions were no child's play. A capacity for every kind of hardship and privation, indomitable enterprise, the multifold perils of the wilderness to face, starvation and thirst, the hostility of fierce savage tribes, treachery and desertion or overt mutiny on the part of his own followers, and the deadly, insidious malaria lurking at every mile in the miasmatic equatorial heat. But the same spirit which had moved those midnight poaching expeditions at Saint Kirwin's was with Haviland now, and carried him through in triumph. Young as he waswell under thirtyhe had already begun to make something of a name for himself as a daring and successful exploring naturalist.

He had kept in touch with Mr Sefton, as much as a correspondence of the fewandfarbetween order could so be called, and from time to time obtained the latest news about Saint Kirwin's. Among other items was one to the effect that after his own departure the Zulu boy, Anthonyotherwise Mpukuzahad turned out badly, had become so intractable and such a power for mischief that the missionary who had placed him there had been invited to remove him. This was done, and they had lost sight of him. Probably he had returned to his own land and reverted to savagery; and this, Haviland thought, was very likely the case. Yet he himself had been in Zululand, and had made frequent inquiries with regard to Mpukuza, but could obtain no satisfactory information, even in the locality where the boy was said to hail from. It was no uncommon thing for missionaries to take away their children and place them in schools, declared the inhabitants, and one case more or less was not sufficiently noteworthy to remain in their recollection. Nor did they know any such name as Mpukuza, and in the ups and downs of a somewhat struggling and busy life the matter faded from Haviland's mind as well.

As time went on the injured man, in spite of the steamy heat and a drained system, had recovered so as almost to regain his former strength; but, before this, the information he had given to Haviland and the doctor about himself had caused a change in their plans. Briefly, it amounted to this. His expedition, consisting of himself and a German botanist, together with a number of porters, had been surprised at daybreak by a party of Arabs and negroes who he had every reason to believe constituted a gang of Rumaliza's slavehunters. So sudden had been the attack that the whole party was completely overpowered. His German comrade was shot dead at his side, and he himself got a cut on the head with a scimitar which nearly put an end to his days, together with a spear thrust in the shoulder. He had a distinct recollection of shooting two of the

assailants with his revolver as he broke through them to run, and then for the whole day some of them had chased him. He had been wounded again by a spear, thrown by one who had outdistanced the others, but he had managed to shoot the thrower. Then he had lost his revolver while extricating himself from a swamp into which he had sunk waistdeep; and thus that most helpless object on earth, an unarmed man, and badly wounded into the bargain, had taken refuge in the deserted village to die.

"And precious hard dying you intended to make of it, old chap," had been Haviland's comment. "Why, it was the finest thing I ever saw in my life, the way you were laying about you with those old shinbones. Make a fine subject for one of those groups of sculpture. The Berserk at Bay, one might call it. Eh?"

Well, it was no laughing matter at the time, they all agreed. But the worst of it was, Oakley had explained, that the ruffians who had surprised his camp had, of course, seized everything, including the whole of the specimens he had collected during this expedition, which latter would, therefore, be so much time, trouble, and expense absolutely thrown away. As for his bearers, such of them as had not been massacred had, of course, been seized as slaves, and his property as loot; but it was just possible that the marauders, finding the botanical specimens utterly valueless to themselves, might have left them on the ground, in which event they could be recovered.

If, in their heart of hearts, Haviland and the doctor were not exultant over this idea, it is hardly astonishing; for, at the rate they had travelled while bearing the injured man in their midst, to return to the scene of the tragedy would mean about a fortnight's march, and that not merely of a retrograde nature, but one which would take them very near an exceedingly dangerous belt of country. But here was a brother scientist, the fruits of his toil and risk, the reward of his enterprise, thrown away, with just a chance remaining of saving them. It was not in these two, at any rate, to let that chance go by, merely at the cost of an extra fortnight's march and a certain amount of potential danger.

Well, the march had been effected, and here they were at last on the site of Oakley's ravaged camp. A ghastly spectacle met their gaze. Many of the bearers had been massacred, and the ground was literally strewn with bones, either cleanpicked by the ravenous carnivora of the surrounding wilderness, or with mangled tatters of flesh and sinew still depending. Skulls, too; in many cases with the features yet remaining, but all showing the same hideous distortion of the terror and agony which had accompanied their deaths. The remains of the illfated German botanist were identified and reverently buried, but everything in the shape of loot which the camp had contained had been borne away by the rapacious marauders.

But to the delight of Oakley, to the delight of all of them, his conjectures had proved correct. Following on the broad track left by the retreating raiders they came upon the lost specimens. The cases had been broken open, and, containing nothing but dried plants, had been thrown away and left. Some had suffered, but the bulk were entirely uninjured, and in his exultation the tragical fate which had overwhelmed his companion and followers was quite overlooked by this ardent scientist. The loot, too, of the camp was nothing. His precious specimens were recoveredthat was everything. The doctor and Haviland, moved by vivid fellow feeling, rejoiced with him, and that exceedingly. Yet, could they have foreseen what was before them, their exultation might have been considerably dashed. Their adventures had been many, their lives had been largely made up of perilous and startling surprises; but the greatest of these was yet to come, and that, perchance, at no very distant date.

Chapter Nineteen.

Danger Signals.

The odd man joining a party of two is by no means necessarily an acquisition, or invariably bound to preserve and promote the harmony already existing. In this case, however, the best happened. No more harmonious trio could be imagined than this one, as, having recovered the lost treasure, the expedition resumed its way. For Oakley proved to be the best of good fellows, and though several years older than Haviland, and with a great deal wider experience, he never for a moment forgot that he was with them now solely in the capacity of a guest. If his advice was asked he gave it, if not, he never by any chance volunteered it. Ahern and Haviland were, of course, tried comrades; and two years of sharing the same hardships, the same dangers, and the same aims, had bound them together as no period of acquaintance within the limits of conventional civilisation could ever have done.

The camp had been set for the day, whose full heat had already begun to strike in through the shading trees. The tired bearers were lying around, for the moon was again bright, and the marches were effected during the comparatively cool hours of the night. Some were cooking their root and grain diet, for game was exceedingly scarce, and they seldom tasted meatas to which, by the way, they expected soon to strike a river, and all hands looked forward eagerly to a possible and plenteous feed of seacow flesh. Haviland and Oakley were seated together, consulting maps, the doctor the while was busy at the other end of the camp with a porter who had somewhat badly hurt his foot.

“By the way, Haviland,” said Oakley, suddenly, “do you believe in the existence of that curious tribe of the Spider? I’ve known at least two men who believe in it firmly. One claims to have actually come into contact with it. If there is such a thing, we can’t be far from its reputed country.”

“H’m!” answered Haviland, musingly. “The more experience you gain of the interior, the more disinclined you are to say straight out that you disbelieve in anything. Now, that Spider tribe, if it exists at alland, mind you, I don’t say it doesn’twould be a good deal further to the west than we are now. I don’t think we have much to fear from it. But there’s a far nastier crowd than that, and within tolerable striking distance, too. It’s a Zuluspeaking tribe, not so very numerous, but occupying difficult country, and the very deuce of a fighting mob. Some say it’s of direct Zulu origin, others that it originated in a split among the Wangoni down on the lakes. But I don’t want to rub against it if I can help it. Ho, Kumbelwa!” he called.

In response there came up a magnificent specimen of a man. His skin was of a dark rich copper colour, and save for a mútya of cat's tails, he wore no clothing whatever. His finely shaped head was shaven, and crowned with the Zulu headring. In comparison with the inferior natives who constituted the carrying staffthough some of these were of powerful and muscular buildhe looked like an emperor.

"Nkose!" he cried, saluting, with right hand uplifted.

Then Haviland, speaking in Zulu, questioned him at some length. The man professed but a scant knowledge with regard to the tribe under discussion. He could not even tell its name for certain. It was reputed to change its name with every new king, and he had heard that a new king had succeeded rather lately. He was said to be quite a young man, but very stern and merciless in his rule. It was said, too, that towards white men he entertained a most extraordinary hatred. Anyhow, more than one who had entered his country had never been known to come out again. He had made himself troublesome, too, to more than one exploring party.

"Well, we'd better keep our eyes open, so as to give them a warm reception if they bother us," said Oakley, when this was translated.

"I know, and that's why I'm not overkeen on this hipposhoot when we strike the river," said Haviland. "Far better go without meat a little longer than get ourselves into a beastly unequal fight. And the banging of guns can be heard a deuce of a distance. We'll call Somala, and get his opinion."

But the Arab had not much to add to the Zulu's information. Him, however, Oakley understood, and needed no translation.

"Did you ever notice those two chaps; what an extraordinary family likeness there is between them?" said Haviland, as the two departed. "If you clapped a turban and long clothes on to Kumbelwa he'd pass for Somala's brother, and if you rigged out Somala in a mútya and headring he'd pass for a Zulu. The same type of face exactly."

"By Jove it is! Think there's a lot of Arab in the Zulu, then?"

"Not a doubt about it. You see, the Zulus didn't originally belong where they now are. They came down from the north, somewhere about where we are now, I shouldn't wonder. They had another custom, too, which was Mohammedan, as most of the other tribes have at the present day, but Tshaka stopped it among them. And I have a theory that the headring is a survival of the turban."

“That might be. But, I say, Haviland, you seem to have got their lingo all right. Were you much in the country?”

“A good bit. I haven’t got it by any means all right, though I know a great number of words, but my grammar’s of the shakiest. I often set them roaring with laughter over some absurd mistake; and I don’t even know what it is myself. By the way, there was a chap at school with mea Zulu from Zululand. He conceived a sort, of attachment for me because I smacked a fellow’s head for bullying him when he first came, and he was a useful chap too; firstrate at egghunting, and we got into all sorts of rows together. The other fellows used to call him ‘Haviland’s Chum,’ to rag me, you know; but I didn’t mind it. Well, he taught me some of his lingo, and made me want to see his country.”

“I wonder they took a black chap in an English school,” said Oakley.

“So did I. So did most of us. But he was put there by a missionary, and old Bowen was nuts on the missionary business.”

“Old Bowen? Was that at Saint Kirwin’s, then?”

“Yes. Why, were you ever there?”

“No. By the way, what sort of a chap was old Bowen?”

“A regular old Tartar. I hated him like poison the last part of the time I was there; but right at the endat the time I lost my poor old dadhe was awfully decent. He’s a good chap at bottom, is Nicka real good chap.”

“It’s extraordinary how small the world is,” said Oakley. “The old chap happens to be an uncle of mine, on the maternal side, and I own I like him better in that capacity than I should as a headmaster; but, as you say, he’s a real good chap at bottom.”

“What a rum thing!” declared Haviland. “Yes, as you say, the world is small indeed. Yet when I was in Zululand, I tried to find out about Cetchywe called him that at Saint Kirwin’s, after Cetywayo of course, his real name was Mpukuzabut could simply hear nothing whatever about him. The world wasn’t small in that instance. Hallo! There’s something up over yonder.”

There was. Excitement had risen and spread among the bearers, causing them to spring up and peer cautiously forth, notwithstanding that the heat was sweltering, and the hour was that of rest. The sentry on that side had passed the word that people were approaching the camp.

The ground there was thinly timbered, and it was seen in a moment that these new arrivals, whoever they might be, were fugitives. They bore the unmistakable look of men and womenfor there were several women among themflying for their lives. They were not even aware of the proximity of the camp until right into it; and then, at the sight of armed men confronting them, they fell on their faces with a howl for mercy.

“Who are these, Somala?” said Haviland, not without a touch of anxiety; foreseeing the possibility of the flight of these people drawing down some formidable enemy upon his expedition.

And, indeed, their tidings confirmed his worst misgivings. They were natives of a small tribe, themselves of indifferent physique. Their village had been attacked the evening before, and burned, but they, being outside, had escaped. They had heard rumours of Mushâd being out with a strong force. Without doubt, he it was who had assailed them.

The name of the dreaded slavehunting chief caused Haviland, and indeed others who heard it, to look grave.

“Well,” he said, “give these people food, such as we have, and let them go on their way.”

But this dictum was greeted by the refugees with a howl of dismay. If they went on further, why, then they were already dead, they protested. Would not the great white lords protect them? They would be safe within the shadow of their camp. Even Mushâd would not dare interfere with them there.

“Wouldn’t he?” said Haviland, in English. “I’m pretty sure he wouldand will. These wretched devils have just about brought a hornet’s nest about our ears, I more than expect. What are we to do, doctor?”

“Why, get out into more open country and beat them off. I figure out that this is just the way Mushâd would take, in any event; so, perhaps, it’s just as well these poor devils turned up to warn us.”

“What do you say, Oakley?”

“I’m entirely with the doctor.”

“Right. A couple of miles ahead, by the lay of the ground, we ought to find just the position we want.”

Within ten minutes of the order being issued the camp was struck. Every man took up his load, and the whole line filed briskly forth through the steaming, sweltering forenoon heat. There was no hanging back. The excitement of impending battle lent a springiness to the step of some, the instinct of selfpreservation to that of others; the refugees the while chanting the most fulsome praises in honour of their new protectors.

“There’s the very place we want!” cried Haviland, when they had thus advanced a couple of miles. “Looks as if it had been made on purpose.”

The ground had been growing more and more open, and now the spot to which he referred was a ring of trees surmounting a rise. This would afford an excellent defensive position if they were called upon to fight, and ample concealment in any case. In an inconceivably short space of time the whole expedition was safely within it.

Nor had they been long there before the instinct of their leaders realised that they had gained the place none too soon. Something like a flash and gleam in the far distance caught their glance, to disappear immediately, then reappearing again. The three white men, with their powerful glasses, soon read the meaning of this. It was the gleam of arms. A very large force indeed was advancing, taking a line which should bring it very near their position. Would they be discovered and attacked; or would the enemy, for such he undoubtedly was, fail to detect their presence and pass on? Well, the next hour would decide.

Chapter Twenty.

Mushâd the slaver.

In an incredibly short space of time the position was placed in a very effective state of defence. Even as Haviland had remarked, it might have been made on purpose for them: for it was neither too large nor too small, but just of a size to contain the whole outfit comfortably and without crowding. Just inside the ring of trees, a sort of breastwork had been constructed with the loadsthose containing the stores and bartertruck that is, for the precious cases of specimens had been placed in the centre, and buried flush with their lids, so as to be out of the way of damage from flying bullets. As far as possible, too, this breastwork had been supplemented by earth and stones, hastily dug up and piled.

The demeanour of those awaiting battle was varied and characteristic. Of the bearers, those of the more timid races were subdued and scared. The temerity of their white leaders in thinking to resist Mushâd and his terrible band was simply incomprehensible. Why did they not pay him the usual blackmail and be suffered to pass on? Some of the bearersthe braver ones, to the number of about a scorethough not usually entrusted with firearms, were now supplied with rifles, in the use of which they had already been drilled, and had even experienced some practice in the shape of a petty skirmish or two. These were now turning on swagger. The ten Arabs, Somala's clansmen, who were always armed, were simply impassive, as though a bloody fight against overwhelming odds were a matter of everyday occurrence, which could have but one resultvictory to themselves. Yet there was a gleam in their keen sunken eyes, and a nervous handling of their weapons, as they trained and sighted their rifles experimentally, and fingered the blades of their ataghans, that betrayed the martial eagerness that bubbled beneath the concealing mask. But the most striking figure of all was that of the Zulu, Kumbelwa. From a private bundle of his own he had fished out a real Zulu warshield of black and white bullhide, with a jackal tail tuft, and a shorthandled, broadbladed assegaithe terrible conquering weapon of his race. He had also brought forth a great headdress of towering black ostrich feathers, and sundry tufts of white cowhair, which he proceeded to tie round his arms and legs, and thus accoutred, he stood forth, a magnificent specimen of the most magnificent race of fighting savages in the world.

"By Jove, that's a grand chap!" exclaimed Oakley, as he gazed with interest upon this martial figure. "Do they grow many like that in the Zulu country, Haviland?"

"A good few, yes. Mind you, I'd sooner have Kumbelwa with me in a rough and tumble than any dozen ordinary men."

"How did you pick him up? Save his life, or anything of that sort?"

“No. A sort of mutual attraction. We took to each other, and he wanted to come away with me, that’s all. D’you see that string of wooden beads hung round his neck? That represents enemies killed, and I strongly suspect most of them wore red coats, for, like every manjack of his nation, he fought against us in the war of ’79. But wild horses wouldn’t drag from him that he had killed any of our people, and it’s the same with all of them. They’re too polite. If you were to ask them the question, they’d tell you they didn’t knowthere was too much racket and confusion to be sure of anything. Butlook at him now.”

The Zulu, half squatted on his haunches, was going through a strange performance. His rifle lay on the ground beside him, but his left hand grasped his great warshield, while with the right he was alternately beating time with his assegai to his song, or making short, quick lunges at empty air. For he was singing in a low, melodious, deepvoiced chant. At him the whole crowd of bearers was gaping, in undisguised admiration and awe.

“He’s singing his warsong,” explained Haviland. “I’ve never seen him do this before any other row we’ve been in. Evidently he thinks this is going to be a big thing.”

“And he’s right,” said the doctor. “Look there?”

He pointed in the direction of their late haltingplace. From their present one, the ground fell away almost open, save for a few scattered shrubs or a little heap of stones, to the thin timber line. Within this forms could now be seen movingmore and more were coming on, until the place was alive with themand the gleam of arms, the light falling on the blades of long spears and shining gunbarrels, scintillated above and among the approaching force. And this was coming straight for their position. Decidedly, our party had gained the latter none too soon.

As the new arrivals debouched from the timber, the three white men scanned them anxiously through their fieldglasses. The leaders, and a goodly proportion, seemed to be pure blood Arabs, but the bulk consisted of negroids and the undiluted negrothese latter naked savages of ferocious aspect, incorporated probably from the fierce cannibal tribes along the Upper Congo. The Arabs, in their turbans and longflowing garments, wore a more dignified and civilised aspect, yet were hardly less ruthless.

This formidable force, once clear of the timber, halted, drawn up in a kind of battle line, possibly expecting to strike terror by reason of its numerical strength and sinister aspect, and those watching reckoned it to consist of not less than five hundred men. Above bristled a forest of long spears, the sun flashing back from their shining tips. But

higher still, reared above these, there floated a flag. In banner shape, so as to display, independently of any breeze, its ominous device, it was turned full towards them. Upon a green ground a red scimitar, dripping red drops.

“That is the standard of Mushâd,” whispered Somala, touching Haviland’s elbow.

A vivid interest kindled the features of the three white men, also those of the Zulu. Here, then, was the renowned slaver, the man whose name was a byword from Zanzibar to Morocco. They were about to behold him face to face. Upon the bulk of the native bearers the effect produced was different. The ruthlessness of the terrible slaver chief, his remorseless crueltiesah! of such they had heard more than enough. And then a man was seen to leave the opposing ranks and walk towards them. Halfway, he halted and cried in a loud voice:

“Who are yeand what do ye here? Are ye friends or foes?”

Somala, instructed by Haviland, replied:

“We are no man’s foes. Our mission here is a peaceful oneto collect the strange rare plants and insects of the land. That is all. Who are ye, and who is your chief?”

The herald broke into a loud, harsh, derisive laugh.

“Who is our chief?” he echoed. “You who gaze upon our standard, and ask ‘Who is our chief?’ Ye must be a kafila of madmen.”

“Is it the great Mushâd? If so, we would fain see him, and talk. Yonder, where the stones rise upon the plain,” went on Somala, prompted by Haviland, and indicating a spot about a third of the distance between their position and the hostile line. “If he will advance, with three othersunarmedwe will do likewise, pledging our oath on the blessed Koran and on the holy Kaba that we meet only in peace.”

“I will inquire,” replied the emissary, and turning, he went back.

“Supposing he acceptswhich of us shall go?” said Oakley.

“I and Somala, and Kumbelwa,” answered Haviland. “And I think Murâd Ali,” designating a dark sinewy Arab, a blood brother of Somala’s.

“I claim to go instead of him,” said Dr Ahern, quietly, but firmly. “Oakley can remain in command.”

“Very well,” said Haviland. “Will they really be without arms, Somala?”

“They will perhaps have small arms concealed, Sidi. But they will not break faith.”

“Then we will do the same, and on the same terms. Look! Here they come!”

Four men were seen to detach themselves from the group, and advance, one bearing the chief’s terrible standard. When they were near the appointed spot, Haviland and the doctor, followed by Somala and Kumbelwa, also stepped forth.

“Whou!” growled the tall Zulu to himself. “A warrior without arms is like a little child, or an old woman.”

For all that, he had taken the precaution of secreting a formidable knife beneath his mútya. He also carried his great warshield.

The Arabs stood, coldly impassive, awaiting them. They were stern, grimlooking, middleaged mentheir keen eyes glowing like coals beneath their bushy brows as they exchanged curt salutations. The chief differed not at all from the others in outward aspect: the same spare, muscular frame; the same grim and hawklike countenance, haughty, impassive; the same turbaned head and flowing white garments. For all the solemn pledge of peace they had exchanged, it was evident that neither party trusted the other overmuch. They had halted a dozen paces apart, and were silently scanning each other. But what seemed to impress the Arabs most, as could be seen by their quick eager glances, was the aspect of Kumbelwa. They gazed upon the towering Zulu with undisguised admiration.

Haviland opened the talk with a few civilities in the current dialect, just to let them see he was no novice at interior travel, then he left the negotiations to Somala. They were peaceful travellers, and desired to quarrel with no man, but were well armed, and feared no man. They would send a present of cloth and brass wire for Mushâd and some of his more distinguished followers, then they would go their different ways in peace and amity.

The ghost of a contemptuous smile flickered across the features of the Arabs at this prospect. Then Mushâd said:

“And my slaves? They will be sent too?”

“Slaves?”

“My slaves. Those who have fled to your camp, O travellers. They must be sent back.”

“But they have taken refuge with us. They have eaten our salt, O chief. We cannot yield them up. Take presents from us instead.”

“You are young, and therefore foolish,” replied Mushâd, staring Haviland in the eye with haughty contempt. “My slaves must be given up. I have said it.”

“And if we refuse?”

“Look yonder. Have you as many fighters as these?”

“Not quite as many. But we are well armed, and, fighting in a good cause, we fear no man.”

For a few moments neither party addressed the other. Meanwhile the doctor said hurriedly in English:

“What do you think, Haviland? Is it worth while risking all the expedition, and throwing away the fruits of these two yearsand all their gain to science, mindfor the sake of a few miserable niggers? If we send them back, they’ll only make slaves of them, and indeed that’s all they’re fit for.”

“Let’s see.” And, turning to the chief, he resumed: “If we send back those who have sought refuge with us, will the chief solemnly promise that they shall not be harmedthat beyond the labour required of them they shall not be killed, or tortured, or illtreated?”

A low growling chuckle escaped the Arab’s deep chest, and his eyes flashed in haughty contempt.

“La Illah il Allah!” he blazed forth. “I will promise this much. They shall groan beneath heavy loads, and shall eat stick in plenty. But first, six of them shall hang by the heels till they are dead, with their eyes scooped out, and a live coal inserted in each socket. Further I promisethat this last shall be the fate of every one in your camp who shall fall into our hands alive, if you hesitate further to send back my slaves. On the holy Kaba I swear it. Now, make your choice. Will you return them, or will you not?”

Haviland looked at Ahern, who nodded his head.

“That settles it,” he said in a cold, decisive tone, turning again to the slaver chief. “Big words, big threats do not frighten us. We send not back to you these people who have sought our protection, to be put to your devilish tortures.”

For a moment, the two parties stood staring at each other in silence. Then Mushâd and his followers withdrew, feeing the others for a little distance, after which they turned, and stalked back to their awaiting forces, the green banner with its sinister symbol seeming to wave defiance and menace as it receded.

Chapter Twenty One.

Battle.

On regaining the shelter Haviland at once made it known to his followers that they had got to fight, and fight hard. They were already in position; that had been arranged during the parley.

“Can you trust these Arabs of yours, Haviland?” asked Oakley in a low tone. “Will they fight against their own countrymen?”

“Trust them? Rather. Besides, these are not their own countrymen. Another tribe altogether. And they are always fighting among themselves. They enjoy it.”

Kumbelwa, who had been placed in command of the armed bearers, was squatted on the ground, his snuff horn and spoon in his hand, and was taking copious quantities of snuff in the most unperturbed manner. There was no excitement about him now. That was to come.

“They know our strength, or rather our weakness,” said Haviland. “They can judge to a man by our tracks how many real fighters we have got. Somala says they will try rushing us.”

Hardly had the words left his mouth when the rattle of a sudden volley, and a line of smoke from the enemy’s front solved all doubts as to the intentions of the latter. Bullets came singing through the trees, and a shower of twigs fell about their ears in all directions. One, which had fallen just short, ricochetted and struck one of the armed bearers, killing him instantly. But the defenders reserved their fire.

Then it was seen that a crowd of blacks was stealing up from another side, taking advantage of every unevenness in the groundof shrubs, stones, everything. At the same time the Arabs from their position poured in another volley. It was rather better aimed than the first, but, beyond slightly wounding two men, took no effect. But with a wild, bloodcurdling scream, the dark horde which threatened their rear charged forward, and gained a position yet nearer. Then the shooting began. Haviland and Oakley, leaving the other side to the doctor and Somala, had sprung to confront this new peril. Their rifles spoke, and two of the advancing savages pitched forward on their faces. Then Kumbelwa’s turn came, and Kumbelwa was one of the few Zulus who could shoot. Lying full length behind the breastwork, he had got his rifle sighted on to a black head which kept appearing and disappearing behind a shrub. Up it came again, and this time Kumbelwa loosed off. The black head sprang into the air and a huge body beneath it,

which last turned a complete somersault, and lay in a huddled still heap beyond. The Zulu's exultation took the form of a deep humming hiss.

"Well done, Kumbelwa!" cried Oakley in glee. "Three shots, three birds."

It was no part of our friends' plan to waste ammunition; besides, they were aware of the effect a sparing fire, and nearly every shot telling, would have, as distinct from a general bout of wild and wide blazing. The black horde which had drawn so near them was evidently impressed, for it lay as though not daring to move.

Then from a new quarter fire was opened upon them. Two porters were struck and killed, and another badly wounded. This one began to screech lustily. In the tumult, unseen by the white leaders, one of the Arabs, at a sign from Somala, stepped behind him and promptly knocked him senseless with a clubbed rifle. They did not want any unnecessary signs of distress to reach the enemy.

And now, taking advantage of this new diversion, the horde of blacks leaped from their cover, and, uttering wild yells, charged forwards. There must have been over a couple of hundred of them, tall, ferociouslooking villains, armed with long spears and heavy axes. Leaping, zigzagging to avoid the bullets aimed at them, they came on in the most determined manner. Haviland and Oakley could not load fast enough, and the armed porters were blazing away in the wildest fashion, and simply doing no damage whatever. Kumbelwa had sent two more down, but still the remnant charged on. The while, on the other side, the doctor and Somala's party had their hands full in repelling an advance on the part of the Arab section of the attacking force, and that under a hot cross fire.

"Heavens, Oakley, they'll be on us in a minute!" exclaimed Haviland in a quick whisper, as he jammed fresh cartridges into the hot and smoking breech of his Express. And, indeed, it seemed so. They could not fire fast enough, and in a great mass the savages were already against the breastwork, lunging over it with their long spears. But then came the defenders' chance. Fools as they were with firearms, even the bearers could not miss point blank, and they poured their fire right into the faces of their swarming assailants. These dropped as though mown down, but with loud yells those behind pressed the foremost on, to be mown down in their turn. The striving, struggling mass would fain have taken flight, but simply could not. And then Kumbelwa, seeing it was time to effect a diversion, concluded to adopt the offensive.

Leaping over the breastwork, covered by his great warshield, he made for a tall ruffian, whose head was streaming with long black feathers, and who seemed to be directing the charge. Like lightning he was upon him, and beneath the shearing flash of the great assegai, down went the man, his trunk wellnigh ripped in twain.

“Usútu! ’Sútu!” roared the Zulu, as, whirling round, he struck another to the heart with his reeking spear, at the same time bringing another to the earth with a mighty slap of his great shield. Like lightning he moved. Never still for a second, he avoided the lunges made at him, always to strike fatally in his turn, and soon a ring of assailants round him was a ring of ripped and struggling corpses deluging the earth in torrents of blood. Whirling here, darting there, and ever roaring the warcry of his late king, the towering Zulu was to these dismayed savages the very embodiment of irresistible destruction. With yells of dismay they fled before him in a broken, demoralised crowd, and into their front the fire of those behind the breastwork played upon their thickest masses.

“Come back, Kumbelwa,” commanded Haviland, in Zulu.

Like magic the trained and disciplined warrior halted at the word of his chief. In a second he was within the breastwork again.

“Thou wert being led on too far, my friend,” said Haviland, all aglow with admiration. “In a moment yon dogs would have turned upon thee, and even a lion cannot stand against a hundred dogs.”

“Nkose! Yet had I but half the Umbonambi regiment here with me, we would eat the whole of these jackals at one bite!” exclaimed Kumbelwa, his great chest heaving with excitement and his recent exertions.

“By Jove! I never saw such a sight as that! Magnificent!” cried Oakley, who was taking advantage of the lull to light his pipe.

On the other side, too, hostilities seemed to have slackened, but here, whatever damage had been inflicted by the defenders they were unable to estimate with any certainty. It was evident that Mushâd had chosen that the least esteemed of his followersthe black savages, to witshould bear the brunt of the first attack, not from any lack of courage, but from sheer cold calculating economy. Their lives were worth the least to him, therefore let them bear the lion’s share of the risk. And this they had assuredly done, if the black bodies which strewed the earth on their side of the breastwork were any criterion. Within, one of Somala’s clansmen had been shot dead; while another, whose hand hung limp and useless, was setting his teeth as Dr Ahern was hastily bandaging the shattered wrist.

“What think you, Somala?” said the doctor, looking up from this operation. “Will they leave us alone now?”

“Not yet, Sidi. The best of Mushâd’s fighters are yonder. They have not done much fighting as yet.”

“If they take it into their heads to invest us, we are done for,” said Haviland, “unless we can break through in the dark. Why, we have hardly enough water to last till then.”

“The battle will be finished before tonight,” said the Arab, decidedly.

“Well, when we have given Mushâd as much fighting as he wants, then I suppose he’ll draw off,” said Oakley. “So the sooner he comes on again the better.”

“You cannot know much about Mushâd, Sidi. He never leaves an enemy once blows have been exchanged,” replied the Arab, darkly. “The battle will be decided before night. But Mushâd will be slainor”

“Or we shall. So be it, Somala. We’ll do our best.”

There followed a lull; ominous, oppressive. Hostilities seemed entirely to have ceased, but they had implicit belief in Somala’s sagacity, and his forecast was not exactly encouraging. They were striving against enormous odds, and, although thus far they had triumphed, the pick of the hostile force had not yet been used against them, even as the Arab had said. The enforced stillness was not good for their nerves. A reaction had set in. The dead and dying within their circlefor three more of the porters had been killed and several of the refugees badly woundedwere groaning in pain; the acrid stench of blood arising on the steamy tropical heat had a tendency to throw a gloom over, at any rate, the white members of the expedition. It was as well, perhaps, that a diversion should occur, and this was supplied by Kumbelwa. A vast and cavernous snore fell upon their ears, then another and another. His great frame stretched at full length upon the ground, his broad blade still sticky with halfdried blood, together with his rifle lying upon his warshield beside him, the Zulu warrior was fast asleep, slumbering as peacefully and as unconcernedly as though in his own kraal at home, in that craterlike hollow beneath the towering roundtopped cone of Ibabanango. Oakley and Haviland burst out laughing.

“Well, he is a cool customer, and no mistake!” cried the former. “I’ve a jolly good mind to follow his example, though. It’s tiring work this holding the fort, with nothing to drink, either.”

“Better have some skoff first,” said Haviland, “such as it is. That hipposhoot we were going to have tomorrow won’t come off now, however things go.”

But little appetite had any of them for their wretched grain diet. A long hot hour dragged its weary length, then another. The three white men were dozing. The Arabs, their squares of praying carpets spread, and with shoes off, were salaaming in the direction of Mecca, as devoutly as their brethren in the faith and foes in arms were, or should have been doing, out yonder in the opposing lines. Then suddenly the alarm was given. A peril, imminent and wholly unlookedfor, had risen up to confront them. In a moment every man was at his station, wide awake now, alert, expectant.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Last Shot.

Alarm quickly gave way to amazement. What did this mean? Approaching in a halfcircle came a great crowd of nativesmiserable, woe begonelooking objects, and entirely unarmed. There were women and children among them too, and as they drew nearer, they uttered the most doleful lamentations, in several different dialects, beseeching pity both by word and gesture.

“What on earth’s the meaning of this?” cried Haviland, fairly puzzled. “Somala, tell them to go away. Tell them we don’t want them. We’ve no use for them.”

Somala’s tone was quick and fierce as he ordered them to halt. But without avail. On they came, howling piteously. Immediately the Arab raised his rifle, and shot down one of the foremost, wounding another.

“Stop that, Somala,” commanded the doctor, who, with the other two white men, was under the brief impression that for some reason or another Mushâd had abandoned his slaves and retired. “The poor devils are not fighting.”

In no wise deterred by what had happened, the miserable crowd ran forward, yelling more piteously than ever. They were within a hundred yards of the defences, then seventy.

“But Mushâd is,” retorted Somala in a growl. “Stand back all of you, or we will kill you all,” he roared, again firing into the densely packed mass of wretched humanity.

The shouts and screams which followed upon the discharge were appalling, but what happened next was more so. Like mown grass the whole crowd of the imaginary refugees fell prone on their facesthus revealing the bulk and flower of the enemy’s fighting line. With one mighty roar of savage triumph the ferocious Arabs, hitherto concealed behind the advancing slaves, surged over the prostrate heaps, and were up to the breastwork in a moment. The stratagem of Mushâd had been a complete success. The defenders, thus surprised, were simply allowed no time. Several of the Arabs fell before their hurried fire, but not for a second did it delay the fierce, rapid, overwhelming rush. With whirling scimitars the savage Arabs were upon them, hacking, hewing, yelling. The native bearers, in wild panic, threw down their arms and fled out at the other side of the defences, only to be met by the spears of the black auxiliaries waiting there for just such a move, and cut to pieces to a man. The improvised fort was choked

with corpses, the frenzied slayers hewing still at the quivering frames, and screaming aloud in a very transport of bloodintoxication.

Back to back in a ring, the three white men and Somala, with his two remaining clansmen, stood. But where was Kumbelwa? Not with them, but yet not far away. And around him, like hounds around a buffalo bull at bay, his swarming enemies, leaping, snarling, yet not able to reach him for the terrific sweeps with that dread weapon, shearing a clear space on every hand.

“Yield thee, thou great fighter!” cried Mushâd, in a dialect very much akin to his own. “Yield thee. Thou at any rate shalt taste our mercy, and shalt fight with us.”

“Au! I yield not. Come, fight with me, O chief! we two alone. Thou wilt not? See, I come to seek theeUsútu ’Sútu!”

And in lightninglike charge, the splendid warrior dashed through the swarming crowd, straight for Mushâd, clearing his way with his broad blade and resistless rush, his great shield throwing off the blows aimed at him, like the cutwater of a mighty ship ploughing through the waves. The crowd closed behind him, and that was the last of him his white leaders beheld.

As for these, their doom was inevitable. Their enemies could shoot them down with ease at any moment, but refrained. It was clearly their intention to take them alive.

“The last shot for ourselves, remember,” said Haviland, in his voice the hard, set tone of a brave man who has done with hope. “Remember that brute’s promise if we are captured. And he’ll keep it too.”

“I’ve got three left, and here goes one,” said Oakley, discharging his revolver at a prominent Arab. The latter spun round and fell. With a roar of rage, several of his comrades, unable to contain themselves, fired a volley, but with discrimination. The remainder of Somala’s clansmen fell dead, leaving himself and the three white men alone.

“My last shot!” exclaimed the doctor, calmly. “God forgive us if there’s sin in what we do!” And placing the muzzle of his revolver against his heart, he pressed the trigger. His body, instantaneously lifeless, sank heavily, but in doing so fell against Haviland’s legs. He, losing his balance, stumbled heavily against Oakleyupsetting him. A wild stagger, then a fall. Before they could rise, a dozen of their enemies had flung themselves upon them with lightninglike swiftness, pinning them to the earth.

Somala, who had expended his last shot, not on himself, was laying about him vigorously with his ataghan. But, wounded in several places, weakened with loss of blood and exhaustion, he too was at last overpowered. The victory was complete.

And the scene of it had now become one or indescribable horrora very nightmare of blood, and hacked corpses in every conceivable attitude of agony and repulsion. And with it all came the convulsive shrieks and groans of a few of the miserable bearers, who had been taken alive, and whom the black contingent was amusing itself roasting to death in the open ground outside the tree belt. Within, the more civilised section of the slavehunters was looting the stores and property of the expedition. They tore open bales, and battered in boxes and cases. But the authority of Mushâd was absolute, and his commands speedily infused an element of method into the looting process.

Helpless, swathed in coils of thongs wound round them from head to foot, to the accompaniment of many blows and kicks, the unhappy prisoners lay.

“Behold, ye dogs!” jeered one of those who guarded them. “Behold! Is it not good to look upon the face of a friend once more? Behold!”

He pointed to the head of the unfortunate doctor, which, ghastly and dripping, was being borne about on the point of a spear. Raising eyes dull with despair and horror, they saw it and envied him. He was at peace now, or, at worst, was in more merciful hands than those of these fiends; while they themselvesthe horrible tortures which had been decreed for them by the slaver chief, and to which end alone they had been sparedwhy, the bare thought was enough to turn the brain.

“Is there no way, Oakley,” said Haviland, “I don’t mean of escape, but of escape from what that devil intends to do with us?”

Oakley was silent for a moment.

“There is a way,” he said at length. “We might turn Mohammedan.”

“What?”

“It has been done before today,” went on Oakley. “Men have saved their lives that way, and ultimately have escaped.”

It was Haviland’s turn to be silent.

“No, hang it,” he said at last. “I’m not a religious chap, Oakley, I’m sorry to say, butI kick at that.”

“Naturally one does, under ordinary circumstances; but under these it’s different. And it needn’t mean anything, you know.”

“No; somehow I can’t. It seems cowardly,” said Haviland. “Perhaps, too, I have an inspiration that it wouldn’t help our case much if we were to do such a thing. But, Oakley, it doesn’t follow that you’re to be bound by my opinion. You’re an older chap than me, and if you”

“If I want to take the chance, I’d better, independently of you. That’s what you were going to say, isn’t it? Nono, Haviland. We are in this together, and we get out of it togetheror not, probably noteven apart from the fact of your having saved my life”

“Pooh! There was no lifesaving about it. Only a chance finding of another fellow in a bit of a difficulty. In any case, there’s not much to be grateful for, but just the reverse.”

“These dogs have long tongues,” said one of the savage guards, striking Haviland with the butt of his spear. “Long tongues, but we will cut them out soon. So chatter, jackals, while ye may, for it will not be long.”

Not there, however, was their cruel martyrdom to take place, for the word went forth to prepare at once to march. The loot was gathered up and disposed among its respective bearers, and soon the two captives found themselves loaded up like bales of goods, and borne forth by those very abjects who had crowded in, beseeching their pitythe miserable slaves who had been used to bring them to this pass.

For some hours this cramped and painful locomotion continued, the barbarous horde carrying severed heads on their spearpoints, and taking a delight in impressing upon their prisoners what lay in store for them. At length, towards sundown, they halted, and the prisoners were flung brutally to the ground in such heavy fashion as to knock all the breath out of their bodies. The pity was that this did not happen altogether, they had bitter reason to think, for now they saw a fire being kindled and blown up into a red, roaring flame. The while, thongs had been thrown over the limb of a tree. Their time had come.

Mushâd, with two or three others, now approached them.

“What was my promise to you, ye swine?” he began. “Was it not that ye should hang by the heels, that your eyes should be scooped out, and live coals placed in the sockets? Behold. The preparations are even now being made. How like ye them?”

“We like them not at all, O chief,” answered Haviland, desperate. “See, now, you are a brave man, and we have fought you fair and you have conquered. We expect death, but we English are not accustomed to torture. Put us therefore to a swift death.”

“Ha! Now ye cry for mercy, but before you laughed! It is well,” answered Mushâd. “Yet ye shall not obtain it. What of all my fighting men ye have slain, also many of my slaves?” And, turning, he beckoned to four savagelooking negroes. “Him first,” pointing to Haviland.

He was as powerless to move as a log. They seized him by the neck and dragged him towards one of the trees whereon a noose dangled. Their knives were drawn, and as they dragged him along he could see another ruffian kneeling by the fire, extracting a great glowing ember with a pair of rude tongs. Utterly powerless to struggle in his bonds, he felt the noose tightened round his ankles; then he was hauled up, swinging head downwards from the bough. His head was bursting with the rush of blood to it, and yet with his starting eyes he could see the fiendlike forms of his black torturers standing by him with the knife, and the red glowing embers.

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Inswani.

The hot night air brooded steamy and close upon the slumbering camp of the slavers, but to these it mattered nothing. Ferocious Arab and bloodthirsty negro alike were plunged in calm and peaceful slumber.

Not so the unhappy captives. To the tortures of their cramping bonds and the bites of innumerable insects from which they were entirely powerless to protect themselves, were added those of anticipation. With a refinement of cruelty which was thoroughly Oriental, the slaver chief had decreed a respite. He had caused his victims to undergo in imagination the horrible torments he intended should be their lot on the morrow, and, to this end, he had ordered them to be taken down from the tree and put back as they were before, so that they might have the whole night through to meditate upon what awaited them on the following day.

Haviland had fallen asleep through sheer exhaustion, but his slumbers were fitful, and ever haunted by frightful visions, which would start him wide awake and quaking: for his nerves were unstrung with the awful ordeal he had undergone; and further, the recollection of the sickening massacre, the heat and excitement of battle over, was one to haunt. In his broken, unrestful sleep he was back at Saint Kirwin's, and, instead of the Headmaster, it was Mushâd, duly arrayed in academicalswhich did not seem a bit strange or out of the way in the bizarre reality of his dreamwho was about to pass sentence upon him. And then appeared Cetchy, not as he used to be, but as a big, powerful, fullgrown man, and started to punch the spurious Doctor's head, and they fought long and hard, and he watched them in powerless and agonising apprehension, for upon the issue of the contest depended whether he should undergo the hideous fate in store for him or not. And then he awoke.

To the first sense of relief succeeded a quick realisation that the actuality of their position was worse than the makebelieve of any dream. Involuntarily a groan escaped him. The savage face of one of his guards shot up noiselessly, with a sleepily malignant grin. But Haviland realised that it was growing almost imperceptibly lighter. The day would soon be here.

It was the hour before dawn, and sleep lay heavy upon the slavehunters' camp. Even their sentinels scarcely took the trouble to keep awake. Why should they? Did they not belong to the great Mushâd, whose name was a terror to half a continent, whose deeds a sweeping scourge? Who would dare to assail or molest such a power as this? So, in the faint lightening of the darkness which preceded the first dawn of day, they slumbered

on, heavily, peacefully, unsuspectingly. And then came the awakening. The awakening of death.

The vibrant barking slogan seems to shatter the world, as the destroyers, apparently starting up from nowhere, pour over the silent camp, and each affrighted sleeper leaps up, only to meet the slash of the broad shearing blade which rends his vitals, and hurls him back to the earth, a deluging corpse. Huge figures, fell and dark, hundreds and hundreds of them, and yet more and more, with streaming adornments and mighty shields and shorthandled, broadbladed spearsthis is what the captives behold in that terrible hour of lightening dawn. Their former enemies, overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, entirely taken by surprise, have not even time to rise and defend themselves. They are struck down, ripped, before they can gain their feet and lay hand upon a weapon. And they themselves? They, too, will be butchered in the helplessness of their bonds, but it will be a swift and sudden death.

But somehow the tide of slaughter seems to surge round them, not over them, to pass them by. What does it mean? That in the confusion and uncertain light they are counted already dead as they lie there, but even in that case these savages would inevitably rip them with their spears? Something like a glimmer of hope seems to light up the despair at their hearts, as it occurs to them that the surprise and massacre of their enemies may mean ultimate rescue for themselves.

Yet who and what are these savages? They are for the most part men of splendid physique, tall and straight, and of a redbrown colour, and their features are of the negroid type. They carry great shields akin to the Zulu, only more oval in shape, and more massive, and the latter is also the case with regard to their shorthandled stabbing spears, and their battleshout is a loud, harsh, inarticulate bark, indescribably terrible when uttered simultaneously by many throats. Here, as uttered by over a thousand, words can hardly express the bloodcurdling menace it conveys. But, while thus pondering, the attention of these new arrivals is turned to themselves. Ha! now their time has come. With ready spear two of the savages bend over them. The dark faces are grim and pitiless, and the spears descend, but not to be sheathed in their bodies. The tense thongs, severed in more places than one, fly from them. Their limbs are free.

They could hardly realise it. They stared stupidly upward at the ring of faces gazing down upon them. What did it mean? Then their glance fell upon one among that vast increasing group of towering men. If that was not the ghost of Kumbelwa, why it was Kumbelwa himself. And then a string of the most extravagant sibonga, bursting from the warrior in question, convinced them that this was indeed so.

“In truth, Amakosi,” he concluded, “well was it for you that Mushâd preferred to take his revenge cool, else had these been too late.”

“Butwho are these, Kumbelwa?” said Haviland. “Not the People of the Spider?” gazing at them with renewed interest.

“The Bagcatya? No. These are the Inswani; they of whom we were talking just lately.”

“What of Mushâd, Kumbelwa? Have they killed him?”

“He is unhurt. But I think the death he intended for yourselves, Amakosi, is sweet sleep by the side of that which the father of this people is keeping for him. Yonder he sits.”

Rising, though with difficulty, in the cramped condition of their limbs, the two, together with Somala, looked around for their enemy. The Arab had accepted their rescue with the same philosophy as that wherewith he had met his bonds. “It was written so. God is great,” had been his sole comment.

In the centre of the erewhile camp they found the man they sought. The terrible slaver chief lay as securely bound as they themselves had so lately been. With him, too, and equally helpless, were about three score of his clansmen. They were the sole survivors of the massacre, and the site of the camp was literally piled with hacked and mangled corpses. Barbarous as had been their own treatment at the hands of this ruthless desperado, the three Englishmen could not but shudder over the fate in store for him and those who had been taken alive with him. To that end alone had they been spared, for such had been the orders of the King.

“Ya Allah!” exclaimed Mushâd, his keen eyes seeming to burn, as he glared up at his late captives. “Fate is strange, yet be not in a hurry to triumph, ye dogs, for it may change again.”

“We have no desire to triumph over you, Mushâd,” said Haviland. “That would be the part of a coward, and I hardly think that even you would name us that.”

The Arab scowled savagely and relapsed into silence, and they left him. When Kumbelwa asked them about the doctor they felt almost ashamed of how the elation, attendant upon their own unexpected deliverance, had sent their friend’s memory into the background. Yet were they destined to miss him at every hour of the day.

“He died like a brave man, Kumbelwa,” had answered Haviland. “And now, what of ourselves; and how did you escape and come so opportunely to our aid?”

Then Kumbelwa sat down, and began to take snuff.

“We had a right good fight up there, Nkose, was it not so? But I knew what would be the end of it, for did not you yourself say, ‘What can one buffalo bull do against a hundred dogs?’ So I cut my way through Mushâd’s people and made for the open, and well I knew that none there could outrun me, nor indeed could their bullets even strike me, so wild were these men with excitement and victory. The while I thought that one man outside and free was better than all within and bound, wherefore I put much space between me and the battle so that I might think out some plan. And then, Nkose, I know not how, whether it was my snake that whispered it to me, or what it was, but I looked upand lo! afar off there rose a smoke. ‘Now,’ thought I, ‘whoever is making that smoke, it is no friend to Mushâd. Further, it is no weak ones of the tribes left in the path of Mushâd, else had they not dared signify their presence so soon after he had passed.’ And I thought ‘Nothing can be worse for those in the hand of Mushâd, and it may be better. As things are, they are already dead; but as things may be, who knoweth?’ So straight to that smoke I went, and lo! by a fire lay four times ten menwarriors, in full array of battle. I walked into their midst before they seized their spears and came for me. Then I said, ‘Who are ye?’ And they told meI standing there and uttering the name of our King. They had heard it, far, far as they dwelt from the land of Zulu; but, where has not the name of Zulu sounded?

“Then I said ‘Ye seek Mushâd? Good. I can deliver him into your handslead me to the impi.’ Then one man saidnot speaking very well in the tongue of the Zulu, ‘How knowest thou whom we seek, O stranger; and how knowest thou that there be an impi with us?’ And I said, ‘Look at me. I am not a boy. I am a kehla, and have I not fought the battles of the Great Great Onehe of the House of Senzangakona?’ And they said, ‘It is well, O stranger. Show us Mushâd.’ And now, Amakosi, I would ask you‘Have I not done so?’”

The cordial assent of Haviland was drowned in the chorus of emphatic applause thundered forth from those who heard, for the few who had gathered round to listen had swelled into a mighty crowd, as, seated there, the Zulu warrior poured forth his tale.

“And what of ourselves, Kumbelwa?” asked Haviland. “How are we to return, for we have no bearers left, and all that is valuable to us, though valuable to no one else, lies up yonder, where we fought?”

The Zulu’s countenance seemed ever so slightly to fall.

“For that, Nkose, you must go with these. The Father of this people desires to see you.”

“That is so, O strangers,” broke in a deep voice. Both turned. The words had proceeded from a very tall man, taller even than Kumbelwa, who stood forth a little from the rest. He was a magnificent savage as he stood there, clad in his war costume, his head thrown haughtily back, his hand resting on his great shield. But the glance wherewith he favoured them was one of supercilious command, almost of hostility. Both Haviland and Oakley felt an instinctive dislike and distrust for the man as they returned his glance.

“Who is the warrior I see before me?” asked Haviland, courteously, realising that this man was chief in command of the impi.

“I am Dumaliso,” was the reply. “You must go with us.”

And somehow both our friends realised that their troubles were by no means over.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Were They Prisoners?

The first elation of their most timely rescue cooled, Haviland and Oakley realised that they had no very bright outlook before them, under the changed condition of things. Instead of their return to civilisation and the outside world after their long exilea return, too, bearing with them the results of a highly successful enterprise, and which every day had been bringing nearer and nearerhere they were virtually captives once more, in process of being marched back further and further from the goal to which they had looked; back, indeed, into unknown wilds, and at the mercy of a barbarian despot whose raids and massacres had set up a reputation for cruelty which surpassed that of Mushâd himself.

The conditions of the march, too, were exhausting even to themselves. Twentyfive, even thirty miles a day, were as nothing to these sinewy savages. They did not, however, take a straight line, but diverged considerably every now and then to fall upon some unhappy village. Contrary, however, to custom, they perpetrated no massacres on these occasions. What they did do was to show off Mushâd and his principal followers, with slaveyokes on their necks, and under every possible circumstance of ignominy, in order that all might see that the terrible and redoubted slaver chief was a mere dog beside the power of the Great King. This revolted the two Englishmen, and however little reason they had to commiserate their late enemies, at any rate these were brave men, and they had expected that a brave race like the Inswani would have recognised this. At last they said as much.

It happened that Dumaliso had compelled several of the meanest of the villagers to lash Mushâd. The infliction was not severe. It was merely the indignity that was aimed at. The haughty Arab, however, might have been made of wood for all the sign he gave of either pain or humiliation. But the two white men were thoroughly disgusted, and it is absolutely certain that, had the means been at hand, they would, at all risks, have aided their late enemy to escape.

“Why degrade a brave man thus, leader of the Great Great One’s impi?” Haviland had expostulated. “If he is to die, even in torment, it may be that he has deserved that. But to degrade him at the hands of these vile dogs, who just now trembled at the mere sound of his nameis that well?”

“Is it well?” echoed Dumaliso, with a brutal laugh. “See there, white man,” pointing with his great assegai at Mushâd. “If yonder dog had fifty lives, every one of them should be

taken from him in the torment of many days. For him nothing is too bad. It is the word of the Great Great One."

"What has he done, that your King should hate him so?"

"Au! He has seized and made slaves of some of our people. Inswani slaves! Think of it, Umlungu! That for one thing. For another, he has sworn to seize the Great Great One, and turn him into the meanest of slaves, to heap indignities upon him far worse than any we have heaped upon his vile carrion carcase, indignities which are not to be named. This hath he done, O insecthunter! Is it not enough?"

Haviland realised the futility of further remonstrance, but the unpleasant conviction seemed to be growing upon them more and more that they had perchance only fallen out of the fryingpan into the firethat they were themselves virtually prisoners, and that in the hands of a race of ferocious savages without one spark of humanity or ruthin short, for sheer devilish, bloodthirsty cruelty not one whit behind those from whom they had been delivered. Not a day but furnished forth instances of this. The captive slavehunters had been forced to act as carriers, and enormous bundles containing the loot of both camps had been placed upon them to bear. Did they falter, they were unmercifully beaten and goaded on with spearpoints, while several, who from sheer exhaustion gave up, were savagely tortured and mutilated and left to die. To our two friends it was simply horrible. It was as though the dark places of the earth were indeed given over to devils in human shapeto work their utmost in deeds of sickening barbarity and bloodshed. And further and further into these "dark places" were they themselves being forced.

They had induced their rescuersor captorsto revisit the scene of the battle, by holding out to them the possibility of finding more loot, over looked or not thought worth bringing away by Mushâd, their own object being twofoldto bury their unfortunate friend, and to recover if possible the precious specimens. As to the first, disappointment befell them, for such high revel had been held by the carrion birds and beasts that the remains of the doctor were undistinguishable from those of any other victim of the hideous massacre. In the second matter they were more fortunate. Most of the treasured collections had escaped damage, and the Inswani warriors had stood round, some amused, some jeering, at the spectacle of the two white menwho they had it from Kumbelwa could fighteagerly repacking dried and pressed plants, or striving to repair the broken wings of tiny beetles.

Haviland, with his knowledge of their language, had laid himself out to try and gain their friendship, but they were not particularly responsive; and here he was surprised, for, whereas someDumaliso includedspoke pure Zulu, others only talked a kind of

dialect of it, introducing a great many words that were strange to him. Yet somehow none of these men quite resembled the straight, cleanlimbed, aristocratic savage he had become familiar with in the realm of Cetywayo. In physique many of them excelled him, but there was a hard, brutal, aggressive look in their otherwise intelligent faces. Those of them, too, who wore the headring wore it very large and thick, and, as we have said, their shields and assegais were heavier and of a different finish. He wondered whether these were an evolution of the original Zulu, or if the Zulu up to date had receded from this type.

Day after day their weary march continued, and they began to estimate they had covered close on four hundred miles. Four hundred weary miles to be retraversed, if they ever did return. But during the last few days the face of the country had been improving. The climate was cooler, and, as they had been gradually ascending, it was evident that the home of these people lay amid healthy uplands. Great valleys opened out, dotted with mimosa patches and baobab, and half a hundred varieties of shrubbery. Game, too, was plentiful; but when our friends would have varied the monotony of the march by a little sport they were promptly repressed, for this was one of the king's preserves, and woe betide him who should violate, it. And then at last one morning a halt was called, and weapons and shields were furbished up, and full wargear, laid aside for the march, was donned. Away in the distance, far up the valley, but just discernible from their elevation on the hill slope, a light veil of smoke hung upon the morning air. It was the King's town.

And now, as the march was resumed, our two friends saw, for the first time, something of the people of the country into which they had been brought; for those inhabiting the outlying villages, both men and women, came swarming down to meet the returning impi. Most of the women, they noticed to their surprise, were inclined to be rather short and squat, though there were some of good height among them. But these stared at the two Englishmen in wild surprise, uttering remarks which, to Haviland, at any rate, who understood them, were not calculated to enhance selfesteem. The main centre of attention, however, was the presence of the captive slavehunters, and here the fury of the undisciplined savage nature broke forth, and the air rang with wild howls and threats of impending vengeance. And this awful tumult gathered volume as it rolled along the valley, for, drawn by it, others came down in every direction to swell the tide of dark, infuriated humanity; and, lo! the returning impi seemed a mere handful in the midst of the crowd that poured round it on every hand, roaring like beasts, clamouring for the blood and anguish of their hated foes; and the dust swirled heavenward in a mighty cloud, while the earth shivered to the thunder of thousands and thousands of feet.

In the midst of all this horrible tumult, our two friends were straining their eyes through the blinding dustclouds to catch a first glimpse of the town, and it was not until they were right upon it that they did so. Contrary to their expectation, however, it bore no resemblance what ever to a Zulu kraal, for it was square in shape and fenced in with a formidable stockade. Some twenty yards back from it was another and a similar stockade, and they reckoned that the space enclosed by this was fully a mile each way. The huts, or houses, were also square, except in some instances where they were oblong, and many of them were of some size. From these dark forms could be seen pouring, until all the open spaces within the town were even as a disturbed ants' nest. Then, as they drew near the principal gate, Haviland noticed that the stakes on either side of it were thickly studded with heads, a very unZulu practice.

The whole impi defiled through this, followed by its accompanying crowd, and to such grim accompaniment our two friends entered the head town of the terrible King of the Inswani. But they were rather silent, for the same thought was in both their minds. How would they leave it?

Up to the principal open space they marched, the impi with its prisoners in its midst, distinguishable from the unorganised crowd by its wellordered ranks and towering headgear. Before an oblong hut of large size it halted. Down went shield and weapon. Every right hand shot into the air, and from the thousand and odd throats there roared forth one word:

"Umnovu!"

"Drop your weapons, Amakosi!" whispered a warning voice.

Haviland obeyed, telling Oakley to do the same, for the speaker was Kumbelwa.

The whole vast crowd continued its vociferations. It was evident, too, to the two white spectators that the word was a royal title, or form of salute. Still the roar continued, but nobody appeared. Then the impi struck up a kind of swaying dance. Faster and faster this grew, stimulated by a wild whirling chant. The whole body would prostrate itself, rising as one man, and taking extravagant leaps into the air. At last, when the frenzy had reached its height, and throats were hoarse with bawling, and dusky bodies were streaming with perspiration, the uproar ceasedceased so suddenly that the dead silence which succeeded was even more startling than the tumult of a second before.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The King.

“Down, Amakosi,” whispered Kumbelwa again. “Down.”

The whole assembly had fallen flat, but our two friends drew the line at that. However, they compromised by dropping into a kind of squatting attitude, and at once the King’s gaze rested upon them.

It was a sufficiently terrorstriking glance. They saw before them a magnificent specimen of a savage, very tall and broad, and of a rich red copper colour. He was clad in a mútya of leopard skin, and wore a short cloak of the same, dangling from one shoulder. His head was shaven, but it and the large thick ring were partly concealed by a towering headdress of black ostrich plumes, a continuation of which fell on either side so as to cover his shoulders. But the face would have commanded attention anywhere, such an impression did it convey of relentless ferocity, of absolute pitilessness, and, at the same time, of indomitable courage. Yet it was the countenance of quite a young man.

For some time the King’s eyes rested on the two white men with a fierce and penetrating stare. Then, pointing at them with the broadbladed assegai in his hand, he said:

“Who are these?”

A confused murmur arose among the crowd, a sort of deprecatory wail. Then the chiefs of the impi crawled to the King’s feet and began to make their report, a mere matter of ceremony, for of course swift runners had already been sent on ahead to tell what had happened. He listened in silence, gazing down upon them with a haughty stare.

“It is well,” he said at last. “Bring these people now before me.”

He strode forth, proceeding along the edge of the prostrate crowd. Three or four old indunas were with him, keeping just a pace in the rear. When he had passed, the whole impi sprang to its feetand broke into shouts of praise:

“Firemaker!”

“Mighty tree that crackleth into sparks!”

“Burner up of the sun at noon!”

“Thou, whose glance scorches up men!”

“Heat of two suns!”

“Scorcher up of the world!”

These and other extravagant attributes were thundered forth from the excited and adoring multitude, and Haviland, who understood a little about that sort of thing, was quick to observe that these attributes mostly referred to fire. A few others were uttered, such as “Swallower up of Rumaliza!” “Thou who makest dust of Mushâd!” and so forth, but the sibonga was always brought back again to the attribute of fire. It interested him, and he made up his mind to ask Kumbelwa about it by and by.

But now the King had reached his chair of state and was seated thereon. It was a genuine throne, of very old and quaint workmanship, beautifully carved, with couchant lions on the arms, and guarding the steps, and had probably been obtained from some slaver who traded in the north. This chair was placed on a kind of raised verandah with a wide grass roof, and was well sheltered from the sun. The indunas squatted on the floor of the verandah on either side of the throne.

“Come forward, ye white men,” said the King, and they noticed that his voice was extraordinarily full and deep.

Our two friends advanced to the throne, and as they did so it was not reassuring to notice ten or a dozen men standing rather conspicuously at hand, armed with wickedlooking scimitars, also thongs and rawhide whipsall most uncomfortably suggestive of their grim vocation.

“You who speak with our tongue,” said the King, pointing at Haviland, “how know you it?”

“In the land of Cetywayo, Great Great One.”

“Now thou liest, for Cetywayo is there no more. Your people have upset his throne long since.”

Haviland wondered how on earth that news should have travelled to this remote, hardly heardof tribe, but he answered:

“That is true, Ndabezita (A term of honour addressed to royalty). But his people still exist.”

“Ha! How came ye here, ye two?”

Then, beginning, Haviland narrated all that had befallen them up to their battle with and capture by Mushâd. The King and all within earshot listened attentively.

“Somala? Where is he?” said the King.

The Arab was pushed forward and stood before the throne. A fell and menacing scowl overclouded the royal countenance.

“Another of these dogs of Rumaliza’s,” said the King. “Take him, ye Black Ones.”

The executioners sprang forward to seize the Arab. But, before they could reach him, Haviland had stepped between.

“Spare him, Burner of the Sun,” he said. “He is not of Rumaliza’s tribe. He is no enemy to the people of Inswani.”

A great groan went up from the assembly. Men held their breath. Had such a thing ever before been known, that a man should stand before another that the King had doomed to die? As for the despot himself, he had risen from his seat. His towering form seemed to dilate, and the scowl on his enraged countenance was terrible to behold.

“Thou hast thy head in the lion’s mouth,” he said, “and dost still dare to tickle the lion’s jaws. Are all white men mad?”

“He is my tried and faithful servant, Ndabezita,” pleaded Haviland. “He is not the enemy of this peopleindeed, very much the reverse, for who delivered himdelivered all of usout of the hand of Mushâd?”

“Ha! Mushâd!” exclaimed the King, whom an idea seemed to strikeperhaps also a little impressed by the absolute fearlessness evinced by Haviland, and which decided him to spare Somala for the present. “Bring forward Mushâd and his other dogs.”

A ferocious murmur of delight hummed through the whole assembly. The hated slavers were about to suffer. Many willing hands dragged them forward into the presence of the King.

His iron frame wasted with exhaustion and illtreatment, Mushâd’s spirit was still unbent.

He met the fierce scowl of the despot with a scowl every whit as savage and defiant.

“Ho! Mushâd!” cried the King, mockingly. “But a short while since thou didst swear to seize me and make a slave of me. How now? I think thou didst swear thine oath upside down.”

“God is God, and Mohammed is the Prophet of God. He shall turn the foul unbeliever into worse than a dog. It matters not who is his instrument in doing so,” answered the Arab, defiantly.

“Whau!” cried the King. “If Mohammed comes near the land of Inswani he shall taste what you are about to taste. But youyou have made slaves of certain of my people. Slaves of the people of Inswani! Hear you it, my children?”

Even our two friends, tried, intrepid adventurers as they were, could not help a sense of heartfailing as they heard the terrific roar of hate and vengeance which was hurled from every throat as these words of the King fell upon their ears: “Warriors of Inswani, slaves beneath the lash of this Arab dog!” Well, he was at their mercy at last.

“Let him taste the lash!” they roared.

The King nodded to the executioners. Mushâd was seized and the clothing rent from his back, revealing the weals of former scourgings. But no cry for mercy escaped him as the cruel whips of rawhide fell upon his emaciated form, striping it until the blood spurted. The two white men felt perfectly sick, but to display signs of any such weakness would be as impolitic as any display of weakness in the presence of these fierce and truculent savages. Even the effort made to remind themselves of Mushâd’s own barbarities was not sufficient to reconcile them to the horrid sight. But with every cruel whistling blow, the Inswani roared with delight.

“Hold!” cried the King at last. “He has had enough. Take him away and give him plenty of food. He must be made quite strong for what he has to undergo. We have only begun upon thee as yet, Mushâd. And now, bring forward yon other dogs, and let them taste of what they have dared to inflict upon my childrenthe warriors of the Inswani. For them, too, it is only a foretaste of what is to come.”

The other slavehunters, to the number of nearly three score, were then dragged forth. There were not enough of the regular lictors, but willing hands were only too ready to take their place, so intense and rancorous was the hatred borne towards them, and soon the whole ground in front of the King was converted into a hideous and writhing

torturechamber. Yet it was not that the Inswani held these people's trade in especial abhorrence; far from it, for they took a hand at it themselves upon occasion. But what they could not pardon was the fact of the Arab raiders seizing and enslaving their own men, and towards Mushâd and his followers their vengeful hatred was now kindled to white heat, and they gloated over the anguish of these whose power had hitherto been able to rival their own.

"Hold!" cried the King at last. "They, too, have had enough. Take yonder ten," designating those who looked the lowest in standing of the party, "and impale them on the stockade. The rest will follow in due time."

A roar of delight greeted these words. The miserable wretches were seized and dragged off, and presently were writhing each on a hard stake, pointing outward from the stockade, crowds of the savages dancing round and taunting them. Indeed, it seemed as though the whole nation had gone mad in its lust for blood. The expression of even the King's countenance had grown indescribably cruel and ferocious, and beholding it, our two friends felt that their peril was hardly less than it had been when they were in the hands of Mushâd.

"Go ye," he said, pointing at them. "Go, lest my mind changes. Let them be given a house for the present. Hold! Who is this?"

He had for the first time remembered the presence of Kumbelwa, who sufficiently resembled the Inswani to escape notice.

"Inkose! Nkulu'nkulu, Inyoka 'mninimandhla!" began the Zulu, crouching low, and breaking forth into the sibonga of his race. "The servant of the Royal House of Inswani is a Zulu of the tribe of Umtetwa."

"Of Umtetwa!" echoed the King. "That which the House of Senzangakona swallowed. Thou shouldst be a great fighter," running his eyes appreciatively over Kumbelwa's fine stature.

"I wielded a spear in the ranks of the Umbonambi, father, when we fought the English, although now we are friends."

"Good," said the King. "Thou hast the look of a warrior indeed, and thou shalt wield thy spear in the ranks of my army now. See now, Kumbelwa. Take charge of these two white men, whose servant thou wouldst seem to be. I will talk with thee later. Go."

Thus dismissed, Haviland and Oakley breathed more freely. It was a respite at any rate. Yet with the scenes of horror and vengeance weighing heavy upon them, their minds were full of foreboding as to what was to come, as they took up their quarters in the large square hut assigned to them. And even yet, the stakes with their writhing victims seemed to haunt them, and in the mind of each was the unspoken thought that they themselves might be the next.

Chapter Twenty Six.

The End of Mushâd.

After this they saw nothing of the King. The days went by, growing into weeks, and still there seemed no prospect of their perilous and irksome captivity drawing to its end. Though outwardly treated as guests, there were not wanting downright intimations that they could not come and go as they pleased, and they received a significant hint that the country was very unhealthy did they venture out of sight of the stockade. At first they strove to take an interest in the novelty of their position, and in the conditions of life of this strange race; but the people were very reserved, and seemed afraid to say much; so that except through Kumbelwa they could learn but little about themand not a great deal through him. The King's name, they gathered, was Umnovunovu; and yet it was in reality only a title, like that of the Pharaohs of Egypt, for the kings of the Inswani had no name, and their former one became very much hlonipa, i.e. not to be uttered.

"You see, Oakley," Haviland said, "there's no end to the curious twists and turns of native etiquetteand the unformulated, or what would be to us the unwritten laws, are the strangest of all. In Zululand, for instance, white men who have had the country and people at their fingers' ends all their lives have told me that the more certain they were they knew everything, the more certain something was to occur to show them they didn't."

"Well, this is a mighty ugly crowd, anyway," answered Oakley, "and, like Pharaoh of old, Mr Umnovunovu doesn't intend to let us go in a hurry."

They were growing very dejected under their enforced detention. The climate was not bad, and a great improvement on the steamy heat of the lower country; indeed, the nights were at times distinctly sharp. But everything tended to depress them. They had nothing on earth to do, and, as Oakley said, all their time to do it in. For another thing, the atmosphere of continuous slaughter and death got very much upon their nerves. Besides the slaver captives, who were done to death under varying circumstances of barbarity, at the rate of several a day, and whose tortured shrieks it was impossible to keep out of their ears, several of the Inswani were taken out and put to death, as they were informed, by order of the King. This young savage seemed positively to wallow in blood and torture; yet, so far from the feet undermining the loyalty of his subjects, it seemed rather to cement their adherence. But, though cruel and bloodthirsty, he was of unimpeachable courage, and more than one tale of heroic valour did Kumbelwa narrate in which the young King was the central figure.

At times, when they were taking their walks abroad, a sudden hubbub, and a roaring crowd on the move, would denote that his Majesty was out, and his faithful subjects were hailing his progress. But they deemed it expedient to keep out of the way of such demonstrations.

“Hallo!” cried Haviland, one hot morning, as they were lying in their hut. “Here, quick, give us that box! Why, that’s the most whacking big scorpion I’ve ever seen, even here.”

In a trice the great crawling venomous brute was, like themselves, a prisoner, savagely walking round and round, and wondering what had happened.

“It’ll be a job to get him into the lethal jar, Oakley! If we use the tongs on him we’re sure to damage his legs, like we did that mammoth tarantula that was taking a stroll over you the other night. Here, hold the box a minute.”

So for upwards of a quarter of an hour, these two enthusiastic collectors were busily at work circumventing the ugly venomous insect. They had forgotten their troubles; the Inswani, the king, Mushâd, everything.

“Well done!” cried Haviland. “We’ve got him at last. What a specimen! Poor old Ahern, how he would have enjoyed this! If only he hadn’t been in such a hurry. Get out of the way, Kumbelwa. You’re in our light,” he added, without looking up, as a shadow darkened the door. With a smothered grunt this was removed. Then, when at last they did look up, the figure squatted on the ground was not that of Kumbelwa at all. It was Dumaliso.

They exchanged greetings, not very cordially on either side. They were not particularly fond of the chief, whom Oakley defined as “a cruel brute, who’d cut our throats as soon as look at us, if he dared.” Moreover, they were vexed that he should appear on the scene when he did, for they had received more than one hint from Kumbelwa that the Inswani looked with considerable suspicion on their collecting propensities. None but abatagati, or evilly disposed sorcerers, went about collecting insects and plants, it was arguedof course to work witchcraft withand they had deemed it wise to refrain. Their position was quite risky enough without doing anything to add to its complications, and now here was one of the most influential men in the nationand toward themselves the most hostileentering just in time to find them capturing one of the ugliest and most vicious specimens of the insect world. What could they want with such save for purposes of witchcraft?

“The King, the Great Great One, has a word unto ye two,” began Dumaliso.

They nodded assent.

“With the firearms we have taken from the slavehunting dogs many of the King’s warriors might be armed. His ‘word’ is that ye shall teach them to shoot, beginning with myself.”

“What do you think of the idea, Oakley?” said Haviland, when he had translated this to his companion, who was himself picking up a moderate knowledge of the tongue.

“Seems reasonable. You see, it isn’t like arming them against our own countrymen, because they’ll never see any of them, and to arm them against the slavehunters is all right. We’d better agree.”

“I think so too.” Whereupon, turning to the chief, they expressed their willingness to organise a corps of sharpshooters among the more promising of the Inswani.

“That is well,” said Dumaliso, rising. “And now, O strangers, if you would see the end of this dog Mushâd, the time is at hand.”

“Tell him we don’t want to see it, Haviland. Brute as Mushâd is, I don’t want to see him tortured. It makes me sick.”

Haviland at first made no reply. He seemed to be thinking.

“We will go, Oakley,” he said at last. “I have got an idea or saving the poor brute from torture, at any rate.”

As they went forth with Dumaliso, a strange subdued roar was arising, and from every part of the town people were hurrying towards the great space at the head of which stood the King’s throne. In thousands and thousands the densely packed mass of surging humanity blocked the way, and it required all Dumaliso’s authority to clear a passage. A new spectacle seemed to be anticipated, and the pitiless crowd thrilled with delight as it speculated by what particular form of torment their traditional enemy was to die. It was horrible, and there, thickly studding the outer stockade, were numerous fresh heads, grinning in anguished distortion, being those of the slavehunters, who had been put to death in batches. And now their leader, the famous and terrible Mushâd, was the last.

There was the usual roaring outburst of sibonga as the King appeared and took his seat. There were the executioners, savagelooking and eager, and thenthe last of the slave captives was dragged forward.

Heavens! what was this? The bowed and shrunken figure, palsied and shaking, was that of an old, old man. The snowwhite hair and ragged beard, the trembling claws and the blinking watery eyesthis could never be Mushâd, the keeneyed, haughty, indomitable Arab of middle age and iron sinewy frame, whom they had last seen, here on this very spot, hurling defiance at his captors in general and at the King in particular. Nono, such a transformation was not possible.

But it was. Illtreatment, starvation, torture had reduced the once haughty, keenspirited Arab to this. Where he had defied, now he cringed. Yet no spark of ruth or pity did his miserable plight call forth in those who now beheld him. Brutal jeers were hurled at him. They had come to see him die in torments. They had looked forward to it from day to day. They were not to be baulked now.

Of all this Haviland was aware, and an intense pity arose in his heart as he gazed upon the miserable wreck. He had thought he knew what savages really were, but now realised that it was reserved for the Inswani to teach him.

“Ho! Mushâd, my dog!” jeered the King, in his deep voice. “Thou who namedst thyself the scourge of the world. Why, I think the meanest slave thou hast ever sold would crack his whip over thee now.”

“Look yonder,” went on Umnovunovu. “Thou seest those four poles? Good. Thou wilt be tied to those by an ankle and wrist to each, half a man’s height from the ground, with fire beneath thee, and for a whole day thou shalt rest upon a warm blanket, I promise thee.”

The two Englishmen shuddered with horror as they saw what was to happen. The miserable slavehunter was to be slowly roasted to death. Then Haviland spoke, as he admitted to himself, like a fool.

“Spare him, Great, Great One. Spare him the torture. See, he has undergone enough. Put him to the swift death of the sword.”

The King’s face was terrible to behold as he turned it upon the interruptor; no less terrible as they beheld it was the roar of rage that went up from the spectators.

“Wilt thou take his place upon yon glowing bed, thou fool white man?” he said with a sneer that was more than half a menacing snarl.

“Haviland, go easy, man,” warned Oakley. “This won’t do at all. Why should we sacrifice ourselves for that infernal villain? Haviland, you’re an ass.”

The sneer had gone out of the King’s face. For a moment he contemplated the two white men in silence.

“What were his words?” he said, pointing to Oakley. Haviland told him.

“Not so,” said Umnovunovu, with an impatient stamp of the foot. “Let him say the words exactly as he said them. Or” The last was rolled out in a roar of menace.

Oakley, greatly wondering, repeated his words. The King, still wondering, pointed with his spear at Mushâd. In a moment the executioners were upon him, and he was dragged to the place of his torment and death.

But to make him fast to the poles it was necessary to cut the thongs which bound his wrists. Mushâd, apparently more helpless than a newborn babe, saw his opportunity and characteristically seized it. From one of the executioners he snatched a heavy twoedged dagger, and with all the old determination reviving, in a twinkling he drove it homehard, strong, and straightcleaving his own heart.

It took the spectators some moments to realise that they were cheated of the glut of revenge for which they were there. Then went up the most awful ravening roar. The two white men! They had bewitched the Arab! They it was who had saved him from their vengeance! Let them take the slaver’s place!

For a few minutes the King listened to their frenzied bellowing. Then, slowly, he raised his spear and pointed at Haviland.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

A New Wonder.

At the fatal signal the executioners threw themselves upon Haviland, so quickly that it became evident that no opportunity would be allowed him of repeating Mushâd's device. His revolver and knife were taken from him, and, firmly held in the iron grasp of these muscular savages, he was forced to stand powerless, awaiting the will of the King. No chance, either, had Oakley of coming to his aid, separated as they were by an infuriated and armed crowd.

"First of all," said the King, "those who allowed the Arab to escape must go. I have no use for such."

Two of the executioners were immediately seized by the rest. No prayer for mercy escaped them; perhaps they knew the futility of it. The King made a sign. Both knelt down; there was a flash of two scimitars in the air, and in a second two spouting, headless trunks were deluging the earth. An awed silence rested momentarily upon the multitude; then broke forth into hideous clamour for the torture of the white wizards.

For such these were, they declared. All the insects and herbs they were collectingwhat was all this for but for purposes of witchcraft? Only that morning they had captured a huge scorpion, and had been found distilling evil múti from its venomous carcase. With this they had enabled their enemy to escape them. With this they had even bewitched the Great Great One himself. Death to the wizards! Let them take the Arab's place!

Haviland's shirt was rent from his back, revealing a curious jagged scar, running from the left shoulder halfway to the elbow.

"Hold!" roared the King.

All eyes were raised, so startling was the tone. The Great Great One was indeed bewitched, was the one thought in the minds of the now silent multitude. And, indeed, there seemed some colour for the idea. Umnovunovu had half risen from his seat, and, both hands gripping the arms of the throne, he was staring wildly at the unfortunate prisoner.

"Loose him!" he cried. Then, in excellent English, "Come here, Haviland. I know you now."

In after times Haviland used to say that he had met with some wild surprises in the course of a somewhat adventurous career, but none wilder, madder, more utterly dumbstriking than when the King of the Inswani broke out into good English, hailing him by name. He started, stared, rubbed his eyes, gaspedthen stared again.

“Great Scott! Am I drunk or dreaming?” broke from him at last. “Why, it can’t be. But it isCetchyAnthonyMpukuza?”

But with the last name a mighty groan broke forth from all who heard, then another and another. Even in the whirl of his amazement and relief, Haviland recognised that he had blundered terribly. He had actually named the King by his veiled name, and that in the presence of the whole nation.

“Not Mpukuza now, but Umnovunovu. The Stump has spread into the Firestriking Tree,” said the King in a loud voice, speaking in Zulu. Then, dropping into English again:

“I have never forgotten you, Haviland, although you have forgotten me. When your friend there called you Haviland, I made him repeat it, so as to make sure. Then I remembered that bad scratch you gave yourself one day at Saint Kirwin’s, when we were scrambling through a wire fence. I knew the scar would be there still, so I arranged to make sure of that too.”

No wonder his people deemed Umnovunovu bewitched. Here he was, talking easily, fluently, in the tongue of these strangers; nor was that all, for his very countenance had changed, and the hardened savagery of the ferocious despot had given way to an expression that was bright and pleasing.

“No fear. I didn’t forget you, Cetchy,” answered Haviland, unconsciously reverting to the old nickname, which, however, didn’t matter, being English. “Why I was quite a long while in the Zulu country, and inquired for you everywhere. Ask Kumbelwa if I didn’t. I wanted no end to run against you again.”

“Well, and now you have, and in a mighty queer sort of way. And, do you know, Haviland, if you had been any one else, I’d have let them do what they liked with you. I hate white people. Nick and the others at Saint Kirwin’s taught me that. I wish I’d got Nick here. I’d put him through what Mushâd’s dogs underwent. Then I’d make him dance on that fire.”

The recollection of his school experiences and discipline revived all the savage in the young King. His face hardened vengefully.

“Oh, bosh, Cetchy,” replied Haviland, with a laugh. “You surely don’t bear a grudge against Nick for giving you a licking now and then; it’s all in the ordinary course of things when a fellow’s at school. Supposing every fellow I’d ever given a licking to wanted to burn me. Instead of that, we’d be shaking hands and talking over old times. Jarnley, for instance.”

Umnovunovu burst into a roar, his good humour quite restored.

“Jarnley!” he echoed, “I gave him such a licking before I left. You see, I was growing every day, and I felt strong enough to lick Jarnley. So we fought, and I licked him.”

It was a curious contrast, this easy and lighthearted school reminiscence, proceeding from the mouth of a bloodstained barbarian despot, clad in his savage panoply, and enthroned at the head of his astounded subjects. And on the ground, where they had fallen, the huge gory trunks of the decapitated executioners. Haviland saw the bizarre incongruity of the situation, and said as much, adding with something of a shudder as his glance fell upon the hideous corpses:

“You’re a cruel young beggar, Cetchy, you know. Why are you?”

“Cruel? Look here, Haviland. When you did wrong, Nick gave you a thousand lines, or a thrashing. I can’t give my people lines because they can’t write, and a thrashed man does wrong again, but a killed man, never. If I stopped killing, I should stop being King, for it would mean that. Butwho is he?” pointing towards Oakley.

“A friend I rescued in rather a strange manner. I’ll call him.” And he started towards Oakley, all making way before him now, so great was the general amazement. And he had a purpose in this move.

“Oakley,” he said hurriedly, and in an undertone. “For your very life, don’t let go you’re related to Nick, or that you ever so much as heard of him. Be careful. I’ll tell you after.”

Then to Oakley’s astonishment the King began to converse with him in fluent English, and he, listening, thought it was a lucky day for Haviland the day he punched Jarnley’s head for bullying the new boy at Saint Kirwin’s, whom the missionary’s wellintentioned zeal had placed at that seat of learninga lucky day for himself, too. But quick to grasp Haviland’s warning, he was nothing if not noncommittal.

“Ha!” chuckled Umnovunovu, erewhile Anthony. “They thought to make me Umfundisi (Missionary), but it suits me better to be a King.”

Later, he told Haviland of all his vicissitudes since the scheme for his education and civilisation had failed, also how he came to be installed on the Inswani throne in succession to his father, but it was a long and intricate history, full of strange and startling plottings and developments, and in no wise material to this narrativelater, we repeat, this was revealed, but not then. For then happened one of those very occurrences which the young despot claimed to justify him in the savage severities for which his white friend had been taking him to task, and the prime mover therein was Dumaliso.

Whether it was that the chief had really resolved upon a coup d'état or was acting upon one of those irresponsible impulses to which savages are so liable, he now rushed forward, waving his great assegai, and shouting in stentorian tones that the King was bewitched by these white people, and that it was time to make an end of them. A frantic uproar greeted his words, and blades flashed in ominous manner. But Umnovunovu hesitated not a moment. Drawing his towering stature to its full height, he gazed for one second with that terrible gaze of his upon the excited multitude, then there was a rush and a spring and he was upon Dumaliso, and the great spear was shearing through that illadvised leader's heart.

"Is the King bewitched?" he roared, flinging the great carcase from him, and rolling his eyes around. But the whole multitude cowered, shouting aloud the sibonga. Then he turned to the two white men, his equanimity quite restored.

"There you are, Haviland. Where would I be if I didn't kill? Dumaliso has been getting too big for his boots, as we used to say, for some time past, so now I've killed him. It's quite simple."

"Well, Haviland, we've fallen into luck's way, it seems," was Oakley's comment, as they found themselves alone again, now in one of the largest and roomiest huts the town could show, and with plenty of attendance and abundance of everything. "And now, I suppose, we can be trotting home again when we feel like it."

"Well, I feel like it now, Oakley. It is, as you say, a piece of luck; and, apart from that, I'm awfully glad to see Cetchy again. But all this sanguinary business has got upon my nerves ratherand I think a change of climate will be good for us."

So, a few days later, having made known their wishes to the King, he sent for them.

"You want to leave me, do you, Haviland?" he said. "Well, you can. But I trust to you both to say and do nothing that might bring a crowd of white people to my country. I don't want them, I tell you, and if any do come I shall kill themand so I warn you. You

can leave whenever you feel inclinedyou and the Arab, Somala. I am going to send an impi to look after you till you are safe beyond the reach of Rumaliza's bands. I am also sending with you, as a parting present, fifty tusks of ivory. And, Haviland, if ever you feel like coming to see me again, you will be welcome, only don't come with a number of people. You, Kumbelwa" relapsing into Zulu, "come hither."

"See. Thou art a great fighting man," he went on, when the Zulu had crept to his feet, "and I have need for such as thee. Wilt thou stay and wield a spear in my army?"

"Nkose! Baba! Great is the Lion of the Inswani! But what of my wives in my kraal beneath Babanangofather of the mighty?"

The King burst into a loud laugh.

"Thy wives! Au! I will give thee three new onessix if thou wilt, and thou shalt have abundant choice. Say?"

The big Zulu thought a moment. His own country had been conquered by the English, and there was no more fighting. What should he do with himself for the rest of his life there? Here there would be plenty. And his wives? Well, the King had promised him six new ones here, and he had but two at home, and they were not new. His mind was made up.

"Great Great One. I will konza to the Black Elephant of the Inswani," he replied. "But may I not go as far with my white chief as the King's impi goeth? Then I return with the King's lions."

"That thou mayest do, Kumbelwa," said the King.

So it came about that a few days later our two friends took leave of the Kingand started on their return journey. They had plenty of bearers now, and a valuable load, and, moreover, travelled with a formidable escort of five hundred shields.

"I tell you what it is, Haviland," Oakley observed, as they turned to take a last look at the great stockade with its array of ghastly and grinning heads, spiked on the stakes. "That chum of yours is a bloodthirsty young villain. But he's jolly well worth being chummy with on an occasion like this."

"Rather. The fellows at Saint Kirwin's who used to call him 'Haviland's Chum' to rag me, would stare if they only knew how I had run against him over here. In fact, they wouldn't believe it."

“Why don’t you put it into print?”

“Then they’d believe it still less.”

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Conclusion.

Saint Kirwin's was jubilant, and the reason for its jubilation lay in the fact that it had just obtained an unexpected and unlookedfor whole holiday, and that thanks to the request of a now famous explorernaturalist, who had been invited to revisit his old school and to deliver a lecture in a scientific interest. So interesting and withal instructive, indeed, had he rendered this, that while cordially thanking him in the name of the whole school, the headmasternot our old friend and sometime terror, Dr Bowen, otherwise Nickhad made him promise to continue it the following week. This he had agreed to do, but only to ask a favour in his turn, and that was to grant the school a whole holiday on the following dayand to an old Kirwinian who had greatly distinguished himself the headmaster had felt that much was due. So Haviland went to bed that night the most popular person within those classic walls; and until late, in more than one dormitory, traditions of his doughty deeds of a dozen years ago were repeated, and those in his whilom dormitory felt themselves of immeasurable importance by virtue of that purely fortuitous circumstance.

The while, in Mr Sefton's snug rooms Haviland and the master were forgathering.

"Light your pipe, Haviland," said the latter. "A wanderer like you can't do without it, I expect. Well! well! I'm very glad to see you again, very. And you've done credit to the old place, too."

"Oh, as to that, sir, I have only my good fortune to thank in having been able to take my own line. Round peg in a round hole, you know."

Mr Sefton looked at the tall form and bronzed face of the young explorer with unmeasured approval. He himself had hardly changed at allturning a little grey, perhaps, that was all.

"I say, sir, what were they about that they didn't make you head when the Doctor left?" broke forth Haviland.

"Ha! That isn't a sore point with me. I'm second now, and that's good enough to go on with." Then, leaning forward in his quaint way"Other maninterest by marriagesee?" with a chuckle. "I say, though," he went on, "fancy them making Nick a bishop, eh?"

"Yes, I'm glad he's got a good thing, though," said Haviland. "He had a 'down' on me, but he was so awfully good to me afterwards that it didn't count."

“I know he had, and I don’t mind telling you now that I thought so at the time, and, still more surprising, he came to recognise it himself. It’s the only time I’ve ever known Nick concede anything. You ought to go and see him one of these days. He’d be delighted.”

“I should like to. But, I say, Mr Sefton, I should burst out laughing in his face, because I should always be thinking of the day I marched up solemnly behind him in chapel.”

“We’ve often shouted over that. Williams never could forget it. By the way, Williams has taken orders now. Fancy, Williams a parson. He’s gone in for a parish and matrimony. He’d like to see you too. Who’s that?” he broke off. “Come in, can’t you! Oh, it’s you, Clay? Here. Sit down.”

“I thought I’d find Haviland here,” said the other master, who though of peppery habit in school could be genial enough outside.

And then they got on to all sorts of old reminiscences, of which the episode of the ghost in Hangman’s Wood was the one which caused the two masters to laugh until their sides ached.

“Fancy Cetchy turning out a king!” said Mr Clay, at last. “We ought to have a sort of Zulu royal arms stuck up over the gate here.”

“Tell him about how nearly Cetchy came to having your head chopped off, Haviland,” said Mr Sefton.

“He’d have done it, too, and worse, if I hadn’t been who I am. No, really, that was the most extraordinary thing that could have happened. We had given ourselves up, entirely, Oakley and I.”

“I should think so,” rapped out Mr Sefton. “They didn’t call Cetchy ‘Haviland’s Chum’ here to no purpose. Eh?”

“Well, you’ve had some rum experiences since you left us, Haviland,” said Clay. “And here I and Sefton have been planted, grinding the mill, year in year outsame old grindall that time. What d’you suppose will be the end of a fellow like Cetchy?”

“A violent one any way. There are only two ends possible to a savage in his positionto be killed in battle or by a conspiracy of his own people. He is a thorough savage, and the people he has to rulethe Inswanistruck me as about as turbulent, ferocious, and

bloodthirsty a crowd as this world can produce. There's the whole situation, and it's simple. Funny I should have tumbled in with Oakley, isn't it? Nick's nephew."

Thus they yarned on, and at last Clay took his departure, for it was late.

"Well now, Haviland," said Mr Sefton, the last thing. "What are your plans for the future? Going to start off again or settle down? But I suppose you're too confirmed a wanderer for that."

Haviland smiled.

"I shouldn't be surprised, sir."

Reader, no more should we.