Haviland's Chum

By

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HAVILAND'S CHUM

Chapter One.
The New Boy.

"Hi! Blacky! Here—hold hard. D'you hear, Snowball?"

The last peremptorily. He thus addressed, paused, turned, and eyed somewhat doubtfully, not without a tinge of apprehension, the group of boys who thus hailed him.

"What's your name?" pursued the latter, "Caesar, Pompey, Snowball—what?"

"Or Uncle Tom?" came another suggestion.

"I—new boy," was the response.

"New boy! Ugh!" jeered one fellow. "Time I left if they are going to take niggers here. What's your name, sir—didn't you hear me ask?"

"Mpukuza."

"Pookoo—how much?"

For answer the other merely emitted a click, which might have conveyed contempt, disgust, defiance, or a little of all three. He was an African lad of about fifteen, straight and lithe and well-formed, and his skin was of a rich copper brown. But there was a clean-cut look about the set of his head, and an almost entire absence of negro development of nose and lips, which seemed to point to the fact that it was with no inferior race aboriginal to the dark continent that he owned nationality.

Now a hoot was raised among the group, and there was a tendency to hustle this very unwonted specimen of a new boy. He, however, took it good-humouredly, exhibiting a magnificent set of teeth in a tolerant grin. But the last speaker, a biggish, thick-set fellow who was something of a bully, was not inclined to let him down so easily.

"Take off your hat, sir!" he cried, knocking it off the other's head, to a distance of some yards. "Now, Mr Woollyhead, perhaps you'll answer my question and tell us your name, or I shall have to see if some of this'll come out." And, suiting the action to the word, he reached forward and grabbed a handful of the other's short, crisp, jetty curls—jerking his head backwards and forwards.

The African boy uttered a hoarse ejaculation in a strange tongue, and his features worked with impotent passion. He could not break loose, and his tormentor was taller and stronger than himself. He put up his hands to free himself, but the greater his struggles the more the bully jerked him by the wool, with a malignant laugh. The others laughed too, enjoying the fun of what they regarded as a perfectly wholesome and justifiable bout of nigger baiting.

But a laugh has an unpleasant knack of transferring itself to the other side, and in this instance an interruption occurred—wholly unlooked-for, but sharp and decisive, not to say violent, and to the prime mover in the sport highly unpleasant—for it took the shape of a hearty, swinging cuff on the side of that worthy's head. He, with a howl that was half a curse, staggered a yard or two under the force of the blow, at the same time loosing his hold of his victim. Then the latter laughed—being the descendant of generations of savages—laughed loud and maliciously.

"Confound it, Haviland, what's that for?" cried the smitten one, feeing round upon his smiter.

"D'you want some more, Jarnley?" came the quick reply. "As it is I've a great mind to have you up before the prefects' council for bullying a new boy."

"Prefects' council," repeated Jarnley with a sneer. "That's just it. If you weren't a prefect, Haviland, I'd fight you. And you know it."

"But I don't know it and I don't think it," was the reply. The while, something of a smothered hoot was audible among the now rapidly increasing group, for Haviland, for reasons which will hereinafter appear, was not exactly a popular prefect. It subsided however, as by magic, when he darted a glance into the quarter whence it arose.

"Come here—you," he said, beckoning the cause of all the disturbance. "What's your name?"

"Mpukuza."

"What?"

The African boy repeated it unhesitatingly, willingly. He was quick to recognise the difference between constituted authority and the spurious and usurped article—besides, here was one who had intervened to turn the tables on his oppressor.

“Rum name that!” said his new questioner, eyeing him with some curiosity, at the full-throated native vowels. “Haven’t you got any other?”

“Other? Oh, yes, Anthony. Missionary name me Anthony.”

“Anthony? Well, that’s better. We can get our tongues round that. What are you, eh? Where d’you come from, I mean?”

“I’m a Zulu.”

A murmur of real interest ran through the listeners. Not so many years had passed since the dramatic episodes of ’79 but that some of the bigger boys there, including Haviland, were old enough to remember the war news reaching English shores, while all were more or less familiar with it in story. And here was one of that famous nationality among them as a schoolfellow.

“Now look here, you fellows,” said the prefect, when he had put a few more questions to the newcomer. “This chap isn’t to be bullied, d’you see, because he doesn’t happen to be like everybody else. Give him a fair show and see what he’s made of, and he’ll come out all right I expect.”

“Please, Haviland, he cheeked Jarnley,” cut in a smaller boy who was one of the last-named’s admirers.

“Small wonder if he did,” was the uncompromising answer. “Now clear inside all of you, for you’re blocking the way, and it’s time for call-over. Who’ll ring the bell for me?”

“I will!” shouted half a dozen voices; for Haviland was prefect of the week, and as such responsible for the due ringing of the calling-over bell, an office almost invariably performed by deputy. There was no difficulty in finding such; incipient human nature being as willing to oblige a very real potentate as the developed and matured article.

It was half term at Saint Kirwin’s—which accounted for the arrival of a new boy in the middle of the term. Now, Saint Kirwin’s was not a first-rate public school, but it was run as nearly as possible upon the lines of one. We say as nearly as possible, because the material was so essentially different. There was no such thing as the putting down of names for the intending pupil, what time that interesting entity was in the red and squalling phase of existence. At Saint Kirwin’s they would take anybody’s son, provided the said anybody was respectable, and professed to belong to the Established Church; and whereas the terms were excessively moderate, well—they got anybody’s son. There was, however, a fair sprinkling of those who but for the shallowness of the parental

purse would have been at Eton or Harrow or some kindred institution—among whom was Haviland, but the majority was composed of those at whom the more venerable foundations would not have looked—among whom was Jarnley. However, even these latter Saint Kirwin's managed to lick into very tidy sort of shape.

The situation of the place left nothing to be desired. The school buildings, long, high-gabled, drawn round two quadrangles, were sufficiently picturesque to be in keeping with the beautiful pastoral English scenery amid which they stood—green field and waving woodland studded with hamlet and spire, undulating away to a higher range of bare down in the background—all of which looked at its best this fair spring afternoon, with the young leaves just budding, and the larks, soaring overhead, pouring forth their volume of song.

As the calling-over bell jangled forth its loud, inexorable note, upwards of three hundred and fifty boys, of all sorts and sizes, came trooping towards the entrance from every direction—hot and ruddy from the playing fields—here and there, an athletic master, in cricket blazer, amid a group of bigger boys who had been bowling to him; others dusty and panting after a long round across country in search of birds' eggs—performed nearly all the time at a run—others again of a less energetic disposition, cool and lounging, perchance just gulping down some last morsels of "tuck"—all crowded in at the gates, and the cool cloisters echoed with a very Babel of young voices as the restless stream poured along to fill up the big schoolroom. Then might be heard shouts of "Silence!" "Stop talking there!" "Don't let me have to tell you again!" and so on—as the prefect in charge of each row of boys stood, note-book in hand, ready to begin the "calling-over."

"I say, Haviland," said Laughton, the captain of the school, in a low voice, "you're to go to the Doctor after call-over. I'm afraid you're in for it, old chap."

"Why? What on earth about? I haven't been doing anything," answered the other, in genuine surprise—"at least—" he added as a recollection of the smack on the head he had administered to Jarnley occurred to him. But no, it couldn't be that, for therein he had been strictly discharging his duty.

"I don't know myself," rejoined Laughton. "He stopped me as I passed him in the cloisters just now, and told me to tell you. He was looking jolly glum too."

Another half-smothered shout or two of "Silence" interrupted them, and then you might have heard a pin drop as the master of the week entered, in this case the redoubtable "Head" himself, an imposing figure in his square cap and flowing gown as he swept up to the great central desk, and gave the signal for the calling-over to begin.

Haviland, shouting out name after name on his list, did so mechanically, and his mind was very ill at ease. His conscience was absolutely clear of any specific offence, but that was no great consolation, for the Doctor's lynx eye had a knack of unearthing all sorts of unsuspected delinquencies, prefects especially being visited with vicarious penalties. That was it. He was going to suffer for the sins of somebody else, and it was with the gloomiest of anticipations that he closed his note-book and went up to make his report.

Chapter Two.
The Headmaster.

The Reverend Nicholas Bowen, D.D., headmaster of Saint Kirwin's, ruled that institution with a sway that was absolutely and entirely despotic. His aim was to model it on the lines of the greater public schools as much as possible, and to this end his assistant staff were nearly all university graduates, and more than half of them in Holy Orders. He was a great believer in the prefectorial system, and those of the school selected to carry it out were entrusted with large powers. On the other hand, they were held mercilessly responsible even for unconscious failures of duty, and on this ground alone the luckless Haviland had ample cause for his misgivings.

The outward aspect, too, of the Doctor was eminently calculated to command the respect of his juvenile kingdom. He was very tall and strongly built, and half a lifetime of pedagogic despotism had endowed him with a sternness of demeanour awe-inspiring enough to his charges, though when turned towards the outside world, as represented by his clerical colleagues for instance, it smacked of a pomposity bordering on the absurd. He had his genial side, however, and was not averse to the cracking of pedagogic jokes, at which he expected the form to laugh. It is almost unnecessary to add that the form never by any chance disappointed him.

To-day, however, no trace of such geniality was discernible, nothing but a magisterial severity in every movement of the massive iron grey head, a menace in the fierce brown eyes, as in a word, sounding like the warning bark of an angry mastiff, he ordered the whole school to keep their places. The whole school did so, and that with a thrill of pleasurable excitement. There was no end of a row on, it decided, and as it only concerned the one who was standing alone before the dread presence, the residue prepared to enjoy the situation.

It was the more enjoyable to the vast majority of the spectators because the delinquent was a prefect, and not a very popular one at that.

"Have you any further report to make, Haviland?" said the headmaster.

"No, sir," answered Haviland in genuine surprise, for he had made his reports, all in order, his own roll, and the general report as prefect of the week. Yet he didn't like the tone. It sounded ominous.

"Ah! Let Finch and Harris step forward."

Two quaking juniors slunk from their places, and stood in the awful presence. The crime charged against the luckless pair was that of trespass. The system of "bounds" did not exist at Saint Kirwin's, though there were limits of time, such being constituted by frequent callings-over. Otherwise the school could wander as it listed, the longest stretch obtainable being about an hour and three-quarters. There had, however, been a good many complaints of late with regard to boys overrunning the neighbouring pheasant coverts in search of birds' nests, for egg-collecting had many enthusiastic votaries in the school, and now these two luckless ones, Finch and Harris, had been collared red-handed that very afternoon by a stalwart keeper, and hauled straight away to the Doctor.

But where did Haviland come in? Just this way. In the course of a severe cross-examination in private, the headmaster had elicited from the two frightened juniors that when emerging from some forbidden ground they had seen Haviland under circumstances which rendered it impossible that he should not have seen them. It is only fair to the two that they hardly knew themselves how the information had been surprised out of them—certain it was that no other master could have done it—only the terrible Doctor. It had been ruled of late, by reason of the frequency of such complaints, that all cases of trespass on preserved land should be reported, instead of being dealt with as ordinary misdemeanours by the prefects; and here was a most flagrant instance of breach of trust on the part of one of the latter. As for Haviland, the game was all up, he decided. He would be deprived of his official position, and its great and material privileges, and be reduced to the ranks. He expected nothing less.

"Now, Haviland," said the Doctor, "how is it you did not report these boys?"

"I ought to have, sir," was the answer.

"You ought to have," echoed the Doctor, his voice assuming its most awe-inspiring tones. "And, did you intend to report them?"

Here was a loophole. Here was a chance held out to him. Why not grasp it? At best he would get off with a severe wigging, at worst with an imposition. It would only be a white lie after all, and surely under the circumstances justifiable. The stern eyes of the headmaster seemed to penetrate his brain, and every head was craned forward open-mouthed for his answer. It came.

"I'm afraid I did not, sir."

"You are afraid you did not! Very well. Then there is no more to be said." And the Doctor, bending down, was seen to be writing something on a slip of paper—the while the whole school was on tenterhooks, but the excitement was of a more thrilling nature

than ever now. What would be the upshot? was in every mind. A swishing of course. Not for Haviland though; he was too old, and a prefect. He would be reduced.

Then the headmaster looked up and proceeded to pass sentence.

“These continual complaints on the part of the neighbours,” he said, “are becoming very serious indeed, and are getting the school a very bad name. I am determined to put a stop to them, and indeed it is becoming a grave question with me whether I shall not gate the whole school during the remainder of the term. These two boys, who have been brought up to me, represent a number of cases, I am afraid, wherein the offenders escape undetected and unpunished: therefore I shall make a severe example of them, and of any others in like case. And now a word to the prefects.”

A long, acrid, and bitter homily for the benefit of those officials followed—the juniors listening with intense delight, not that the order was especially unpopular, but simply the outcome of the glee of juvenile human nature over those set in authority over it being rated and brought to book in their turn. Then, having descanted on authority and trust, and so forth, until every one of those officially endowed with such responsibility began almost to wish they were not—with the exception perhaps of the one who stood certain to be deprived of it—the headmaster proceeded:

“Harris and Finch, I shall flog you both to-morrow morning after divinity lesson, and I may add that any boy reported to me for the same offence will certainly receive the same treatment. As for you, Haviland,” handing him the slip of paper on which he had been writing, “you will post this upon the board. And I warn you that any further dereliction of duty on your part brought to my notice will entail very much more severe consequences.”

Mechanically Haviland took the paper, containing of course the notice of his suspension, and could hardly believe his eyes. This is what he read:

“Haviland. Prefect.

“Fifteen hundred lines (of Virgil). For gross neglect of duty. Gated till done.

“Nicholas Bowen, D.D., Headmaster.”

The great bound of relief evolved by the respite of the heavier penalty was succeeded in his mind by resentment and disgust as he realised the magnitude of this really formidable imposition. The Doctor had left the desk and the room, and now the whole gathering was pouring forth to the outer air again. Not a few curious glances were

turned on Haviland to see how he took it: the two condemned juniors, however, being surrounded by a far more boisterously sympathetic crowd—those who had been swished before undertaking, with a hundredfold wealth of exaggeration, to explain to these two, who had not, what it felt like, by way of consolation.

"What's he given you, Hav?" said Medlicott, a fellow prefect, and rather a chum of the principal victim's, looking over the notice. "That all! You've got off cheap, I can tell you. We reckoned it meant suspension—especially as Nick has a down on you."

"Nick," be it observed, was the inevitable name by which the redoubtable headmaster was known among the boys. It had started as "Old Nick," but the suggestion diabolical had been sacrificed to brevity.

"That all!" echoed Haviland wrathfully. "Fifteen hundred's a howling stiff impos, Medlicott. And it really means two thou, for the old brute always swears about a third of your stuff is so badly written you've got to do it over again. It's a regulation time-honoured swindle of his. And—just as the egg-season is getting at its best! It's too beastly altogether."

Haviland was an enthusiastic egg-hunter, and had a really fine collection. In the season he lived for nothing else, every moment of his spare time being given up to adding to it. Of course he himself frequently transgressed the laws of trespass, but he was never known to bring a junior to book for doing so—on the contrary, he was always careful to look the other way if he suspected the presence of any such.

Now, having fixed the hateful notice to the board nailed to the wall for such purposes, he got out a Virgil and sat down to begin his odious task. The big schoolroom was empty save for a few who were under like penalty with himself. What a lovely afternoon it was, and he would have had nearly an hour and a half, just time to go over and secure the two remaining eggs in that sparrow-hawk's nest in the copse at the foot of the down—a programme he had mapped out for himself before this grievous misfortune had overtaken him. Now some other fellow would find them, or they would be "set" and useless before he could get out again. "Gated till done." Half the sting of the penalty lay in those abominable words—for it meant that no foot could be set outside the school gates until the whole of it was completed.

"I say, Haviland. We're no end sorry."

The interruption proceeded from the two smaller culprits, predestined to the rod on the morrow. Haviland looked up wrathfully.

“Sorry, are you, you young sweeps? So am I—sorry I didn’t ‘sock’ your heads off.”

“Please, Haviland, can’t we do your impos for you—or at any rate some of it?”

“D’you think Old Nick’s such an ass as all that? Why, he’d spot the fraud a mile off! Besides, remember what he said about breach of trust and all that. He’d better keep that for chapel next Sunday,” he added sneeringly. “Look here, you youngsters, you’ll be well swished to-morrow, a round dozen at least, and you’d better toss for second innings, because then Nick’ll be getting tired—but anyway you’re not gated and I am. Will you go and take a nest for me?”

“Rather. Where is it?” chorussed both boys eagerly.

“Smallest of the two tree patches, foot of Sidebury Down. Sparrow-hawk’s—in an ivy-hung ash. It’s quite an easy climb. You can’t miss it, and there should be two eggs left in it. I collared two a couple of days back, and put in stones. You won’t get pickled for it any more either, because it isn’t on preserved ground. You’ll have to run all the way though.”

They promised, and were off like a shot, and it is only fair to say that they brought back the spoil, and duly and loyally handed it over to its legitimate claimant.

Left to himself, Haviland set to work with an effort. After a hundred of the lines he flung his pen down angrily.

“Hang it, I hate this beastly place,” he muttered to himself. “I don’t care how soon I leave.”

This was not strictly true. He liked the school and its life, in reality more than he was aware of himself. He was always glad to get back to it, for his home life was unattractive. He was the son of an extremely conscientious but very overworked and very underpaid parson, the vicar of a large and shabby-genteel suburban parish, and the fresh, healthy, beautiful surroundings of Saint Kirwin’s all unconsciously had their effect upon his impressionable young mind, after the glaring dustiness, or rain-sodden mud according to the season of the year—of the said suburb. He was a good-looking lad of seventeen, well-grown for his age, and seeming older, yet thus early somewhat soured, by reason of the already felt narrowing effects of poverty, and an utter lack of anything definite in the way of prospects; for he had no more idea of what his future walk in life was to be than the man in the moon.

And so he sat, that lovely cloudless half-holiday afternoon, grinding out his treadmill-like imposition, angrily, rebelliously, his one and only thought to get that over as soon as possible.

Chapter Three.

The Bully.

Haviland's gloomy prediction proved in so far correct, in that when, after nearly a weary week of toil during his spare moments, he handed in his imposition, his insatiable taskmaster insisted on his re-writing two hundred of the lines. Then with lightened heart he found himself free to resume his all-engrossing and gloriously healthy pursuit.

There is, or used to be, a superstition that a boy who didn't care for cricket or football must necessarily be an ass, a loafer, and to be regarded with some suspicion. Yet in point of fact such by no means follows, and our friend Haviland was a case in point. He could cover as many miles of ground in the limited time allowed as any one in the school, and more than most. He could climb anything, could pick his way delicately through the most forbidden ground, quartering it exhaustively every yard, what time his natural enemy the keeper, his suspicions roused, was on the watch in the very same covert, and return safe and sound with his pearly treasures—to excite the envy and admiration of the egg-collecting fraternity; yet though this represented his pet hobby, he was something of an all-round naturalist, and his wanderings in field and wood were by no means confined to the nesting season.

He might have liked cricket could he have been always in, but fielding out he pronounced beastly slow. As for football he declared he couldn't see any fun in having his nose jammed an inch and a half deep into liquid mud, with ten or a dozen fellows on top of him trying to jam it in still deeper: and in the result he always wanted to hit some one when he got up again. Besides, a game you were obliged to play whether you wanted to or not, ceased to be a game at all—and during its season football was compulsory on half-holidays, at any rate for the juniors. Now, as a prefect, he was exempt, and he appreciated his exemption. But, his distaste for the two great games notwithstanding, there was nothing of the loafer or the muff about Haviland. He was always in the pink of hard training, clear-eyed, clean-skinned, thoroughly sound in wind and limb.

In the matter of his school work we regret to say that our friend cut a less creditable figure; for in it indeed he shone in no particular branch. His sole object was to get through his work as quickly and as easily as possible, thereby to have more time for his favourite pursuit, wherefore his ambition soared no higher than a respectable middle of the fifth form. The ethics of Saint Kirwin's held "cribs" to be perfectly justifiable—needless to say not from the masters' point of view—and a large proportion generously availed themselves of such dubious aid, being of course careful to avoid all the stock catches. Even a certain amount of cribbing in form was held not to be unlawful, although perilous; and when the Reverend Joseph Wilmot—an absent and star-gazing

type of master—gravely and impressively warned his Greek Testament form one Sunday, à propos of some suspiciously technical construing, that he should, detect in a moment if any one used the English version, the form was simply dying to roar; the point of the joke being that every fellow composing it had got his English version concealed beneath his locker, and was surreptitiously reading up the part where he would be put on, this having been the practice of the form from time immemorial, and, we grieve to say, destined to continue so indefinitely.

"Serve 'em right," pronounced Haviland, who was one of the offenders. "They've no business to make us work on Sundays. It's smashing up the fourth commandment. So if we take the English in to form with us it saves us from working, and we get out of smashing the fourth commandment. See?"

They did see, for a shout of acclamation hailed this young casuist's special pleading. "Besides," he added, "Old Joe is such an ass. Detect in a moment if any one used the English! Faugh! As if any one in this form had ever done anything else?"

It may be thought that by reason of his own delinquencies Haviland's authority as a prefect would have been partially if not entirely undermined, yet such was not the case, for under the school code they were justified, whereas the terrible crime of "sneaking" was as much the one unpardonable sin at Saint Kirwin's as elsewhere. And in the enforcement of that authority he was pitiless, hence his unpopularity—but it answered—and whether he presided over preparation, or in the dormitory, or elsewhere, order reigned. The spirits of misrule were laid.

Once indeed an offender thought to round on him. He had unearthed a smoking case, and the use of tobacco was of course a capital offence. One of the offenders—three biggish fellows by the way—had said meaningly:

"If you do anything in this, Haviland, we can hand you up. We saw you in Needham's Copse only last week, and other places besides."

"All right, Starford. You must go before the next prefects' council, all three of you. This'll mean a licking I'm afraid, but you'll have an appeal to the Doctor. You can give me away then if you think it'll do yourselves any good, but I believe you know Nick better than that."

He was right, except that the headmaster took the matter out of the prefectorial hands and soundly flogged the culprits himself. But no word did these utter with regard to any delinquency on the part of him who was instrumental in bringing them to justice.

Meanwhile the Zulu boy, Anthony, otherwise Mpukuza, was not finding life at Saint Kirwin's exactly a bed of roses, the more so that Jarnley and a few other choice spirits were making it their especial business that he should not. Deprived of the protection of his first and accidental defender, he was very much at their mercy. Haviland was gated, and would so remain for some days to come, and so long as they could catch their victim outside, this rough element promised itself plenty of fun. There was no fear of the victim himself giving it away, for although complaining to a prefect was immeasurably less heinous than complaining to a master, still it was not held justifiable except in very extreme cases.

"Come down and have a bathe with us, Snowball," cried Jarnley, catching sight of his intended victim, while proceeding with a group of his followers to one of the school bathing-places.

"Can you swim, Cetchy?" cried another of the group—that being the Zulu boy's nickname as the nearest they could get to Cetywayo.

"Swim—eh? Well, I dunno."

"Come along then, and we'll teach you," and grins of malignant delight went round the group. They anticipated no end of fun. They were going to duck this somewhat unusual specimen until they nearly drowned him. Jarnley, in particular, was radiant.

Mpukuza grinned too. There was no escape. They had hedged him about too completely for that. He might as well accept the situation good-humouredly. And—he did.

About half a mile from the school buildings there flowed an insignificant sluggish river, opening here and there into broad deep pools. One of these, screened off, and fitted with a diving board, constituted the bathing-place of those who had passed a certain swimming test, and thus were entitled to disport themselves aquatically when they listed. It was not a good bathing-place, far from it, for the bottom was coated thickly with slimy mud. Still, it was the best obtainable under the circumstances.

Jarnley and Co. unvested in a trice, nor did their intended victim take any longer.

"Come along, Cetchy," laughed Jarnley, grabbing the other by the scruff of the neck, and leaping out into deep water with him. "Now I'll teach you, you black beast," he snarled, between the panting and puffing extracted by the coldness of the water as they both rose to the surface. "I'm going to duck you till you're nearly dead. Take that first though," hitting him a smart smack on the side of the face. Those still on the bank yelled with delight, and hastened to spring into the water in order to get their share of the fun.

They got it. The African boy uttered an exclamation of dismay, broke away from his tormentors, and in a few swift strokes splashed across to the furthest and deepest side of the pool. This was what they wanted. With more yells of delight all hands swam in pursuit.

Mpukuza was holding on to a trailing bough, his copper-coloured face above water, showing every indication of alarm, as his assailants drew near.

“Now we’ll duck him!” yelled Jarnley. “It’s jolly deep here.”

But as they swooped towards him something strange happened—something strange and utterly unexpected. The round head and dark scared countenance had disappeared. So, too, at that moment did Jarnley, but not before he had found time to utter a yell—a loud yell—indicative of surprise and scare—drowned the next second in bubble and splash.

What on earth did it mean? That Jarnley was playing the fool, was the first idea that occurred to the spectators as they swam around or trod water—the next that he had been seized with cramp. But what about Cetchy? He too, was under water, and they hadn’t gone down together, for Jarnley hadn’t touched him yet.

No—he hadn’t. But Mpukuza knew a trick worth two of waiting for that. These confiding youths had overlooked the possibility that this descendant of many generations of savage warriors might be far more at home in the water than they were themselves. But such in fact was the case. Watching his opportunity, as his would-be tormentors bore down upon him, the Zulu boy had simply dived, and grabbing Jarnley by both ankles dragged him under water. And there he held him—and all the bully’s frantic attempts to escape were in vain. The grasp on his ankles was that of a vice; and when at last it did relax, Jarnley rose to the surface only to sink again, so exhausted was he. He was in fact drowning, and but for his intended victim—who rose unruffled, unwinded, even smiling, and at once seized him and towed him to the bank—he would actually have lost his life. For the African boy could remain under water a vast deal longer than they could, and that with the most perfect ease.

“What’s all this about?”

The voice—sharp, clear, rather high-pitched—had the effect of a sort of electric shock on the streaming and now shivering group gathered round the gasping and prostrate Jarnley, as it started round, not a little guiltily, to confront a master.

The aspect of the latter was not reassuring, being decidedly hostile. With his head thrown back he gazed on the dumb-foundered group with a stony stare.

“Umph! Bathing before permission has been given?” he said.

“That black beast! I’ll kill him,” muttered the muddled and confused Jarnley.

“Eh? What’s the fellow saying?” cried the new arrival sharply, who, by the way, was dressed in clerical black himself, and was now inspired with the idea that the speaker was suffering from sunstroke, and was off his head. For all its apprehensiveness, a sickly grin ran round the group.

“He’s talking about Cetchy—er—I mean Anthony, sir,” explained some one.

Now the Reverend Alfred Augustus Sefton was endowed with a vast fund of humour, but it was of the dry quality, and he was sharp withal. He had seen more than they knew, and now, looking from one to the other, the situation suddenly dawned upon him, and it amused him beyond words. But he was a rigid disciplinarian.

“What have you been doing to him?” he said, fixing the African boy with his straight glance.

“Doing? Nothing, sir. We play in the water. He try how long he keep me under. I try how long I keep him under. That all. That all, sir.” And a dazzling stripe of white leaped in a broad grin across the speaker’s face—while all the other boys tittered. Mr Sefton gave a suspicious choke.

“That all!” he echoed. “But that isn’t all,” and extracting an envelope and a pencil from his pocket, he began to take down their names. “No, that isn’t all by any means. Each of you will do four hundred lines for bathing before permission has been given, except Anthony, who will do one hundred only because he’s a new boy. Now get into your clothes sharp and go straight back and begin, and if you’re not in the big schoolroom by the time I am, I’ll double it.”

There was a wholesome straightforwardness about Mr Sefton’s methods that admitted of no argument, and it was a very crestfallen group that overtook and hurried past that disciplinarian as he made his way along the field-path, swinging his stick, his head thrown back, and his soft felt hat very much on the back of it. And on the outskirts of the group at a respectful distance came Anthony, keen-eyed and quick to dodge more than one vengeful smack on the head which had been aimed at him—for these fairplay-loving young Britons must wreak their resentment on something—and dire and deep were the

sinister promises thrown at the African boy, to be fulfilled when time and opportunity should serve.

Chapter Four.
Concerning an Adventure.

Mr Sefton did not immediately repair to the big schoolroom. When he did, however, the half-dozen delinquents were at work on their imposition. He strolled round apparently aimlessly, then peered into the fifth form room, where sat Haviland, writing his.

Haviland was not at first aware of the master's presence. An ugly frown was on his face, for he was in fact beginning the extra two hundred lines of which we have made mention. It was a half-holiday, and a lovely afternoon, and but for this he would have been out and away over field and down. He felt that he had been treated unfairly, and it was with no amiable expression of countenance that he looked up, and with something of a start became aware of the master's presence.

"Sit still, Haviland," said the latter kindly, strolling over to the desks. "Have you nearly done your imposition?"

"I've done it quite, sir, but you can always reckon on having to do a third of it over again when it's for the Doctor," he added with intense bitterness.

"Look here, you mustn't talk like that," rejoined Mr Sefton briskly, but there was a kindliness underlying his sharp tones which the other's ear was quick to perceive. They were great friends these two, and many an informal chat had they had together. It involved no favouritism either. Let Haviland break any rule, accidentally or not, within Mr Sefton's jurisdiction, and the imposition entailed was not one line shorter than that set to anybody else under like circumstances, as he had reason to know by experience. Yet that made no difference in his regard for this particular master.

"Well, it's hard luck all the same, sir," he now replied. "However, this time I've got off cheap with only a couple of hundred over again. But it has done me out of this afternoon."

Mr Sefton had hoisted himself on to one of the long desks and sat swinging his legs and his stick.

"What d'you think?" he said. "I've caught half a dozen fellows bathing just now. The new boy Anthony was among 'em. And he'd nearly drowned Jarnley—the beggar! What d'you think of that?"

"What, sir? Nearly drowned him?"

“I should think so,” pursued the master, chuckling with glee. “Jarnley lay there gasping like a newly caught fish. It seems he’d been trying to duck Cetchy, and Cetchy ducked him instead. Nearly drowned him too. Ha—ha!”

Haviland roared too.

“That chap’ll be able to take care of himself, I believe, sir,” he said. “I need hardly have smacked Jarnley’s head for bullying him the other day.”

“I know you did,” said the other dryly, causing Haviland to stop short with a half grin, as he reflected how precious little went on in the school that Sefton didn’t know.

“Well, he’s got four hundred lines to get through now,” went on the latter. “I let Cetchy off with a hundred.”

“I expect the other fellows made him go with them, sir,” said Haviland. “And he’s hardly been here a week yet.”

“If I let him off them, the other fellows’ll take it out of him,” said Mr Sefton, who understood the drift of this remark.

“They’ll do that anyhow, sir. But I’ve a notion they’ll tire of it before long.”

So Anthony was called and made to give his version of the incident, which he did in such manner as to convulse both master and prefect—and, to his great delight, the imposition was remitted altogether.

“He’s no end of an amusing chap that, sir,” said Haviland when the African boy had gone out. “He has all sorts of yarns about Zululand—can remember about the war too. He’s in my dormitory, you know, sir, and he yarns away by the hour—”

The speaker broke off short and somewhat confusedly—as a certain comical twinkle in Mr Sefton’s eyes reminded him how guilelessly he was giving himself away: for talking in the dormitories after a certain time, and that rather brief, was strictly forbidden. Mr Sefton, secretly enjoying his confusion, coughed dryly, but made no remark. After all, he was not Haviland’s dormitory master.

“What a big fellow you’re getting, Haviland!” he said presently. “I suppose you’ll be leaving us soon?”

“I hope not, sir, at least not for another couple of terms. Then I expect I’ll have to.”

“You’re not eager to, then?” eyeing him curiously.

“Not in the least.”

“H’m! What are they going to make of you when you do leave?”

The young fellow’s face clouded.

“Goodness only knows, sir. I suppose I’ll have to go out and split rails in the bush, or something about as inviting, or as paying.”

“Well, I don’t know that you’ll be doing such a bad thing in that, Haviland,” rejoined Mr Sefton, “if by ‘splitting rails’ you mean launching out into some form of colonial life. But whatever it is you’ve got to throw yourself into it heart and soul, but I should think you’d do that from what I’ve seen of you here. At any rate, life and its chances are all in front of you instead of half behind you, and you’ve got to determine not to make a mess of it, as so many fellows do. Well, I didn’t come in here to preach you a sermon, so get along with your lines and start clear again.” And the kind-hearted disciplinarian swung himself off the desk and departed, and with him nearly all the rankling bitterness which had been corroding Haviland’s mind. The latter scribbled away with a will, and at length threw down his pen with an ejaculation of relief.

Even then he could not go out until the lines had been shown up. The next best thing was to look out, and so he climbed up to sit in the open window. The fair English landscape stretched away green and golden in the afternoon sunlight. The shrill screech of swifts wheeling overhead mingled with the twittering of the many sparrows which rendered the creepers clinging to the wall of the school buildings untidy with their nests. Then the clear song of larks soaring above mead and fallow, and farther afield the glad note of the cuckoo from some adjoining copse. Boys were passing by twos and threes, and now and then a master going for his afternoon stroll. Haviland, gazing out from his perch in the window, found himself thinking over Mr Sefton’s words. He supposed he should soon be leaving all this, but didn’t want to. He liked the school: he liked the masters, except the Head perhaps, who seemed for no reason at all to have a “down” on him. He liked the freedom allowed by the rules outside school hours, and thoroughly appreciated his own post of authority, and the substantial privileges it carried with it. A voice from outside hailed him.

“Hi—Haviland! Done your impos yet?”

“Yes.”

“Come with me after call-over. I’ve got a good thing. Owl’s nest. Must have two to get at it.”

The speaker was one Corbould major, a most enthusiastic egg-hunter, and, though not a prefect, a great friend of Haviland’s by reason of being a brother sportsman.

“Can’t. I’m gated. Won’t be able to take the lines up to Nick till to-morrow.”

“Why not try him in his study now? He’s there, for I saw him go in—and he’s in a good humour, for he was grinning and cracking jokes with Laughton and Medlicott. Try him, any way.”

“All right,” said Haviland, feeling dubious but desperate, as he climbed down from the window.

It required some intrepidity to invade the redoubtable Head in his private quarters, instead of waiting until he appeared officially in public; however, as Corbould had divined, the great Panjandrum happened to be in high good humour, and was graciously pleased to accept the uttermost farthing, and release the prisoner then and there.

Half an hour later two enthusiastic collectors might have been seen, speeding along a narrow lane at a good swinging, staying trot. A quick glance all round, then over a stile and along a dry ditch skirting a long high hedge. Another quick look round, and both were in a small hazel copse. On the further side of this, in a field just outside it, stood a barn. This was their objective.

Now, before leaving cover, they reconnoitred carefully and exhaustively. The farmhouse to which the barn belonged stood but two fields off, and they could distinctly hear the cackling of the fowls around it—and in another direction they could see men working in the fields at no great distance. Needless to say, the pair were engaged in an act of flagrant trespass.

“That’s all right so far,” whispered Corbould major, as they stood within the gloom of the interior, feebly illuminated by streaks of light through the chinks. “There’s the nest, up there, in that corner, and you’ll have to give me a hoist up to the beam from the other end. We can’t take it from this because there’s a hen squatting on a lot of eggs right underneath, and she’ll kick up such a beastly row if we disturb her.”

A warning “cluck-cluck” proceeding from the fowl in question had already caused Haviland something of a start. However, they were careful not to alarm her, and she sat

on. Meanwhile, Corbould had reached the beam, and with some difficulty had drawn himself up and was now creeping along it.

Haviland's heart was pulsating with excitement as he stood there in the semi-gloom, watching his companion's progress, for the adventure was a bold one, and the penalty of detection condign. Now a weird hissing arose from the dark corner overhead, as Corbould, worming his way along the beam, drew nearer and nearer to it, and then, and then, to him above and to him below, it seemed that there came a hissing as of a thousand serpents, a whirlwind of flapping wings, a gasp, a heavy fall, a crash, and he who had been aloft on yonder beam now lay sprawling beneath it, while the hen, which had saved itself as though by a miracle, was dashing round and round the barn, uttering raucous shrieks of terror.

"You ass! You've done it now!" exclaimed Haviland, horror-stricken, as he surveyed his chum, who, half-stupefied, was picking himself up gingerly. And he had. For what he had "done" was to lose his hold and tumble right slap on top of the sitting hen, or rather where that nimble fowl had been a moment before, namely on the nest of eggs; and these being in a state of semi-incubation, it followed that the whole back of his jacket and trousers was in the most nauseous mess imaginable.

This was too much for Haviland, and, the peril of the situation notwithstanding, he laughed himself into a condition that was abjectly helpless.

"Shut up, Haviland, and don't be an ass, for heaven's sake! We must get out of this!" cried Corbould. "Scrag that beastly fowl. It's giving away the whole show!" And indeed such was likely to be the result, for what with the owl hissing like a fury overhead, and the hen yelling below, it seemed that the din should be heard for miles.

A hedge stake, deftly shied, silenced the latter, and this first act of stern self-preservation accomplished, the second followed, viz.: to slip cautiously forth, and make themselves remarkably scarce. This they succeeded in doing. Luck favoured them, miraculously as it seemed, and, having put a respectable distance between themselves and the scene of the adventure, they made for a safe hiding-place where they could decide on the next move, for it was manifestly impossible for Corbould to show up in that state.

Snugly ensconced in a dry ditch, well overhung with brambles, they soon regained wind after their exertions and excitement. But Haviland, lying on the ground, laughed till he cried.

“If you could only have seen yourself, Corbould,” he stuttered between each paroxysm, “rising like Phoenix from the ashes! And that infernal fowl waltzing round and round the barn squawking like mad, and the jolly owl flapping and hissing up top there! O Lord, you’d have died!”

“We didn’t get the eggs, though. Wouldn’t have minded if we’d got the eggs.”

“Well, we won’t get them now, for I don’t suppose either of us’ll be such asses as to go near the place again this season after the to-do there’ll be when old Siggles discovers the smash up. It’s a pity to have done all that damage though, gets us a rottener name than ever.”

“It couldn’t. These beasts of farmers, it doesn’t hurt them if we hunt for nests. Yet they’re worse than the keepers. They have some excuse, the brutes.”

“How on earth were you such an ass as to come that cropper, Corbould?” said the other, going off into a paroxysm again.

“Oh, it’s all jolly fine, but what’d you have done with that beastly owl flapping around your ears and trying to peck your eyes out? But I say. What are we going to do about this?” showing the horrible mess his clothes were in.

Both looked blank for a few moments. Then Haviland brightened.

“Eureka!” he cried. “We’ll plaster you up with dry mud, and it you’re asked, you can swear you had a fall on your back. You did too, so that’ll be no lie.”

The idea was a good one. By dint of rubbing in handfuls of dry earth, every trace of the eggs, half-incubated as they were, was hidden. But as far as further disturbance at the hands of these two counted for anything the owl was allowed to hatch out its brood in peace. Not for any consideration would they have attempted further interference with it that season.

Chapter Five.
"Haviland's chum."

When Haviland expressed his belief, in conversation with Mr Sefton, that the Zulu boy would prove able to take care of himself, he uttered a prediction which events seemed likely to bear out.

When three or four of the fellows who sat next to him in chapel conceived the brilliant idea of putting a large conical rose thorn—point uppermost of course—on the exact spot where that dark-skinned youth was destined to sit down on rising from his knees, they hardly foresaw the result, as three or four heads were quickly and furtively turned in anticipation of some fun. They were not disappointed either—for Simonds minor, the actual setter of the trap, shot up from his seat like a cork from a soda-water bottle, smothering an exclamation expressive of wild surprise and something else, while the descendant of generations of fighting savages sat tight in his, a rapt expression of innocence and unconcern upon his dark countenance. Nor did the fun end there, for the prefect in charge of that particular row, subsequently and at preparation time sent for Simonds minor, and cuffed him soundly for kicking up a disturbance in chapel, though this was a phase of the humour which, while appealing keenly to the spectators, failed to amuse Simonds minor in the very least. He vowed vengeance, not on his then executioner, but on Anthony.

Under a like vow, it will be remembered, was Jarnley. Not as before, however, did he propose to make things unpleasant for his destined victim. This time it should be on dry land, and when he got his opportunity he promised to make the very best of it, in which he was seconded by his following—who connected somehow the magnitude of the impos, given them by "that beast Sefton," with the presence of "Cetchy" in their midst. So the party, having completed their said impos, spent the next few days, each armed with a concealed and supple willow switch, stalking their quarry during his wanderings afield; but here again the primitive instincts of the scion of a barbarian line rendered it impossible for them to surprise him, and as to catching him in open pursuit, they might as well have tried to run down a bird in the air. He would simply waltz away without an effort, and laugh at them: wherein he was filling Jarnley and Co.'s cup of wrath very full. But an event was destined to occur which should cause it to brim over.

One afternoon, owing to the noxious exhalations arising from a presumably poisoned rat within the wainscoting common to the third and fourth form rooms, both those classes were ordered to the big schoolroom, and allotted desk work to fill in the time.

Now the rows of lockers were arranged in tiers all down one half of the long room, leaving the other half open, with its big desk in the centre dominating the whole. Ill

chance indeed was it that located Anthony's form in the row beneath, and himself immediately in front of, his sworn foe.

Now Jarnley began to taste the sweets of revenge. More than one kick, hard and surreptitious, nearly sent the victim clean off the form, and the bright idea which occurred to Jarnley, of fixing a pin to the toe of his boot had to be abandoned, for the cogent reason that neither he nor any of his immediate neighbourhood could produce the pin. Meanwhile the master in charge lounged in the big desk, blissfully reading.

"Look here, Cetchy," whispered Jarnley, having varied the entertainment with a few tweaks of his victim's wool. "Turn round, d'you hear: put your finger on that."

"That" being a penholder held across the top of one of the inkwells let into the desk.

"Put it on, d'you hear. I'll let you off any more if you do. No—press hard."

For Anthony had begun to obey orders, but gingerly. Once more was Jarnley digging his own grave, so to say. The black finger was now held down upon the round penholder, and of course what followed was a foregone conclusion. Its support suddenly withdrawn, knuckle deep went that unlucky digit into the well, but with such force that a very fountain of ink squirted upward, to splash down, a long running smudge, right across the sheet of foolscap which Jarnley had just covered, thereby rendering utterly useless the results of nearly half an hour's work. This was too much. Reaching forward, the bully gripped the perpetrator of this outrage by the wool where it ended over the nape of the neck, and literally plucked out a wisp thereof.

"I'll kill you for this, you black devil," he said, in a snarling whisper.

But the reply was as startling as it was unexpected. Maddened by the acute pain, all the savage within him aroused, and utterly regardless of consequences, the Zulu boy swung round his arm like a flail, hitting Jarnley full across the face with a smack that resounded through the room, producing a dead and pin-dropping silence, as every head came round to see what had happened.

"What's all this?" cried the furious voice of the master in charge, looking quickly up. "Come out, you two boys. Come out at once."

Then, as the two delinquents stood up to come out of their places, a titter rippled through the whole room, for Jarnley's red and half scared, half furious countenance was further ornamented by a great black smear where his smiter's inky hand had fallen.

Now the Reverend Richard Clay was hot of temper, and his method under such circumstances as these short and effectual, viz.: to chastise the offenders first and institute enquiry afterwards, or not at all. Even during the time taken by these two to leave their places and stand before him, he had flung open the lid of the great desk, and jerked forth the cane always kept there; a long supple, well-hardened cane, well burnt at the end.

“Fighting during school time, were you?” he said. “Hold up your coat.”

“Please sir, he shied a lot of ink over my work,” explained Jarnley in desperation. Anthony the while said nothing.

“I don’t care if he did,” was the uncompromising reply. “Stand up and hold up your coat.”

This Jarnley had no alternative but to do, and as Mr Clay did nothing by halves the patient was soon dancing on one foot at a time.

“No, no, I haven’t done yet,” said the master, in response to a muttered and spasmodic appeal for quarter. “I’ll teach you to make a disturbance in schooltime when I’m in charge. There! Stand still.”

And he laid it on—to the bitter end; and with such muscle and will that the bully could not repress one or two short howls as he received the final strokes. But the Zulu boy, whose turn now came, and who received the same unsparing allowance, took it without movement or sound.

“Go back to your seats, you two,” commanded Mr Clay. “If any one else wants a dose of the same medicine, he knows how to get it,” he added grimly, locking up the cane again.

“Oh, wait till I get you outside, you black beast,” whispered the bully as they got back to their seats. “I’ll only skin you alive—that’s what I’ll do.”

“Come out again, Jarnley,” rang out Mr Clay’s clear, sharp voice. “Were you talking?” he queried, as the bully stood before him, having gone very pale over the prospect of a repetition of what he had just undergone.

“Yes, sir,” he faltered, simply not daring to lie.

“I know you were,” and again quickly the cane was drawn forth from its accustomed dwelling place. Then, as Jarnley was beginning to whine for mercy, the master as quickly replaced it.

“I’ll try another plan this time,” he said. “There’s nothing like variety.” The room grinned—“You’ll do seven hundred and fifty lines for talking in school hours, and you’re gated till they’re done.” The room was disappointed, for it was looking forward to another execution, moreover the bulk of it hated Jarnley. It consoled itself, however, by looking forward to something else, viz.: what was going to happen after school, and the smaller boys did not in the least envy Anthony.

The latter, for his part, knew what a thrashing was in store for him should he fail to make good his escape; wherefore the moment the word to dismiss was uttered, he affected a strategic movement which should enable him to gain the door under convoy of the retiring master, while not seeming to do so by design. Even in this he would hardly have succeeded, but that a simultaneous rush for the door interposed a crowd between him and his pursuers, and again his luck was in the ascendant, and he escaped, leaving Jarnley and Co. to wreak their vengeance on some of the smaller boys for getting in their way.

Anthony had been put into Haviland’s dormitory, which contained ten other boys, and was a room at the end of a much larger one containing forty. This also was under Haviland’s jurisdiction, being kept in order by three other prefects. At night he was left entirely in peace, beyond a slight practical joke or two at first, for the others were not big enough to bully him, what time their ruler was perforce out of the room. Besides, they rather liked him, for, as we have heard so unguardedly divulged, he would tell them wonderful tales of his own country—for he was old enough to just remember some of the incidents of the war, and could describe with all the verve and fire of the native gift of narrative, the appearance of the terrible impis, shield- and spear-armed as they went forth to battle, the thunder of the war-song, and the grim and imposing battle array. He could tell, too, of vengeful and bleeding warriors, returning sorely wounded, of sudden panic flights of women and children—himself among them—and once indeed, albeit at some distance, he had seen the King. But on the subject of his parentage he was very reticent. His father was a valiant and skilled fighter—so too, had been all his ancestors—but he had fallen in the war. He himself had been educated by a missionary, and sent over to England to be further educated and eventually to be trained as a missionary himself, to aid in evangelising his own people; although with true native reticence he had refrained from owning that he had no taste for any such career. His forefathers had all been warriors, and he only desired to follow in their steps. Later on he imparted this to Haviland, but with all the others he kept up a certain reserve.

To Haviland, indeed, the African boy had attached himself in doglike fashion, ever since that potentate had interfered to rescue him from Jarnley; yet his motive in so doing was not that of self-preservation, for no word did he utter to his quondam protector that he was still a particular object of spite to Jarnley and his following. At first Haviland was bored thereby, then became interested, a change mainly brought about by a diffident entreaty to be allowed to see his collection of eggs, and also to be allowed to accompany him during the process of adding to it. This was granted, and Haviland was amazed at the extent of the Zulu boy's knowledge of everything to do with the bird and animal life of the fields and woods, although totally different from that of his own country. So he was graciously pleased to throw over him the wing of his patronage, and the beginning of this strange friendship was destined to lead to some very startling experiences indeed before it should end.

But the school regarded it with partly amused, partly contemptuous wonder, and in like spirit Anthony became known as "Haviland's chum."

Chapter Six.
The Haunted Wood.

"What a rum chap Haviland is!" said Laughton, the captain of the school, as from the window of the prefects' room, he, with three or four others, stood watching the subject of the remark, rapidly receding into distance, for it was a half-holiday afternoon. "He and Cetchy have become quite thick."

"I expect he finds him useful at egg-hunting," said Medlicott.

"Yes—and how about it being wrong form for us to go about with juniors?" struck in Langley, a small prefect who had attained to that dignity by reason of much "sapping," but was physically too weak to sustain it adequately. "Haviland's never tired of jamming that down our throats, but he doesn't practise what he preaches. Eh?"

"Well, Corbould major'll be a prefect himself next term," said Medlicott.

"Yes, but how about the nigger, Medlicott? A nigger into the bargain. Haviland's chum! I don't know how Haviland can stick him," rejoined the other spitefully, for he loved not Haviland.

"I wish he'd chuck that confounded egg-hunting, at any rate for this term," said Laughton. "He'll get himself reduced as sure as fate. Nick's watching him like a cat does a mouse. He's got a down on him for some reason or other—don't know what it can be—and the very next row Haviland gets into he'll reduce him. That's an absolute cert."

"Haviland did say he'd chuck it," replied Medlicott. "But what's he to do? He's a fellow who doesn't care for games—swears cricket's slow, and football always makes him want to hit somebody."

"He's a rum card," rejoined Laughton. "Well, I'm going round to the East field to do some bowling. I expect Clay'll be there. Coming, Medlicott?"

"No. I don't care about bowling to Clay. He expects you to keep at it all the time just because he's a master. Never will bowl to you. I bar."

The two under discussion were speeding along—Haviland jubilant over having obtained leave from call-over—thus being able to get very far afield. He fancied Mr Sefton, the master of the week, had eyed him rather curiously in granting it, but what did that matter? He had the whole afternoon before him.

As they proceeded, he was instructing the other in various landmarks, and other features of the country.

“Think you could find your way back all right, Cetchy?” he said, when they had proceeded some distance, “if you were left alone, I mean?”

“Find way? Left alone? What do you mean?”

“Why sometimes, if you get chevvied by a keeper it’s good strategy to separate, and get back round about. It boggles the enemy and at worst gives one of you a chance.”

“Find way—ha!” chuckled Anthony. “Well, rather. All that tree—hill over there—plenty church steeple. Fellows who can’t find way here must be thundering big fools.”

“Quite right. I hope we shan’t be put to it to-day, but it has saved both of us before. Though as a rule, Cetchy, I never go out with another fellow, except Corbould now and then. Much rather be alone—besides, when there are two fellows together they get jawing at the wrong time. Remember that, Cetchy. Once you’re off the road don’t say a word more than you can help—and only that in a whisper.”

The other nodded.

“I know,” he said.

“One time I had an awful narrow squeak,” pursued Haviland. “It was in Needham’s Copse, the very place Finch and Harris were swished for going through. There’s a dry ditch just inside where you can nearly always find a nightingale’s nest. I’d just taken one, and was starting to get back, when I heard something and dropped down like a shot to listen. Would you believe it, Cetchy, there was a beast of a keeper with a brown retriever dog squatting against the hedge on the other side! It was higher than where I was lying, and I could see them against the sky, but they couldn’t see me, and fortunately the hedge was pretty thick. The wonder was the dog didn’t sniff me out, but he didn’t. It was lively, I can tell you, for nearly an hour I had to squat there hardly able to breathe for fear of being heard. At last they cleared out and so did I. I was late for call-over of course, but Clay—it was his week—only gave me a hundred lines—said I looked so jolly dirty that I must have been running hard. He’s a good chap, Clay, and a bit of a sportsman, although he is such a peppery devil. Well, Cetchy, you see if there had been two of us, one would have been bound to make a row, and then—what with the dog we couldn’t have got clear. That would have meant a swishing, for I wasn’t a prefect then.”

With similar narratives did Haviland beguile the way and instruct his companion, therein however strictly practising what he preached, in that he kept them for such times as they should be upon the Queen's highway, or pursuing a legitimate path.

So far, they had found plenty of spoil, but mostly of the commoner sorts and not worth taking—at least not from Haviland's point of view—all of whose instincts as a sportsman were against wanton destruction.

"Why don't you begin collecting, Cetchy?" he said, as, seated on a stile, they were taking a rest and a look round. "I should have thought it was just the sort of thing you'd take to kindly."

"Yes. I think I will."

"That's right. We'll start you with all we take to-day, except one or two of the better sorts, and those we'll halve. What have we got already? Five butcher-bird's, four nightingale's, and five bullfinch's, but I believe those are too hard-set to be any good. Hallo!" looking up, "I believe that was a drop of rain."

The sky, which was cloudy when they started, had now become overcast, and a few large drops fell around them. Little enough they minded that though.

"Are you afraid of ghosts, Cetchy?" said Haviland.

"Ghosts? No—why?"

"See that wood over there? Well, that's Hangman's Wood, and we're going through that. It's one of the very best nesting grounds in the whole country—it's too far away, you see, for our fellows to get at unless they get leave from call-over, which they precious seldom can."

He pointed to a line of dark wood about three-quarters of a mile away, of irregular shape and some fifty acres in extent. It seemed to have been laid out at different times, for about a third of it was a larch plantation, the lighter green of which presented a marked contrast to the dark firs which constituted the bulk of the larger portion.

"It's haunted," he went on. "Years and years ago they found a man hanging from a bough right in the middle of it. The chap was one of the keepers, but they never could make out exactly whether he had scragged himself, or whether it was done by some fellows he'd caught poaching. Anyway the yarn goes that they hung two or three on suspicion, and

it's quite likely, for in those days they managed things pretty much as they seem to do in your country, eh, Cetchy—hang a chap first and try him afterwards?"

"That's what Nick does," said the Zulu boy with a grin.

Haviland laughed.

"By Jove, you're right, Cetchy. You've taken the length of Nick's foot and no mistake. Well, you see now why they call the place Hangman's Wood, but that isn't all. They say the chap walks—his ghost, you know—just as they found him hanging—all black in the face, with his eyes starting out of his head, and round his neck a bit of the rope that hung him. By the way, that would be a nice sort of thing for us to meet stalking down the sides of the wood when we were in there, eh, Cetchy?"

The other made no reply. Wide-eyed, he was taking in every word of the story. Haviland went on.

"It sounds like a lot of humbug, but the fact remains that more than one of the keepers has met with a mortal scare in that very place, and I've even heard of one chucking up his billet rather than go into the wood anywhere near dusk even, and the rum thing about it too is that it never gets poached: and you'd think if there was a safe place to poach that'd be it. Yet it doesn't. Come on now. I got a lot out of it the season before last, and we ought to get something good to-day."

Keeping well under cover of the hedges the two moved quickly along. Then, as they neared the wood, with a "whirr" that made both start, away went a cock-pheasant from the hedge-row they were following—springing right from under their feet. Another and another, and yet another winging away in straight powerful flight, uttering a loud alarmed cackle, and below, the white scuts of rabbits scampering for the burrows in the dry ditch which skirted the covert.

"Confound those beastly birds! What a row they kick up!" whispered Haviland wrathfully as he watched the brilliantly plumaged cocks disappearing among the dark tree tops in front. "Come along, though. I expect it's all right."

"There you are," he went on disgustedly, as they stood in the ride formed by the enclosing hedge of the first line of trees. "'Trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law.' Nice free country this, eh, Cetchy?"

The notice board, nailed some seven or eight feet from the ground, stared them in the face. But Haviland was used to such.

Cautiously, noiselessly, they stole in and out among the trees, one eye and ear keenly alert for that which they sought, the other for indication of possible human, and therefore hostile, presence. The shower had ceased, but the odour of newly watered herbage hung moist upon the air, mingling with the scent of the firs, and the fungus-like exhalations of rotten and mouldering wood. A semi-twilight prevailed, the effect of the heavy foliage, and the cloud-veiled and lowering sky—and the ghostly silence was emphasised rather than disturbed every now and then by the sudden flap-flap of a wood-pigeon's wings, or the stealthy rustle in the undergrowth as a rabbit or pheasant scuttled away.

"Look, Cetchy," whispered Haviland. "This is the place where they found the chap hanging."

Right in the heart of the wood they were, and at this spot two ridges intersected each other. A great oak limb reached across this point like a huge natural gallows beam.

"The fellow who found him," went on Haviland, pointing at this, "did so by accident. He was coming along the ride here in the dark, and the chap's legs—the chap who was hanging, you know—sort of kicked him in the face as he walked underneath that bough. Then he looked up and saw what it was. Ugh! I say, Cetchy, supposing that sort of thing was to happen to you or me! Think we'd get in a funk, eh?"

The Zulu boy, coming of a race which is intensely susceptible to superstitious fears, shook his head, and muttered something in his own tongue. The drear and dismal aspect of the place and its gruesome legend impressed him. He did not like it at all, but would not own as much. If Haviland, to whom he looked up as something of a god, was not afraid, why should he be? Haviland, moved by some spirit of mischief, went on, sinking his voice to a still more impressive whisper:

"Supposing we were to see the ghost now, Cetchy, looking just as they say it walks—black in the face, and with its eyes and tongue all bulging out of its head, and the bit of rope dangling from its neck! Think we should get in a beastly funk, eh? There, just coming out from under those dark firs—can't you imagine it?"

For answer the other started violently, and uttered a scared ejaculation. Even Haviland's nerves were not entirely proof against the interruption, coming when it did. Something had happened to startle them both.

Chapter Seven.
The Ghost.

The next moment Haviland burst into a fit of smothered laughter.

“It’s only a hen pheasant, Cetchy,” he whispered, “but she made such a row getting up right under our feet just as we were talking about the ghost. It quite gave me the jumps.”

“She’s got nest too,” said the other, who had been peering into the undergrowth. “Look, nine, ten eggs! That’s good?”

“Yes, but you can’t take them. Never meddle with game eggs.”

“How I make collection if I not take eggs?”

This was pertinent, and Haviland was nonplussed, but only for a moment.

“I’ve got some extra specimens I’ll give you,” he answered. “Come on, leave these, and let the bird come back.”

The other looked somewhat wistfully at the smooth olive-hued eggs lying there temptingly in their shallow bowl of dry leaves and grass. Then he turned away.

“We’ll find plenty of others,” said Haviland. “Last time I was here I took a nest of blackcap’s, and the eggs were quite pink instead of brown. That’s awfully rare. We’ll see if there are any more in the same place.”

Round the cover they went, then across it, then back again, all with a regular system, and soon their collecting boxes were filled—including some good sorts.

“There! Big bird go away up there,” whispered Anthony pointing upward.

They were standing under a clump of dark firs. Over their tops Haviland glimpsed the quick arrowy flight.

“A sparrow-hawk, by Jingo!” he said. “Sure to have a nest here too.”

A keen and careful search revealed this, though it was hidden away so snugly in the fir-top, that it might have been passed by a hundred times. The Zulu boy begged to be allowed to go up.

“I think not this time, Cetchy,” decided Haviland. “It’s an easy climb, but then you haven’t had enough practice in stowing the eggs, and these are too good to get smashed.”

It was not everything to get up the tree: half the point was to do so as noiselessly as possible, both of which feats were easy enough to so experienced a climber as Haviland. He was soon in the fir-top, the loose untidy pile of sticks just over his head; another hoist—and then—most exciting moment of all, the smooth warm touch of the eggs. The while the parent bird, darting to and fro in the air, came nearer and nearer his head with each swoop. But for this he cared nothing.

“Look, Cetchy,” he whispered delightedly as he stood once more on terra firma and exhibited the bluish-white treasures with their rich sepia blotches. “Three of them, and awfully good specimens. Couple days later there’d have been four or five, still three’s better than none. You shall have these two to start your collection with, and I’ll stick to this one with the markings at the wrong end. What’s the row?”

For the Zulu boy had made a sign for silence, and was standing in an attitude of intense listening.

“Somebody coming,” he whispered. “One man.”

Haviland’s nerves thrilled. But listen as he would his practised ear could hear nothing.

“Quick, hide,” breathed the other, pointing to a thick patch of bramble and fern about a dozen yards away, and not a moment too early was the warning uttered, for scarcely had they reached it and crouched flat to the earth, when a man appeared coming through the wood. Peering from their hiding-place, they made out that he was clad in the velveteen suit and leather leggings of a keeper, and, moreover, he carried a gun.

He was looking upward all the time, otherwise he could not have failed to see them, and to Haviland, at any rate, the reason of this was plain. He had sighted the sparrow-hawk, and was warily stalking her, hence the noiselessness of his approach. The situation was becoming intensely exciting. The keeper was coming straight for their hiding-place, still, however, looking upward. If he discovered them, they must make a dash for it that moment, Haviland explained in a whisper scarcely above a breath. The gun didn’t count, he daren’t fire at them in any event.

Suddenly the man stopped. Up went the gun, then it was as quickly lowered. He had sighted the flight of the hawk above the tree tops, but the chance was not good enough. And he had sighted something else, the nest to wit. The bird was sure to come back to it,

and so give him a much better chance. Accordingly he squatted down among the undergrowth, his gun held ready, barely twenty yards from the concealed pair, but with his back to them.

That sparrow-hawk, however, was no fool of a bird. She seemed possessed of a fine faculty for discrimination, and manifestly knew the difference between a brace of egg-collecting schoolboys, and a ruthless, death-dealing gamekeeper, and although at intervals she swooped overhead it was always out of range, but still the latter sat there with a patience that was admirable, save to the pair whom all unconsciously it menaced with grave consequences.

For, as time fled, these loomed nearer and nearer. As it was, they would need all their time to get back, and were they late for evening chapel, especially after being granted leave from calling-over, it was a dead certainty that the Doctor himself would have something to say in the matter, at any rate in Haviland's case. And still that abominable keeper lurked there, showing no sign whatever of moving within the next half-hour, in which event it mattered little if he did not move at all. A thin, penetrating drizzle had begun to fall, which bade fair to wet them to the skin, but for this they cared nothing, neither apparently did their enemy, who furthermore was partly sheltered beneath a great fir. Haviland grew desperate.

"We shall have to make a run for it, Cetchy," he breathed. "Look," showing his watch. "If the beast doesn't make a move in five minutes, we must run and chance it. I'll give the word."

The hand of the watch moved slowly on—one minute—two—three—four. Haviland replaced it in his pocket, and drew a long breath: but before he could give the word, his companion touched him and whispered.

"No run. He run. I make him."

"What?"

"I make him run. I flighten him. I ghost. You'll see."

For a great idea had occurred to Mpukuza, christened Anthony, named by Saint Kirwin's "Cetchy"—and exactly one minute and as rapid a metamorphosis in his personal appearance was all he needed to put it into execution.

Darker and darker had grown the lowering skies, and now the wind began to moan dismally through the tree trunks. Anything more drear and depressing than the

brooding gloom of the haunted wood could hardly be imagined. The keeper, however, was of the dogged order of rustic, and doubtless lacking in imagination, for he remained patiently at his self-appointed post. Then, suddenly, he started to his feet and faced quickly round.

A sight met his gaze, transfixing him with terror, seeming to turn him to stone. Reared above the undergrowth, an awful head, covered with dust, and bristling with brambles—a black face with lolling, swollen tongue, and huge eyeballs protruding from their sockets rolling their vivid whites in most hideous fashion—yes, and there, round the neck, a strand of cord, while from the throat of this horrifying apparition there proceeded the most hollow, half-strangled moan that ever curdled mortal blood. For a moment the appalled keeper stood with livid countenance, and his knees knocking together—then with a wild hoarse cry, and dropping his gun—he turned and fled away down the ride of the wood as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Come, Haviland, we'll go now," chuckled the ghost, dropping down into the undergrowth again. But Haviland made no reply, being powerless alike for speech or movement. He lay there gasping, choking back with superhuman effort the scarcely repressible roars of laughter that he dared not let out.

"Come quick. We be off," urged the Zulu boy. "Praps he come back."

"Not he," gurgled Haviland faintly. "Oh Cetchy, that's about the most deadly thing I ever saw in my life. Oh, it'll be the death of me." Then recovering himself with a mighty effort:

"Come along, Cetchy. You're right, by Jingo! We'll have to put our best leg forward as it is. Oh, but we mustn't think about this or it'll kill me again."

Cautiously and in silence, and ever keeping a bright look-out lest mayhap their dupe should recover from his scare and return, they made their way out of the haunted wood, then across country at a hard swinging trot, and the far-away roofs of Saint Kirwin's seemed painfully remote.

"I say, Cetchy," said Haviland as they sat beneath a hedge for a brief but necessary breather. "Supposing the chap had let off his gun at you? Eh? We never thought of that."

"He not shoot—he too much funk."

"So he was. I dare say, too, he thought it wasn't any good firing at a ghost. No, I mustn't start laughing again. Come along."

And indeed they needed to make the most of their time, for the bell was already ringing during the last five minutes of their run. However, they got through by a narrow shave.

After chapel, as he was walking across the quadrangle, a scurry of feet and a rustle of long garments behind him caused Haviland to turn. He beheld Mr Sefton.

“Did you find lots of eggs this afternoon, Haviland?” said the master, who was still in his canonicals and square cap.

“Yes, sir. A grand lot. Thanks so much for giving us leave.”

“Are you teaching Cetchy bird-nesting?”

“Yes, sir. He wants to collect. He’s a good hand at finding them too.”

“Ah! Don’t get him into mischief. Eh? And keep out of it yourself. D’you hear? Keep out of it yourself.”

There was a warning note underlying the quaint, dry quizzical tone which was not lost upon the hearer. He was wondering how much Sefton suspected, but at the same time was thinking how dearly he would have liked to tell Sefton the joke about the ghost, but that of course he dared not. Yet Sefton would have appreciated it so keenly—no one more so. But he only answered:

“I’ll try to, sir. Yes, we had a real ripping afternoon—thanks to you.”

“Ha!” With which enigmatical ejaculation the master nodded and went his way.

That evening, in the dormitory, Haviland being in hall at supper with the other prefects off duty, Anthony was relating, in his quaint racy English, the exciting events of the afternoon, all except the ghost episode, which he had been strictly enjoined to keep to himself. Those who were collectors were thrilled with envy.

“You are a lucky beggar, Cetchy,” sighed Smithson minor. “I wish to goodness Haviland would take me with him once or twice—that’s all.”

“Ha! Take you!”

“Yes. Why not?” bristling up.

“You no good. You can’t run.”

“Look here, Cetchy. I’ll smack your head if you talk like that to me.”

“Smack my head! You can’t do it.”

“Oh, can’t I?” retorted Smithson minor jumping out of bed. The other said nothing. He simply followed suit, and stood waiting. This was not in the least what Smithson expected, and now he remembered, when too late, the Zulu boy’s summary retaliation on Jarnley, and how sturdily and unmovedly he had taken the caning it involved, what time Jarnley had howled. He remembered, too, the hard, wiry training the other was in and—hesitated. But it was too late to draw back, and so he rushed on his enemy, hitting out right and left; and at first Anthony seemed to be getting the worst of it, for, in common with his race, he had no idea how to use his fists, nor had he been long enough at Saint Kirwin’s to have learnt, and the scuffle was enlivened by the encouraging though stifled adjurations of the spectators.

“Go it, Smithson! Now then, Cetchy! Ah! He’s got it! Shut up, you fellows. We’ll have Medlicott in directly if you kick up such a row,” and so forth. But just then, Anthony, who, if he hadn’t science, assuredly had all the fierce fighting valour of his race, woke up to a mighty effort, and dashing out with both hands and hurling himself forward at the same time, landed his adversary full in the face, and down went Smithson minor, and with him two other fellows who were pressing him too close behind. In the midst of which shindy the door opened, and in walked Haviland.

“What’s all this about?” he cried, turning the gas full up and revealing the whole scene of disorder—the panting combatants and the now sheepish-looking spectators, some of whom were making desperate efforts to appear as if they had never left their beds. “Come here, Smithson. What d’you mean by it, eh?”

Smithson, who recognised in this formula a certain preamble to condign punishment, thought he might as well try to say something for himself.

“Please, Haviland, he cheeked me,” he faltered.

“Cheeked you, did he? I wonder you haven’t had Sefton up here with his cane, and of course that wouldn’t have meant a thousand lines for me for not keeping order, would it?”

“He tell me he smack my head,” cut in Anthony. “I tell him he can’t do it. Then he try. Ha!”

The room tittered. Haviland was mollified.

“Did he do it?” he said.

“No fear. I knock him over. Then you come in.” And the speaker stood with his head in the air, and the light of battle in his eyes, albeit one of them was rather swollen, looking for all the world a youthful reproduction of one of his warrior sires.

“Well, I know jolly well that Cetchy didn’t begin the row,” pronounced Haviland, throwing down his square cap, and beginning to take off his coat and vest with a yawn. “Get into bed, Smithson. If I hear anything about this to-morrow from Sefton, I’ll sock your head off. If not, I’ll let you off this time. Now shut up, you fellows. No more talking.”

There was no need to repeat the order. Silence prevailed in that dormitory forthwith.

Chapter Eight.
Jarnley again.

If the practical joke played upon the keeper in Hangman's Wood ever transpired in the immediate neighbourhood of that ill-omened locality, the tidings thereof did not reach as far as Saint Kirwin's—nor had its perpetrators any opportunity of revisiting the place, by reason of the distance, and the difficulty of so soon again obtaining leave from call-over. But other coverts were levied upon in like fashion, all, or nearly all, we regret to say, under equally forbidden conditions.

The summer term proved exceptionally fine, and Haviland and other collectors revelled in the bright and glowing weather. If at times illicit, the long breezy rambles over field and down were fraught with all that was healthful and wholesome, in the splendid air, the beautiful surroundings of the fairest of English landscapes, the hardening of the young frame into the most perfect training, the excitement of a certain amount of ever present risk, and the absorbing pursuit of a favourite hobby. And then the cool plunge into the swimming pool at the close of the long summer's day. There was plenty of cricket too, and some exceptionally good matches in which Saint Kirwin's kept up its name quite well.

"Can't think why you don't go in for cricket, Haviland," observed Laughton, in the prefects room one whole holiday as he was getting ready for one of the matches aforesaid, and in which he figured in the school eleven as a bowler of no mean repute. "You ought to, you know. It's due to your position."

"No, thanks, Laughton. You don't catch me wasting a splendid day like this shying a ball at three silly sticks."

"Well, you could go in for batting. From what little I've seen you do in that line, with a little practice you'd make a very fair bat indeed."

"Oh, yes. Get bowled first ball, and spend the rest of the day fielding out. I'd as soon be doing an impos."

And the speaker finished some arrangement of cotton wool and cardboard boxes, and stowing the same into his side pockets tightened the strap wherewith he was girded, and nodding to Laughton started off there and then upon his favourite pursuit—but alone.

After him from the third form room windows gazed a pair of wistful eyes. Mpukuza, otherwise Anthony, had conceived a hero-worship for the other, nearly akin to that felt by some of the old indunas of his race for their king. To accompany Haviland on one of

these rambles had become for him something to live for. He would have "broken his gates" and cheerfully welcomed the inevitable swishing thereby incurred, rather than forego one such, and of late the occasions on which Haviland had been graciously pleased to command his attendance had been growing more and more rare—partly due to the unwritten code which was against a prefect fraternising much with a junior unless the latter were about his own age and size. So he gazed wistfully after his hero, and in the expressive idiom of his race "his heart was sore."

"Hallo, Cetchy! Not gated, are you? Come out bird-nesting." The voice was that of Smithson minor.

Since their little scrimmage in the dormitory the two had become very friendly, and had been out together several times.

"All right."

"Thought you were gated when I saw Haviland go out alone," went on Smithson as they started. "Hallo! There's Clay! Quick. We'll dodge him. I've got an impos to do for him. I'm not gated, but if he saw me he might want to know why I'm not doing it."

Having successfully dodged the master they struck across some fields. But alack and alas! in escaping one possible danger they were destined to run straight into the jaws of another and a more certain. At the crossing of a stile there was a rush of big fellows who had been lying in wait on the other side, and in a trice they were pounced upon and collared by Jarnley and his gang.

"Got you at last, have I, Cetchy?" snarled that worthy, fairly grinning with delight. "Oh, I've a long score to pay off on your black hide, haven't I? and I'm going to begin now," tweaking the other savagely by the ear with one hand though holding him firmly by the collar with the other. "You would get me tanned by Clay, would you?"

"I was tanned too," protested the victim.

"And now you'll be tanned again. What Clay gave you—gave us—is nothing to what we are going to give you now. And the seven hundred lines, and the lines Sefton gave us all but let you off."

"Shut up, Perkins, you beastly bully!" yelped Smithson minor, who was undergoing his share of trial in the little matter of a twisted arm and a fistic punch or two thereon. "I'll report you to Haviland if you don't leave us alone."

“Oh, you’d sneak, would you? Take that—and that”—emphasising the expostulation with a couple of sounding smacks on the head.

“Come on, you fellows,” said Jarnley. “Don’t let him go, but we’ll deal with Cetchy first. Oh, yes, my black snowball, my woolly-pated beauty—I told you I’d skin you alive, didn’t I? I told you I’d rip the black hide off you, and now I’m going to do it. Now then, spread-eagle him over the steps of that stile. Oh, yes. We’ve been keeping these for you many a long day, my noble snowball,” producing a thick but supple willow switch, and one of the others, of whom there were just half a dozen, producing one likewise.

It was then or never. The victim, well aware of what a savage thrashing would be inflicted upon him, should he fail, made one last effort. Before the others had time to seize him he struck his heel down sharply on to Jarnley’s toes, crushing them into the ground, at the same time sending his elbow back with all his force. It caught the bully fair in the pit of the stomach, and with a howl, promptly strangled in a gasp, Jarnley partially relaxed his hold. In a trice the Zulu boy had wrenched himself free, and, deftly ducking between two of the others who sprang at him, was off like a shot.

Jarnley was beside himself with rage.

“You asses!” he shouted gaspingly as he recovered his wind. “All this time we’ve been looking out for him, and now, just as we’ve got him, you let him get away.”

“It strikes me it was you who let him get away,” retorted Perkins. “Well, we’ll take it out of this little beast instead.”

Poor Smithson minor howled for mercy, but he howled in vain. They pulled him down over the stile step, the switches were uplifted and ready when—

“Whack! Whack!” came a couple of stones. “Whack—whack—whack!” came three more, flung hard too, and with a terrible precision. One struck Perkins on the hand, causing him to dance and swear all his fingers were broken. Another hit Jarnley on the shoulder, while two more found their billet in violent contact with another of the bullies—and there, in a gap in the hedge some little distance off, stood the one who had escaped, grinning in mingled vindictiveness and glee. Other stones followed, hurled with the same unerring precision. To proceed with their congenial work under that terrible bombardment was impossible—and so, leaving one in charge of Smithson, the gang started in pursuit of the Zulu boy.

The latter chuckled, for he knew that not one of them could get any nearer to him than he chose, when it came to running. He sprang down into the road again, quickly

shovelled up a double handful of stones, and loped on. Then he turned, just as the pursuers came within easy range, and opened fire again. It was too much. With dire threats they beat a retreat. They would get hold of him again sooner or later, they declared, and that time he would not get off at any price. At all of which the Zulu boy chuckled and laughed, hurling abusive epithets at them in his quaint English.

The while poor Smithson, in the grasp of the big fellow who custodied him, was having a bad time, in the shape of a slight forestalment of what he might expect when the others returned. But for him, too, came relief—rescue, and it came in the shape of a couple of prefects who appeared in sight, sauntering along the field-path towards them.

"You'd better let me go," he said, "or I'll call out to Street and Cluer."

The other saw the force of this, and, with a threat and a sly cuff, acted upon it, and slunk away to give the alarm to the rest. Half an hour later Smithson and Anthony were forgathering under a hedge, talking over their escape.

"Well, you are no end of a brick, Cetchy," said the former. "Why, they'll make you cock chief of your tribe one of these days, I should think."

"Ha—ha—ha!" chuckled the other. "Jarnley hurt more'n we hurt. All of 'em hurt. Ha—ha—ha!"

"Well, you got me out of it with those beasts. I say, Cetchy, old chap, I'm expecting a hamper next week, and won't we have a blow out then!" he added, in a burst of gratitude and admiration.

"Hamper? What's that?"

"Why, a basket of tuck. Grub, you know, from home. No end of good things."

"Ha! All right," said the other with a jolly laugh.

That day Haviland was making the most of his time and his solitary ramble. His collecting boxes were fairly well filled; among other specimens he had hit upon a grasshopper warbler's nest, whose existence he suspected, containing five eggs, beautifully fresh and thus easily blown, likewise a sedge-warbler's, hung cuplike, among the bulrushes of a reedy pond. The spoils of two wheatears, extracted with some difficulty from a deep burrow on the slope of Sidbury Down, had also fallen to his lot, and now, stretched on the springy turf on the summit of that eminence, he was enjoying a well-earned rest, thoroughly contented with himself and all the world. And what a

view lay outstretched beneath and around—a fair, rolling champaign, green meadow and darker wood—here and there the shining surface of a pond: farm buildings too, picturesque with their red roofs and yellow corn-stacks, nestling among hanging elms noisy with the cawing of restless rooks, and the shrill whimsical chatter of jackdaws. The bark of a sheepdog, and the glad melodious shout of the cuckoo here and there, were borne upward on the still air—and far away over this beautiful landscape the brown high-pitched roofs of Saint Kirwin's, conveying a sort of monastic suggestion in its surroundings of field and wood.

Haviland had been making the most of his day—therefore this was his fourth expedition, and it was now late afternoon. His watch marked ten minutes past five, and chapel was at six. There was plenty of time, but he thought he would take it easy going back. So, having allowed himself another five minutes' rest, he took a final look around, and started to come down.

He had nearly reached the bottom of the slope when he stopped short, with an exclamation of unbounded amazement and unmistakable dismay. He stood listening, motionless, intent. Only the sound of a bell, pealing out with startling plainness through the sleepy afternoon air. Great heavens! It was the chapel bell at Saint Kirwin's.

No. It couldn't be! Why, it wasn't nearly time. Chapel was at six—not half-past five. Eagerly, almost convulsively, he jerked forth his watch. Still the hands marked ten minutes past five.

He groaned aloud. The game was up. Not by any possibility could he now be in time for chapel. The bell always rang for a quarter of an hour, and he knew—none better—that exactly double that period of time was required to cover the distance between where he stood and the school gates, and that at a sharp run all the way. By a wellnigh superhuman effort it might possibly be done in twenty-five minutes, but not one second less, and here he was with something under a quarter of an hour to do it in. He was in despair.

For being late for chapel was one of the most heinous offences he could commit. The only chance for him was if for any reason the Doctor should happen to be absent himself. In that event the best he could expect was a stiff imposition from the master of the week. Should however the Head be there, as was nearly always the case—why then it would mean certain suspension for him at any rate.

He glared at the offending watch, and shook it savagely. It ticked feebly for a few seconds, then hopelessly stopped once more. A pretty trick it had played him, and he felt

inclined to hurl it into the first pond he should pass, as he sped along at a hard steady run: for every minute he was late would, if possible, render his case worse.

Chapter Nine.
Disaster.

Saint Kirwin's boasted a really beautiful chapel, large, lofty, rich in stained glass and abundant sculpture of first-rate design and execution. The services, which were fully choral, were rendered by an excellent choir drawn from the school, and on Sundays and on certain saints' days its performance would have done credit even to the average cathedral. The structure was in shape a parallelogram, the seats running in long rows, tier upon tier the whole length, certain stalls, however, being returned against the west wall on either side of the entrance. The principal of these was that of the headmaster, who thus had the whole assemblage under his view. And his lynx gaze was quick to descry any irregularity, and woe indeed to the prefect in whose row such should occur, and still greater woe to the delinquent or delinquents.

We have said that Dr Bowen cut an imposing figure as he entered the big schoolroom in cap and gown amid an awed silence, but he looked, if possible, more imposing still in chapel, in his snowy voluminous surplice and great scarlet hood, as, preceded by a verger, he made his way along the aisle to read the Lessons from the great eagle lectern which stood in the middle of the choir; indeed, so majestic was his gait and bearing on these occasions as to be the source of a good deal of surreptitious fun on the part of the more satirically minded, among whom, needless to say, was our friend Haviland.

Now the latter, on this ill-fated afternoon, was standing outside the door, striving to recover breath after the length and severity of his run. If only he could enter and reach his place unseen by the Doctor, it would be all right. The master of the week—in this case Mr Williams—his own dormitory master, a good-natured and genial athlete, would give him an imposition, as in duty bound, but would almost certainly not report him at head-quarters, which he was not strictly bound to do. But how on earth could he accomplish any such entrance seeing that the Doctor's stall was next to the door, and commanded everything that went on, as we have said? And then there occurred to him a desperate scheme, one which spoke much for his readiness and resource, and on that account alone deserved to succeed. What if he were to seize the opportunity when the Doctor should descend from his stall, and, the moment his back was turned, slip in and walk close behind him all the way to the lectern. Arrived there, the attention of the Great Panjandrum would be momentarily diverted while turning to ascend the steps, and he could slip into his seat, which, luckily, stood there hard by. The chance was a desperate one indeed, but it was his only one. He would risk it.

Would the chanting never cease? Haviland's heart thumped, and a mist seemed to come before his gaze. Ah, now for it! The voices were tailing off into an Amen; the organ

stopped with a final snarl, then silence, only relieved by a rustling sound and that of footsteps on the stone floor. Now was his time.

The door, fortunately, was not quite closed, and so could be opened noiselessly. Now it was done, and Haviland was within the chapel, his rubber-soled shoes making no noise as he stole along, conscious of a confused sea of faces; and, indeed, that progress seemed to his excited brain like hours instead of minutes, and the great scarlet hood adorning the Doctor's back seemed like a huge red-hot furnace before his eyes.

This strange procession had reached the lectern. Haviland felt safe. He had calculated his move to a nicety, and in a fraction of a second would have gained his place. But he had reckoned without the consummate shrewdness, which was the result of long experience, of the headmaster of Saint Kirwin's.

For the look of surprise, of interest, on the rows of faces on either side of him as he paced up the aisle had not escaped that potentate, but he was not going to impair the majestic dignity of his march by turning then. When he had gained his objective he did just half turn, and in the momentary compression of the lips and that one look on the Doctor's face Haviland knew that his fate was sealed. To many there who had witnessed the episode, and there were few who had not, it seemed that there was a menacing growl in the sonorous voice rolling out the splendid old Scriptural English.

"Well, Haviland, what have you got to say for yourself?" said Mr Williams, when our friend went to report himself afterwards.

"My watch stopped, sir. I thought I had plenty of time, and then heard the bell begin when I was just coming off Sidebury Down. Even then I tried to do it, but it was impossible."

"Well, I can't help that. You'll have to do four hundred lines," answered Mr Williams, fully intending to let him off half of them. "One of my prefects, too," he added, half quizzically, half with a mock aggrieved air.

"Very sorry, sir."

The imposition was really less than he had expected. If only the matter were to rest there, he thought.

"I say, Haviland," subsequently remarked Laughton in hall. "You're a cool customer, marching in behind Nick in that stately manner. Did you think he wouldn't see you?"

“Yes. It was the only chance, and I took it. He wouldn’t have, either, if all those asses hadn’t given, the show away by gaping like so many idiots, confound them.”

“What’s Williams given you?”

“Four hundred. I believe I’ll try and get him to let me off one. He hasn’t gated me either. He’s a good sort, is Williams. What do you think, Laughton? Think Nick’ll take the thing any further? The old brute looked vicious, and he perfectly hates me. I don’t know why.”

Laughton wouldn’t commit himself to an opinion, and the general feeling at the prefects’ table was about evenly divided as to whether the Doctor would take it up or not.

“If you could only have seen yourself, Haviland!” cut in Cluer, another prefect. “It was enough to kill a cat, I swear it was. It looked for all the world as if you and Nick were trying which could crowd on the most side.” And he spluttered over the recollection.

“Jolly good fun for you, Cluer, no doubt,” said Medlicott, “and for all of us, but it’s beastly rough on Haviland, remember.”

“Rather, if Nick’s in one of his rotten moods,” said Laughton. “But let’s hope he won’t be.”

Alas for any such hopes! On the way out of hall the fatal summons came: “Haviland to go to the Doctor’s study after prep, bell.”

“All up!” groaned the implicated one.

When, at the appointed time, Haviland entered the dread presence, there was no doubt but that the headmaster was “in one of his rotten moods,” as Laughton had so graphically put it. Seated there at his study table, his face wore a very thundercloud of sternness, as he curtly invited the other to make his explanation. This was exactly the same as that offered to Mr Williams, but here it was received with a wrathful grunt—and then in his most magisterial manner the Doctor proceeded to deliver himself.

“You have been guilty of a double breach of rules, in that you were absent from calling-over—for a part of which, by virtue of your office, you were personally responsible—and you were late for chapel. It is no excuse to say that your watch stopped; if that were any valid reason, why then half the school might stay away from calling-over, and, indeed, we might as well do away with calling-over altogether, or any other rule. For a prefect to break the rules, which it is his bounden duty to help in enforcing—to do which, indeed,

is the very reason of his official existence—has always been, in my eyes, a ten times greater offence than the same conduct on the part of a junior.

"Now, over and above this double breach of the rules you have been guilty of two further and very serious offences. You have disturbed the decorum and dignity of divine service by entering the chapel in the way you did, and you practised deceit in making that entrance in such manner that you hoped it would escape my observation. Let me tell you that nothing escapes my observation—"

"No, by Jingo it doesn't!" thought the delinquent, ruefully.

"—and of late that observation has convinced me that you are unfit to hold the office you bear, for I have had you specially under my notice for some time past. As, therefore, you have proved yourself utterly unfit to hold office, I have made up my mind to deprive you of it, and you may now consider yourself no longer a prefect."

Here Haviland broke in desperately:—

"Sir, has there ever been any report against me—I mean of any disorder arising where I was in charge?"

The unheard-of audacity of this expostulation seemed to take away the Doctor's breath, to render him utterly speechless. He to be answered, remonstrated with! Why, the thing was unprecedented!

"Silence, sir!" he thundered, rising in his seat, and Haviland thought he was going to strike him. However, he did not, and went on:—

"And as you have abused the reasonable liberty which the rules of the school allow—and that not once, but continually—thus setting a bad example where it was your duty to set a good one, you will be confined to the school grounds from now until the end of the term. You may go."

Seen from the windows of the somewhat sombre room in which he stood, the fair open country seemed to Haviland's gaze more alluring than ever in the summer twilight, as he heard his sentence of imprisonment. And now he might roam it no more.

Then, as he went forth from the dread sanctum, a feeling of desperation dashed with recklessness came upon him. They might just as well expel him now, he thought, and perhaps he would do something to deserve even that. Practically gated until the end of the term—a matter of about seven weeks! Yes, he felt desperate.

At the breaking up of preparation that evening there was considerable excitement among the groups scuffling to get a glimpse of the notice board in the big schoolroom, in the brief time allowed between prep, and prayers, and the attraction was a brand-new notice which ran thus:—

"Haviland—prefect.

"Suspended from his office and confined to the school grounds for the remainder of the term for gross breach of rules and general misconduct.

"Nicholas Bowen, D.D., Headmaster."

"It was a pretty stiff account to have to settle, all because a fellow's watch happened to stop," Haviland had remarked to Laughton and some others when giving an account as to how he had fared. "Suspended, gated for the rest of the term, and four hundred lines to do for Williams into the bargain."

The latter, however, was not to be added to his already burdened shoulders, for at dormitory time, when he went to report to Mr Williams that he was no longer a prefect, the latter said:—

"I'm sorry to hear that, Haviland. But now you must just lie quiet a bit and keep out of mischief. The Doctor's sure to reinstate you. Oh, and look here. You needn't do those lines I set you this afternoon. It doesn't seem fair that a fellow should have two punishments for the same offence."

"The Doctor doesn't seem to think so, sir," he could not restrain himself from saying. "But thank you very much, sir. Reinstate me? No. The Doctor has a regular spite against me—why I can't think."

"Oh, nonsense, Haviland," said the master very kindly. "At any rate you must try not to think so. Good night."

But while uttering this protest officially, Mr Williams did so half-heartedly, for in his own mind he thought the young fellow had been very severely treated indeed, and that the punishment was out of all proportion to the offence.

Chapter Ten.
Brooding.

Haviland, fallen from his high estate, did not take his misfortunes well. He was of a proud and sensitive temperament, and now that he found himself humiliated, reduced to the level of the rank and file, deprived of the very material privileges he had formerly enjoyed, shorn of his powers, and now in a position to obey where for so long he had been accustomed to command—yes, the humiliation was intolerable, and for no greater crime than that his watch had unfortunately stopped. A mere accident.

Not that his former colleagues were in the least likely to add to his humiliation by word or act of theirs. Esprit de corps was strong among them, very largely fostered indeed by his own influence while in a position to exert it. Even the two or three among them who disliked him would have shrunk from such an act, as being one of unspeakable meanness. And his fall was great. In seniority he had stood next to Laughton, the captain of the school, and were he eventually reinstated, he would lose this, and have to start again at the bottom of the list.

As for the juniors, some were unfeignedly glad, though their instinct of self-preservation made them remarkably careful not to obtrude that fact upon him, yet, though his strictness while in office had rendered him unpopular, now that he had fallen most of their sympathies were with him.

But from sympathy or condolence alike he himself shrank. His mind was bitter with thoughts of hatred and revenge—the latter, if only it could be obtained—yet why not? He was utterly reckless now. They could but expel him, and for that he didn't care—at least, so he told himself. It was in this dangerous mood the day after his suspension that he encountered Jarnley—Jarnley and his gang.

But Jarnley had seen him coming, and tried to shuffle away. So, too, did his gang.

"Here—Hi, Jarnley!" he cried. "Wait a bit. I want to speak to you."

There was no escape, short of taking to his heels, wherefore Jarnley stopped, with a very bad grace and faced round.

"Eh? What is it, Haviland?"

"Just this. That day I smacked your head for bullying Cetchy you said you'd fight me if I wasn't a prefect. Well, I'm not a prefect now, so—come on."

“Oh, I was only humbugging, Haviland,” returned Jarnley, not in the least eager to make good his words.

“Then you’d rather not fight?”

“Of course I don’t want to,” said Jarnley, shrinkingly. “And, look here, Haviland, I’m beastly sorry you’ve been reduced.”

What was to be done with a cur like this? Haviland knew that the other was lying, and was the reverse of sorry for his misfortunes. He had intended to give Jarnley his choice between fighting and being thrashed, but how, in the name of common decency, could he punch a fellow’s head who expressed such effusive sympathy? He could not. Baulked, he glared round upon the group.

“Any one else like to take advantage of the opportunity?” he said. “You, Perkins?”

“I don’t want to fight, Haviland,” was the sullen answer.

“Very well, then. But don’t let me hear of any of you bullying Cetchy any more. He can tell me now, because I’m no longer a prefect; and any fellow who does will get the very best hammering he ever had in his life. That’s all.”

His former colleagues spared no pains to let him see that they still regarded him as one of themselves. Among other things they pressed him to use the prefects’ room as formerly, but this he refused to do. If he had been walking with any of them he would stop short at the door, and no amount of persuasion could prevail on him to enter.

“You needn’t be so beastly proud, Haviland,” Laughton had said, half annoyed by these persistent refusals. “Why, man, Nick’s bound to reinstate you before long. The notice, mind, says ‘suspended’ only.”

At which Haviland had shaken his head and laughed strangely.

The confinement to grounds told horribly upon his spirits. Three miserable cricket fields—as a matter of fact they were remarkably open and spacious—to be the sole outlet of his energies during all these weeks! He hated every stick and stone of them, every twig and leaf. He saw others coming and going at will, but he himself was a prisoner. Not even to the swimming pool might he go.

In sheer desperation he had followed Laughton’s advice, and gone in for cricket, but had proved so half-hearted over the game, then bad-tempered and almost quarrelsome, that

no one was sorry when he declared his intention of giving it up. More and more he became given over to brooding—seeking a quiet corner apart, and looking out on to the open country from which he was debarred. While thus occupied one day, a hand dropped on his shoulder. Turning angrily—thinking some other fellow was playing the fool, and trying to startle him—he confronted Mr Sefton.

"What were you thinking about, Haviland?" said the latter in his quick, sharp, quizzical way.

"Oh, I don't know, sir. Nothing very particular, I suppose," forcing a laugh, for he was not going to whine to Sefton.

The latter looked at him with straight, penetrating gaze.

"They tell me you've given up cricket again. Why?"

"I don't care for it, sir, never did. Everybody seems to have a notion that nothing can be of any use, or even right, but that confounded—I beg your pardon, sir—cricket and football. A fellow is never to be allowed to take his own line."

"Yes, but it's a good wholesome rule that if a fellow can't take his own line he'd better adapt himself to the lines of others. Eh?"

Haviland did not reply. He merely smiled, cynically, disdainfully. Mr Sefton, watching his face, was interested, and more sorry for him than his official position allowed him to say. He went on:—

"Don't mope. There's nothing to be gained by it. Throw yourself into something. If one has lost a position, it is always possible to regain it. I know, and some others know, your influence has always been used in the right direction. Do you think that counts for nothing? Eh?"

"It hasn't counted for much, sir, in a certain quarter," was the bitter reply. "It isn't the position I mind—I don't care a hang about it, sir!" he burst forth passionately, "but to be stuck down in these three beastly fields, in the middle of a crowd all day and every day—I'd rather have been expelled at once."

"Don't be an ass, Haviland," said the master, stopping short—for they had been walking up and down—and peering at him in his quaint way. "Do you hear? Don't be an ass."

This commentary, uttered as it was, left no room for reply, wherefore Haviland said nothing.

“Why don’t you go to the Doctor and ask him to remove your ‘gates’?” went on Mr Sefton.

“I wouldn’t ask him anything, sir.”

The tone, the expression of hatred and vindictiveness in the young fellow’s face, almost startled the other. As a master, ought he not to administer a stern rebuke; as a clergyman, was it not his duty to reason with him? But Mr Sefton, no part of an ass himself, decided that this was not the time for doing anything of the sort.

“You talk about not caring if you were expelled, Haviland,” he went on. “How about looking at it from your father’s point of view? How would he feel, d’you think, if you ended up your school life with expulsion? Eh?”

He had struck the right chord there, for in the course of their conversations he had gathered that the young fellow was devotedly attached to his father, whom he regarded as about a hundred times too good for the barren, ungrateful, and ill-requited service to which he had devoted his life—at any rate, looking at it from the unregenerate and worldly point of view. And, with a consciousness of having said just the right thing at the right time, Mr Sefton wisely decided to say no more.

“Think it over, Haviland. Think it over. D’you hear?” and with a friendly nod of farewell, he went his way.

A few minutes later he was walking along a field-path, his hat on the back of his head as usual, and swinging his stick. With him was Mr Williams.

“I’ve just been talking to that fellow Haviland,” he was saying. “Of course, I didn’t tell him so, but Nick has made a blunder this time. He’s piled it on to him too thick.”

The Doctor’s sobriquet, you see, had got among the assistant masters. It was short and handy, and so among themselves they used it—some of them, at any rate.

“I think he’s been most infernally rough on him, if you ask me,” replied Mr Williams, who, by the way, was not in orders, but an athletic Oxford graduate of sporting tastes, and who was generally to be met when off the grounds surrounded by three or four dogs, and puffing at a briar-root pipe. This he was even now engaged in relighting. “One would think it’d be enough to kick the poor devil out of his prefectship without gating

him for the rest of the term into the bargain. I promptly let him off the lines I'd given him when I heard of it."

"That's just my opinion, Williams. And it's the gating that's making him desperate. And he is getting desperate, too. I shouldn't be surprised if he did something reckless."

"Then he'll get the chuck. That'll be the last straw. Why has Nick got such a down on him, eh, Sefton?"

"I don't know, mind, but perhaps I can guess," said the other, enigmatically. "But look here, Williams. Supposing we put in a word for him to Nick. Get him to take off the fellow's gates, at any rate? Eh? Clay would join, and so would Jackson, in feet we all would."

"That'd make it worse. Nick would think we were all in league against him. He isn't going back one jot or tittle on his infallible judgment, so don't you believe it. We'd get properly snubbed for our pains."

"Well, I'm going to tackle him, anyhow. I'm not afraid of Nick for all his absurd pomposity," rejoined Mr Sefton, with something like a snort of defiance, and his nose in the air. He meant it, too. Yet, although the above expression of opinion between these two masters very fairly represented the general estimate in which the whole body held the Head, they were fully alive to the latter's good points, and supported him loyally in upholding the discipline and traditions of the school.

Chapter Eleven.
A Midnight Foray.

There was one in whose eyes Haviland, fallen from his pedestal, was on a still higher plane even than he had been before; and that one was Mpukuza, otherwise Anthony, sneeringly known among the ill-disposed as "Haviland's chum." With the entire and unswerving loyalty of his race towards the object of its hero-worship, the Zulu boy looked upon his god's misfortune as his own misfortune, and was not slow to proclaim the fact in season and out of season. Any fellow within measurable dimensions of his own size who professed satisfaction within Cetchy's hearing had got to fight, while more than one thrashing came his way from bigger fellows, towards whom his championing of his hero's cause took, perforce, the form of cheek. As for the prime author of the said misfortune, it would have been astonishing to note the result upon the reverend but stern Doctor's mind, could he either have heard or understood the awful threats and imprecations muttered at him in the liquid Zulu language whenever he came within view of Anthony.

The latter, since he had been at Saint Kirwin's, had made his way very fairly well. Acting upon an earnest and wise warning from the missionary who had placed him there, the masters had refrained from taking undue notice of him, and so spoiling him, as perhaps might otherwise have been the case, and being thus left to make his own way, he had made it, as we have said. And he was growing taller and stronger, with all the fine physique of his race. Lithe, active, enduring, he was as hard as steel; nor would it be very long before he might be in a condition to turn the tables on Jarnley and Co., quite independently of his hero and protector.

To whom one day he sidled up, and opened conversation this way:

"You not sick of being always in?"

"You ass, Cetchy! What d'you mean by asking such an idiotic question?" was the excusably irritable retort.

"Au! Then why you not go out?"

"Look here, Cetchy. If you're trying to make a fool of me, you'll promptly find you've got the wrong pig by the ear. What are you driving at? Eh?"

The other looked quickly around. The two were alone.

"I not make fool. Ishinga 'nkulu not let you go out in day. Au! go out at night. Why not?"

We regret to say that by the above epithet—which being interpreted means “big rascal”—this descendant of generations of fighting savages was of late wont to refer to the Reverend the Headmaster of Saint Kirwin’s.

“No one see you,” he went on. “Quite easy. I go with you; we find lots of nests. We go to Hangman’s Wood again. Plenty of time. All night long.”

“Now, Cetchy, you young ass, how are you going to find nests in the dark?”

“Not dark. Plenty moon. Besides,” and here he looked round once more, and said something in a quick, hurried whisper. Haviland started, and his face flushed red with eagerness and excitement.

“The very thing,” he exclaimed. “By George, won’t we have fun? But I’m not so sure about the other fellows in the room. Some of them hated me while I was a prefect. What if they sneak?”

“They not sneak,” tranquilly replied the other. “No; they not sneak. I know.”

Then the two plotters put their heads together and talked a good while, but always cautiously. If any one came within earshot, why they were only talking about bird-nesting.

We said that Haviland occupied a smaller room at the end of the big dormitory, the said room containing ten other fellows, and from this it had not been deemed necessary to shift him at the time of his suspension; indeed, the same order prevailed therein as before, so great the force of habit and his own prestige. Now, a night or two after the above conversation, just before “lights out” time, Haviland remarked meaningly:

“Any sneaks here?”

The boys stared, then tittered. What on earth was Haviland driving at? they were all thinking.

“Don’t stand grinning like a Cheshire cat, Smithson, you young ape,” said the ex-prefect. “Why don’t you answer, all of you? Are there any sneaks here?”

“No,” came the unanimous answer; while one or two added, “Of course not. Why?”

“Ha! Any fellow sneak, I kill him!” said Mpukuza, otherwise Anthony, in would-be blood-curdling tones, and rolling the whites of his eyeballs hideously.

“There’s no need for that, Cetchy,” said Haviland, judiciously. “I know none of these fellows are sneaks.”

“Of course not,” they repeated. “But why, Haviland?”

“You’ll see, or, rather, you won’t see, for you’ll all be asleep. You’ll all be asleep, d’you hear?” he added significantly.

He turned out the gas. Not for another hour could he begin operations, and all he and his accomplice had to do was to sit and wait.

Ten of the occupants of the room were pretending to be asleep, except two or three who, wearied with waiting to see what was going to happen, actually were so. The others noiselessly arose. Both were dressed, but instead of their boots wore light running shoes. Then the other inmates of the dormitory thrilled with excitement and admiration as, peeping furtively from beneath the clothes, they beheld in the moonlight, which streamed into the room, their ex-prefect busily engaged in knotting a cord to the framework of the two iron bedsteads which stood right under the outside window.

This long wing of the school buildings ended here. Without, the chapel wall, buttressed and lofty, extended at right angles to it. Another convenient buttress on the other side of the window screened the corner thus formed, in most effective fashion.

Haviland and his dusky satellite proceeded to pay out the cord. The end just swung clear of the ground, and the height, from twenty-five to thirty feet, was a mere nothing to such practised climbers. Down they went, hand over hand, first one, then the other. Then, taking advantage of the shadows thrown out by the rose bushes that grew outside, they flitted along the chapel wall, then over the fence and into the field beyond.

How good it was to be out again, to move freely over this glorious open country spreading around so still and soft and mysterious in the moonlight! Half hundred fragrant scents seemed to blend and fuse, distilled from grass and bank and hedgerow, upon the pure night air, and mingled with the odour of kine asleep in the pasture meadows. A nightingale “jug-jugged” in an adjacent copse, and was answered by another; a large hare, long-eared and ghostly, sprang out of their way and loped off into misty dimness—but, over all, that sense of freedom, of entire and complete liberty, which a sense of risk, and very real risk, did but add to.

For a keeper would likely be on his beat these moonlight nights, and to encounter one such would be almost fatal. And to-night they had higher game in view than bird-nesting.

“Here it is,” said Mpukuza, diving into a bed of leaves at the bottom of a dry ditch and dragging forth—an air-gun. “Now we have fun. Au!”

Haviland’s hand shook with excitement as he took the weapon. Fun indeed! Wouldn’t they? He was not unpractised in the use of firearms, for on rare and happy occasions when he had visited at the country place of a distant relative he had been taught and encouraged to shoot, and he was passionately fond of the sport. But his opportunities, alas, had been few and far between.

The air-gun was a good one of its kind, and up to a certain distance shot true and hard. The Zulu boy had seen it among the wares of a travelling pedlar during one of his solitary wanderings, and had purchased it for five shillings, it having probably been stolen in the first instance. He had hidden it craftily away, with an eye to just such an adventure as this.

Haviland put in a pellet and fired at nothing in particular. Even the slight twang as he pulled the trigger seemed quite loud in the midnight stillness; but he felt that it would hit hard.

They stole along in the shadow of a hedgerow, Haviland carrying the gun. A covert loomed darkly in front of them. As they entered it stealthily, the flap-flap of startled wood-pigeons set their nerves all tingling, for would not a tale be thereby conveyed in the event of keepers being abroad?

But alas for their reckoning! It was the wrong time of year for night-poaching. The foliage was so thick that they could see nothing. Every tree might have been weighted with roosting pheasants for all the sport that fact would afford them. For some time they went round and round the copse, looking upward, and were just going to give it up when—there in a young ash of scanty leafage, they made out two dark balls silhouetted against the moonlit sky. Controlling his excitement, Haviland took careful aim and pressed the trigger. There was a thud, a flapping of wings, and one of the dark balls fell to earth with a louder thud. There lay at their feet a splendid cock-pheasant. The Zulu boy promptly ended its struggles by a tap on the head with his stick.

“Shoot again,” he whispered. “Shoot again.”

Now at ordinary times Haviland's sporting instincts were far too true to allow him to find much satisfaction in shooting birds on the roost. But here the night adventure, the secrecy and risk, and, further, the skill required to pick off a bird with a single pellet, and that in a very uncertain light, all went to render the situation intensely exciting. Again he raised the weapon and took careful aim, with the same result as before. Mpukuza capered with delight.

"That enough for to-night," he whispered. "Now we go and eat him. Come."

For the speaker had been carefully planning this adventure for some days past, consequently it was not surprising that when the two gained the congenial hiding-place formed by a deep dry ditch with clayey overhanging banks, the whole well concealed by brambles, the materials for a fire were laid and ready, and only wanted lighting. The fireplace was cunningly scooped out of the clay bank, and now, in deft manner known to himself, the Zulu boy managed to light and foster that fire in such wise that it soon consisted of a mass of ardent and glowing charcoal, giving forth little or no smoke. The while the birds had been hastily plucked and cut in pieces, and set on the embers to broil.

It was almost worth while undergoing his long imprisonment to have such glorious fun as this, thought Haviland, as he watched the hissing and sputtering flesh which, but half an hour ago, had been alive and totally unsuspicious of approaching fate. The dry ditch became a sort of cave of romance, an episode in a life of wild adventure. Perhaps some day, at no great distance of time either, such a life might be his. And as the roast went on, his dusky companion told him strange tales of his own country—tales of war, of stirring sights he himself had looked on with childish eyes, of grim legends fraught with mysterious horror; stories, too, of widespread slaughter, and ruthless, unsparing revenge. The listener's blood was all on fire.

"I say, Cetchy, I would like to go to that country of yours," he said, half breathlessly. "Perhaps I will one of these days."

"Ha! you come. We have good fun then. But it's no longer good country. The English have driven out the king—broken up the people. Ha!"

The first instalment of the broil was ready, and they fell upon it with a will, the while Anthony had raked up the fire and put on as much more of the birds as it would hold.

"Cetchy, old chap, this is splendid," said Haviland gleefully, as with their pocket-knives they stripped the flesh from the bones, and devoured it with their healthy school

appetites. “Why Nick himself can’t get roast pheasant now for love or money, because it’s out of season. Old brute! I’d like to give him a turn on that fire. Eh?”

“Oh yes, make him wriggle on it like Umbelini make the Tonga prisoners I was goin’ to tell about. They go work in diamond mines, come back through Umbelini’s country with plenty money. They no tell where it is, hide it away. He burn them till they tell—most of them never tell; Umbelini burn ’em till they dead. One man tell. Ha!”

The while Haviland had hardly noticed how the other had been allotting all the choicest bits to his share.

“I say,” he said at last, “I never thought you and I would be able to polish off a brace of cock-pheasants to our own cheek. Yet we jolly well nearly have.”

They had. The night air and their natural growing appetites had rendered the feat one of no great difficulty. But it was time to go back. The nights were nearly at their shortest. By two o’clock it would be almost daylight. So they started from their alfresco kitchen and banqueting-room, and, concealing the air-gun and its ammunition, made their way back once more, and neglecting no precaution, shinned up the rope which had been left dangling, and were safe and sound within the dormitory again—the rope being carefully coiled away in Haviland’s box—he about five minutes thereafter being fast asleep, and dreaming that he was plugging a huge cock-pheasant through and through with air-gun pellets, the riddled bird finally taking shape as the Doctor, to his own great and vengeful satisfaction.

Chapter Twelve.
Tying Knots in Nick's Tail.

A change seemed now to have fallen upon Haviland. He was no longer to be met wandering alone, and the moody frown had left his brow, giving way to an expression of easy, light-hearted contentment. Yet there were days when he spent nearly the whole of his spare time lying in a corner of the playing fields, his cap over his face and—fast asleep. There was no fear of him sleeping too long, or being late for anything—Mpukuza, otherwise Anthony, took care of that—and was always at hand to awake him in time.

Not much together were they in the daytime, in feet, hardly at all, yet the Zulu boy was always at hand when his hero wanted him, actually or unconsciously. He could do without all this extra sleep, but the other, with his nervous, high-strung temperament, felt the reaction after these nights of adventurous excitement, to say nothing of the sheer physical fatigue following upon the hard exercise attendant on their nocturnal exploits.

For that first expedition was by no means the last. The appetite for such grew, and night after night the cord was let down, and these two amateur poachers would sally forth upon their lawless but entrancing errand. Not always so lucky were they, however, as on that first occasion, for it was generally impossible to see the roosting birds because of the abundant foliage, and then too, the moon began to wane, which added to the difficulty of bringing them down, even when they did see them. Moreover, they had at least two exceedingly narrow escapes at the hands of unduly vigilant keepers. They decided that the time had come to change their field of action. Things were getting too hot.

Not always, however, were they on poaching bent. Sometimes the air-gun would be left reposing in its place of concealment and egg-hunting would be the order of the day—or rather of the night—and here Haviland's consummate knowledge of the life of the fields and woods brought success where another would have returned empty-handed. But the season was getting late, and the nests mostly contained young birds, or eggs so hard-set as to be useless.

Now this change in Haviland did not long escape the keen, observant eyes of Mr Sefton. True to his resolution, that kind-hearted disciplinarian had taken an opportunity of putting in a word with the Doctor, in mitigation of his favourite's penalty, and had been incontinently snubbed for his pains. The headmaster saw no reason whatever for modifying his former judgment, nor did he recognise the right of his assistants to offer criticism upon his acts, had been the substance of his reply.

“Ha! Nick blew himself out like a bullfrog, by Jingo!” was Mr Sefton’s subsequent comment when he narrated the result to Mr Williams. “But I don’t mind his bounce, not I, ha ha! It’s like water off a duck’s back with me. Ha!” he added whimsically, with his head thrown back, as his way was.

Of course he said nothing to Haviland as to his kindly meant attempt, but this new attitude on the part of his favourite was sorely puzzling. He would engage him in conversation from time to time—not out of any motive of spying, but because he was really interested in the young fellow, and liked him genuinely, but even then he could arrive at no clue.

Haviland, for his part, was greatly enjoying that side of the situation. He knew they were all curious about him, those, that is, who were interested in him at all. Laughton and Medlicott and others had at times commented on his altered demeanour, but he had explained it away on the ground that the end of the term was not far off, and he expected to go and stay at an awfully jolly place for part of the holidays. If they only knew the fun he was having what time everybody else was in bed and asleep! The thought appealed to the humorous side of his nature. It is possible he might even have forgiven the Doctor, but that his sense of justice was outraged. Other masters had punished him, but never unfairly. He knew he had earned such. The extreme and double-weighted penalty with which the Head had visited a not very grave offence he could not feel he had earned. Other masters had set him more than one swingeing imposition, but even when they had spoken sharply they had always behaved like gentlemen. The Doctor, on the other hand, had a bullying, overbearing way with him, which was quite unnecessary, and galling and ungentlemanly to the last degree, he considered. It might be all right when dealing with some of these cads, thought Haviland, but he ought to know when to discriminate. No, he could not forgive the Doctor. The sense of injustice rankled, and festered, and not the least side of the enjoyment of his new escapades was that he was “tying knots in Nick’s tail,” as he put it to himself—and Anthony—consciously or unconsciously “lifting” from Ingoldsby.

The only misgiving—and it was rather a serious one—that would strike him was how long the other fellows in the dormitory would manage to hold their tongues. He did not believe that any among them would willingly give them away, but the young asses might get chattering. With this in view, many and oft were the monitions addressed to them by himself and his accomplice. They were admonished, not only to make no confidences to those outside, but never even to talk about it among themselves, for fear of being overheard—in fact, to regard their knowledge as the cherished secret of some privileged order, of which they had the honour to be members. This appealed to them more than any other argument, and it hardly needed Cetchy’s from time to time repeated threat: “Any fellow sneak—I kill him.” This threat he would emphasise by the production of a

wicked-looking weapon, which he kept in his box—namely, the half of an old sheep-shear, with which, spliced on to a short, strong handle, he had manufactured a very creditable imitation of his native assegai. Nor did they regard the menace as an entirely futile one, for they had witnessed an outbreak or two of genuine, though not unprovoked, savagery on the part of the threatener, which, but for timely interference, might have entailed serious—if not fatal—consequences.

Yet the above misgiving grew by dwelling upon, and there were times when Haviland would feel exceedingly uncomfortable and almost make up his mind to give up these perilous expeditions. Were they worth the risk? The end of the term was drawing near, and his irksome restraint would, of course, end with it; whereas, were he detected, the result would be inevitable expulsion. Mr Sefton's words would strike uncomfortably home to his mind, and, after all, embittered and reckless as he might feel, he had no desire to be expelled. His accomplice would get off with a sound swishing, for which, of course, he himself was too old. He would certainly be expelled.

But such prudential moods were not destined to last. His close confinement galled him more and more, and, besides, there was one expedition the pair had promised themselves, and that was to extend their midnight marauding to Hangman's Wood. That would be a famous exploit. They would shoot two or three pheasants there—the place just grew pheasants—and at night they would be entirely safe, because no one dared go into it on account of the ghost. Yes, it would be the crowning exploit of all, and the sooner they undertook it the better, while there was some moonlight left.

They might have been less easy in their minds, however, could they have assisted unseen in a discussion then going on in the Doctor's study between that potentate and Laughton, with a couple of the senior prefects.

"It is really becoming a serious matter," the Headmaster was saying, "and I am considering what action I shall take. Again I have had complaints. Both Mr Worthington's and Lord Hebron's keepers have been to me again. There is no doubt as to the truth of their stories, I am afraid. Their woods are overrun and pheasants taken—they gave me ample proof of that. They have even found a place where the birds have been cooked and eaten, and a good many of them too."

"Surely, sir, that's no evidence whatever that it has been done by any of the school," said Laughton, as the Doctor paused, as though inviting opinion.

"I think it is, Laughton. The ordinary poacher, you see, would remove his game, not cook and eat it in a dry ditch. Furthermore, the footmarks observed by the keepers were made

by cricket shoes, and not large enough nor broad enough to be imprinted by the village ne'er-do-well."

"But Lord Hebron's preserves are too far away, sir," urged Medlicott. "No fellow would have time to get there and back unless he got leave from calling-over."

"That's true," rejoined the Doctor; "but the Question is, has anybody been getting such leave of late, and, if so, how many? I shall inquire into that. And now have any of you any other suggestions to offer?"

The prefects looked at each other rather blankly. It was, of course, very flattering, and all that sort of thing, to be taken thus into the counsels of the redoubtable Doctor; but then, unfortunately, they hadn't the ghost of a notion what to suggest. At last Laughton said:—

"I should think, sir, the best plan would be for the owners of the shootings to increase their staff of keepers. It seems hard for them to lay the blame on the school when there's so little to justify the suspicion."

"On the contrary, I think there is a good deal to justify it," returned the Doctor. "I think they have made out a primâ facie case. The question now is what steps I shall be called upon to take. I am very loth to put in force so grave a measure as withdrawing the privilege of rambling over the country and confining the school strictly to grounds, merely on suspicion, even though a strong suspicion. I have always held, too, that that privilege, combined with the natural healthiness of our situation, has not a little to do with the high reputation for health we have always enjoyed. But, if this goes on, I shall be obliged to take some such step."

"Perhaps, sir, some of us might make it our business to go about a little and keep our eyes open," suggested Read, the other prefect.

"That is just what I was thinking, Read," replied the Doctor. "If we can discover the offenders, I shall make a grave example of them, and it will be to the interest of the whole school. Meanwhile, let me impress upon you that I particularly wish this meeting to be considered a confidential one. To the other prefects its burden must, of course, be imparted, but beyond them I desire no information to leak out, for that might be to defeat our object entirely, for it is better for the evil-doers to be detected than to be only warned and to desist for a time. And at this we will leave it."

And so they were dismissed.The while Haviland and his dusky accomplice, blissfully unconscious, were planning their great stroke, which had the additional attraction of tying yet another knot in Nick's tail.

Chapter Thirteen.
A Grim Tussle.

"I say, Cetchy, isn't this splendid?" said Haviland, drawing in long breaths of the cool night air. He was simply revelling in the sense of absolute liberty as he gazed around upon the dim fields, then up at the star-gemmed sky.

"Oh, yes. Splendid, rather! Hangman's Wood long way—get morning very early," replied the other.

The long, dark outline of the ill-omened covert loomed before them; and at sight of it Haviland could hardly restrain a wild paroxysm of laughter, as he remembered the last time they visited the place, and the awful scare they had put upon the unfortunate keeper. Just as they gained it, the moon in its last quarter arose above the tree tops.

"It's awfully dark in here, Cetchy," whispered Haviland, as they stood within the gloomy depths of the wood. "These trees are too thick. We can't see a blessed bird."

It was even as he had said. The light of the feeble moon hardly penetrated here, and the chill gloom and weird associations of the place began to take effect even upon their spirits. A fox barked in the further end of the covert, and ever and anon the doleful hooting of owls, both far and near, rang out upon the night, and now and again one of the ghostly birds would drop down almost into their faces, and skim along the ride on soft, noiseless pinions. The earthy moisture of the soil and undergrowth was as the odour of a charnel-house. Every now and then some sound—strange, mysterious, unaccountable—would cause them to stop short, and, with beating hearts, stand intently listening. Then they went on again.

They had secured no spoil; the tree tops were too thick to see the roosting birds. At last, as luck would have it—whether for good or ill we say not—they managed to glimpse a single pheasant through a gap against the sky. All of a quiver with excitement, Haviland pressed the trigger, and missed. Still the dim black ball up aloft never moved. Again he took careful aim, and this time it did move, for it came down from its perch with a resounding flapping of wings, and hit the earth with a hard thud, still flapping. In a moment the Zulu boy was upon it and had wrung its neck, but not before it had uttered a couple of raucous croaks that seemed, to the over-strained sense of its slayers, loud enough to be heard for miles in the midnight stillness.

"I'm glad we've got something at last, Cetchy," whispered Haviland, as he examined the dead bird. "We'll have to be contented with it, though, for time's up. Come along, we must get back now."

Bearing off their spoil in triumph, they had gained the centre of the wood—the spot, in fact, where the old tragedy had occurred, and close to that whereon they had so badly frightened the keeper. Suddenly Haviland felt a hand on his arm, heard a brief whisper:

"Stop! Something moving."

At first he could hear nothing; then his ears detected a sound, and his nerves thrilled. As the other had said, it was something moving, and instinctively he realised that it was something heavier, more formidable than any of the light-footed denizens of an English wood. Somehow his mind reverted to the grim legend. What if it were true, and the strangled man actually did walk, with all the marks of his horrible and violent death upon him? In front, where the rides of the wood intersected each other, the moonlight streamed through in a broad patch, rendering blacker still the pitchy blackness beneath the trees beyond. The stillness and excitement, together with the gruesome associations of the place, had got upon their nerves even more than they knew. What if some awful apparition—appalling, horrible beyond words—were to emerge from yonder blackness, to stand forth in the ghostly moonlight, and petrify them with the unimaginable terrors of a visitant from beyond the grave? Haviland's pulses seemed to stand still as the sounds drew nearer and nearer. A keeper's? No. They were too quick, too heavy, too blundering, somehow. Then Anthony breathed one word:

"Dog!"

A dog! Of course, that solved the mystery. But even then the jump from supernatural fears to the material hardly seemed to mend matters. A dog meant a keeper, of course, unless it were a midnight poacher like themselves, in which event it would give them a wide berth; but this was too much to hope. On the other hand, if it were accompanying a keeper on his midnight round, the brute would certainly attack them; and that it was a large and heavy animal they could determine by the sound of its quick, fierce rushes to and fro, and a sort of deep-toned grunt which it uttered now and then as it snuffed the ground.

Breathlessly they crouched. Ha! It was coming! The sound of its approaching rush in the pitchy blackness was almost upon them—then it passed. It had not discovered them yet, but evidently suspected their presence. When it winded them, as it might do any moment, then it would come straight for them. There was something terribly unnerving in this feeling of being hunted, and that by an enemy whose strength they had no opportunity of estimating.

As the retreating sound grew fainter, Haviland suggested climbing a tree. There was no such thing as playing the ghost again. That was all very well with a keeper, but it wouldn't do for a moment with a dog. Besides, the brute could maul them horribly even before the keeper should arrive on the scene; but Anthony negatived the suggestion.

"No climb tree," he said. "I kill him. Look, he come again."

It was even as he had said. The rush of a heavy body through the undergrowth, this time on the other side of the ride, and then, from the darkness beyond, there sprang forth into the moonlit ride an enormous bull-mastiff.

Terrible to a degree looked the formidable brute, his fangs exposed in a white line across the blackness of his huge bullet head: and the great muscular brindled body looked powerful enough to bring down a bullock with ease. Why, these two would simply be torn to pieces.

As the brute sprang into the light it paused a moment. Then, uttering one deep, cavernous "gowl" it came straight for them.

But at the moment it began its rush, there darted forth into the light a form, lithe and dark. Something flashed aloft, and at the same time descended—and then animal and human were mixed up together in a struggling mass upon the ground. The descendant of a long line of warriors knew better than to give his antagonist the choice of battle ground, and did not prefer to fight in the dark, wherefore he had hurled himself straight at the onrushing monster—stabbing furiously with his improvised sheep-shear assegai.

Not ineffectually either, but the sheer weight of the heavy muscular brute had hurled him flat.

It had all been done with a rapidity that was almost lightning-like. Haviland, witnessing it, felt all in a maze for a moment, realising that he was unarmed—for the air-gun of course would be about as effective against such an adversary as this as the common or school pea-shooter. Yet he bethought him of a weapon more useful still, and without hesitation he advanced upon the struggling pair, and his right fist was armed with a knuckle-duster of the most formidable kind, each knuckle constituting a sharp point—a terrible implement, one moderately strong blow of which could kill a man easily.

The Zulu boy lay on the sward beneath the great dog—his one object being to shield his throat. Fortunately he had previously rolled his jacket round his left arm, and this had received the powerful jaws, which hung on, with a dreadful worrying snarl—while, with his right, he was stabbing furiously at the creature's body, but somehow without much

effect. Haviland saw his chance—and the good moonlight befriended him. With the utmost coolness and ready promptitude he selected his opportunity—letting out with all the force of his iron-bound right hand. "Woof!" It caught the snarling, gnashing monster full and square on the side of the head, and without waiting to see the result he followed it up with another. One quick gasp, and the great brute rolled off, lying on its side, hardly moving—stunned, if not dead. But the Zulu boy would leave nothing to chance. Springing to his feet he drove his sharp weapon through and through the body of the dog. There was no doubt about it then. The animal lay still—the dark pool of its blood widening ever in the moonlight.

"Are you hurt, Cetchy? D'you hear—are you hurt?" gasped Haviland, panting with the effort and excitement of his supreme exertion.

"Hurt? No. He bite me once. Ha! I, Mpukuza! I can kill! Ha!"

Thus spoke the savage—the descendant of a line of fighting savages, standing there, grasping his savage weapon, surveying the dead and bleeding body of his formidable enemy, not in his own native wilds, but in the peaceful glade of an English game preserve.

"Well, come along then, and quick. There's sure to be a keeper not far off."

Quickly they took their way to the edge of the wood. They were over the fence and away, but hardly had they gone some fifty yards when a voice behind them shouted:—

"Hi! Stop there! Stop, do 'ee 'ear? I'll shoot 'ee if 'ee don't." And immediately the bang of a discharged gun crashed out upon the night, Haviland laughed.

"It's all right, Cetchy. He daren't fire at us, for his life. It's bluff. Come along."

And away they raced, but a glance over their shoulder showed them that the keeper was giving chase.

That in itself didn't afflict them much, but by and by when they had covered several long fields, they observed with concern that he was still on their heels. As a rule, a keeper was easy to distance, but this one seemed lightly built and in excellent training. Even a dark lane down which they dived, hoping to double on him, proved of no avail; rather did it serve to make matters worse, for the keeper, knowing where they were bound to come out, had wasted neither time nor energy, but made straight for that point: a manoeuvre which brought him alarmingly close when he did emerge. And at all hazards he must not be suffered to head them off from their objective.

“Now, then—’ee’d better stop, I tell ’ee!” he shouted, reckoning them done up. But the fugitives knew better than to waste wind, if he did not. They simply raced on, offering no reply. And by degrees their superior wind and training told, the more so that the race was a long one. They saw they were shaking their pursuer off, and it was all important they should do this, because it would never do for them to let him run them all the way back to the school. They might as well surrender at once as that.

“My clothes all over blood!” said Anthony at last, when they were safe beyond pursuit. “What I do?”

Haviland examined him critically in the moonlight.

“So they are,” he said. “Well, Cetchy, you must peel them off and stow them away in the ditch, and go in without them. You can think you’re back in Zululand again.”

“So I can. Yes,” answered the other, showing his white rows of splendid teeth.

Half an hour later, two wearied perspiring figures shinned up the cord under the angle of the chapel wall at Saint Kirwin’s, and so ended another night of excitement and adventure—as they thought.

Chapter Fourteen.
The Bolt Falls.

"I say, you fellows, there's no end of a row on," pronounced Wood major, joining a group of others.

"No! Is there? What about? Who's in it?" were the eager inquiries which hailed the good news. For a row at Saint Kirwin's was, in its generation, akin to the Coliseum sports in theirs, inasmuch as it afforded pleasurable excitement to the multitude. To the small minority directly implicated it afforded excitement too, but the reverse of pleasurable. This particular group, however, being presumably clear of conscience, hailed the news with unfeigned satisfaction.

"Why, the small room at the end of Williams's dormitory are all in it, I believe," explained Wood major. "Cetchy's been caught getting out late at night."

"What, Cetchy? Haviland's chum?"

"Rather. We're going to see something, I can tell you."

"Then Haviland's in it too," said some one else.

"I expect so. I believe the whole room's in it."

"A case of Cetchy caught," remarked a puffy-faced fellow who set up for being a wag.

"Oh, shut up, Cross. We don't want Clay's second-hand wheezes," was all the appreciation he met with. "Why we've yelped at that in all its variations till I believe we'd sooner do his impos. than get off it by putting him in a good humour over that 'honk' any more. Go on, Wood. What have you heard about it?"

"Why, Smithson minor told me. He's rather a chum of Cetchy's, you know. The first he knew of it was seeing Cetchy come out of Nick's study looking precious puffy about the chops. Nick had been socking him all over the shop, he told Smithson; and then Nick came out himself, and maybe Smithson didn't slink off. Oh, no."

"Well, we shan't hear anything about it till to-morrow morning," said Cross. "Sure to come on at morning prep. Great Scott, but there'll be some swishing on!"

"Haviland won't take it, I expect."

“He’ll be jolly well expelled then.”

“He won’t care. I know he won’t take a swishing. I hated him when he was a prefect, but now I hope he’ll score off Nick.”

“P’raps he’s not in it.”

“Not in it? Why, the whole room’s in it.”

And so the discussion ran on; the while, however, the news had somehow leaked out, and the presage of a row—and a very big row at that—hung over the school like a thundercloud.

It will be necessary to go back.

For a day or two after the exploit chronicled in the last chapter our two midnight marauders plumed themselves on their feat of arms, and delighted to meet and fight their battle over again in a secluded corner of the playing fields, the only thorn in the rose being that they had lost the air-gun, abandoned during the precipitancy of their flight, and, of course, the pheasant. This, however, they decided was of small account compared with such a glorious experience as had been theirs, and they positively glowed over the recollection of their adventure. But they were a little premature in their elation. Retribution was at hand, and this is how the bolt fell.

To a group of boys strolling along a field-path not far from the school it was not strange that they should meet a keeper. What was strange to them was the gun in the hand of that worthy.

“That’s a rum sort of gun you’ve got there,” said one of them. “I say, let’s have a look at it.”

The keeper merely shook his head. Then an idea seemed to strike him, and he stopped.

“Yes, it be a rum gun, bean’t it, young genelmen?” he said, extending it to them, but not loosing his hold of it. “That be one o’ they new-fangled air-guns. They don’t make no bang when they goes off.”

The group gathered round interested. The keeper explained the working of the weapon, and from that got to talking on other matters—in fact, was extraordinarily chatty and affable, which was remarkable, because between gamekeepers and the Saint Kirwin’s boys a state of natural hostility existed.

“I’ve heard tell,” he went on at last, “that there’s a black African young genelman up at the school there. If that’s so, I’d like to make so bold as to see he. I ’ad a brother servin’ in the wars again they Africans over yonder, and ’e told me a lot about ’em. Yes, I’d like to see he.”

Now, under ordinary circumstances, this request would have caused them, in their own phraseology, to “smell a rat.” Perhaps in this case it had that effect all the same; but then, as ill-luck would have it, the group the keeper had struck in this instance happened to be Jarnley and his gang. Here was a chance to pay off old scores. Here was a noble opportunity for revenge, and it would in all probability comprehend Haviland too. Jarnley, Perkins, and Co. were simply jubilant.

“There’s no difficulty about that, keeper,” said the former, genially. “You go to the gate of the west field and ask any fellow to point you out Cetchy. I expect he’ll be there now. Cetchy—mind, that’s the name.”

“I’ll remember, sir, and thankee kindly. Mornin’, young genelmen.”

Three-quarters of an hour later our friend Anthony, having, in obedience to an urgent summons, hastened, though not without misgivings, to present himself in the Doctor’s study, found himself confronted by a tall red-whiskered keeper, while on the table, exposed on a sheet of newspaper, lay his lost air-gun and the corpse of a fine cock-pheasant. Then he knew that the game was up.

“Yes, sir. That be he, right enough,” said the keeper. “I saw him several times as I was a chevyin’ of him. There was a good moon, and I’d swear to him anywhere, sir. There was another with him, sir, a tall young chap, but I never got a chance of seeing his face. But this one, I can swear to he.”

“Very well,” said the Doctor. “You had better go down to the porter’s lodge, and wait there in case I should require to see you again.”

The keeper saluted and retired.

“And now,” went on the Doctor, in his most awe-inspiring tone, “what have you got to say? On the night of Tuesday, you and another—with whom I shall presently deal—were found by the man who has just gone out in one of Lord Hebron’s coverts. That pheasant lying there was killed by you with that air-gun. Now, who was with you?”

“I don’t know nothin’ about it, sir.”

“What?” thundered the Doctor, rising from his seat; and the next moment Anthony received a terrific box on the ear which sent him staggering against the table, followed up by another on the other side, the force of which wellnigh restored him to his original equilibrium. “So you would add lying to your other misconduct, would you? Now, answer my question. Who was with you?”

But the question was addressed seemingly to empty air. The Zulu boy, thinking to detect another hostile move, had incontinently dived under the table.

Here was a situation wholly outside the Doctor’s experience. He was a violent-tempered man when roused, especially when his dignity had sustained, as he thought, any slight, but he had too much sense of that dignity to embark actively in the chase of a boy who had got under the table of his own study. Not for a moment, however, was he nonplussed.

“Come out and stand where you were before,” he said, “and that at once, or I shall send for two prefects to drag you out, and shall cane you now as I have never caned a boy before, and that in addition to whatever punishment I shall decide to inflict upon you for your other offence. Do you hear?”

Anthony did hear, and being, like most of his race, of a practical turn of mind, had rapidly decided that it was better to be thrashed once than twice; wherefore he emerged from under the table, and stood upright as before, but with a quick and watchful eye, ready to dodge any further hostile move on the part of the Doctor.

The latter, for his part, had had time to think; and in the result it occurred to him that it was scarcely fair to judge this raw young savage, for he was hardly more, with the same severity as the ordinary boy. So he would refrain from further violent measures for the present.

“Who was with you?” he repeated remorselessly, and in a tone which in all his experience he had never known any boy able to hold out against. But he reckoned without the staunch, inherent Zulu loyalty.

For now Anthony shifted his ground. No power on earth would have induced him to give his accomplice away—they might flog him to death first. But by confessing his own criminality he might save Haviland.

“No one with me, sir. I all alone,” he answered volubly. “That man tell big lie. Or praps he seen a ghost. Ha!”

The Doctor looked at him with compressed lips. Then he rang the bell, and in the result, within a minute or two, the keeper re-appeared.

“Now Anthony,” said the Doctor, “repeat to this man what you have just told me.” Anthony did.

“Why you tell one big lie? Ha! You saw me, yes, yes. No one with me. I alone. How you see other when other not there?”

“Come. That’s a good ’un,” said the man, half amused, half angry. “Why I see he as plain as I see you.”

“See he? Ha! You see a ghost, praps? You ever see a ghost in Hangman’s Wood, hey?” and rolling his eyes so that they seemed to protrude from his head, and lolling his tongue out, the Zulu boy stared into the face of the dazed keeper, uttering the while the same cavernous groan, which had sent that worthy fleeing from the haunted wood as though the demon were at his heels.

“Good Lord!” was all the keeper could ejaculate, staring with mouth and eyes wide open. Then, realising what a fool they had made of him, he grew furious.

“You see ghost, yes? Praps Hangman’s ghost, hey?” jeered the boy.

“You young rascal, you!” cried the infuriated keeper. “This ain’t the first time by a long chalk you’ve been in my coverts, you and the other young scamp. There was another, sir,” turning to the Doctor, “I’ll take my dying oath on it—and I hopes you’ll flog ’em well, sir—and if ever I catches ’em there again I’ll have first in at ’em, that I will.”

“You bring another big dog. I kill him too,” jeered the descendant of savage warriors, now clean forgetful of the dread presence of the headmaster, and the condign punishment hanging over himself. “Kill you, praps, Hau!” he added with a hideous curl of the lips, which exhibited his splendid white teeth.

“See that, Doctor, sir?” cried the exasperated man. “The owdacious, abandoned young blackamoor! But his lordship’ll want that dawg paid for, or he’ll know the reason why. And ’e’s a dawg that’s taken prizes.”

Now Dr Bowen, for all his unbending severity, was a thorough Englishman, and, as such, an admirer of pluck and grit. Here these two boys had been attacked by a brute every whit as savage and formidable as a wolf, and that under circumstances and amid

surroundings which, acting on the imagination, should render the affair more terror-striking—viz., at midnight, and in the heart of a wood; yet they had faced and fought the monster, hand to hand, and with very inadequate means of defence, and had overcome and slain it. In his heart of hearts the feat commanded his admiration, and moreover, he was devoutly thankful they had not sustained serious injuries, for the sake of his own responsibilities and the credit of the school. Yet none of these considerations would be suffered in any way to mitigate the penalties due to their very serious offence. He had further been secretly amused at the scene between Anthony and the keeper, though outwardly the grimness of his expression showed no trace of any relaxation.

"That will be a matter for future discussion," he replied to the keeper. "Now I shall not require your further attendance. I have sufficient to go upon to put my hand on all concerned, and you can rest assured that they will be most severely punished."

"I hopes you'll flog 'em well, Doctor, sir," was the keeper's parting shot, "and especially that there young blackamoor rascal. Good-day, sir."

Chapter Fifteen.
Sentence.

The big room was full. Every form room, always occupied at morning preparation, was emptied of its contents, for all had been convened, by special proclamation, to the large schoolroom, now to become, for the time being, a species of hall of justice. So, even as at prayer time, arranged in the rows of lockers according to dormitories, the whole three hundred and fifty or so of boys chattered in a continuous and undertoned buzz—restrained, but not silenced, by the prefectorial calls:

"Quiet there!"

"You, Jones. I've spoken to you before already."

"Brown, come to me afterwards in the fourth form room."

"Now, then, that bottom row. Stop that shoving about! D'you hear?"

And so on.

Yes, the excitement was intense. There had not been such a row on, said some one, since that in which Thurston's gang had been caught smoking. They had set up a kind of divan in a dry ditch, which, being unexpectedly raided, they, and their pipes and tobacco, had been seized in close conjunction the one with the other—and Thurston and five other big fellows had been flogged. Or, said others, since a far worse case of another kind, wherein some fifteen fellows of all ages had been swished. And now all sorts of wild rumours began to go round. All the fellows in the small room at the end of Williams's dormitory were going to be swished—so extensive was the order sent to the gardener for the manufacture of birch rods, declared some, who affected to be in the know. But the centre light of all the excitement and conjecture was Haviland. He was not a prefect now, and therefore could, constitutionally, be swished. But—would he take it? That was the point—would he take it? Some opined that he would not—others that he would have to.

"Silence! Ss-silence there!" roared the prefects, with a force and unanimity that hushed the room in a minute. For it meant that the Doctor was coming in.

You might have heard a pin drop in that hitherto buzzing assemblage as the Headmaster ascended to the big desk in the middle and signed for the door to be shut. Then it was seen that there stood before him of culprits exactly one dozen, of whom all but two were in varying stages of funk.

The Doctor, you see, acting upon his usual thorough and whole-hearted method, had wasted no time in elaborate investigations. He had simply sent for Haviland and taxed him with what was charged, and Haviland, disdaining to prevaricate or make excuses, had owned his whole share in the alleged misdoing, and rather more, for he had endeavoured to shield Anthony by declaring that the Zulu boy had been entirely influenced by him; nor would it have helped him any way to have denied the matter, for the Doctor meanwhile had ordered the search of every box in the dormitory, and there in Haviland's box was the coil of cord, and in that of Anthony the blood-stained weapon. Further, with the same thoroughness, he had chosen to consider the whole room as in a degree implicated.

Now, confronting the whole school, speaking in his most awe-inspiring tones, the Doctor commenced his harangue. He dwelt on the complaints that had been coming in for some time past of serious depredations in the game preserves of the neighbouring landowners, and how such were entirely detrimental to the credit of the school, as also to its interests in another way, for the time had now arrived when it had become a grave question whether the reasonable liberty which had always been its privilege should not be withdrawn. Here a stir of sensation went through the listeners, who began to think that this rare excitement, even to those not the most active participants in it, had its unpleasant side.

Fortunately, though protracted, detection had overtaken the offenders, he declared—the principal offenders—as sooner or later it invariably and surely did, let them be certain of that, and, with detection, chastisement immediate and condign.

"It should be a matter of shame and grief to all of us," he went on, "that one who for so long has held a position of responsibility and trust should be the ringleader in these occasions of disorder and grave offence—leading astray not only his younger schoolfellows, but also one whom the humane and civilising spirit of a noble and self-sacrificing organisation has rescued from a life of barbarism and degradation, and sent here, where every opportunity is placed in his way to become a credit to that organisation, and a shining light in the noble endeavours to rescue from heathenism his barbarous fellow countrymen. I refer to Anthony, upon whom, I trust, the punishment I am about to inflict will act as a salutary warning and prove the turning-point in his school life. The other boys in the room I hold in a lesser degree to be participants in the grave scandal—I will not say breach of rules, because obviously such an offence as to get outside the school walls surreptitiously at night is one that no rule need be definitely formulated to cover."

Here two or three of the smaller boys implicated began to snivel. The whole lot would be swished, of course, they thought, and, indeed, such was the opinion of the whole school. It was precious hard lines, for they had no more hand in the affair than anybody else in the room; but such was the Doctor's way.

"As for you, Haviland," he continued, "it is simply lamentable how you have time after time betrayed your trust and shirked your responsibilities—in short, gone from bad to worse. I had hoped you would have taken warning when I was obliged to suspend you from your office, and have behaved in such wise as to justify me in shortly reinstating you; but, so far from this, you seem to have become utterly reckless and abandoned. You are nearly grown up now, and should be setting an example; but, instead of that, you are using the influence which your age and strength give you in the eyes of your schoolfellows, to lead your juniors into mischief and wrong-doing. It is clear, therefore, that there is no further place for you among us. Yet I am reluctant, very reluctant, to proceed to such an extreme measure as your public expulsion—"

Now the excitement had reached its height. Haviland was going to be swished, not expelled, decided the spectators, but—would he take it? Haviland standing there, his lips compressed, a set frown on his brow, was of the same opinion, except that he himself, and he only, held the answer to the question. He would not take it—no, decidedly not. They might expel him and welcome, he did not care, he was past caring; but submit to the indignity of a flogging at his age he would not.

"Therefore," continued the Doctor, "I shall take time to consider so grave and painful a matter; and, meanwhile, you will be withdrawn from all intercourse or contact with the rest of the school. Anthony I shall, of course, soundly flog. I shall also flog Smithson minor and Mcmurdo; and, as for the other boys in the dormitory, on this occasion I shall confine myself to severely warning them."

There was a sort of audible sensation among the listeners, but it was nothing to what followed. For now Haviland lifted up his voice:—

"Please, sir, Smithson and Mcmurdo had no more to do with it than the man in the moon."

The Doctor frowned as he gazed sternly at the speaker.

"Keep silence," he said, in a curt tone. Haviland obeyed. He had made his protest in the name of fair play. He was not concerned to take any further risks. But those who saw—those who heard—was ever such a thing witnessed before at Saint Kirwin's? The

Doctor—the awful, the dreaded Doctor—expostulated with, and that before the whole school! Why did not the very heavens fall?

The public floggings at Saint Kirwin's were public in the sense that they could be heard by all but seen by none, for they took place in a small room adjoining the big schoolroom, and the audience were able to estimate how each of the victims "took it." In the present instance, Smithson and Mcmurdo got off with a comparatively slight infliction, and, beyond a smothered yelp or two, "took it" well. But when it came to Anthony's turn, they wondered if it was going on for ever. He received, in fact, a most relentless swishing, but for all the sound that escaped him—whether of cry or groan—he might just as well not be undergoing chastisement at all. The school was lost in admiration of his pluck and endurance; and, afterwards, when he emerged, showing no sign of pain, but scowling savagely, and muttering in his own tongue—the word having been given to dismiss—he broke forth:—

"What they do to Haviland?"

"Well done, Cetchy! Well done, old chap! You did take it well. Biggest swishing Nick ever gave. He'd have stopped if you'd yelled out," were some of the congratulations showered upon him. But of them he took no notice whatever.

"D—n! What they do to Haviland?" he repeated, stamping his foot, and scowling savagely.

"I'm afraid he'll be expelled, Cetchy," said some one. The others thought so too.

"What's expelled? Sent away?"

"That'll be it."

The Zulu boy made no answer. He gazed from one to the other, and then his eyes began to nil, and great tears, which the most savage flogging ever administered within the walls of Saint Kirwin's had failed to wring from him, rolled down his cheeks. "Haviland sent away! perhaps not even allowed to bid him good-bye. No, that was too much."

"Never mind, Cetchy, old chap. Perhaps it won't come to that, after all," were some of the well-meant attempts to console him. But he would have none of it, and turned away, sorrowful and speechless.

The while, in many a group, recent events were being volubly discussed.

“I always hated Haviland,” declared one youngster emphatically. “He was such a brute when he was a prefect. But I like him now, since he cheeked Nick. He is a plucky beggar.”

“Now then, get along to your places—sharp, d’you hear?” commanded two or three prefects, breaking up such groups—for it was preparation time.

Haviland, after a day and a half of solitary confinement—retirement would perhaps be a better word, for he was not under lock and key—had reached the stage of sullen resignation. Of course he would be expelled.

There was no hope, and now that it had come to this, and he had had time to think, he felt that he would give anything for another chance. Then his heart hardened. The Doctor had driven him into it, had simply persecuted him with an unrelenting spite: and his thoughts were bitter and black and revengeful. In the midst of which a sound of firm footsteps was heard outside, and the door opened, admitting—the Doctor. A hard resentful scowl came upon the young fellow’s face, and he gazed sullenly before him.

“Haviland, you are to go home immediately.”

“Of course,” thought Haviland to himself. “Now for it! I am to be shot out, and the old brute’s going to preach me a humbugging canting sermon first.”

But there was no sternness in the Doctor’s voice as he went on. It was solemn, almost affectionate.

“I am sorry to say I have received bad news, I fear very bad news, but—we must hope for the best.”

“What, sir?” shouted Haviland, springing to his feet. “Who is it? Who?”

“Your father.”

Haviland’s face went deadly white. He staggered forward, and in his agony of grief seized the headmaster—the terrible headmaster—by the coat sleeve.

“Is he—is he—?”

“Alive, yes. But, my poor boy, you must go to him at once. Everything is arranged for you to catch the earliest train for London, and you have just a quarter of an hour to get ready in.”

“Tell me, sir, what have you heard?” besought Haviland piteously.

Dr Bowen, like many hot-tempered men, was at bottom soft-hearted, and now he could hardly control his voice to reply, so deeply was he affected. For the telegram which he had received was to the effect that Haviland’s father had met with a street accident, and was not expected to live till night. If his son arrived in time to see him again, it was all that could be hoped.

“Remember, Haviland,” he said, after conveying this as feelingly as possible, “that, after all, while there is life there is hope, however small. Go now and get ready. In view of this great grief which has been sent you I will say nothing of what is past, except that when you return to us next term, I am sure you will redeem what is past and start afresh.”

The latter was intended to convey that, under the great sorrow which had fallen upon him, Haviland might consider the past overlooked, and that although he was going home now, it was not under expulsion.

Chapter Sixteen.
Hunted.

On, through the steamy forest, heavy and damp with the tropical rain; on, over stodgy swamp land, whose miasmatic exhalations rise misty and foul in visible vapour, the fugitive is wending. Toiling for very life is he, dragging with infinite labour each spent footstep over the yielding and spongy ground, drawing breath in long gasps; and ever throughout his entire frame that sinking and yet sickening and agonising sensation of feeling utterly spent; wounded too, in more places than one, unarmed and without means of defence—a solitary fugitive in the mighty heart of that vast stretch of African forest land. What chance has he?

He stumbles on, and a sigh of relief, of thankfulness, escapes him, as his feet once more tread firm ground, though, did he but know it, the soil of the washy swamp, by closing over his footsteps, has rendered him invaluable service in hiding his spoor from his enemies. That he has enemies, more than one furtive and anxious glance behind—if nothing else—would serve to show.

A pitiable spectacle, his clothing in rags and plentifully soaked with blood—his own blood—still welling from and clotting round his wounds, as he toils onwards, his heavy unkempt beard matted with it as it trickles from a gash in his head, his progress beset by a whole cloud of flies and voracious winged insects, yet the fugitive is a well-built, strong-framed man of medium height, and well below middle age; strong indeed he must be, for in this deplorable plight he has covered many a weary mile, nor before him is there any hope of succour or refuge. Yet the sheer dogged instinct of self-preservation buoys him up, keeps him ever moving forward, anywhere so that it is only forward.

The low-lying ragged rain clouds roll back over the tree tops, and the dull blaze of the sun, watery through the tropical mist, but intensely piercing and penetrating as though focussed through the lens of a burning-glass, envelops him in an overpowering fold of heat, His brain reels, his uneven steps are more staggering than ever. Why keep on? Why struggle further? The spears and hatchets of his enemies were more merciful. Yes, but the fire, the lingering death of torment by that or any other form, or at best the yoke and slave chain, and being weaponless, he has no means of selling his life dearly, or even of ending it with his own hand when the last hope had vanished.

Ah! the welcome shade of the trees is gained at length. The lay of the land is flat, with a scarcely perceptible undulation, and alternates in open spaces—mostly swampy—and forest, the latter, however, not thick with undergrowth. Once within the shade, cool by comparison, the fugitive sinks to the earth. With bursting heart and labouring lungs, his strong frame weakened by continual loss of blood, he can go no further. A lurid mist is

before his eyes, and a feeling of intense lassitude, of dissolution, overpowers him, and he lies unconscious.

Not for long, however. All creation—human, animal, insect, even vegetable life—seems leagued together against the hunted man. Great black ants, attracted by the blood from his wounds, are crawling over him, and soon their sharp bites have the effect of bringing him back to himself again. But on the whole the infliction is salutary, for it acts as a spur; and, staggering to his feet in quick loathing, the fugitive shakes off the horrible insects, and drags on his weary way.

The solitude is intense, but not so the silence. The call of bird voices echoes through the shade; some shrill and piping and not unmelodious, others harsh, half human, almost menacing; the screech of cicalas too, loud, vibrant, distressing to overwrought and weakened nerves. Green lizards of some size dart scramblingly through the scattered bark or lie motionless, with head erect, and ruby-like eyes dilated, as they watch the intruder; and a great tree spider, huge, hairy, and hideous, shoggles up a trunk within a yard and a half of the wanderer's face.

And now hunger is gripping the unfortunate man; thirst, too, which the slimy swamp water he has drunk—though, in prudence, sparingly—has not availed to stave off for long. The day is waning, moreover, and well he knows that another night spent in the forest spells death. And still no sign of human habitation or friendly succour; yet how should there be, seeing that the red scourge of the slave-hunter, or of warring barbarian clans, equally ruthless, has swept this zone of terror and of blood, leaving it a howling waste of uninhabited wilderness. Or even were things otherwise, why should those he half hoped to meet prove any more desirable than those from whom he fled, here in the dark places of the earth, where anything in human shape, any fellow creature, was almost synonymous with a cruel and ruthless enemy? But the enduring courage, the bulldog tenacity of purpose, which characterise the true explorer or up-country adventurer, whatever his nationality, is to this man an ever present force. The traditions of his order that no hardship, no peril, however great, however hopeless, is without abundant precedent, are with him now, to steady his staggering steps as he plunges forward, to uphold and cheer his despairing mind.

There is light ahead; a break in the skies. Only another tract of open swamp, is the first thought of the fugitive; and yet with it a sort of instinct—hardly more, although the creation of experience—warns him, tells him, that human habitation lies at hand. With renewed strength and quickened steps he presses forward to the edge of the forest line and peers forth.

At the sight which meets his gaze his heart gives a great bound. His instinct has not been at fault. There, in the midst of the open space, are the thatched roofs of a native village—and a village of some size.

It is situated in the open—in the midst of an amphitheatre of forest which engirdles it on three sides, the further being bounded by a line of jagged rocks of no great height. But around it there is no sign of life. No human forms are issuing from or entering its low stockade, no sound of human voices comes to him from within it. Perhaps they are sleeping throughout the heat of the day. And then he pauses.

What will be his reception? Hostile possibly. Yet here lies his only hope. To remain as he is means certain death. He will warn the inhabitants of yonder place of the proximity of his enemies and theirs, that it not strong enough for defence, which is more than likely, they may save their lives—and his—in timely flight. And, having decided upon this line of conduct, he steps from his hiding-place, and proceeds to cross the intervening space.

But as he draws near the village, he is conscious of a renewed sinking of the heart; for now he perceives that the stockade is broken down in several places, and what he has hardly noticed before in his excitement and hunger as he snatched at the bunches of millet—a field of which he is passing through—that the crops are trampled and torn about, as though hurriedly foraged. And then, as he gains a wide breach in the stockade, and is about to step through, a sight meets his gaze which is not entirely unfamiliar, but which somehow or other never seems entirely to lose its horror and repulsion.

Strewn around in scattered profusion are hundreds of bones. Skulls, too, grinning up out of the long herbage which in some instances has sprouted right through the battered orifice which has let out the life, producing the most hideous and ghastly effect. Everywhere they lie, grouped in batches, mostly just within the stockade, though others are not wanting immediately around the low-roofed grass huts. Well enough does the fugitive know these signs. The fate of this village has been that of many another in the blood-stained heart of the Dark Continent. Its inhabitants have been surprised, and all who have shown resistance, or for any reason were not worth carrying away, ruthlessly massacred, regardless of age or sex—as not a few skulls of diminutive size lying around eloquently proclaim. His supposed place of refuge is but a village inhabited by the dead.

Grim and gruesome as this thought is, a new hope springs within the hunted man's resourceful mind. His pursuers, even should they suspect the direction he has taken—he is satisfied that they have lost his spoor, or they would have been upon him long since—will forbear to follow him here. The last asylum they will dream of him seeking will be this village of the dead. There is comfort in this, at any rate, and now, his next thought is to collect the ears, or rather bunches of millet—there is still plenty left which is not

crushed and trampled—and as he devours great handfuls of the grain, he remembers that where there is a village there must be water. Fortified by even this sorry food, rough, indigestible, unwholesome as it is, he renews his search and is soon rewarded. He has no difficulty—save for the exhaustion of dragging along his weary frame—in finding water, which, though slimy, and tepid and unpalatable, is still water—and having slaked his thirst, he crawls back to the village again.

The sun has sunk beneath the ridge of black rocks, and in the brief gloaming the miasmatic vapours seem to roll up thicker than before. One by one, the stars twinkle forth into the hot misty sky, and soon the reddening glow of a broad moon suffuses the tree tops, flooding with its spectral light the open space and whitened relics of those who erewhile tenanted these silent and primitive dwellings. Gigantic bats are flitting to and fro, uttering their strident squeaks, and the forest depths begin to resound with the howling of hyaenas, and the shrill baying of hunting jackals. To the fugitive the sounds are not without a certain sinister significance. Well he knows that the hyaena is the most cowardly of beasts, but he remembers too, how in these regions of constant massacre, even the most cowardly of beasts can hardly have failed to lose all respect for the dominant animal, Man—seeing that he, at any rate dead, constitutes an easy and abundant form of prey. He realises his own enfeebled state, and knows that the otherwise cowardly carnivora will realise it too. Even now, he can descry grisly, blunt-snouted shapes, skulking about in the moonlight, allured by the scent of fresh blood—his own blood to wit—nor does the occasional subdued shout he utters avail to alarm them overmuch, or cause them to retire very for. The stealthy patter of their footfalls seems ever to increase—to be drawing nearer and nearer.

Hitherto he has shrunk from entering any of the huts; now, however, the instinct of sheer self-preservation prescribes that course. Selecting one, a large oblong structure, whose wide low-pitched roof forms a kind of verandah all round it, he crawls within. But it has no door, and his strength is not equal to questing about for a substitute for one—indeed, hardly is he within when he stumbles forward, and sinks to the ground. The pain of his wounds has become intolerable, a deadly faintness seizes him—and before his final unconsciousness his hand closes with convulsive grip upon the skull belonging to a fleshless skeleton lying there within.

Huge spiders—hairy monsters, the size of a man's hand—crawl over the prostrate form, then, startled by the instinct that here is life, scurry back to the shelter of the thatch again. A wicked-looking centipede draws its shining rings in disgusting length along the ground in the stripe of moonlight, and flying beetles whirr and buzz in and out of the doorway; and there, among such surroundings, lies the dying explorer—his sands of life run out—every object which might meet his failing gaze, that of loathing and horror and repulsion.

But, outside, the whole place is alive with stealing, skulking shapes. Here and there a subdued snarl, or some snapping, is audible, but they are all converging on one point—the structure which as their scent informs them contains fresh blood; and the pointed ears and bared fangs of the hideous, blunt-snouted brutes, show plain in the moonlight. And now the foremost is standing snuffing within the open doorway, while others are stealing up, by dozens, behind the first.

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 irritable—white men, at any rate—and 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 Anglo-Saxon, 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 weather-beaten 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 double-barrelled 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 him—long or short, straight or curved or double-edged, but all wicked-looking weapons enough.

The line swings along at an even, wiry-paced walk, to the croon of some wild, weird melody. Then, as, the open space passed, they re-enter the forest shade, they stop short, the whole line telescoping together—loads 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 long-drawn intensity—so fraught with terror and energy and despair—surely 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 demon-haunted 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, blood-curdling 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 leg-bone 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 turned—and 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.”

“But—where 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 blood-stained 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 you—Dr 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 look-out, 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 match-box, 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 thing—eh, 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 up-country 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 then—that, 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 blood-poisoning.

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. Still—well, 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 plant-hunting line."

“That so? I’m Haviland, and I’ve been up rather more than two years in the bug-hunting 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 was—am, in fact—keen 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 everything—not 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 that—the death of his father; and for the most part of that period his career has been pretty much as we find him now—a 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 downs—mostly downs—and then it occurred to him

to try to turn his much-loved 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 whole-hearted 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 was—well under thirty—he 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 few-and-far-between 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, Anthony—otherwise Mpukuza—had 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 slave-hunters. 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 out-distanced 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 waist-deep; 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 shin-bones. 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 clean-picked 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 ill-fated 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 recovered—that 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 meat—as 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 sea-cow 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 all—and, mind you, I don’t say it doesn’t—would 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 Zulu-speaking 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 head-ring. In comparison with the inferior natives who constituted the carrying staff—though some of these were of powerful and muscular build—he 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 over-keen on this hippo-shoot 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 head-ring 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 head-ring 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 me—a 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; first-rate at egg-hunting, 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 end—at the time I lost my poor old dad—he was awfully decent. He’s a good chap at bottom, is Nick—a 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 Cetchy—we called him that at Saint Kirwin’s, after Cetywayo of course, his real name was Mpukuza—but 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 women—for there were several women among them—flying 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 slave-hunting 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 would—and 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 self-preservation 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 loads—those containing the stores and barter-truck 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 bearers—the braver ones, to the number of about a score—though 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 every-day occurrence, which could have but one result—victory 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 war-shield of black and white bull-hide, with a jackal tail tuft, and a short-handled, broad-bladed assegai—the terrible conquering weapon of his race. He had also brought forth a great head-dress of towering black ostrich feathers, and sundry tufts of white cow-hair, 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 man-jack 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 know—there was too much racket and confusion to be sure of anything. But—look 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 war-shield, 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, deep-voiced chant. At him the whole crowd of bearers was gaping, in undisguised admiration and awe.

“He’s singing his war-song,” 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 halting-place. 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 moving—more and more were coming on, until the place was alive with them—and the gleam of arms, the light falling on the blades of long spears and shining gun-barrels, 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 field-glasses. The leaders, and a goodly proportion, seemed to be pure blood Arabs, but the bulk consisted of negroids and the undiluted negro—these latter naked savages of ferocious aspect, incorporated probably from the fierce cannibal tribes along the Upper Congo. The Arabs, in their turbans and long-flowing 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 cruelties—ah! 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 ye—and 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 one—to 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 others—unarmed—we 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 accepts—which 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 war-shield.

The Arabs stood, coldly impassive, awaiting them. They were stern, grim-looking, middle-aged men—their 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 hawk-like 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 years—and all their gain to science, mind—for 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 harmed—that beyond the labour required of them they shall not be killed, or tortured, or ill-treated?”

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 promise—that 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 ground—of 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, blood-curdling 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, ferocious-looking 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 war-shield, 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 war-cry 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 followers—the black savages, to wit—should 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 to-night,” 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 slain—or—”

“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 circle—for three more of the porters had been killed and several of the refugees badly wounded—were 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 half-dried blood, together with his rifle lying upon his war-shield beside him, the Zulu warrior was fast asleep, slumbering as peacefully and as unconcernedly as though in his own kraal at home, in that crater-like hollow beneath the towering round-topped 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 hippo-shoot we were going to have to-morrow 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 unlooked-for, 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 half-circle came a great crowd of natives—miserable, woe begone-looking 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 faces—thus 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 blood-intoxication.

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 thee—Usútu 'Sútu!"

And in lightning-like 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 Oakley—upsetting him. A wild stagger, then a fall. Before they could rise, a dozen of their enemies had flung themselves upon them with lightning-like 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 horror—a 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 slave-hunters 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 themselves—the horrible tortures which had been decreed for them by the slaver chief, and to which end alone they had been spared—why, 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 to-day,” 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, but—I 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? No—no, Haviland. We are in this together, and we get out of it together—or not, probably not—even apart from the fact of your having saved my life—”

“Pooh! There was no life-saving 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 pity—the 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 spear-points, 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 savage-looking 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 fiend-like 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 academicals—which did not seem a bit strange or out of the way in the bizarre reality of his dream—who was about to pass sentence upon him. And then appeared Cetchy, not as he used to be, but as a big, powerful, full-grown 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 make-believe 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 slave-hunters' 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 short-handled, broad-bladed spears—this 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 red-brown 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 short-handled stabbing spears, and their battle-shout 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 blood-curdling 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.”

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

“The Ba-gcatya? 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 up—and 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 men—warriors, 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 me—I 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 hands—lead me to the impi.’ Then one man said—not 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 One—he 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 exile—a return, too, bearing with them the results of a highly successful enterprise, and which every day had been bringing nearer and nearer—here 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. Twenty-five, 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 slave-yokes 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 name—is 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 insect-hunter! 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 frying-pan into the fire—that they were themselves virtually prisoners, and that in the hands of a race of ferocious savages without one spark of humanity or ruth—in 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 slave-hunters 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 spear-points, 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 shape—to 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 rescuers—or captors—to 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 twofold—to 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 men—who they had it from Kumbelwa could fight—eagerly 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 some—Dumaliso included—spoke 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, clean-limbed, 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 head-ring 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 re-traversed, 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 war-gear, 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 self-esteem. The main centre of attention, however, was the presence of the captive slave-hunters, 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 dust-clouds 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 un-Zulu 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 well-ordered ranks and towering head-gear. 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 ceased—ceased 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 terror-striking 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 head-dress 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 broad-bladed 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 feet—and broke into shouts of praise:

"Fire-maker!"

"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 wicked-looking scimitars, also thongs and raw-hide whips—all 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 heard-of 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 people—indeed, very much the reverse, for who delivered him—delivered all of us—out of the hand of Mushâd?”

“Ha! Mushâd!” exclaimed the King, whom an idea seemed to strike—perhaps 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 ill-treatment, 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 you—you 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 heart-failing 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 raw-hide 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 children—the warriors of the Inswani. For them, too, it is only a foretaste of what is to come.”

The other slave-hunters, 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 torture-chamber. 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 them—and 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 etiquette—and 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 argued—of course to work witchcraft with—and 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 nation—and toward themselves the most hostile—entering 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 slave-hunting 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 slave-hunters 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 slave-hunters, 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, savage-looking and eager, and then—the 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 snow-white hair and ragged beard, the trembling claws and the blinking watery eyes—this could never be Mushâd, the keen-eyed, 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. No—no, such a transformation was not possible.

But it was. Ill-treatment, starvation, torture had reduced the once haughty, keen-spirited 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 slave-hunter 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 new-born babe, saw his opportunity and characteristically seized it. From one of the executioners he snatched a heavy two-edged dagger, and with all the old determination reviving, in a twinkling he drove it home—hard, strong, and straight—cleaving 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 collecting—what 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 dumb-

striking than when the King of the Inswani broke out into good English, hailing him by name. He started, stared, rubbed his eyes, gasped—then stared again.

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

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 Fire-striking 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 light-hearted school reminiscence, proceeding from the mouth of a blood-stained 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. But—who 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 well-intentioned zeal had placed at that seat of learning—a lucky day for himself, too. But quick to grasp Haviland’s warning, he was nothing if not non-committal.

“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 narrative—later, 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 ill-advised 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 rather—and 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 them—and so I warn you. You can leave whenever you feel inclined—you 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 Babanango—father of the mighty?"

The King burst into a loud laugh.

"Thy wives! Au! I will give thee three new ones—six 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 King—and 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 unlooked-for whole holiday, and that thanks to the request of a now famous explorer-naturalist, 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 headmaster—not our old friend and sometime terror, Dr Bowen, otherwise Nick—had 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 day—and 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 all—turning 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 man—interest by marriage—see?" 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 out—same old grind—all 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 position—to be killed in battle or by a conspiracy of his own people. He is a thorough savage, and the

people he has to rule—the Inswani—struck 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.