

**The Luck
Of
Gerard Ridgeley
By
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THE LUCK OF GERARD RIDGELEY

Chapter One.

Crossing the Durban Bar.

The steamship Amatikulu was drawing near the end of her voyage.

A fresh breeze was ploughing up the blue waves of the Indian Ocean, hurling off their crests in white, foamy masses, casting showers of salt spray upon the wet decks of the vessel as she plunged her nose into each heaving, tossing billow, and leaped up again with a sudden jerk which was more than lively, and calculated to produce the most distressful of throes in the systems of her passengers. But these were well salted by this time, for, as we have just stated, they were at the end of their voyage.

This being so, it was pleasant work coasting along the Natal shore; pleasant to gaze on the green slopes and luxuriant tropical foliage, with here and there a planter's bungalow peeping out from the tall canes; trebly pleasant, indeed, after a month of sea and skyline, unvaried by any sight or diversion save such as the ocean could afford; for the Amatikulu was not in the mail service, but owned by a private firm, and, being advertised to "sail direct for Natal," had touched nowhere save at Madeira, a week out from home.

"I reckon you two youngsters will be glad to stretch your legs ashore."

The two thus unceremoniously addressed, who had been leaning over the taffrail intently watching the coastline, turned to the speaker, one with an air of wouldbe offended dignity, the other with a goodhumoured laugh and a word of hearty assent.

Not less dissimilar in appearance than in their manner of receiving the above greeting were these two. Both of the same age, both bound on the same errand, it was easy to see that, come good or come ill, their lines would run upon altogether different roads. One, a wellmade, broadshouldered young fellow, whose sunburnt face and muscular hands spoke of abundance of cricket and rowing, and, in short, of every healthy outdoor sport within reach. The other, of slighter build, showed, in feature and dress alike, every symptom of the budding "masher," the wouldbe man of the world. Thus Gerard Ridgeley and Harry Maitland respectively, as they gazed curiously at the shores of the new country, whither both had been consigned to seek their fortunes in a word, to shift for themselves.

They were in no way related. They had become friends on board ship up to a certain point, that is, for they had few ideas in common. Both were of the same age, however, just under nineteen, and the Amatikulu carried but few passengers. But she carried them at a considerably reduced rate.

“Of course, of course,” went on he who had accosted the pair, a bluff, jolly-looking individual with a short, grizzled beard. “That’s only natural and right. Young fellows who don’t look ahead ain’t worth their salt, in my humble opinion. And yet, if I know anything of life, I’ll bet a guinea the time’ll come when you’ll find yourselves wishing all you know you were back aboard this old barkie, with the cockroaches running over you all night, and nothing to do all day but play ‘bull,’ and look at the sea, or quarrel to kill time.”

“That’s cheerful, Mr Kingsland, at any rate,” said Gerard Ridgeley, laughing heartily at this terse summary of a sea voyage, no less than at the somewhat discouraging prediction which accompanied it. “But of course no one expects a bed of roses by way of a start in a new country. And now that it has come to the point, I feel in no hurry to leave the old barkie, cockroaches and all.”

“That’s right, my lad,” said his senior, looking at him approvingly. “We haven’t had such a bad time aboard the old ship after all. And she’s brought us over safe and sound. No you’ll do; I can see you’ll do, wherever you are.” And the speaker strolled away forward.

“Of all the bumptious old clodhoppers!” muttered Harry Maitland, scowling after the retreating form. “You seem to take things mighty cool, Ridgeley. Now, for my part, I can’t stand that fellow’s patronising way of talking to one. As if a chap was a schoolboy, don’t you know.”

“Bosh, Maitland!” said Gerard. “Old Kingsland’s not half a bad sort. He’s colonial, you know, and these colonial fellows are always blunt and outspoken at least, so I’ve heard. He doesn’t mean any harm, and, if I were you, I’d knock off being so touchy about everything. I’m tolerably sure it won’t pay out here.”

“Hallo!” sneered Maitland. “You seem to be taking a leaf out of old Kingsland’s book. And it’s rather rich you setting up to lecture a fellow when you know about as much of this country as I do.”

“Well, we shall both know a little more about it directly,” was the goodhumoured reply, “for in less than half an hour we shall be at anchor.”

The Amatikulu was now nearly abreast of the lofty brushclad headland known as The Bluff, which extends its protecting arm between the port of Durban and the full force of the southwesterly gales. Signals were exchanged with the lighthouse, and, tumbling through the blue and lumpy seas, the steamer with slackened speed dropped cautiously into the roadstead. Then the rattling of the cable, as down went the anchor into half a score fathoms of water, and the voyage was at an end.

Not quite, however. There was still the “bar” to cross, before any could set foot on that beautiful land lying there spread out, an ocean of wooded hills, softly outlined in mellow distance against the cloudless blue. Dotted along the Berea, nestling amid tropical foliage, were scattered the villas of the wellto-do. Below lay the roofs of the busy town, a forest of masts rising above them from the landlocked harbour.

The Amatikulu drew too much water to attempt crossing this bar even in the smoothest of seas. From her decks the lines of roaring, boiling surf, the spume flying in misty clouds from each combing roller, were plainly visible. Visions of battenning down, of a horrible halfhour spent in darkness beneath closed hatchways and crushing, thunderous seas, arose in the minds of her dismayed passengers. And their misgivings underwent no abatement as they watched the puffing little tugboat, tossing like a cockleshell upon the great rollers, or burying her hull out of sight beneath the surf. Out she came, however, right bravely, and soon sheered up alongside, to take off the passengers.

Then followed much leavetaking. Gerard, who had made friends with everybody on board, from the skipper and his mates to the sourvisaged old quartermaster, felt lowspirited enough as he took his seat in the great basket, through the agency of which, by threes and fours at a time, the passengers were swung off the Amatikulu and deposited with a thump on the streaming decks of the little tugboat. Nothing delighted the grinning salts so much as to note the aspect of each human basketful as it tumbled out, scared and flurried, or mirthful and cheery, according to temperament, upon the heaving deck of its new and uncommonly lively restingplace, and the gleeful alacrity with which they hoisted up the empty basket for a load of fresh victims, spoke volumes for the genuineness of the pleasure too many people take in the misfortunes of their neighbours.

“I say, my hearties, I must trouble you to get below,” said the parchmentfaced skipper of the tug, hailing our two young friends. The boat was rapidly nearing the worst part, plunging and rolling in the furiously increasing seas.

“I’d rather stay on deck,” expostulated Gerard.

“Dare say you would and get washed overboard. Then what’d be said to me I’d like to know?”

“Is it as bad as that?” said Harry Maitland, in a scared tone.

“It is so. Time we came out before this, we had a couple of black fellows washed clean overboard. There was a towrope out, luckily for them, or they’d never have come up again. Now then, get below, will you? it’s time to batten.”

Harry needed no second warning. Down he went into the dark, stuffy little cabin. But Gerard still hesitated.

“Let him stay, captain,” said Mr Kingsland, who had overheard the dialogue, and who, moreover, was acquainted with that functionary. “He’ll know how to take care of himself.”

“Oh, all right; he’ll have to, then. Here, mister, stand there forrard the companion, and lay hold of that ringbolt. Hang on to it, mind hang on to it by your teeth and your eyelashes for all you know, or you’ll find yourself overboard in less than a duck’s whisper. We are going to get it lively in a minute.”

So saying, he jumped on to the bridge to take the wheel from his subordinate, while Gerard, resolving to follow that advice which related to “hanging on,” looked around upon the situation.

Up went the boat’s head suddenly with a smooth slide, up a great hill of water, from whose summit it seemed she must leap right on to that of the lofty wooded bluff rising on her port bow. Then a mighty plunge; the foam flew in a deafening hiss from her bows, breaking on and pouring kneedeep along her decks. There was a sharp warning cry. In her wake, rearing up higher and higher as it sped on, came a huge green wall rearing up till it seemed to shut out the very heavens. Watching it with an awestruck fascination, Gerard marked its crest curl, then, with a terrible and appalling crash, it burst full upon their decks.

For a moment he could not have told whether he was overboard, or not. The shock, the continuous pouring rush of the mighty wave by no means over in a moment was so stunning, so bewildering in its effect, that his senses were utterly confused. But for his firm hold of the iron ring, he would have been swept away like a feather. Hold on to it, however, he did, and with good reason. The first shock was but an earnest of what was to follow. Crash after crash, the game little craft burying herself completely beneath the mighty seas, to rise again like a duck, only to be sent staggering under once more, as a

fresh roller broke in bellowing fury upon her. The rattle of her steering chains, the harsh and laboured clank of her engines, the sharp whirr of her propeller spinning clear of the water, the stifled shrieks of terrified female passengers hermetically sealed up in the cabin belowthese alone were the sounds heard through the deafening roar of the surf, the swirling din of cataracts pouring along her heaving decks. A quarter of an hour of this raging, seething cauldron of waters, of buffeting, staggering, plunging, rolling half under, and there was a sudden calm. The terrible bar was passed; and none the worse for her rough usage, the staunch little craft sped blithely over the still waters of the landlocked harbour.

Then, released from their imprisonment, the passengers came swarming on deck, and a woeful sight they presented. Pallid, shaky, grimebesmeared and otherwise the worse for wear, not a man but looked as though he had been turned prematurely out of a hospital, while many of the females were in a fainting and hysterical condition. And small wonder. Here were these unfortunate people sealed up in a square box, whose sole furniture consisted of a wooden bench let into each side, and thus, with nothing in the world to hold on to, literally shaken up as though in a cask rolling downhill, every frantic plunge of the vessel sending them tumbling over and over each other on the floor; many, too, in the wildest throes of seasickness; add to this the darkness, the horrible stifling atmosphere, the hoarse thunder of the great seas shivering the fabric, and the shrieks of the panicstricken women, and it will be seen that the 'tweendecks of a tugboat crossing the Durban bar might almost put Pandemonium itself to the blush.

“Well, Ridgeley, how did you come through it?” said Maitland, emerging very white and shaky. “I believe I’d sooner end my days in this country than go through that awful cabin experience again.”

“You’d have been better above,” said Gerard. “Although I haven’t got a dry stitch on me, and am going to land in our new country wet to the very bones!”

But the semitropical sun was strong and bright, and the seawater warm. No harm would come of ten such wettings. Then the tug was moored to the quay. There was a rush of coolie porters on board, and our two friends, surrounded by all their worldly goods, planted a first footstep on the land which was to be the scene of their start in life.

Chapter Two.

Strangers in a Strange Land.

“Now, young fellows. Bring along your traps this way. Got anything to declare?”

The voice proceeded from a bluff hearty individual wearing a thick grizzled beard and a brassbuttoned coat. He was standing in the doorway of the Customhouse.

“Oh, hang it, I don’t know,” answered Maitland, peevishly, and looking around rather wildly. “Those niggers have cleared out every mortal thing we possess. What they’ve done with them, Heaven only knows. There doesn’t seem to be any one to look after one’s things in this beast of a place.”

The official burst into a loud laugh.

“Any one to look after your things!” he echoed. “You’ve got to do that yourself, sonny, here. But we are going to do that too.”

“I wish you had said so before,” was the illtempered reply. “Well, then, I have got two portmanteaus, a saddlecase and two guncases; a hatbox, a handbag, and two bundles of wraps.”

“All right. Step in here,” said the official, leading the way inside. The luggage was all piled on a counter, and presently Harry, to his intense disgust, found himself nearly five pounds the poorer, which amount he had contributed to the Colonial revenue as duty upon his guns, saddle, and a few other small sundries; while Gerard, whose outfit was of a more modest order, came off considerably lighter.

“Going upcountry, mister?” said the official, as, the examination over, he lit his pipe and strolled into the air again.

“Yes,” answered Gerard. “We want to get to Pietermaritzburg first, though.”

“Going to join the Police, maybe?”

“Well, I have at times thought about that, if nothing better turns up. By the way, perhaps you could tell us of some place here where they would put us up, at a low figure, for the two or three days we are here. These hotels run you up such a bill.”

“So they do. I can, as it happens, send you to a place where you’ll save the ‘chips,’ at any rate. But maybe you’ll find it a bit roughish. Wayne’s, between this and the town almost in the town. They take in boarders there, mostly workingchaps and small storemen, but all decent respectable fellows. But Wayne won’t charge you more than half what an hotel will; and if you don’t mind it being a bit rough, you can’t do better than go there. You can mention I sent you.”

“That’ll do us first rate,” said Gerard.

“All right. I’ll send a couple of boys up with your traps on a trolley. Oh, here’s one just starting up town.”

And hailing two of the native hands, he spoke to them volubly in the Zulu language, with the result that our friends’ luggage was loaded up there and then upon the vehicle.

“Goodbye, and good luck to you, if we don’t meet again. You’ll find a tramcar outside the yard gates,” said the jolly official, holding out his hand.

“Goodbye, and many thanks,” replied Gerard, giving it a hearty shake. An example which Harry Maitland followed, but minus the heartiness.

“What a fellow you are, Ridgeley!” fumed Harry, as soon as they were alone together. “What sort of a doghole is it that that cad is sending us to? Why, he himself said it was full of navvies and counterjumpers. Hanged if I go there! I’m going to the Royal.”

“You must please yourself, of course, Harry,” was the perfectly goodhumoured reply. “Unfortunately I can’t afford to do that. I’ve none too much cash as it is, and when that’s gone, I don’t see the slightest prospect of getting any more until I can make it myself. So, as I’ve got to rough it anyhow, I may as well begin now, and save the ‘chips’ at the same time. It won’t do you any harm either. Try it, for one night at any rate.”

The other sulkily acquiesced. The fact was he did not care to cut adrift from Gerard just then. He felt very much a fish out of water, in that strange country; were he alone, he would feel ten times more so. So comfort must give way to companionship, and he made no further objections.

A few inquiries soon brought them to the object of their search a long low house standing back from the road. It was roofed with corrugated iron, and on each side were wings containing apparently bedrooms, opening onto the high stoep, for the doors stood wide open. In front of the house was a barren looking garden, shaded by a couple of eucalyptus trees, growing one in each corner.

As they swung back the wooden gate which opened into the garden, the owner came out onto the stoep. He was a tall, loosely hung man, with the sallow complexion characteristic of the dwellers in the semitropical coast country of Natal.

“Good day, gentlemen. Did you want to see me? I am Wayne.”

Briefly Gerard explained the object of their visit.

“I don’t quite know what to say,” said Wayne. “We don’t care as a rule to take in boarders for so short a time, besides being pretty full up just now. However, as you’re new to the country, we’ll do the best we can for you, if you can manage with a room between you, that is; it’s not a very big one at that. Here it is.”

He showed them into one of the rooms aforesaid, opening onto the stoep. It certainly was not palatial, being about twelve feet square. Its fittings consisted of a small iron bedstead, a ditto washstand with a zinc basin and ewer, a rather dilapidated chair, a few pegs, and a cupboard.

“But there’s only one bed, and even that is too small for two people,” cried Harry, in dismay.

The proprietor laughed.

“That’s so. One of you will have to shake down on the floor. You can toss up which it’s to be.”

“It will do us all right,” said Gerard. “Now about terms.”

The man named a figure which seemed reasonable enough.

“You see, we could put you in lower if you were going to stop. As it is it wouldn’t pay us.”

“I see. We are quite satisfied,” said Gerard.

“Right. Maybe you’d like to stroll up into the town a bit. Tea is at seven. So long!”

“Pretty offhand, that chap,” remarked Harry, as they walked along the broad dusty road towards the town.

Lines of houses, similar to their new abode, and all built apart in their own grounds, stood on each side of the road, behind hedges of tamarisk or pomegranate. Tall bananas hung out their feathery tufts, and the verandahs twined with cactus or jessamine looked cool and inviting. A stretch of flat marshy land, extending to the blue waters of the landlocked bay, was still dotted with shaggy tufts of the “forest primeval.”

But the streets showed plenty of life in all its human varieties, black or white. The red or yellow dresses of the Indian coolies made quite a glow of colour in the dusty streets. Here and there a tall headringed native from some inland kraal strode down the street, his head in the air, and majestic in the proud possession of a rather cloudy check shirt, his kerries on his shoulder, and a bevy of his obedient womenkind following in his wake. At these original lords of the soil Gerard could not but look with considerable interest, as he noted with approval the massive limbs and stately bearing which seemed to raise the scantily clad savage a head and shoulders above the groups of slightly built, effeminate Orientals through which he somewhat disdainfully took his way. Whites, sallowcomplexioned townspeople, there were too, standing about exchanging conversation rather listlessly, for the close of a hot summer day in Durban is apt to find men not a little languid and here and there a bronzed planter or farmer cantering down the street, bound for his country home among the sugarcanes or the bush.

A couple of hours’ stroll, and our two young friends began to feel a little of the enervating influence of the hot moist climate. Accordingly, having hailed a tramcar, they were soon set down at the door of their new lodgings.

The evening meal had already begun as they entered. Some seven or eight men, of the class described by the friendly Customs official, were seated at a long table, making great play with their knives and forks. The landlord sat at one end of the table and his wife at the other. The latter, a woodenfaced, middleaged person, pointed to two seats which had been kept for the new boarders, and subsided again into silence. The other inmates, after a furtive stare, resumed their knifeandfork play.

The meal, though plain, was extremely good. It consisted of tea, roast mutton, and potatoes, followed by some splendid pineapples. There was also boiled Indian corn served up in the ear, and plenty of bread and jam.

“Never ate ‘green mealies’ before, eh, mister?” sung out Wayne from the other end of the table, noticing that Harry half shied at the edible in question. “You just try one; you’ll find them first rate.”

Some one at the same time handed him the dish. The tender, smoking ears of corn looked tempting enough. Harry helped himself to one, and without much thinking what

he was doing, put it endways into his mouth, and took a bite. A shout of laughter went up from the men. They had been furtively watching him, on the lookout for this. Harry reddened with anger, then tried to look dignified and indifferent.

“Never mind, mister,” cried Wayne, reassuringly. “You ain’t the first by a long chalk who has to learn how to eat green mealies. Half these chaps grinning here did just the same thing at first. Why, Robertson there, alongside you, bit the mealie cob clean in half, and then said it seemed rather dry sort of forageeh, Robertson?”

“That’s just a fact, Wayne,” answered the man referred to, a tall, goodhumoured young mechanic, seated next to Gerard, and with whom the latter had already been having some conversation.

The incident led to a good deal of chaff and bantering recrimination among the men themselves, during the progress of which Harry managed to smooth down his ruffled feelings.

Supper over, a move was made outside. Some of the men started off for the town to amuse themselves for the evening, while the others remained quietly at home, smoking their pipes in the verandah. After the noise and steamy heat of the diningroom, this was an example our two friends were not sorry to follow.

“Well, Harry, you can have the bedstead; I’ll take the floor,” said Gerard, as a couple of hours later they found themselves in possession of their room. “I feel like sleeping anywhere, I’m so tired.”

“I don’t,” grumbled the other, on whom the dearth of comfort, together with the uncongeniality of the position, was beginning to tell. “I feel more inclined to take the first ship home again than to do anything else, I can tell you.”

“Pooh, man, don’t be so easily put off! I suppose that’s what most fellows think at first, though.”

Gerard soon dropped off to sleep. Tired as he was, however, and with every disposition to adapt himself to circumstances, in less than two hours he awoke. The heat of the room, notwithstanding that the window was wide open, was suffocating, and, added to this, he awoke with the sensation of being devoured alive. A subdued groan from his companion, who was tossing restlessly upon his bed, caught his ear.

“Hallo, Harry! what’s the row?”

“Ugh! I was wondering how long you would stand it. I’m being eatendragged out of bed. These infernal mosquitoes!”

That was at the bottom of the mischief, then. In the silence following on his companion’s words, Gerard could hear the shrill trumpet of more than one of these nocturnal pests, winging his way aloft, to lie hidden in some secure corner of the ceiling until quiet should once more prevail, and he could again descend to browse upon his victims to his heart’s content and the repletion of his skin.

“Oh, that’s it, is it!” cried Gerard, striking a light with alacrity. “By Jove, I’m bitten all over!” he went on, examining his hands and chest, and also becoming aware of the existence of several lumps upon his head and face.

“So am I,” groaned Harry. “I haven’t been able to snatch a wink of sleep this blessed night. Just look at the brutes!”

In the candlelight, some halfdozen of the tiny venomous insects could be seen floating in the air. A good many more were on the ceiling.

“Why, hang it, I always thought they gave one mosquito curtains in countries like this!” said Gerard, “andwhy, Harry, you’ve got one. How is it we didn’t spot the thing before?”

“Have I? Where? Whatthis thing?”

“Yes, of course. Let’s see what it’s good for.”

There was a fold of gauze netting at the head of the bedstead. This, on further investigation, was found to be large enough to protect the head and shoulders of the sleeper, and Gerard duly arranged it as best he knew how for the benefit of his companion.

“There you are, old chap. Now you’ll be all rightonly it’s rather like shutting the stable door after the horse is stolen. I’ll tuck my head under the sheet, and dodge them that way.”

He returned to his shakedown, and put out the light. He was just dozing off, when another exclamation on the part of his companion aroused him.

“What’s the row now?” he cried.

“Row? I should think there was. Just listen to that fellow next door ‘sawing planks.’”

A shrill, strident, rasping snore came through the partition, which was constructed of very thin boarding. A most exasperating snore withal, and one calculated to drive a light sleeper to the verge of frenzy.

“Well, I’m afraid we can do nothing against that,” said Gerard, ruefully.

Nor could they. And what with the stifling heat, the mosquito bites, and that maddening snore, our two young friends had a very bad night of it indeed, and but little sleep fell to their lot. Harry Maitland, fagged and disgusted, was not slow to air his grievances to the full the next morning on meeting Wayne. But that unfeeling individual only laughed.

“So!” he said. “Yes, it’s always that way. Mosquitoes are always death on a new man out from home. They don’t think much of us old stagers when they can get fresh blood. But never mind. You’ll soon get used to that.”

Which was all the sympathy they met with.

Chapter Three.

A Friend.

“Well, youngsters! And what have you been doing with yourselves since you got ashore?”

Thus a jolly voice behind them, and a hand fell upon the shoulder of each. They were returning from a couple of hours' row among the bushy islets of the bay, and were strolling down the main street of Durban, stopping here and there to look at a shop window crammed with quaint curios and Kafir truck, or displaying photographic views representing phases of native life and scenes upcountry.

“Mr Kingsland!” cried Gerard, turning with a lively sense of satisfaction. “Why, I thought you were going straight through.”

“So I wasso I was. But I ran against some fellows directly I landed, and they wouldn't hear of my leaving Durban yesterdayor today either. And now you'd better come along with me to the Royal and have some lunch.”

This invitation met with cordial acceptance. Both were beginning to feel rather out of it, knowing nobody in the place. The breezy geniality of their shipboard acquaintance did not strike Harry as officious or obtrusive now.

“We shall be delighted,” he said. “The fact is, we are none too comfortable where we are. I, for one, don't care how soon we get out of it.”

“Ehwhat! Why, where are you putting up?”

“At a precious roughandtumble sort of shop,” answered Harry resentfully, the recollection of the mosquitoes still fresh and green. “A fellow named Wayne, who keeps a sort of boardinghouse for navvies”

“Wayne! At Wayne's, are you? I know Wayne well. Smartish fellow he used to bemade a little money at transportriding (Note 1), but couldn't stick to itcouldn't stick to anythingnot enough staying power in him,” went on Mr Kingsland, with that openhearted garrulity on the subject of his neighbours' affairs which characterises a certain stamp of colonial. “And you find it roughish, eh?”

“I should rather think we did,” rejoined Harry. And then he proceeded to give a feeling account of his experiences, especially with regard to the mosquitoes.

Mr Kingsland laughed heartily.

“You’ll soon get used to that,” he said. “Here we are. And now for tiffin.”

They entered the hotel just as the gong sounded. Several men lounged about the hall in cane chairs. To most of these their entertainer nodded, speaking a few words to some. Then he piloted them to a table in a cool corner.

“And now what do you propose doing?” said Mr Kingsland, when lunch was well in progress. “Stay on here and look around for a few days, or get away further upcountry?”

“The last for choice,” answered Gerard. “We have had about enough of Durban already. You see, we don’t know a soul here,” he hurried to explain, lest the other should think him fastidious or faultfinding; for there is no point on which the colonial mind is so touchy as on that of the merits or demerits of its own particular town or section.

“And feel rather ‘out of it.’ Quite so,” rejoined Mr Kingsland. “But didn’t you say, Ridgeley, you had friends in Maritzburg to whom you were consigned?”

“Not that exactly. I have a distant relative up there Anstey his name is perhaps you know him? I believe he manages a store, or something of that kind.”

“Nno, I can’t say I do. There’s Anstey out Greytown way; but he’s a farmer.”

“Oh no, that’s not the man. This one hasn’t got an ounce of farming in him. The fact is, I don’t know him. My mothermy people, that is thought he might be able to put me into the way of doing something, so I have got a letter to him.”

“And what is the ‘something’ you are thinking of doing, Ridgeley?” said Mr Kingsland, fixing his eyes upon Gerard’s face.

“I’m afraid I must take whatever turns up think myself lucky to get it. But, for choice, I should like above all things to get on a farm.”

“H’m! Most young fellows who come out here are keen on that at first. They don’t all stick to it, though not they. They begin by fancying it’s going to be no end of a jolly life, all riding about and shooting. But it isn’t, not by any means. It’s regular downright hard work, and a rough life at that.”

“That I’m quite prepared for,” said Gerard. “I only wish I could get the chance.”

“Rather. It just is rough work,” went on Mr Kingsland, ignoring the last remark. “There’s no such thing as saying to a fellow ‘Do this,’ and he does it. You’ve got to show him the way and begin by doing it yourself. You’ve got to off with your coat and work as hard as the rest. How do you like the idea of that, in a blazing sun about as hot again as it is today? Eh, Maitland?”

“Oh, I suppose it’s all right,” said Harry, rather uncomfortably, for this aspect of the case had struck him as not encouraging. “But I don’t know what I shall do yet. I think I’ll look around a bit first. It’s a mistake to be in too great a hurry over matters of this kind, don’t you know. And I’ve got a lot of letters of introduction.”

Mr Kingsland looked at him curiously for a moment, as if about to make a remark, and then thought better of it. He turned to Gerard again.

“If I were you, Ridgeley, if I might offer you a bit of advice I wouldn’t stop on here. Get on to Maritzburg as soon as you can and look up your relative. Anyway, you can’t do any good by hanging on here. Now, there’s a man I know starting from Pinetown with a load of goods. He’d give you a passage up there on his waggon for the cost of your keep, and that’s a mere trifle; and you’d have the advantage of seeing the country and at the same time getting an insight into waggon travelling. But you’ll have to leave here by an afternoon train. He starts from Pinetown tonight.”

“It’s awfully kind of you, Mr Kingsland,” said Gerard. “There’s nothing I should like better. How shall we find him?”

“That’s easily done. Pinetown isn’t such a big place. Dawes, his name is John Dawes. I’ll give you a line to him. If you won’t take anything more I’ll go and write it now.”

Just before they took leave of each other Mr Kingsland found an opportunity of speaking to Gerard apart.

“Look here, Ridgeley, I don’t say I shall be able to help you in that notion of yours about getting on a farm, but I may be. You see I’ve got a couple of boys of my own, and between them and myself we haven’t room for another hand on the place. I won’t even ask you to come and see us not just now, because the sooner you get into harness the better. But afterwards, whenever you have a week or two to spare, we shall be delighted to see you, whenever you can come, and as long as you can stay. That’s a very first-rate idea of yours to get your foot in the stirrup before you think of anything else; and when you’ve got your foot in the stirrup, keep it there. Stick to it, my lad, stick to it, and you’ll do well. One word more. This is a deuce of a country for fellows getting into a free-and-easy, let-things-slide sort of way I say so, though I belong to it myself. Now, don’t

you let any such influences get hold of you. You've got to make your waygo straight through and make it, and while that's your motto you have always got one friend in this country at any rate, and his name is Bob Kingsland. Well, Maitland," as Harry rejoined them, "ready to start on such short marching orders, eh?"

"Rather. Anything to get away from those beastly mosquitoes."

They took leave of their kind entertainer and returned to their lodgings to pack up their traps.

"Rattling good chap, old Kingsland," said Gerard, enthusiastically, when they were alone again.

The straight commonsense counsel, the kind and friendly interest in him and his welfare, and that on the part of a comparative stranger, on whose good offices he had not a shadow of a claim, touched him deeply. Moreover, he felt cheered, morally braced up for whatever start in life might lie before him. There and then he resolved more firmly than ever that whatever his right hand should find to do, he would do it with all his might.

Gerard Ridgeley's story was that of many another youngster who has begun life under similar circumstances. He was the eldest son of a professional man, a struggling surgeon in a provincial town, who had recently died, leaving his widow with a family of five and the scantiest of means whereon to maintain, let alone educate, the same. His father, an easygoing thriftless man, had fixed on no definite profession for him, dimly reckoning on the chance that "something was sure to turn up" when the boy was old enough. But the only unexpected thing that did "turn up" was the doctor's sudden death in the prime of his years, and the consequent straitened circumstances of his widow and family.

So Gerard was removed from schoolindeed it was time he should be in any case, for he had turned eighteen. The good offices of an uncle were invoked on his behalf, and somewhat grudgingly given. He was offered his choice between a stool in a countinghouse and a free passage to any British colony, with an outfit and a few pounds to start him fair upon landing, and being a fine, strong, manly lad, he had no hesitation in choosing the latter alternative. Then it became a question of selecting the colony, and here the choice became perplexing. But Mrs Ridgeley remembered that a distant relation of hers had emigrated to Natal some years earlier. It was true she hardly knew this relative; still "blood was thicker than water," and he might be able to give Gerard a helping hand. So it was decided to ship the boy to Natal accordingly.

It was hard to part with him. He was the eldest, and just of an age to be helpful. Still, there were four more left, and, as it happened, Mrs Ridgeley was not a woman who ever displayed over much feeling. She was a good woman and a sensible one, but not ostentatiously affectionate. So the parting between them, though hard, was not quite so hard as some others. One fact is certain. It was the best thing in the world for Gerard himself.

Harry Maitland, on the other hand, was the son of a wellto do London clergyman. From a pecuniary point of view, therefore, his chances and prospects were immeasurably better than those of his companion. He would inherit a little money by and by, of which prospective advantage, however, he was wisely kept in ignorance. He, too, had been sent to the colonies at his own wish, and we think we have shown enough of his character and disposition to suggest grave doubts in our readers' minds as to whether he would do any good when he got there. But whether he does or not will appear duly in the course of our narrative.

Note 1. The carriage of goods by oxwaggon, which before the day of railways was the sole method, is thus termed.

Chapter Four.

John Dawes, TransportRider.

No time was to be lost in preparing for their start, and also in informing their landlord of their change of plans. This Gerard did with some inward trepidation, knowing that they were expected to make a longer stay. But he need have felt none. That philosophic individual manifested neither surprise nor disappointment. Whether they left or whether they stayed was a matter of supreme indifference to him. He wished them goodbye and good luck in the same happygolucky way in which he had first greeted them, and filled up a fresh pipe.

Though only about a dozen miles from Durban, it took them upwards of an hour to reach Pinetown. But they did not mind this. The line ran through lovely bush country, winding round the hills often at a remarkably steep gradient; now intersecting sugar plantations, with deepverandahed bungalowlike houses, and coolies in bright clothing and large turbans at work among the tall canes; now plunging through a mass of tangled forest. Every now and then, too, a glimpse was afforded of the blue, landlocked bay, and the vessels rolling at their anchorage beyond the lines of surf in the roadstead outside.

“There lies the old Amatikulu,” said Gerard, as his eye caught the black hull and schooner rig of a steamer among these. “We shan’t see the old barkie again, and perhaps the sea either, for many a long day.”

Pinetown, as Mr Kingsland had said, was not much of a place, being a large straggling village, greatly augmented by the huts and tents of a cavalry regiment then quartered there, and they had no difficulty in finding John Dawes. Him they ran to earth in the barroom of an hotel, where, with three or four cronies, he was drinking success to his trip in a parting and friendly glass. He was a man of medium height, straight and well proportioned. His face was tanned to the hue of copper, and he wore a short sandy beard, cut to a point. He took the letter which Gerard tendered him, glanced through the contents, then nodded.

“All right; I start in two hours’ time. How’s Kingsland?”

Gerard replied that, to the best of his belief, the latter was extremely well.

“Good chap, Kingsland!” pronounced the transportrider, decisively. “Say, mister, what’ll you drink?”

“WellthanksI think I’ll take a lemonade,” answered Gerard; not that he particularly wanted it, but he did not like to seem unfriendly by refusing.

“Right. And what’s yours?”

“Oha brandy and soda,” said Harry.

“Mister, you ain’t one of them Good Templar chaps, are you?” said another man to Gerard.

“I don’t know quite what they are, I’m afraid.”

“Why, teetotalers, of course. Chaps who don’t drink.”

“Oh no. I’m not a teetotaler, but I don’t go in much for spirits.”

“Quite right, young fellow, quite right,” said another. “You stick to that, and you’ll do. There’s a sight too many chaps out here who are a deal too fond of ‘lifting the elbow.’ Take my advice, and let grog alone, and you’ll get along.”

“Well, here’s luck!” said the transportrider, nodding over his glass. “Now, you turn up at my waggon in two hours’ time. It’s away on the flat there at the outspan just outside the town; any one’ll tell you. Got any traps?”

“Yes.”

“Well, better pick up a couple of boys and trundle them across. And if I were you I should get a good dinner here before you start. I believe that’s the gong going now. So long!”

Having taken the transportrider’s advice, and with the help of the landlord procured a couple of native boys as porters, the two were landed, bag and baggage, at Dawes’s waggon. That worthy merely nodded, with a word of greeting, and having seen their luggage safely stowed among the bales and cases which, piled skyhigh, constituted his cargo, gave orders to inspan. Then Gerard, always observant, noted how the oxen, to the number of sixteen, were driven up and ranged into line by one native, and kept there while another and Dawes placed a noosed reim, or thong of raw hide, round the horns of each, and in a trice the yoke was adjusted to each neck, for the animals were veteran roadsters, and each knew his place. The yoking was a simple process. Two flat wooden pegs, called “skeys,” passed through the yoke on each side of the neck, which was kept in its place between them by a twisted strip of raw hide passing underneath just below the

throat, and hitched in a nick in the “skey.” The motive power is that of pushing, the yoke resting against the slight hump above the animal’s withers.

“TrekHambake!” cried the native driver, raising his voice in a wild longdrawn yell. “EnglaandScotlandMofBokvelKwaaimanTreek!”

The long whip cracked like pistol shots, again and again. As the driver ran through the whole gamut of names, each ox instinctively started forward at the sound of its own, and the ponderous, creaking, loadedup structure rolled heavily forward. Other waggons stood outspanned along the flat, but mostly deserted, for their owners preferred the more genial atmosphere of the hotel bar, and the native servants in charge had all foregathered at one fire.

“Like to ride, eh? or would you rather walk?” said Dawes, lighting his pipe. “Maybe, though, you’ll find it a bit jolty riding, at first. It’s a fine night, though.”

Gerard answered that they would rather walk; and, indeed, such locomotion was infinitely preferable to the slow rumbling roll of the waggon, crawling along at just under three miles per hour. And the night was fine indeed. The air was deliciously cool, the dim outline of the rolling downs was just visible in the light of the myriad shining stars which spangled the heavens in all the lavish brilliance of their tropical beauty. Here and there a grass fire glowed redly in the distance. Now and again the weird cry of some strange bird or beast arose from the surrounding veldt, and this, with the creaking ramble of the waggon, the deep bass of the native voices, chatting in their own tongue, made our two English lads realise that they were indeed in Africa at last. There was a glorious sense of freedom and exhilaration in the very novelty of the surroundings.

“Well, this is awfully jolly!” pronounced Gerard, looking round.

“Eh! Think so, do you?” said John Dawes. “How would you like to be a transportrider yourself?”

“I believe I’d like nothing better,” came the prompt reply. “It must be the jolliest, healthiest life in the world.”

“So?” said the other, with a dry chuckle. “Especially when it’s been raining for three days, and the road is one big mudhole, when your waggon’s stuck wheeldeep, and no sooner do you dig it out than in goes another wheel. Why, I’ve been stuck that way, coming over the Berg”the speaker meant the Drakensberg“and haven’t made a dozen miles in a fortnight. And cold, too! Why, for a week at a time I’ve not known what it was

to have a dry stitch on me, and the rain wouldn't allow you to light a fire. Jolly healthy life that, eh?"

"Cold!" broke from both the listeners, in astonishment. "Is it ever cold here?"

"Isn't it? You just wait till you get away from this steaming old sponge of a coast belt. Why, you get snow on the Berg, yards deep. I've known fellows lose three full spans of oxen at a time, through an unexpected fall of snow. Well, that's one of the sides of transportriding. Another is when there hasn't been rain for months, and the veldt's as bare as the skull of a baldheaded man. Then you may crawl along, choking with dust, mile after mile, day after day, the road strewn like a paperchase, with the bones of oxen which have dropped in the yoke or been turned adrift to die, too weak to go any further and every waterhole you come to nothing but a beastly mess of peasoup mud, lucky even if there isn't a dead dog in the middle of it. My word for it, you get sick of the endless blue of the sky and the redbrown of the veldt, of the poor devils of oxen, staggering along with their tongues outwalking skeletonscreeping their six miles a day, and sometimes not that. You get sick of your own very life itself."

"That's another side to the picture with a vengeance," said Harry.

"Rather. Don't you jump away with the idea that the life of a transportrider, or any other life in this blessed country, is all plumjam; because, if so, you'll tumble into the most lively kind of mistake."

Thus chatting, they travelled on; and, at length, after the regulation four hours' trek, by which time it was nearly midnight, Dawes gave orders to outspan.

The waggon was drawn just off the road, and the oxen, released from their yokes, were turned loose for a short graze, preparatory to being tied to the trekchain for the night. Then, while the "leader" was despatched to fill a bucket from the adjacent waterhole, Dawes produced from a locker some bread and cold meat.

"Dare say you'll be glad of some supper," he said. "It's roughish feed for you, maybe; but it's rougher still when there's none. Fall to."

They did so, with a will. Even Harry Maitland, who had started with an inclination to turn up his nose at such dry provender, was astonished to find how cold salt beef and rather stale bread could taste, when eaten with an appetite born of four hours' night travel.

“Now, you’d better turn in,” said the transportrider, when they had finished. “You’ll get about four hours’ clear snooze. We inspan at daybreak, and trek on till about ten or eleven. Then we lieby till three or four in the afternoon, or maybe longer, and trek the best part of the night. It depends a good deal on the sort of day it is.”

A small portion of the back of the waggon was covered by a tilt; this constituted the cabin of this ship of the veldt. It contained lockers and bags to hold the larder supplies, and a kartel or framework of rawhide thongs, stretched from side to side, supported a mattress and blankets. This Dawes had given up to his two passengers, he himself turning in upon the ground.

Hardly had the heads of our two friends touched the pillow than they were sound asleep, and hardly were they asleepat least, so it seemed to themthan they were rudely awakened. Their first confused impression was that they were aboard the Amatikulu again in a gale of wind. The heaving and swaying motion which seemed half to fling them from their bed, with every now and again a sickening jolt, the close, hot atmosphere, the harsh yells, and the ramble, exactly bore out this idea. Then Gerard sat upright with a start. It was broad daylight.

“Hallo!” quoth Dawes, putting his head into the waggontent. “Had a good sleep? We’ve been on trek about half an hour. I didn’t see the use in waking you, but there’s a roughish bit of road just here. I expect the stones shook you awakeeh?”

“Rather. Ohh!” groaned Harry, whom at that moment a violent jerk banged against the side of the waggon. “Let’s get out of this, though. It’s awful!”

“Hold on a minute. We are just going through a drift.”

They looked out. The road sloped steeply down to the edge of a small river which swept purling between reedfringed banks. The foremost oxen were already in the water. There was a little extra yelling and whipcracking, and the great vehicle rolled ponderously through, and began toilsomely to mount the steep ascent on the other side. Gerard’s glance looked longingly at the water.

“Better wait till we outspan,” said Dawes, reading this. “We can’t stop now, and by the time you overtook us you’d be so fagged and hot you’d get no good at all out of your swim.”

The sun was hardly an hour high, and already it was more than warm. The sky was an unbroken and dazzling blue, and on every side lay the roll of the open veldt in a shimmer of heat, with here and there a farmhouse standing amid a cluster of blue

gumtrees. The road seemed to be making a gradual ascent. Our two friends felt little inclined for walking now, for the beat of the morning, combined with short allowance of sleep during the past two nights, was beginning to tell.

“Jump up here, now,” said Dawes, flinging a couple of rugs on top of the load of goods. “Sun or no sun, you’ll be better off than in the tent. Canvas, with the sun on it, is almost as baking as corrugated iron. Hold hard. Wait till she stops,” he warned, having given orders to that effect. “Old stagers, like me, can jump on and off while trekking along, but you’d get under the wheels sure and then what’d Kingsland say?”

“You see,” he went on, when they were safely and comfortably on their perch, “in getting up and down by the disselboom you have to be fairly smart. You just get inside the fore wheel and walk along with the machine, and jump quietly up. Getting down’s the worst, because, if you hit the disselboom or slip on it, ten to one you get shot off bang in front of the wheel, and then nothing on earth’ll save you, for you can’t stop one of these waggon under fifty yards, sometimes not even then.”

“By Jove! Do many fellows come to grief that way?” asked Gerard.

“Heaps. You can hardly take up a paper anywhere without seeing a paragraph headed ‘The Disselboom again.’ But generally it’s when fellows are rather full uptaken a drop too much you understand. Not always, of course. And when you think of the weight these waggons carry this one’s loaded close on eleven thousand pounds, now No, you’ve no show at all.”

Then at the morning’s outspan Gerard, always observant, and now keenly thirsting for experience, noted every detail how there was a regular routine even in this apparently happy-go-lucky species of travel; how when the oxen were turned out to graze, the “driver” set to work to build the fire, while the “leader” took the bucket and went away to fetch water from the nearest stream or waterhole; how the natives received their daily ration of Indian corn meal, subsequently to be made into a thick stirabout and eaten piping hot from the threelegged pot in which it was cooked. He noted, too, with considerable satisfaction, how Dawes produced from a locker a goodly supply of raw mutton chops, which were set to frizzle on the fire against the time they should have returned from their swim, which with the remainder of last night’s loaf and a steaming kettle of strong black coffee, made up the most succulent breakfast he thought he had ever eaten in his life, so thorough an appetiser is open air, and novelty, and travel. And then, after a long lieby and a nap in the heat of the day, he begged to be allowed to bear a hand in the process of inspanning, and felt as proud as Punch when he found himself holding a couple of reins, at the end of which were as many big black oxen, even though

he had but a confused idea as to what he should do with them. Still, he was doing something, and that was what he wanted to realise.

And then, again, when they were on the move, he induced Dawes to initiate him into the mysteries of waggondriving. These, as that worthy explained, did not consist, as many stupid Kafirs and some stupider white men seemed to think, in running alongside of the span and flourishing the whip, and frantically yelling and slashing away indiscriminately. A good driver, with an average wellbroken span, need hardly yell inordinately, or use the whip at all. Each ox would instinctively start forward at the sound of its own name, and if it grew slack or negligent a touch with the voerslag (the cutting, tapering end of the lash.) was sufficient. A clever driver could put his voerslag as deftly and surely as a troutfisher could his fly at least, as to the latter, so he had heard, added Dawes; for he had never been in England himself and, of course, had never seen trout fishing. But Gerard, who was a very fair flyfisher, saw the point at once, and soon came to handle the whip in such fashion as to show promise of eventually becoming as proficient as Dawes himself. True, he managed to clip himself over the ear two or three times; but then every beginner is bound to do this, so he didn't mind. On Harry, however, such reverses produced a different effect. He gave up the whole thing in disgust, and voted waggondriving a beastly difficult thing and not at all in his line. Wherein, again, the diversity of their respective characters came out.

Now and again they would pass other waggon on the road, either in motion or outspanned, or would pass through a small township, where John Dawes would drop behind for half an hour for a glass of grog with a few of his fellowcraftsmen and a chat at the hotel bar. These would always extend a frank hand and a hearty greeting to the two young strangers; for, however rough externally it may occasionally be, the bearing of the South African colonist towards the newly arrived "Britisher," especially if the latter be young and inexperienced, is, as a rule, all that is kindly and goodnatured. But it was the time of the evening outspan that these two would enjoy most heartily. Then it was that with the darkness, and the wide and to them still mysterious veldt stretching around, with the stars burning bright and clear in the dusky vault above, and the red glow of the campfire shedding a circle of light which intensified the surrounding gloom then it was that they realised that they were indeed "camping out," and no makebelieve. And John Dawes, with his pipe in full blast, made a firstrate campfire companion, for his experiences in his own line had been large and chequered. He knew every inch of the country for hundreds of miles. He had been away to the north, past Swaziland, and had tried his luck on the new goldfields in the Zoutpansberg. He had made a couple of trading trips in the Zulu country, and knew many of the Zulu chiefs and indunas. Many a tale and strange incident would he narrate in his own dry fashion of flooded rivers and the perils of the road; of whole spans of oxen laid low in the yoke by one stroke of lightning, or of a comrade struck down at his side in the same way; of lively ructions

with surly Boers and their retainers, when the latter strove to interfere with their right of outspan; of critical situations arising out of the craft and greed of native chieftains, while practically in the power of lawless and turbulent bands of savages during trading operations and to these our two wayfarers listened with the most unfeigned delight.

But from Pinetown to Pietermaritzburg is no great distance even for a bullockwaggon, and on the afternoon of the second day they came in sight of the capital, an area of blue gums and straggling iron roofs, lying in a vast hollow. Both were unfeignedly sorry that the journey was over. They felt like being cast adrift again, and said as much to their new friend as they took a right cordial leave of him.

“Well, I’ve been very glad to have you,” said the latter. “Been sort of company like. What do you think you’re likely to be doing with yourselves now you are here, if I may ask?”

“I want first of all to find out a relative of mine,” said Gerard. “I’ve a letter to him. Anstey, his name is. Do you know him?”

A queer smile came into the transportrider’s face at the name.

“Anstey, is it?” he said. “So he’s a relation of yours? Well, he’s easily found. He runs a Kafir store out beyond Howick, near the Umgeni Fall. Does he know you’re coming?”

“He knows I’m coming some time, but not to the day.”

Again that queer expression in John Dawes’s weatherbeaten countenance. Gerard thought nothing of it then; afterwards he had reason to remember it.

“Umjilo’s the name of his place. You can’t miss it. Well, goodbye, both of you. We may knock up against each other again or we may not; it’s a ram world, and not a very big one either. I wish you good luck. I’ll send your traps down first thing in the morning.”

With which adieu, cordial if practical, John Dawes turned away to greet a batch of old acquaintances who had just hailed him; while his late passengers took their way townwards, both agreeing thoroughly upon one point, viz. that the transportrider was “a downright real jolly good fellow.”

Chapter Five.

Anstey's Store.

“Here! Hi! you two Johnny Raws! What the devil are you doing there, tramping down all my green mealies? Get out of that, will you?” And a volley of curses emphasised the injunction, as the speaker hurried up to the scene of the damage.

The latter was a goodsized mealie patch adjoining the roadside, through whose battered and brokendown fence had plunged a horsea stubborn and refractory horse withal, whose shies and plunges sorely tried the equilibrium of his unskilled rider. That rider was no other than our friend Harry Maitland. Gerard, who was a better horseman, had kept his steed in the road, and was shouting encouragement to his comrade, who, hot and fagged with a long ride on a somewhat rough animal, now found it all he could do to keep his seat.

The aggrieved proprietor's voice rose to a perfect yell of fury as he gained the spot and noted the havoc wrought. Mealie stalks were snapping off short, one after the other, and a broad, trampled, and broken patch, as if the place had been roughly mown, marked the passage of the horse. Mad with rage, he picked up a stone.

“Here, drop that, will you?” cried Gerard, warningly.

Too late. The stone whizzed, and striking the horse on the hind quarters, caused that quadruped to kick out wildly. Harry was deposited in a face among the broken stalks, while his steed, thus relieved, tore away snorting and kickingcrashing through the standing crop with a diabolical indifference to the feelings of its owner which made the latter foam again.

“Come out of that!” he raved, as poor Harry began ruefully and rather gingerly to pick himself up. “Come out of it. I'll have twenty pound out of you for this little bit of fun. But first of all I'm going to give you the biggest licking you ever had in your life, you spickandspan popinjay masher!”

“We'll see about that part of the business,” said Gerard, who, seeing the hostile turn of affairs, had dismounted and hitched his bridle to a convenient rail. “If there's going to be any fighting, it'll have to be done fair, you understand.”

“What the blazes have you got to say to it anyhow?” cried the man, turning to Gerard, but with something of the light of battle gone out of his unprepossessing countenance as he took in the wellknit frame and determined aspect of his younger opponent.

“Just this,” said Gerard. “My chum there’s shaken by his fall, and I doubt if he’s much good with his fists or a match for you. So if there’s any licking to be done, just start here. See?”

But the man apparently did not see. He hesitated, staring at the speaker, his features working with rage. He was a hardlooking customer of about forty, with shifty eyes and a shaggy sandy beard. His raiment withal was slovenly, consisting of moleskin trousers none too clean, a collarless flannel shirt, also none too clean, and a slouch hat.

“Why don’t you fence your confounded mealiefield, or whatever you call it?” said Gerard, angrily, for although a goodtempered fellow he had all the average young Englishman’s objection to being bullied or crowed over. “You deserve all that’s happened for keeping a place like that practically unfenced, for one can’t call that brokendown thing a fence. And right by the roadside, too! Shouldn’t wonder if it was left that way on purpose.”

The man yelled out a fresh torrent of blasphemy. The last remark had allunwittingly hit the right nail on the head. That mealie patch was a source of revenue to its owner beyond the mere value of its crop. But he hesitated to come to close quarters.

“Fence or no fence,” he shouted, “I’m going to have twenty pound out of that papercollared, monkeyheaded son of a bandbox. His brute of a horse has done more than twice that amount of damage. So shell out, Shinyboots!”

Harry, to whom this remark was addressed, though, as his comrade had said, somewhat shaken by his fall, was quite alive to the situation. He realised what a tower of strength lay in Gerard’s thews and sinews, and was not at all unwilling that his comrade should fight his battles for him. So he answered with a spirit born of that confidence.

“Keep your confounded cheek to yourself, you dirtylooking clodhopper. Twenty pounds! Why, I’ll summon you for shying stones at me and starting off my horse. And if he’s lost you’ll have to pay for him.”

“Look here,” said Gerard, “if you think you’ve any claim upon us, we are staying in Maritzburg, at the Imperial. I’ll give you our names and addresses, and you can do what you like. But we are not going to stick fooling around here all day.”

“Oh, you’re not, eh? We’ll soon see about that.” And turning, he began bawling out something in a language they did not understand.

A house stood back from the road. This building they had at first hardly noticed. Now, from around it, a swarm of natives were pouring, about a dozen of whom, leaving the rest, came running down to the scene of the dispute.

“This is getting serious,” said Gerard to himself. “I’m afraid we’re in for a ripe old row.”

The natives had surrounded our two friends. They were mostly wellsetup, stalwart fellows, some clad in European clothes, others wearing only the mútya, a sort of apron which hangs from the loins before and behind. All carried sticks.

The white man was haranguing them vehemently in their own tongue in fact, binding them to his interests by promises of grog and tobacco. Gerard cast an eager glance up and down the long riband of dusty road, over the shimmering expanse of sunbaked veldt. But in vain. No help need be looked for from outside. He resolved to make one more appeal to reason.

“Look here,” he began.

But the other stopped him short.

“Shut up. We don’t want any more indaba. Are you going to fork out or are you not? because, if not, we are going to take your horse and yourselves too. There are enough of us, you see.”

“Possibly there are,” said Gerard. “But before you attempt anything foolish, just hear what I’ve got to say. My name’s Ridgeley, and”

“Eh? What!” The other was staring at him openmouthed now. “What did you say your name was?”

“Ridgeley Gerard Ridgeley,” was the reply, in some astonishment at the sudden transition in the other’s demeanour.

“Why on earth didn’t you say so before?”

“Well, I tried to, but you wouldn’t let me get in a word edgewise. Isn’t there a Mr Anstey living somewhere about here? Umjilo is the name of his place, I believe.”

“Quite right, Gerard, quite right. There is. I’m Mr Anstey, and yonder’s Umjilo” pointing to the house before referred to. “And so you’re young Ridgeley! Well, well!”

Gerard started and stared, then stared again. His countenance exhibited surprise, relief, amazement, but no satisfaction; relief at this fortunate termination of their difference, yet a profound sense of disappointment. That this seedy, disreputable-looking rowdy should turn out to be the relative of whom he was in search was something of a shock, and that such a specimen as this should have it in its power to advance his prospects in life seemed incredible. His hopes sank to zero.

“Lord, now, to think of that!” went on Anstey. “And to think how near we came to punching each other’s heads! You’d never have dreamt it, eh, Gerard? I’m a bit of a rough chap, I’m afraid. Years of this cursed country and climate are apt to touch up a man’s temper and liver; but I mean no harm to you, no. We haven’t shaken hands yet.”

Gerard reddened, as he came to himself, and held out his hand eagerly. Young as he was, his natural acumen had detected a false ring underlying the assumed heartiness of the other’s speech, and he feared by his manner to show it.

“Now, introduce your friend. Ah, very sorry, sir, we should have had any difference of opinion. Shake hands and forget all about it. I’ll soon have your horse brought back. And now, come round to the house and have some dinner. It’s a bit rough, maybe, but very much at your service.”

The almost deferential tone of this apology completely availed to salve Harry Maitland’s wounded dignity, and he began to see in his whilom foe, but now prospective host, an uncommonly sensible fellow, shrewd enough to appreciate to a hair his own sense of self-importance. The natives, with many surprised ejaculations over this unlooked-for turn events had taken, dispersed by twos and threes, not, however, before Anstey had despatched a couple of them to hunt up the runaway steed.

“Come on up to the house,” he went on. “I dare say you’ve learnt not to expect much by this time—not much in the way of comfort, that is. When did you land?”

“Only a few days ago,” answered Gerard. “We came straight on here at once. Travelled up to Maritzburg in a waggon, chartered a horse apiece, and came out to find you.”

“Travelled up in a waggon, did you say? Whose waggon?”

“John Dawes’s. A rattling good chap. Do you know him?”

“Used to. But, between you and me, Gerard, he’s not really much of a chap. Did he seem to know me?”

The covert anxiety of the tone brought back to Gerard's mind the queer expression which the mention of his relative had called up to the transportrider's face. Still it was possible that the two men had but quarrelled. At the same time, do what he would he could not quite overcome a growing aversion to Anstey. This was hardly promising for their future relationship.

"This is my crib," said Anstey, as they approached the house. "The store's at the back. We'll go round and look at it presently. Come in; come in."

The house was a rough, square, onestoreyed building, roofed over with corrugated iron. A low stoep ran round the front of it, and the door opened into the sittingroom direct, without the intervention of any entrance hall. The floor was of hard clay covered with matting, and the furniture of the very plainest. Accommodation seemed strictly limited, for besides the room which did duty as the proprietor's bedroom there was only one other, and it was half full of lumber of every description. The whole of the back part of the house was used for the trading store, and from this came a foetid and pungent whiff, mingled with the deep bass hum of native voices.

While they dined on a baked shoulder of mutton, with pumpkin and sweet potatoes Anstey questioned his young guests somewhat profusely as to their plans and prospects. Gerard, whose rising aversion had engendered in him suspicions of which he was more than half ashamed, fancied he detected a slight change of manner on his host's part, as he frankly avowed his own utter lack of prospects or means, and a corresponding increase of cordiality towards Harry Maitland, who was not prone to underrate himself or his possessions.

"I remember your mother perfectly well, Gerard," said Anstey. "But I never saw your father. So they shipped you off to shift for yourself, eh? Well, we must see what can be done for you. And what are your plans, Maitland?"

"Oh, I must first go round and look up a lot of people I've got introductions to," was the airy reply. "Nothing like looking around a bit before making up one's mind, eh?"

"Quite right, quite right," nodded their host approvingly, inking another glass of grog, which, by the way, was the sixth he had taken since he came in. Then he proposed they should light their pipes and stroll round and look in at the store.

The latter was a long low room, with a counter running through it. This, as also the shelves lining the walls, was covered with goods blankets and rugs, canisters of coffee and sugar, brass wire and bangles and every species of native "track," biscuit and

paraffin tins. Strings of beads of every conceivable hue, overcoats, and flannel shirts, and moleskin trousers hung from pegs, and clusters of reims, or rawhide thongs for rope is but little used in South Africa in fact, half a hundred varieties of the genus "notion" for supplying the needs of customers, native or white.

The room was pretty full of tobacco smoke and natives, who suspended their conversation and nudged each other as they recognised the two young strangers against whom their aid had been invoked for hostile purposes, but who were now hand in glove with the proprietor behind the counter. A lanky youth in shirtsleeves, with a mudcoloured, wispy face, was presiding over the transactions.

"Well, Smith, how's 'biz'?" said Anstey. The wispy youth shrugged his shoulders and growled some inarticulate reply in monosyllable. Then, on being introduced to the newcomers, he extended a limp paw to each, and returned to his former occupation of measuring out roll tobacco to a native, always with the same wooden and vacant expression.

"Well, how do you think you'd like storekeeping?" said Anstey, as he went through the performance which he jocosely termed "showing them round the place," though, apart from a tumbledown stable and the historic mealiefield before described, there was no "place" to show them round.

Gerard, the recollection fresh in his mind of the dismal room and foetid atmosphere, and the generally depressing aspect of all connected therewith, replied, with an inward shudder, that he hardly thought he would care about it. He would much prefer farming. This was greeted as a huge joke.

"Pooh!" said Anstey. "Farming is a beggar's trade compared with this. Why, bless my soul, a farmer's a slave to all the seasons, to every shower of rain, or the want of it, even if his place and stock ain't mortgaged up to the hilt. Again, the diseases among cattle are legion. Now, in a neat little store like this of mine, you can just coin money hand over fist."

His listeners thought this last statement hardly borne out by the aspect of the surroundings in general. The other, quick to see this, went on.

"Ah, you think it don't look much like it, eh? Well, I don't wonder. But, you see, it isn't worth my while bothering about tinkering up this place. Here it doesn't matter how one lives. But I'm just waiting till I've made my pile, and then" And the concluding blank left scope for the most magnificent, if somewhat vague possibilities.

They returned indoors, and Anstey made the heat and the walk an excuse for another glass of grog. Then a native knocked at the door to announce that the missing steed had been found and brought back. Harry suggested that it was time to start on their return ride to Maritzburg. But of this their host would not hear.

“Stay the night, anyhow,” he said. “That is, if you don’t mind roughing it. I can knock you up a shakedown of some sort. I meant to have had the spare room arranged when I first heard you were coming out, Gerard. But I dare say you can manage without white sheets.”

Gerard, of course, declared that, if anything, he rather preferred it. That point settled, Anstey became even more the effusively genial host; but, with all his desire to be entertaining, both were sensible of a want of something a difference between the perfectly frank and selfpossessed geniality of John Dawes, for instance. They were joined at supper by the wispyfaced youth, who came straight in from his duties in the store now closed for the night without going through any such superfluous ceremony as washing. Afterwards, when the talk was in full swing, Anstey would constantly appeal to his subordinate for confirmation of his statements or anecdotes “Isn’t that so, Smith?” “Didn’t I, Smith?” and so forth; whereupon the latter would remove his pipe from his mouth, and spit and remark, “Ja, that’s so.” Which was the full extent of his conversation.

Chapter Six.

Gerard is Launched.

“Why not stay on here a bit, Gerard, and help me in the store?”

Thus Anstey, on the following day, after dinner. The two were alone. Harry Maitland had returned to Maritzburg, disgusted with the exceeding roughness of his night's quarters, which together with the booming snores of Smith, who slept in the adjoining store, had effectually hindered him from getting any sleep to speak of. Gerard, however, had yielded to his relative's urgent invitation to stay a few days and talk matters over. He, too, found his quarters none too comfortable, and he did not like Anstey indeed, he feared he never should like him; but, he reflected with something of a sigh, beggars cannot be choosers. He was a stranger in a strange land, and after all this man was his relative, though a distant one, and showed every desire to help him.

“It is very good of you,” he replied. “But I know nothing of that sort of business.”

“Pooh! You don't want to know anything at least that is I mean,” correcting himself hurriedly, “there's nothing very technical about it. You only want a little commonsense and ordinary smartness, and of that I should say you had plenty. Well, then, we'll consider the matter settled. Smith is leaving me soon, and until he does I'll give you ten shillings a week and the run of your teeth. Afterwards I'll give you more. You see, you'll be learning a useful business all for nothing a very paying one, too and getting a trifle of pay for it besides. The fact is, Gerard, I want a decent kind of fellow countryman about me, an educated chap like yourself. One falls into rough ways all by one's self.”

There was such a genuine ring about this speech, that Gerard felt quite ashamed of his former mistrust. What a snob he had been to dislike the man because he was a bit wanting in polish! The thought moved him to throw an extra warmth into his expressions of thanks.

“Pooh! my dear fellow, don't say another word,” said Anstey. “By and by, when you are thoroughly up to the mark, I might leave you here in charge, and open another place somewhere else. Extend the business, don't you know extend the business. Storekeeping's the most paying thing in the world if you only know what you're about. I've always intended to extend as soon as I could get hold of some decent fellow, and that lout Smith's of no good,” sinking his voice. “I'm getting rid of him. Then, when you know your business, I might take you into partnership, and we might run houses all over the Colony.”

To a practically penniless lad, who had just come out there to seek his fortune, this was very glowing, very tempting sort of talk. Gerard began to see himself already coining wealth, as the other had said "hand over fist," and again he felt ashamed of his first unfavourable impressions of the man who was now so freely holding out to him a helping hand.

But when he set to work in real earnest, he discovered, as many another had done before him and will do again, that the royal road to wealth, if sure, was desperately slow, and to one of his temperament intolerably irksome. The whole day, from early morning till long after dark, was spent in the close atmosphere of that stuffy room, rendered foetid by the chronic presence of uncleanly natives, and such unsavoury goods as hides, sheepskins, etc., handing things over the counter in exchange for the hardearned sixpences and threepennybits of his dusky customers. Now and then, too, a white traveller or transportrider would look in to make a purchase, and the short, offhand manner of some of these would try his temper sorely. Was it for this he had come out to Natal? Where was the free, healthy, openair life he and his young companions at home had so glowingly evolved? He remembered the envy with which his schoolfellows had regarded him when they knew he was going out to a colony. Would he be an object for envy if they could see him now? Why, he was more of a prisoner than ever he had been when chained, as he thought, to the school desks. He had, in fact, become nothing more nor less than a shopkeeper.

Smith had in no wise seemed to resent the presence of his supplanter. He was even impassively goodnatured, and in his stolid way would give Gerard the benefit of his experience. He put him up to all the little tricks of the native customers, and showed him innumerable dodges for lightening his own labour. As for books, why, there were none to speak of, or at any rate they were precious queerly kept, he said. Anstey would just clear the till when he thought there was enough in it, or when he wanted to go away anywhere; then it would fill up again as before, with like result.

"I suppose you know," said Smith, in his wooden, expressionless manner, "I've got the sack on your account?"

Gerard started.

"On my account! Surely not. Why, I thought you were going anyhow."

"So? Well, I wasn't. Soon as you came, Anstey gave me notice to clear."

"Good heavens! But that would be beastly unfair to you," cried Gerard, in great distress. "I'll tell him I won't agree. I'll go and tell him now at once."

“Sit still, Ridgeley. That wouldn’t help me any. You’re a good fellow, I believe, and if it was any one but Anstey, I’d say it was kind of natural to want to stick in his own relation. Still, I’ve done very well for him, and for less pay than most chaps would ask. But, to tell the truth, I’m sick of the berth, dead sick of it, and had made up my mind to clear anyhow. Don’t you get bothering Anstey over it. I say, though. He was pretty boozy last night, eh?”

Gerard shrugged his shoulders with a look of mingled distress and disgust. He had noted with some anxiety that his relative was too much addicted to the bottle, but he had never seen him quite so bad as on the occasion just alluded to. Anstey himself had referred to this failing once or twice, declaring that the sort of life was of a nature to make any man feel “hipped,” and take a “pickmeup” too many, but that now he had got a decent fellow for company he reckoned it might make a difference. He seemed, in fact, to have taken a real liking to his young kinsman, and would sit at home of an evening on purpose to talk to him, instead of riding off to the nearest bar. Gerard had begun to think he might even be instrumental in getting him out of his drinking habits.

One day Smith, while absent for some minutes from the store, was attracted back again by something of a hubbub going on therein. Returning, he beheld Gerard confronted by three natives, the latter haranguing and gesticulating wildly in remonstrance, the former gesticulating almost as wildly, but tonguetied by reason of his inability to master more than a few words of their language. The natives were holding out to Gerard two large bottles filled with some liquid, which he was as emphatically refusing to accept.

“What’s the row, Ridgeley?”

“Row?” answered Gerard, in a disgusted tone. “Row? Why, these fellows asked me to fill their bottles with paraffin, and I did so. Now they won’t pay for it, and want me to take it back.”

Smith opened his head, and emitted as large a guffaw as he ever allowed himself to indulge in. Then he went to the front door and looked out over the veldt, and returning took the two bottles and emptied their contents back into the paraffin tin. Then he gave the bottles a brief rinse in a tub of water, and filling them up from another tin precisely similar to the first, handed them to the natives. The latter paid down their money, and stowing the bottles carefully away among their blankets, departed, now thoroughly satisfied.

“Didn’t I give them the right kind?” said Gerard, who had witnessed this performance with some amazement. “Ah, I see!” he broke off, as an odour of spirits greeted his nostrils.

“You just didn’t give them the right kind. Look here. When a nigger brings a bottle and asks for paraffin, and goes like thissee?” making a rapid sort of drinking sign, “you fill it out of this tin.”

“But why don’t they ask for it outright? Isn’t there a word for it in their language? Those fellows distinctly said ‘paraffin.’”

Again Smith emitted that halfhearted guffaw.

“Look here, Ridgeley. I’d have put you up to the ropes, but reckoned it was Anstey’s business. Don’t you know the law of the Colony doesn’t allow grog to be sold to niggers, even in licenced houses, but there’s a sight of it done for all that. This isn’t a licenced house, but we’ve got to run with the times.”

“And what if you’re caught?”

“Mortal stiff fine. But that would be Anstey’s lookout, not yours or mine. And I tell you what. It’s lucky for him I ain’t a chap who’s likely to bear a grudge or cut up nasty, or I might round on him properly for giving me the sack.”

This incident had set Gerard thinking, and in fact it added considerable weight to his dissatisfaction with his present position. Honest trade was one thing, but to be required daily to break the laws of the land was another. After Smith’s departure, he put the matter fairly to his employer.

“Oh, hang it! every one does it,” was the characteristic reply. “You’ll never get on in life, Gerard, if you carry all those scruples along with you. Too much tophammer, don’t you knowcapsize the ship. See? Eh, what? Against the law, did you say? Well, that’s the fault of the law for being so rotten. Meanwhile, we’ve got to live, and if the fellows don’t buy grog here they will at the next place. We may just as well get their custom as the other Johnny. Besides, it’s good for trade all round. They will always deal for choice at a place where they know they can get a glass or a bottle of grog when they want it.”

Apart from being in itself an abstraction, the “law” is a thing which stands in much the same relationship towards the average respectable citizen its the schoolmaster does towards even the bestdisposed of boysto wit, there is about it a smack of the “natural enemy.” This being sowe record it with griefGerard, who was young, and though a

wellprincipled lad, very much removed from a prig, allowed his conscience to be so far seared as to accept and indeed act upon this explanation. We further regret to add that he filled many and many a subsequent bottle with “paraffin,” as set forward in Smith’s instructions, receiving the price therefor without a qualm.

He was now in charge of the whole place, and his sense of authority and responsibility had gone far towards reconciling him to the irksomeness of the life. He was able to write home with some pride, saying that he had found employment from the very first, and not only employment, but fair prospects of advancementthanks to Ansteywhich entailed upon that worthy a more grateful letter of acknowledgment than he deserved, as we shall see. He had mastered a good many Zulu words that being the language of nearly all the natives of Natal, whether of pure or mixed raceand was getting on well all round. He had made his rough quarters as comfortable as he could, having sent over to Maritzburg for his outfit. Still, the life, as we have said, was terribly irksome. Day after day, the same monotonous round. He had no acquaintances of his own age or social standing. Now and again some friend of his employer’s would drop in and literally make a night of it, and then his disgust and depression knew no bounds. Then, too, his prospects seemed to vanish into clouds and mist. Would he, too, become one day like Anstey, stagnating out his life in a dead grey level, without a thought or interest beyond the exigencies of the hour? And he would gaze wearily out upon the open level flat of the veldt, which surrounded the place, and the dusty monotonous riband of road, and it would seem, young as he was, that life was hardly worth living at the price. Still, he was earning his own livelihood, and the novelty and independence of the feeling went far to counterbalance all other drawbacks.

One day Anstey said to him, “Wouldn’t you like to have some interest, some share in the business, Gerard?”

“Some interest!” he echoed, thinking that he had rather too much of that, seeing that his employer left all the burden of it to him and pocketed all the advantages himself.

“Why yes. How would it be to put something into it? It would give you a sharemake you a kind of partner, don’t you see?”

“But I haven’t got anything to put into it except the mere trifle I brought out with me.”

“Wouldn’t the people at home invest something for you, eh? It would pay them andyoua thundering rate of interest, and give you a share in the concern besides.”

But Gerard was able completely to disabuse Anstey’s mind of any illusions on that head. “The people at home” had done all they could in scraping together enough for Gerard’s

passage and outfit, together with a few pounds to start him on landing. There was not the faintest chance of them doing anything further.

“How much did you bring out with you?” pursued Anstey.

Gerard was able to inform him he had brought out about thirty pounds; but what with travelling and other expenses he had not much more than twentyfive at his disposal a mere trifle.

“A mere trifle indeed,” rejoined Anstey. “But then we all have to start upon trifles. Now, why not put that twentyfive pounds into this concern? You would get interest on it, and it would have the additional advantage of being, so to speak, under your own eye instead of lying idle at the bank. I should strongly recommend you to invest it in this. But think it well over first.”

And Gerard, after thinking it over, resolved to follow his relative’s advice, and invested his twentyfive pounds accordingly.

He had now been three months with Anstey, and the latter had kept him pretty well with his nose to the grindstone, discouraging especially any desire to visit Maritzburg. He had far better stick to business, he said. Knocking around the city might be good enough fun for fellows with plenty of coin, but one with scarcely any was very likely to get rid of what little he had. Of Harry Maitland, Gerard had hardly heard since they parted. He had received one letter stating that the writer had found a lot of friends through his letters of introduction, among whom he was having a right good time. He would ride over some day and see him. But that day never came. Harry was not going to take the trouble to hunt up a fellow who had become what he superciliously termed a mere counterjumper. So Gerard just plodded on, determined to stick to what was a certainty as long as possible in spite of everything, the “everything” being mainly a certain change which he thought to have detected of late in his employer’s behaviour towards him a change not for the better.

But just at this time there befell him an adventure which was destined to affect materially his after destinies, and that in more ways than one.

Chapter Seven.

Sobuza, the Zulu.

The river Umgeni, at Howick, a point about twelve or fourteen miles west of Maritzburg, hurls itself over a sheer cliff, making a truly magnificent waterfall some hundreds of feet high. So sudden and unlookedfor is the drop that, crossing by the drift a little above the fall, the appearance of the river and the lay of the country would lead the casual visitor to expect nothing very wonderful. Yet, as a matter of fact, viewed from the opposite side of the great basin into which it hurls itself bodily, the Umgeni Fall is one of the grandest sights of its kind.

Now, it happened one morning that Gerard Ridgeley, riding through the abovementioned drift, found his attention attracted by an extraordinary sound, a sort of loud, longdrawn, gasping cry, as though an appeal for help; and it seemed to come from the river. His first impulse was to rein in his steed, but his own position was not quite free from risk, for the river was in a somewhat swollen condition and the drift dangerous. So he plunged on, and, having gained the opposite bank, he halted his panting and dripping horse and sat listening intently.

Yes, there it was again, and, oh, Heavens! it came from below the drift. Some one was in the water and in another minute would be over the fall.

With lash and spur he urged his horse along the bank. The broad current swept downward swift and strong. He could see the turbid water creaming into foam where it sped in resistless rapids around two or three rock islets, and then curled over the frightful brink, and between himself and the brink, speeding swiftly towards it, swept helplessly onward by the force of the flood, was a round dark object a man's head.

It was the head of a native. Gerard could even make out the shiny black ring which crowned it. But native or white man, here was a fellowcreature being whirled down to a most horrible death right before his eyes. Again that wild harsh cry for help rang out above the seething hiss of the flood and the dull roar of the cataract below, but shorter, more gaspingly. The man was nearly exhausted. He was swimming curiously too. It seemed as if he was treading water; then his head would sink half under, as though something were dragging him down. Gerard had heard there were crocodiles in the Umgeni. Could it be that the unfortunate man had been seized by one of these? The thought was a terrible one; but he could not see the man perish. In a trice he had kicked off his boots and thrown off his coat, and urging his horse into the river till the depth of the water swept the animal off its legs, he threw himself from its back, for it had become unmanageable with fright, and struck out for the drowning man.

The latter was about thirty yards below him, and hardly thrice that distance from the brink. Gerard was a bold and powerful swimmer, and with the aid of the current was beside him in a moment. But what to do next? The upper part of the man's body was entirely naked. There was nothing to lay hold of him by. But the cool selfpossession of the savage met him halfway. The latter gasped out a word or two in his own language and held out his arm. Gerard seized it firmly below the shoulder, and, using no more effort than was just necessary for the other's support, he husbanded his strength for the final struggle.

Now, all this had taken place in a mere moment of time. It would take no more than that to decide their fate. And this seemed sealed.

For all his hard condition and desperate pluck, Gerard felt strength and nerve alike wellnigh fail him. The native was a fearful weight, heavier even than one of his size ought to be, and he was not a small man. They were now in the roar and swirl of the rapids. Once or twice Gerard's foot touched ground, only to be swept off again resistlessly, remorselessly. Several times he thought he must relax his grasp and leave the other to his fate. He could see the smooth glitter of the glassy hump where the river curled over the brink; could feel the vibration of the appalling boom on the rocks below. In a second he both of them would be crashed down on to those rocks, a thousand shapeless fragments, unless, that is, he could secure a footing upon the spit of stony islet in front.

A yard more will do it. No. The current, split into two, swirls past the obstruction with a perfectly resistless force. He is swept out again as his fingers come within an inch of grasping a projecting stone. Then he both of them are whirled over and over in the surging boil of the rapids the brink is in front space.

Then it seems to Gerard that he is upholding the weight of the whole world. For a most wonderful thing has happened. The native is perfectly stationary still as though anchored in the resistless velocity of the current, and now it seems to be his turn to support his wouldbe rescuer. For the latter's legs are actually hanging forth over the fearful abyss, and but for the firm grip now of both hands which he has upon the other's arm, he would be shot out into space. The roar and vibration of the mighty fall is bewildering, maddening the crash upon the rocks, the spuming mist flying away into countless rainbows before his sight. He seems to live a lifetime in that one fearful moment. He must loose his hold and

"Here, mister! I'm going to throw you a reim. Can you catch it?"

Gerard hardly dares so much as nod an affirmative. He sees as in a dream a couple of bearded faces on the bank above, the owner of one of which is swinging a long, noosed cord of twisted raw hide.

“All right! Nowcatch!”

Swish! The noose flies out, then straightens. It falls on Gerard’s shoulder. Loosening one hand, he quickly passes it round his body. It is hauled taut.

“Nowleave go the nigger. He’s all right. He’s anchored.”

Instinctively Gerard obeys, and swings free. For a second he is hanging on the smooth, glassy, curling lip of the fall. Should the reim break But it is staunch. He is drawn slowly up against the current, and hauled safely to land.

The native, deprived of Gerard’s support, is seen to be thrown, as it were, with his face downward on the current. Something is holding him back, something which has him fast by the legs; but for it, he would be shot out over the falls. He shouts something in his own language.

“By jingo! It’s just as I said,” exclaims one of the men. “He’s anchored.”

“Anchored?” wonderingly echoes Gerard, who, beyond being very much out of breath, is none the worse for his narrow escape.

“Yes, anchored. He says he’s got a lot of reims and truck tangled round his legs, and it’s hitched in something at the bottom of the river. That’s what’s holding him back; and a mighty good thing it is for you, young fellow, as well as for him. You’d have been pounded dust at the bottom of the fall long before this.”

The while the speaker has been fixing a knife to the noosed ram, in such wise that the distressed native shall be able to detach it and cut himself loose below water. A warning shoutthe noose flies outwardthe man catches it without difficulty, for the distance is not great. Then, having made it fast beneath his armpits, he dives under the surface, while the two on the bankthe three in fact, for Gerard now helps to man the linekeep the ram taut. The latter shakes and quivers for a moment like a line with a heavy fish at the end; then the ringed head rises.

“Haul awayhe’s clear!” is the cry. And in a moment the native is dragged safe to the bank and landed beside his rescuers.

Having recovered breath, he proceeded to account for the origin of his mishap. He was on his way to a neighbouring kraal, to obtain possession of a horse which he had left there. He was carrying a headstall and a couple of reims for this purpose, and, thinking it a trifle shorter to ford the river below the drift than at it, had gone into the water accordingly. But the current proved stronger as well as deeper than he had expected. He had been swept off his feet, and then the reims had somehow or other got entangled round his legs, which were practically tied together, so that he could not swim. It must have been the headstall which, dragging along the bottom, had so opportunely anchored him.

“Well, it’s the tallest thing I’ve seen in a good many years,” said one of the men. “The very tallesteh, George?”

“Ja, that’s so!” laconically assented George, beginning to shred up a fragment of Boer tobacco in the hollow of his hand.

The men were transportriders, travelling with their waggons, which accounted for the prompt production of the long reim which had borne so essential a part in the rescue. They had just come over the rise in time to take in the situation, and with the readiness of resource which characterises their class, were prompt to act accordingly. But the object in which Gerard’s interest was centred was the man whom he had been instrumental in saving from a most horrible death.

The latter was a very fine specimen of native manhood, tall, erect, and broad, and with exquisitely modelled limbs. His face, with its short black beard, was firm and pleasing, and the straight fearless glance of the clear eyes seemed to shadow forth the character of the man. He had a grand head, whose broad and lofty forehead was tilted slightly back, as though the shiny black ring which surmounted it were a crown, instead of merely a badge of marriage and manhood; for the Zulu wears his weddingring on his head, instead of on his finger, and moreover is not accounted to have attained to manhood until he has the right to wear it. His age might have been anything between thirty and fifty. His only clothing was a mútya, which is a sort of apron of hide or cats’ tails hung round the loins by a string.

If Gerard expected him to brim over with gratitude, and to vow a life’s service or anything of the sort, he was disappointed. The man made a few laughing remarks in his own language as he pointed to the terrible fall, whose thunderous roar almost drowned their voices where they stood. The two might have been taking a friendly swim together, instead of narrowly escaping a most frightful death.

“Who is he?” said Gerard. “Where does he live?”

As one of the other men put this question, the native, with a word or two, pointed with his hand to the northward.

“But what’s his name?”

The question struck the onlookers as an unpalatable one.

“Name?” repeated the native, after the manner of his race when seeking to gain time. “Name? They call me Sobuza. I am of the Aba Qulúsi, of the people of Zulu. Who is he who helped me out of the water?”

Gerard told who he was. The two white men exchanged looks of surprise.

“Anstey’s relative! So?” they said. “Looking him up, maybe?”

Gerard explained his exact position with regard to Anstey. He noticed that the significance of the look exchanged between the pair did not decrease. The Zulu, however, seemed to receive the answer with but little interest. He made one or two ineffectual attempts at Gerard’s name, but the recurring “r” a letter which none of the Bantu races can pronounce, always in fact making it a sort of guttural aspirate baffled him, and he gave it up. Then, with a sonorous farewell, he took his departure.

“If all Zulus are like him, they must be a splendid race,” said Gerard, gazing after the retreating figure. “That’s the first real one I’ve seen, to my knowledge.”

“Ungrateful beggar!” commented one of the men, angrily. “Why, he hardly took the trouble to say ‘Thankee.’ He deserved to have been let go over the fall.”

“I’m afraid I’m nearly as bad,” said Gerard. “I don’t or rather I do know where I should be if it hadn’t been for you.”

“That’s nothing, mister,” was the prompt rejoinder. “Help one another’s the rule of the road eh, George?”

“Ja, that’s so,” assented George again.

They chatted on for a while, and smoked a sociable pipe, and Gerard accepted an invitation to accompany his friends in need to their waggons which were standing waiting for them at the drift higher up and take a glass of grog, which, with the torrid

heat of the sun, combined to keep off any chill which might result from his wetting. Then with much mutual good will they separated.

Gerard held on his way, pondering over his adventure, which indeed was a pretty stirring one, and the first he had ever had. He was bound on an errand of partly business, partly pleasure; namely, to visit some people he did not greatly care for on some business of Anstey's. Still the change from the sedentary round of the store was something, and, hot as it was, he enjoyed the ride. It was Sunday, and thus a sort of holiday, though even on the Sabbath we fear that trade was not altogether at a standstill.

That day, however, was destined to be one of incident, of adventure. His visit over, he was riding home in the cool of the evening. The sun was just touching the western skyline, flooding with a golden light the open, rolling plains. There was nothing specially beautiful in the landscape, in fact it was rather monotonous, but the openness of it gave an idea of free and sweeping space, and the almost unearthly glow of a perfect evening imparted a charm that was all its own. The uncongenial circumstances of his present life faded into insignificance. Gerard felt quite hopeful, quite elated. He felt that it was good even to live.

Suddenly a hubbub of voices rose upon the evening air of native voices, of angry voices and mingled with it the jarring clash of kerries. Spurring his horse over the slight eminence which rose in front, the cause of it became manifest. A small native kraal stood just back from the road. Issuing from this were some halfdozen figures. A glance served to show that they were engaged in a highly congenial occupation to the savage mind fighting, to wit.

It was a running fight, however, and an unequal one. A tall man was retreating step by step, holding his own gallantly against overwhelming odds. He was armed with nothing but a knobkerrie, with which he struck and parried with lightninglike rapidity. His assailants were mostly armed with two kerries apiece, and were pressing him hard; albeit with such odds in their favour they seemed loth to come to close quarters, remaining, or springing back, just beyond the reach of those terrible whirling blows. To add to the shindy, all the women and children in the kraal were shrilly yelling out jeers at the retreating adversary, and three or four snarling curs lent their yapping to the uproar.

"Yauw! great Zulu!" ran the jeers. "We fear you not! Why should we? Haha! We are free people free people. We are not Cetywayo's dogs. Haha!"

"Dogs!" roared the tall man, his eyes flashing with the light of battle. "Dogs of Amakafúla! By the headring of the Great Great One, were I but armed as ye are, I would

keep the whole of this kraal howling like dogs the long night through I, Sobuza, of the Aba Qulúsi alone. Ha!”

And with a ferocious downward sweep of his kerrie, he knocked the foremost of his assailants off his legs, receiving in return a numbing blow on the shoulder from the stick of another. All the warrior blood of the martial Zulu was roused, maddened, by the shock. He seemed to gain in stature, and his eyes blazed, as roaring out the warshout of his race, the deepthroated “Usútu!” he abandoned the offensive and hurled himself like a thunderbolt upon his four remaining adversaries. These, not less agile than himself, scattered a moment previous to closing in upon him from all sides at once. At the same time he was seen to totter and pitch heavily forward. The man whom he had previously swept off his feet had, lying there, gripped him firmly by the legs.

Nothing could save him now! With a ferocious shout the others sprang forward, their kerries uplifted. In a moment he would be beaten to a jelly, when

Down went the foremost like a felled ox, before the straight crushing blow of an English fist; while at the same time a deft lefthander met the next with such force as to send him staggering back a dozen paces. Wrenching the two sticks from the fallen man, Gerard pushed them into the hands of the great Zulu. The latter, finding himself thus evenly armed, raised the warshout “Usútu!” and charged his two remaining assailants. These, seeing how the tables had been turned, did not wait. They ran away as fast as their legs could carry them.

“Whou!” cried the Zulu, the ferocity which blazed from his countenance fading into a look of profound contempt. “They show their backs, the cowards. Well, let them run. Ha! they have all gone,” he added, noticing that the others, too, had sneaked quietly away. “Whau!”

The last ejaculation was a staccato one of astonishment. For he recognised in Gerard his rescuer of the morning.

“I say, friend, you floored those two chappies neatly. By Jove, you did!”

Both turned towards the voice. It proceeded from a light buggy, which stood drawn up on the road behind them. In this were seated a young man some three or four years older than himself, and an extremely pretty girl, at sight of whom Gerard looked greatly confused, remembering the circumstances under which she had beheld him.

“It was an A1 row,” continued the former. “We saw the whole of it. Allamaghtaag! but I envy the way in which you spun those two to the right and left.”

“Well, I had to,” answered Gerard. “It was five to one. That’s not fair play, you know.” And his eyes met the blue ones of the young lady in the buggy, and were inclined to linger there, the more so that the said blue orbs seemed to beam an approval that was to the last degree heterodox in one of the tenderer sex and therefore, theoretically, an uncompromising opponent of deeds of violence.

“Who’s your longlegged friend?” went on the young man, proceeding to address a query or two to the Zulu, in the latter’s own language, but in a tone that struck even Gerard as a trifle peremptory. “He’s a surly dog, anyhow,” he continued, annoyed at the curtness of the man’s answer.

“He’s a Zulua real Zulu and his name’s Sobuza,” said Gerard.

“A Zulu, is he? Do you know him, then?” was the surprised rejoinder.

“I didn’t before this morning. But I happen to have got him out of one little difficulty already today. I never expected to see him again, though.”

“The deuce you did! Was he engaged in the congenial pastime of headbreaking then, too?”

“Nno. The fact is” And then Gerard blushed and stuttered, for he saw no way out of trumpeting his own achievements, and somehow there was something about those blue eyes that made him shrink instinctively from anything approaching this. “The truth is he got into difficulties in the river a bit of string or something twisted round his legs in the water so that he couldn’t swim, and I helped him out.”

The girl’s face lighted up, and she seemed about to say something; but the other interrupted

“By Jove, we must get on. It’ll be dark directly, and looks like a storm in the offing, and we’ve a good way to go. Well, tata to you, sir. So long!” And the buggy spun away over the flat.

Gerard followed it with his glance until it was out of sight. Then he turned to the Zulu. That worthy was seated on the ground, calmly taking snuff.

“Ha, Umlúngu!” (white man) he exclaimed, as, having completed that operation, he replaced his horn snufftube in the hole cut out of the lobe of his ear for that purpose. “This has been a great daya great day. Surely my inyoka has taken your shape. Twice

have you helped me this day. Twice in the same day have you come to my aid. Wonderfulwonderful! The death of the waterto pass through the mighty fall to the Spiritlandthat is nothing. It is a fitting end for a warrior. But that I, Sobuza, of the Aba Qulúsi, of the people of Zuluthat I, Sobuza, the second fighting captain of the Udhloko regimentsshould be 'eaten up' by four or five miserable dogs of Amakafula (Note 2). Whau! that were indeed the end of the world. I will not forget this day, Umlúngu. Tell me again thy name."

Gerard, who although he understood by no means all of this speech, had picked up sufficient Zulu to grasp most of its burden, repeated his names, slowly and distinctly, again and again. But Sobuza shook his head. He could not pronounce them. The nearest he could come was a sort of Lewis Carrollian contraction of the two"U' Jeríji," pronouncing the "r" as a guttural aspirate.

"I shall remember," he said; "I shall remember. And now, Jeríji, I journey to the northward to the land of the Zulu. Fare thee well."

Instinctively Gerard put forth his hand. With a pleased smile the warrior grasped it in a hearty muscular grip. Then with a sonorous "Hlala gahle," (or farewell), he turned and strode away over the now fast darkening veldt.

The occupants of the buggy, speeding too on their way, were engaged in something of an altercation.

"It was too provoking of you, Tom," the girl was saying, "to rush me away like that."

"So? Well, we've no time to spare as it is. And that cloudbank over there means a big thunderstorm, or I'm a Dutchman."

"I don't care if it does. And we never found out his namewho he is."

"No more we did, now you mention it," said the other in a tone of halfregretful interest. "But, after all, we can survive the loss."

"Buthe was such a nicelooking boy."

"Oho!" was the rejoinder, accompanied by a roar of laughter. "So that's the way the cat jumps!"

"Don't be an idiot," answered the girl, but in a tone which seemed to say the "chaff" was not altogether displeasing to her. "But you remember the report we heard coming

through Howick, about two men being nearly carried over the Umgeni Fall today, while one was trying to save the other. That's the hero of the story, depend upon it. I'd have got it all out of him if you hadn't been in such a desperate hurry. And now we don't even know who he is!"

"No more we do. Let's put an advertisement in the paper. That'll draw him? Such a nice-looking boy, too!" he added, mimicking her tone.

"Tom, you're a born idiot," she rejoined, blushing scarlet.

The "nice-looking boy" meanwhile was cantering homeward in the twilight, building castles in the air at a furious rate. Those blue eyes that voice hovered before his imagination even as a stray firefly or so hovered before his path. It was long since he had heard the voice or seen the face of any woman of birth and refinement. Anstey was not wont to mix with such, and the few female acquaintances the latter owned, though worthy people enough, were considerably his inferiors in the social scale. At this time, indeed, his mind and heart were peculiarly attuned to such impressions, by reason of his lonely and uncongenial surroundings; more than ever, therefore, would a feeling of discontent, of yearning homesickness, arise in his mind. Then, by a turn of retrospect, his memory went back to Mr Kingsland's hearty, straightforward words of advice: "When you've got your foot in the stirrup, keep it there. Stick to it, my lad, stick to it, and you'll do well." And now he had got his foot in the stirrup. Was he to kick it out again in peevish disgust because the stirrup was a bit rusty? No; he hoped he was made of better stuff than that. He must just persevere and hope for better times.

He reached home just as the black cloud, which had been rolling up nearer and nearer, with many a red flash and low rumble, began to break into rain. Having hastily put up his horse in the tumbledown stable, and seen him fed, he went indoors, only to find Anstey blind drunk and snoring in an armchair. Utterly disgusted, he helped that worthy to bed, and then, after a cold supper, for which he had little appetite, he sought his own shakedown couch in the comfortless lumberroom. Then the storm broke in a countless succession of vivid flashes and deafening thunderpeals which shook the building to its very foundations; and to the accompaniment of the deluging roar and rush of the rain upon the iron roof he fell fast asleep to dream that he was rescuing countless numbers of fighting Zulus from the Umgeni Fall, over which a rainbow made up of blue eyes was striving to lure them.

Note 1. "Snake." Zulus are great believers in tutelary spirits, of which each individual has one or more continually watching over him. To such they frequently, though not invariably, attribute the form of the serpent.

Note 2. A term of contempt employed by the warlike natives of Zululand to designate the natives dwelling in Natal. Probably a corruption of the popular term “Kafir,” ama being the plural sign.

Chapter Eight.

Down.

We referred to a change which had come into Anstey's manner as regarded his intercourse with our young friend. More than once he had returned to the charge and sounded the latter again as to the probability of his relatives being willing to invest some funds for him in what he was pleased to call their joint concern. But Gerard's reply had been positive and unvarying. So persuaded was he of their inability to do so that he would not even apply to them. Then it was that Anstey's manner began to change.

He dropped the intimate, elderbrother kind of tone which had heretofore characterised their intercourse, and which poor Gerard in his youth and inexperience had taken for genuine, and for it substituted a masterandservant sort of demeanour. He would order Gerard about, here and there, or send him off on an errand, with a short peremptoriness of tone as though he were addressing some particularly lazy and useless native. Or he would always be finding fault more than hinting that the other was not worth his salt. Now, all this, to a lad of Gerard's temperament, was pretty galling. The relations between the pair became strained to a dangerous tension.

It happened one morning that Gerard was in the tumbledown old stable, saddling up a horse to start upon some errand for his employer. It was a clear, still day, and through the open door came the sound of voices, which he recognised as belonging to two or three transportriders, whose waggons were outspanned on the flat outside, and who had been lounging in the store making purchases and chatting just before.

"So I hear they've got two more writs out against Anstey," one voice was saying.

"So? Who's doing it this time?"

"Oh, Butler and Creighton. They ain't going to allow him any more ticknot even to the tune of a string of beads. Why, he's dipped three or four times over. His bills ain't worth the paper they're written on."

"Going to sell him up, are they?"

"Ja. They just are. They've got out two more writs, I tell you. Shouldn't wonder if they put in an execution today."

Gerard, to whom every word was as plainly audible as it was to the speakers themselves, felt as though petrified. This relative of his, with his plausible and grandiloquent

schemes, stood revealed a bankrupt swindler of the worst type. All the glowing pictures of wealth and success which he had drawn now seemed mere pitiful traps to catch him, Gerard, in his youth and inexperience. Now the motive of Anstey's change of manner was as clear as daylight. There was nothing further to be got out of him. And with a dire sinking of the heart Gerard thought of how he had been induced to invest his little all in this utterly rotten concern. But no it could not be. Anstey was his relation. He could not be such a mean, pitiful rascal as that. But the next words were not such as to reassure him.

"How they've given him so much law as they have bangs me, I admit," went on the first speaker. "Why, for the last year past he's never had a cent he could call his own. This show, and every mortal thing in it, has been dipped up to the hilt."

"Maybe this young Britisher he's got hold of has helped bolster him up. Eh!"

"Maybe. So much the worse for the Britisher, for he'll never see a brass farthing of his money again. But how the mischief even a raw Britisher could be softsawdered by Anstey is a stumper. He's out and away the most infernal scoundrel in this colony."

All the blood rushed to Gerard's head. He had been duped, swindled. He had given several months of hard and honest work without receiving any pay, for his employer had always put him off on some pretext or other that it was more convenient, or usual, to settle up halfyearly, or what not. He had been swindled out of even the few pounds which were all he had in the world; for, as the man had just said, he would never be able to get a farthing out of Anstey. Unfortunately there could be no reason to doubt the truth of what he had just heard, for other signs, now made clear, seemed to point to it. These men, moreover, were talking at ease among themselves, and freely. They evidently knew what and who they were talking about. His first impulse was to walk straight up to them and ask for a further explanation. Instead, however, he went back to the store.

Anstey was there, drinking grog with a transport rider who had just come in. At sight of Gerard he started up angrily.

"Why, what the deuce is the meaning of this?" he said, in his most offensive and hectoring tone. "Not gone yet, and I sent you to saddle up half an hour ago."

Gerard made no reply; but there was a look in his face which mightily disquieted his employer. But the latter, who was fuddled to a quarrelsome stage by the grog he had been drinking, roared out, with a volley of curses

“You disobedient, skulking beggar! What do you suppose I keep you here for at all? Get out of this at once, and do as I tell you. Do you hear, sir?”

Gerard’s face turned livid. The abominable insult of the tone and words was too much. He made a quick move forward, and things would have gone badly for Anstey. But the grip of muscular hands on his shoulders restrained him.

“Hallo, young fellow! What’s all the row about? Keep cool, now, I say. Keep cool!”

The advice was sorely needed, and the restraining touch had a salutary effect. Gerard was not going to throw himself into any vulgar promiscuous struggle, and collected himself with an effort. In the voices of the two men who had just entered, he recognised the two whose conversation he had overheard.

“I’ll keep cool, right enough,” he said. Then, addressing Anstey, “As for you, the sooner we part the better. I have stood your abominably offensive behaviour long enough, and I won’t stand it a day longer. As long as you behaved decently to me which you did at first, no doubt for reasons of your own I would have done anything for you. Now you have got upon the other tack I’ve had about enough of it. So we may as well part at once. Please hand me over what you owe me, and I’ll be off.”

“What I owe you eh?” said Anstey, with an evil sneer. “But supposing I don’t owe you anything, my fine fellow? If you slink off without giving me proper notice, you forfeit every penny. How does that pan out eh?”

Gerard’s countenance fell. There was truth in this, he feared.

“Well, never mind about that,” he said. “I’ll waive my claim. I’ll make you a present of these months of hard work. Just return me my twentyfive pounds, and we’ll cry quits.”

Anstey’s face was a study in well simulated amazement blank, bewildered amazement.

“Is the fellow drunk,” he said, “or only mad? Your what? I’m not sure if I quite heard. Your twentyfive thousand pounds, did you say?”

“I said my twentyfive pounds, that you induced me to hand over to you to be invested in this business, which I believe to be an utterly rotten concern, and has been for some time past,” replied Gerard, stung out of all prudence or reserve.

The two transport riders looked at each other with dismayed meaning. Their conversation must have been overheard. Anstey’s face turned livid at this hit.

“You’re slandering meslandering me before witnesses, by God and that’s actionable. I’ll have it out of you, you beggarly young sweep!” he yelled, shaking his fist furiously, safe in the conviction that the other men would not suffer Gerard to assault him.

“Well, you can please yourself about that. What I want now is the return of my money?”

“Oh, indeed!” sneered Anstey, affecting a cool sarcasm. “And will you kindly state what money it is you desire returned?”

“Certainly,” answered Gerard, “though I have already done so. I want the twentyfive poundsall I had in the worldwhich you induced me to entrust to you to be invested in this rotten business. And I am going to have it!”

“Oh, you are? So you shall, and welcome, when you can produce one scrap of evidence, either in writing or by word of mouth, that I have ever had twentyfive pounds, or shillings, or pence from you. Eh, sonny? What do you say, now?”

Gerard started; stared blankly as he grasped the full extent of the other’s rascality. For, in his rawness and inexperience, he had not required any sort of receipt or acknowledgment from Anstey, and he had handed over the money at a time when there was no witness within sight or earshot.

“And I tell you what it is,” pursued Anstey, marking his undisguised discomfiture, “I’ll be hanged if I don’t have the law of you for trying to extort money out of me by threats and violence. I will, too, if you don’t clear out of this mighty sharp, and give me no more bother! It’s a criminal offence, I tell you; and these gentlemen are witnesses that you tried it on. I’ll have you put in the tronk. I’ll”

“Stow all that, Anstey,” said one of the men, sternly and decisively. “D’you mean to deny that this youngster ever handed you twentyfive pounds? Come, now. Speak up, man!”

“Why of course I do,” unhesitatingly replied Anstey, though not without quailing before the indignation and contempt depicted on all three faces.

“Well, then, I for one believe you are telling the most infernal lie ever laid tongue to,” said the transportrider. “As for you, youngster,” turning to Gerard, “I can only say I’m sorry for you, for you have fallen into the hands of the biggest blackguard in the whole of this Colony. Why on earth didn’t you make him give you a receipt or something?”

“The fact is, he is related to me. I thought I could trust him. How should I know he was no better than a common thief?”

“You’re a mighty virtuous lot, eh, Sam Carruthers?” sneered Anstey. “I’ve heard of a few tricks being played with waybills before today, while the load’s on the road.”

“You just shut up, or I’ll about knock your head off, Anstey, and be glad of an opportunity to do it, too!” said another of the transportriders.

“Will you?” yelled Anstey, moving towards the inner door to ensure a retreat in the event of any of them making an attempt at climbing over the counter which now separated them from him. “I tell you what it is. You’re all in league with this swindling young thief, who is trying to bluff me out of money. But it won’t do it won’t do. He can take his things and go to the devil. He came to me a beggar, and he can go out a beggar the ungrateful dog. And, if any one likes to try the smashing trick, I’ve got a barker here that knows how to bite.”

And, making a rapid skip inside, he reappeared in a moment with a longbarrelled revolver.

All the anger, the indignation, almost the grief at being robbed, left penniless, had momentarily faded from Gerard’s mind before the overwhelming disgust which he felt for the other’s villainy. It was too painful, too nauseating. That a man of Anstey’s birth and antecedents, a relative, though a distant one, of his own, could stoop to such a black, pitiful, crawling theft, was revolting beyond words. He now looked upon him with a kind of horror, as upon some loathly and hardly human monster.

“It is just as he says,” he said at last. “I have no receipt, and no witnesses. I suppose I can do nothing.”

“Just try, my hearty just try; that’s all!” jeered Anstey. “Maritzburg’s busting with law and lawyers. See what you can do. You’re quite welcome.”

“Better shut up, Anstey,” said the man who had evinced a headpunching disposition. “We ain’t afraid of you and your pistol, and you may get more than you like, yet. And you, friend. What do you propose to do?”

“Get out of this as soon as possible,” answered Gerard, in weary disgust. “Get back to Maritzburg, I suppose. But I’ve got some luggage herenot much, but a good deal more than I can carry; and you can imagine I don’t want to leave it behind.”

“Rather. Well, look here now,” said the man who had been addressed as Sam Carruthers; “I’m bound for the town, and if you don’t mind jogging along with a waggon, I’ll be glad to take in your luggage and yourself too. I won’t charge you anything for it either. And, remember this. You don’t seem to have been long in the country, and have fallen into the hands of a mortal sweep. Well, remember the swindle that has been planted on you was done by one of your own countrymen, not by one of as Anstey hasn’t been out here so very many years himself.”

This was only too true. From the colonial people he had had to do with Gerard had met with many little acts of kindness. It had been reserved, as the other had said, for one of his own countrymen to rob him of his little all to leave him penniless, a stranger in a strange land.

He gladly accepted the transportrider’s friendly offer, and, having hastily packed his outfit Anstey the while keeping well out of his way he bade adieu for ever to the scene of his first colonial experience.

Poor Gerard, alone in Maritzburg, without a friend in the Colony, and with about fifty shillings to his name, besides his moderate outfit, might indeed have reckoned himself in evil case; and, after a few days, in spite of his pluck and determination, he did so reckon himself. He had taken up his quarters at a cheap boardinghouse which the friendly transportrider had told him about a place in comparison with which the mosquito-haunted Wayne’s was almost a palace and had set about trying to find work. But what chance had he? The fact of his being a lad of education and refinement told against him with those among whom he applied. “A fine gentleman and a raw Britisher,” as they put it to do them justice in their own minds only was only a synonym for uselessness. Every billet wherein education was required was either filled, or hungrily competed for by a hundred applicants; applicants, too, with recommendations in their favour, and where were his? He tried to turn to account such experience as he had gained with Anstey, but with no better success. The country stores required a much more experienced hand, and one who could speak the native language fluently; the town ones wouldn’t look at him. Apart from the question of recommendations, here the very fact of his having been with Anstey was against him, was enough to shut him out even from the list of that most hopeless form of hope deferred—the cases “under consideration.” That precious rascal, he found, was far better known than trusted, and more than one instance of sharp practice and roguery on the part of Anstey now came to his knowledge. But meanwhile time was flying, and with it, of course, money. And he was no nearer attaining any way of replenishing his well-nigh vanished stock of the latter.

Gerard Ridgeley's education had been of the usual happygolucky, slipshod sort which is hammered into the average English boy who is destined for no profession in particular, and which for purposes of after life is practically useless. The regulation amount of Latin and Greek, and Euclid and arithmetic, got through by rote, often with the help of a crib, with perhaps a smattering of British and homemade French, had fallen to his lot, as well as the regulation share of cricket and football. But these attainments, good in themselves, seemed not to help him one whit in gaining the means of subsistence in his present predicament. He had never even taken to carpentering as an amusement, as some boys do, and of course of any other handicraft was as ignorant as a babe unborn.

Probably no one in these days really imagines that living is cheap in the Colonies, save perhaps to the dwellers in the veldt or bush, who grow their own necessities of life. In the towns it is considerably dearer than in England, and a sovereign is apt to represent nearer ten shillings than twenty. So Gerard speedily learnt, as time flew and so did his funds, and prospects of employment remained as remote as ever.

"There ain't room for chaps as wants a job in this here blessed colony," bitterly remarked one of his fellowboarders one day. "It's a small country when all's said and done, and there's too many of us already, besides all these Hindian coolieniggers they're a importin' of by shiploads."

In the extremity of his strait, Gerard bethought himself of Mr Kingsland. Should he write and endeavour to bespeak the latter's aid, telling all the circumstances of his evil fortune and the cruel swindle which had left him penniless? He remembered the hearty kindness of the old settler's tone, and assurances of friendship. Surely he was justified in asking for a helping hand towards some means of gaining his own livelihood! But no sooner had he taken pen in hand to do so than he flung that redoubtable implement to the other end of the room. He could not do it. It was too much like writing a begging letter. Besides, what claim had he upon anybody? So, instead of writing the letter, he took a hurried survey of his possessions, and then strolled round to an auctioneer's salerooms, to see whether the chances were good in favour of obtaining a reasonable price for his new saddle at the next morning's sale.

Turning the street corner he ran right against Harry Maitland, or rather against the latter's horse, for Harry himself was in the act of dismounting.

"Hallo, Ridgeley! Where've you dropped from?" said Harry. "Still counterjumping with that distinguishedlooking relation of yours?"

"No such luck," replied Gerard, with a rueful laugh. And he told him what had happened. "And here I am nearly stumped, and see no way of getting up again," he concluded.

"Stumped, eh? That's devilish awkward," quoth Harry. "You would go counterjumping, you see, instead of going to work in the right way. Look at me now. I know shoals of people already, and am having a right good time. There's nothing like looking about one first for a bit, depend upon it. Well, tata. See you again. Herehallo, Warner!" he sang out to a man who had just passed them. "Hold on, can't you!"

And, leaving Gerard standing there, he went after the newcomer.

"Who's that fellow you were yarning to?" said the latter. "A devilish decentlooking chap, whoever he is."

"That! Oh, he's a poor devil I used sometimes to talk to on board ship. And, I say, Warner, you turned up in the very nick of time. He was just going to try and borrow a fivepound note from me. I'll swear he was. I could see it in his eye. Let's go and liquor."

It was lucky for the utterer of this remark that it remained unheard by the object thereof, otherwise we fear that, even in the middle of that bustling pavement, a vigorous application of shoeleather might have awakened Master Harry most painfully to the fact that it had been overheard. Gerard, however, had resumed his way, sad and bitter of heart; for he was young yet, and had not even begun to learn to take the insincerity and ingratitude of so-called friends as a matter of course. He only remembered how glad the other had been to get under his wing, so to say, when they had first landed. Thrown upon their own resources, strangers in a strange land, he it was who had taken the initiative; upon him had all the managing and thinking devolved. Harry Maitland had been glad of his company then, so glad of it indeed that he had even made some sacrifice of his own comfort rather than cut himself adrift from it. Now he hardly condescended to know him. Well, it was only one more lesson out of the volume of the world's hard and flinty teaching; but, as we said, Gerard was still very young, and the lesson was bitter.

He gained the auctionroom. A sale of miscellaneous articles was in full swing, and bidding was brisk. While waiting till it should be over and he could speak to the auctioneer, he amused himself watching the competing groups as well as those far the greater number who were only there to look on; for in a colonial town a public sale of whatever kind draws a crowd of loungers of every description as surely as a storecupboard draws flies in hot weather. Bronzed and bearded stockfarmers and transportriders, alertlooking townsmen, a sprinkling of Indian coolies, turbaned and

deferential, but none the less intent, in their own quiet, halfshy manner, upon getting their money's worth for their money, all clustered and crowded around the tables, more or less eagerly bidding, or keeping up a running fire of chaff with the auctioneer. Watching this mass of diversified humanity, Gerald was conscious of the descent of a friendly hand upon his shoulder, and a friendly voice at his ear.

"Ridgeley isn't it?"

With a start of surprise, he turned, to find himself face to face with the suntanned lineaments and corduroyclad form of John Dawes.

"Thought we'd meet again some day," said the latter, grasping the hand which Gerard delightedly put forth. "Small world after all. How has it been using you?"

Had Gerard been worldly wise, taught by his last experience, he would have answered with equal indifference, "Oh, soso." Being, however, only genuine, he replied

"Badly, I fear."

"So?" said the transportrider, upon whom the unconscious despondency of the tone was not lost. "Sorry to hear that. I've often wondered how you got on, especially with Anstey. Found him, I suppose?"

"I did. And I found him out too."

"So?" said Dawes again. "But look here, if you're not doing anything just now, come round, and we'll have a bit of dinner together. I'd like to hear how you've been getting on."

As Gerard's business with the auctioneer would very well keep until the afternoon, he accompanied his newly found friend to a luncheon bar in the neighbourhood, and there, over a dish of sizzling beefsteak and a bottle or two of English beer, gave a full account of his experiences and misadventures since they had parted.

"When you first told me you were going to find out Anstey, I'd have liked to have warned you," said Dawes, who had listened attentively to every word of his narrative. "But, then, I thought it was none of my business, and you said he was a relation of yours, too, which of course made it all the worse. I know him well; and, what's more, he knows me."

"He seemed to," said Gerard, remembering the disquieted look which had come into Anstey's face when he had mentioned the transportrider.

“Rather. I gave him a licking once well, it’s an old story and don’t matter now. But, excuse the question, I suppose you find yourself at pretty low ebb just now, eh?”

“Low ebb isn’t the word for it,” was the weary reply. “I’ve been moving heaven and earth to try and raise some sort of a billet, but it’s no go. There seems to be no room for me here. I wish I had never come out.”

Dawes had been filling his pipe, and passed his pouch on to his young companion. As he lighted it, and the glow of the match fell upon his impassive and weatherbeaten features, it brought out therein no trace of feeling, no sign that the other’s narrative interested him one whit. But in reality he was revolving a plan. He had from the very first taken a great liking to this bright, frank, warmhearted English lad, the extent of whose difficulties now he was thoroughly capable of appreciating.

“You wouldn’t be over particular as to the sort of billet you might get, eh?” he said, puffing out a great cloud of smoke in a vacant and abstracted manner.

“Not I, indeed, if only I might get it,” answered Gerard, wearily. “Why, I was going to see about putting my new saddle on the sale, when we met each other. I’ve had to part with things already to raise the wind.”

“That hard up, are you? Well, if you ain’t particular to a hair, I’ve been turning over a scheme. What would you say to going an upcountry trip with me?”

“What?” almost shouted Gerard, half starting from his seat. “An upcountry trip with you? You can’t mean it!”

“Keep your hair on, Ridgeley,” rejoined Dawes, with a half-indulged smile, for although the besthearted and the most equably dispositioned fellow in the world, he was of the “dry” order of being, and seldom laughed outright. “Don’t get excited; that’s never sound policy. But just turn the idea over in your mind a bit, and then you can let me know. I’m loading up two waggons now for a trading trip away beyond the Zulu country. Well, it occurs to me that you took so kindly to driving a waggon, and all to do with it on our way up here, that you might be useful to me. You’d pick up all there is to be learnt in that line the first day. What do you say to the idea?”

But just then Gerard was nearly incapable of reply. A lump seemed to rise in his throat. All the futile efforts of the past few weeks rose before his mind; his loneliness, the certainty of approaching destitution. And now this man with his offhand friendliness,

who was thus holding him out a helping hand, seemed as an angel sent from heaven. He managed to stutter out at last that it seemed almost too good to be true.

“All right,” said the other, kindly; “then that’s settled. I can’t give you any pay, but I’ll give you the run of your teeth, and a small commission on the takings of the trip after the trip’s over. The said trip, by the way, may last a year, or maybe more.”

“I don’t care if it lasts ten,” said Gerard, eagerly.

“It isn’t any good for you to hang on here with the notion of getting anything out of Anstey,” pursued Dawes, with rare tact affecting to believe that that was Gerard’s object in remaining there, and so to lessen the latter’s sense of obligation to himself. “He’s the most slippery fish that ever kept out of gaol. I’m afraid you’d never see a farthing of your coin back again, even if you were armed with as many papers to prove the transaction as a Supreme Court lawyer. He’ll have been sold up by now, lock, stock, and barrel. Well, now we’ll go round and attend to biz, and see to our loads, for we’ll have to start tomorrow night. I’d have trekked tonight, but that two of my oxen are not quite the thing, and I had to send out to one of the locations for two more.”

And having paid the score, Dawes led the way out, nodding here and there to an acquaintance at the crowded tables as he went, while Gerard, walking on air, could hardly believe in his good luck. He had entered that room despondent and almost a beggar; he left it with a friend, and in possession of the most congenial and delightful form of occupation he could have desired in his wildest dreams.

Chapter Nine.

Up.

The time intervening having been spent in getting together the loads, and otherwise seeing that everything was in order for the roadwheels greased, waggons overhauled, all necessary supplies for the trip got safely on board by the following evening they were ready to start.

The said loads consisted of every conceivable kind of object of barter then in favour among the upcountry natives blankets and Salampore cloth, knives and hatchets, tobacco and snuff, beads and umbrellas of wondrous colours, brass wire for bangles, brass buttons and striped handkerchiefs, lookingglasses and musical instruments, and a score of other "notions." For their own use and that of their native servants they carried sacks of mealie flour, coffee and sugar, a tin of biscuits or so, and two or three sides of bacon sewn up in canvas, with a few tins of preserved fruit, and ditto vegetables.

Each waggon was drawn by a full span of sixteen oxen, which were engineered by a leader and driver to the span, both natives. The waggons and their fittings were similar to that which brought Gerard up from the coast, one of them, indeed, being the same vehicle. The load took up nearly the whole available space, just leaving room for a small tilt, which contained a mattress for sleeping on, also lockers, and canvas pockets hung round the sides. Altogether it is wonderful what a lot can be stowed away on board these ships of the veldt.

One of the waggons had been loaded up in the morning and sent on to the outspan; the other was ready by sundown. As they went lumbering down the street, the oxen fresh and rested, stepping out briskly to the shout of the driver and the occasional crack of his long whip, Gerard, seated beside Dawes on the box, felt quite elated as he heard the driver's reply to passing natives inquiring their destination: "Kwa Zulu," and could enter fully into the spirit of the said reply, given loftily and as it were with a touch of pity for the unfortunates condemned to stagnate at home.

"I was in luck this morning, Ridgeley," said Dawes, as they superintended the inspanning of the other waggon. "I picked up a capital Basuto pony, dirt cheap. He'll do for you to ride. There he is, by the side of mine."

Two steeds were being driven up, knee haltered. One was a bay, the other a strongly built mouse coloured pony of about fourteen hands. Gerard was delighted:

“They tell me he’s a good shooting horse,” went on Dawes, “so that’s another advantage. I always like to have a horse along. One can turn off the track, and get a shot at a buck without having to fag one’s soul out to catch up the waggons again; and then, too, one sometimes wants to go into places where one can’t take the waggons, and for that, of course, a horse is nearly indispensable. Are you fond of shooting?”

Gerard answered eagerly that he had hardly ever been lucky enough to get any. It was, however, the thing of all others he was keenest to attempt. But he had not even got a gun, though he had a revolver.

“Well, we’ll soon make a shot of you,” said Dawes. “There’s a Martini rifle in the waggon, and a double gun, one barrel rifled, the other smooth. We’ll find plenty to empty them at when we get up into the Zulu country, never fear.”

Then, the waggons being inspanned, and the two horses made fast behind, they started. And as they toiled slowly up the long hill which led away to the border, and presently the lights and blue gumtrees which marked the site of Maritzbnrg lying in its great basinlike hollow disappeared behind the rise, Gerard felt that this was the most glorious moment of his life. The most dazzling vista seemed to open out before him adventures and strange experiences to crowd upon each other’s heels. Was he not bound for that wild, mysterious, enchanted land, of which he had heard many a strange tale from those who had called from time to time at Anstey’s? “Upcountry,” they would say, with a careless jerk of the finger, “upcountry!” And already he seemed to hear the booming roar of the prowling lion round the midnight fire, to see the savage phalanx of the Zulu regiment on the march, bound upon some fell errand of death and destruction. All the hard and dull routine of the last few months, the utter desolation of his uncongenial life, even the terrible and sickening realisation that he was next door to destitute, all were forgotten now; all such memories swallowed up in the anticipation of what was before him. As they trekked along in the moonlight, seated side by side on the box of the foremost waggon, Dawes proceeded to initiate Gerard further into some of the mysteries of native trade.

“As I was telling you,” he said, “there’s a regular fashion among natives, just the same as among white folks. For instance, take Salampore cloth; there are the two kinds the thin dark blue and gauzy, and the lighter coloured and coarser kind with the orange stripes. Now, the Zulus are keen as mustard on the first, and simply won’t look at the last, whereas with the natives of Natal, whether of Zulu or Basuto blood, it’s exactly the other way about. Again, take beads. We’ve got all sorts black, white, blue, pink, red. Now, which would you suppose the Zulus are keenest on?”

Gerard replied that of course they would go for the brightest coloured onessay, the red or blue.

“Not a bit of it. The ones they like best of all are the black, after them the white. There’s a fashion about these things, as I tell you. Now, you’d think one of them pocketknives, with a blade like a sabre, and a saw and a corkscrew, and the Lord knows what amount of gimcrackery all in one handle, would fetch them more than any mortal thing. Well, it wouldn’t. They’d hardly say thank you for one such knife that might have cost you a guinea, whereas, for them roughly knocked together butcher knives, that cost me tenpence apiece wholesale, they’ll give almost anything. They like to make a sheath for the thing, to hang around them.”

“What sort of people are they in the way of trade?” asked Gerard.

“Hard as nails. Haggle the eyes out of your head. But you’ve got to be firm over a deal, for they’re up to all manner of tricks. If the barter is live stock, they’ll try all they know to jockey you with some worthless and inferior beasts, and so on. Dishonesty? No, they don’t think it dishonest. It is simply their principle of tradedevil take the hindmost. So far are they from dishonest, that I have more than once in the Zulu country left my waggon standing for an hour at a time with absolutely nobody in charge, and have come back to find it surrounded with people waiting for me, and yet not a thing touched or displaced. How would that pan out for an experiment in England, for instance?”

“But poorly, I’m afraid,” laughed Gerard.

“Just so. No, the Zulu is the hardest nail going at a deal. But once the deal is over and it’s no longer a question of trade, he’s the most honest man in the world. You’ll soon get into their ways and know exactly how to deal with them, and meanwhile try all you know to pick up as much of the language as you can. Sintoba, the driver of the other waggon, is a smart clever chap, and talks English fairly well. You can’t do better than learn all you can from him.”

Thus, with many a useful hint and anecdote illustrative of native character or the life of the veldt, would Dawes beguile the time as they trekked along, all of which Gerard drank in eagerly. His anxiety to make himself of use knew no bounds. He was up before the first glimmer of dawn, and would have the “boys” astir and the fire started for the early pannikin of black coffee, sometimes even before Dawes was awake, to the latter’s astonishment and secret satisfaction. In a day or two he could take his share at inspanning as readily as the rest, was as deft at handling the whip as the professional driver, Sintoba himself, and knew all the oxen by name. And at night, as they sat around the red embers, he was never tired of listening to Dawes’s narratives of experience and

adventure, whether his own or those of others. He was, in fact, as happy as the day was long, and felt almost fraternal when he thought of Anstey, remembering that but for that worthy's rascality he would not be here now.

Several days had gone by. They had passed through Grey Town, and the magnificent bush country beyond, with its towering heights and great cliffs rearing up their smooth red faces from tossing seas of verdure. They had met or passed other waggons from time to time for it was the main road to the Transvaaland now they were descending into the Tugela valley.

"Hot, eh, Ridgeley?" said Dawes, with a dry smile, mopping his forehead with a red pocket-handkerchief.

"Yes, it's warm," assented Gerard, who in reality was nearly lightheaded with the terrible heat, but would not own it. There was not a breath of air. The sunrays, focused down into the great bush-clad valley, seemed to beat with the force of a burning-glass, and the heights on either side shut out whatever breeze might have tempered the torrid fierceness. A shimmer rose from the ground as from the outside of the boiler of a steam-engine, and the screech of the crickets kept up one unending and deafening vibration.

"Do we outspan on this side or cross first?" said Gerard, as the cool murmur of water became audible.

"We'll outspan on the other. The river's low enough to cross without any trouble; but the drift isn't always a good one. The principle of the road is always outspan on the other side of a drift—that is, the opposite side from the one you arrive at. These rivers, you see, come down with surprising swiftness, and then, of course, if you delay, you may be stuck for a week or more. The exception, however, to this rule is, if there's more water in the river than you quite like but yet not enough to stop you. Then it is sometimes a good plan to outspan for a little while to rest your oxen, because they'll need all their strength for pulling through."

The current, though smooth and swift flowing, proved stronger than it looked. In splashed the first waggon, amid the shouting and whipcracking. The leader could hardly keep his feet, and what with the force of the current and the plunges of the fore oxen, he was having a pretty bad time of it. But they emerged panting and dripping on the other side. Gerard, however, who was on the second waggon, came near meeting with a disaster that might have cost him his life.

The great vehicle was three parts through. The driver, wading and splashing beside the span, was urging and encouraging it by the regulation series of shrill and longdrawn yells. Gerard, who was standing on the box, cracking the long whip, and also lending his voice to swell the chorus, was suddenly seen to overbalance, sway, and topple over into the water, disappearing immediately.

John Dawes, watching progress from the opposite bank, turned white as death. Gerard had fallen in front of the wheels!

“Oh, good God! He’s done for!” he gasped.

Meanwhile the driver, who had not seen the accident, was yelling his loudest, with the result that the span was tugging its hardest. The waggon was already emerging from the water, rolling up the steep slope from the drift.

“He’s done for,” muttered Dawes, ashy pale. “He’ll have been ground to pulp under the water.”

But no sooner had the words escaped him, than, lo, Gerard himself, dripping from head to foot! He jumped down from behind the waggon with a celerity that showed he had come to no sort of harm.

“Whatwhat did you do that for?” stammered Dawes. “How did you do it?”

“I just grazed one wheel in falling. Luckily I fell between both, and remembering all you had said about falling off the disselboom, I hung on like grim death to the bottom of the waggonheld my breath under water, knowing we would be out in a minute. Then I worked my way along till I was clear of the wheels and got out. But I’m pretty well blown after it. I couldn’t have held on a minute longer,” he gasped, still out of breath with the almost superhuman exertion he had just gone through.

“By Jove, youngster, but you’ll do!” said the other. “You’ve got pluck and presence of mind, and that’s all you want to carry you through any mortal thing.” And he turned away, to give orders about outspanning, glad of the opportunity to recover his selfpossession, for even he had undergone a rude shock over the frightfully narrow escape his young companion had just experienced.

The next morning, when they turned out, Dawes said

“Do you feel like paying Bob Kingsland a visit, Ridgeley?”

“Rather. Does he live near here, then?”

“A few miles off. In fact, this outspan is almost on his farm. Doorn Draai, it’s called. We’ve come along very well, and the grazing here is first rate. It won’t hurt the oxen to have a day’s rest and a real good fill up. We’ll have breakfast early and ride over. We are likely to find some of them at home, anyway.”

“That’ll be first rate!” said Gerard, with genuine pleasure. And then he set to work to serve out rations to the leaders and drivers, each of whom received a measure of maizemeal, which, going into a common stock, was stirred up in a threelegged pot and soon reduced to porridge, for on such fare do the natives of Natal wax fat and strong. Afterwards he got out a clean basin and kneaded up rosterkoekjes, a species of dampercake, and put them to bake on the ashes for their own breakfast, while Dawes superintended the cooking of a savoury game stew, compounded of partridges, ringdoves, and a plover or two, which they had shot the day before while coming along.

“We don’t live so badly, even on the road, eh, Ridgeley?” said Dawes, as they sat doing ample justice to this, and to the steaming cups of strong black coffee wherewith it was washed down.

“No, indeed,” assented Gerard, briskly, beginning on half a partridge. “Shall we take a gun along this morning?”

“We might. Don’t know that it’s worth while, though. By the way, Kingsland’s a widower, and his pretty daughter keeps house for him. Don’t you go and fall in love with her in view of the time our trip is likely to last.”

For reply Gerard laughed lightheartedly. It was not likely, he thought, remembering that pair of blue eyes in the buggy.

After breakfast they saddled up the horses, and Dawes having given Sintoba some final instructions, they started. The ride was a pleasant enough one, though somewhat hot. Their way lay mostly at the bottom of a long winding valley with great bushclad slopes shooting up on either hand, and the sunny air was alive with the piping whistle of spreuws and the cooing of innumerable ringdoves.

“There’s the house,” said Dawes, as a curl of blue smoke rose from the bushclad hillside about a mile ahead. “And there’s Kingsland himself,” he added, as a shout from a little way off their road drew their attention to a horseman who was riding towards them.

“Hallo, John Dawes!” cried the latter, as he joined them. “Where have you dropped from now and who have you got with you? Why, it’s young Ridgeley. Well, Ridgeley, I’m glad to see you, my boy. What have you been doing with yourself all this time? By the by, didn’t you get my letter?”

“Letter? No,” echoed Gerard, in some astonishment.

“Why, I wrote to you at Anstey’s about a fortnight ago. Found out you were there through the papers. That affair with the Zulu and the Umgeni Fall went the round of the papers. Didn’t you see it?”

“No,” answered Gerard, still lost in astonishment. “I’m very sorry. I don’t know what you must have thought of me, Mr Kingsland, but I never had that letter. It must have come after I left, and the fact is, Anstey and I didn’t part on very good terms.”

“So? The paragraph said you were in his employ. Couldn’t you get on with him, or wasn’t the work to your taste?”

“Anstey swindled him out of every shilling he had,” put in Dawes, seeing Gerard hesitate and look a trifle embarrassed. “Biggest blackguard in this colony, is Anstey.”

“So?” said Mr Kingsland again. “Well, we must hear all about your experiences by and by, Ridgeley. Here we are at the house now and here’s my little housekeeper come to see who I’m bringing home to dinner,” he added lovingly, as the figure of a girl appeared at the door and came down the steps to meet them. “Ridgeley, this is my daughter May,” he went on, when they had dismounted. “May, you’ve heard me talk of this young man we were shipmates on board the Amatikulu. Why, what’s the matter?”

For Gerard was staring in astonishment, and the girl’s blue eyes were opening wide with the same emotion, while a slight colour came into her face. And in those blue eyes Gerard recognised the identical pair which had beamed approval on the deft manner in which he had reduced the odds against the sorely beset Zulu.

“Why, we’ve met before, father, only we didn’t know who we were then,” she answered. “How do you do, Mr Ridgeley? Welcome to Doorn Draai.”

Gerard, in a sort of waking dream, took the hand extended to him in no wise the sharer of the girl’s quiet selfpossession. To think that the owner of those blue eyes which had been in his thoughts a great deal since that chance meeting, should turn out to be old Kingsland’s daughter! And again, the fact that they had dwelt in his thoughts was,

considering his age, enough to play havoc with his composure on finding himself thus suddenly and unexpectedly face to face with their owner.

“Met before, have you?” echoed Mr Kingsland, in some surprise.

“Why, of course we have,” said a male voice in the background. “How d’you do, Mr Ridgeley!”

And Gerard found himself shaking hands with the other occupant of the buggy on that memorable evening.

“Been keeping up your boxing since then, eh?” laughed Tom Kingsland. “Why, governor, this is the man who floored those two niggers so neatly. I told you about it, you remember, when we were coming back from Maritzburg.”

“Ah, to be sure, to be sure. He can take care of himself anywhere now, I should think,” said the older man, kindly.

And Gerard, though somewhat shy and embarrassed at finding himself a sort of point of general observation, could not resist a feeling of elation over the consciousness that he stood well in the opinion of his new friends.

Then, after a brief rest, during which Dawes and Mr Kingsland put away a glass of grog together and smoked a pipe or two, they set out for a look round. And then for the first time Gerard was able to take in the place for at the time of his arrival he had had no eyes for anything but one of its inhabitants. The house, a roomy, onestoreyed building, with a stoep and verandah, stood against the slope of the hill. A little distance off stood the sheep and cattlekraals, and the huts of the native servants. Below, on the bank of a small watercourse, was a large bit of enclosed and cultivated land, and beside this a fruit orchard.

“I’m afraid it’s a little late for fruit,” said Tom Kingsland, as they strolled through the latter. “There are still a few peaches left, though, and any amount of figs.”

“You can’t grow peaches and grapes like this outofdoors in England?” said May. “I suppose you hardly ever see such a thing there except under glass.”

“Oh yeson walls,” said Gerard.

And then, as they wandered on beneath the pleasant shade of the overarching fig trees, and down by a quince hedge spangled with yellow fruit, or again emerged upon a

waterhole where a colony of finks dashed hither and thither chattering in alarm, while their globular nests, hanging like oranges from the boughs above the water, swung and jerked at a rate which promised badly for the eggs they might contain. The girl plied him with all manner of questions about England and the life there. And, lo, when they had laughed over each other's mistakes and misconceptions with regard to their respective countries, it seemed as if they had known each other all their lives. Certain it was that to Gerard that walk seemed the most delicious he had ever taken. But it could not last for ever, and so they had to return to the house and to dinner.

There they found Mr Kingsland's other son, who was duly introduced to Gerard. Arthur Kingsland was very like his brother Tom, and both were fine specimens of young colonial manhood. They could ride anything, follow spoor, hit any mark at most astonishing ranges, and were afraid of nothing. The reputation of Gerard's feats, which had already reached them, was a sure passport to their favour, and accordingly they soon became the very best of friends.

"Heard anything more about the Zulu question, Arthur?" said Mr Kingsland during dinner to his youngest son, who had been out on horseback since daybreak.

"Only the usual lie Cetywayo is going to sweep in and eat us all up at a minute's notice. Another yarn is that he's going to drive all the Boers out of the disputed territory."

"It's just possible there may be some disturbance there," said Mr Kingsland. "Still, Cetywayo is much too shrewd a man to declare regular war against the Transvaal."

"Well, our route lies right through that same disputed territory," said Dawes. "What do you think, Ridgeley? Like to get into a scrimmage with a Zulu impi?"

"Mr Ridgeley is pretty good at fighting Kafirs, I should say," put in May, slyly, before he had time to reply.

"Oh, I'm afraid I shan't hear the end of that little difference in a hurry," said Gerard, laughing ruefully. "I rather wish I had left Sobuza to fight his own battles."

"How can you say that?" said May. "Are you so utterly devoid of imagination? Why, you rescued the man twice on the same day! That means that he is to have some influence on your fortunes. You are going up into the Zulu country now. You are sure to see him again."

"Maybe only to get an assegai put into him if he does," cut in Tom. "Isn't there a proverb, that if you save a fellow's life he's bound to play you a shady trick?"

“Be quiet, you wet blanket,” retorted the girl. “I foresee different things. I foresee that the Zulu will in some way or other turn up again, and that he will have an influence in Mr Ridgeley’s destinies.”

How true this was fated to prove it was little that either of them thought at the time.

The afternoon was spent very much as had been the morning, strolling around looking about the farm, for it was a slack time just then and there was not much doing. Towards sundown Tom Kingsland suggested they should go down to a waterhole and try for a shot at a duck, an idea which Gerard cordially endorsed, and in the sequel greatly distinguished himself, considering his want of practice with the gun, for the pair of ducks which they brought home represented one apiece. And then, in the evening, while Mr Kingsland and Dawes smoked their pipes on the stoep, the young people gathered round the piano, and Gerard thought he had never heard anything so entrancingly delicious in his life as May’s fresh clear voice lifted up in song. Then all too soon for him had come bedtime, and in the morning an early start to rejoin the waggons.

Before Gerard turned in Mr Kingsland followed him to his room for a few words.

“Well, Ridgeley, so you’re going to make another start, this time as an upcountry trader. You’ve had a few ups and downs already, it appears; and maybe there’ll come a time when you’ll thank your stars you have.”

“I do that already, Mr Kingsland, for otherwise I should never have found myself launched on this undertaking. What a good fellow Dawes is!”

“He is he is. But what I was going to say is this. It’ll do you no harm to get an insight into waggon travel and veldt life, and the native trade and the natives themselves. But a sensible fellow like you must see that that sort of thing isn’t going to last a man all his life; and, indeed, it oughtn’t to. It isn’t good for any man to become a confirmed wanderer, a sort of rolling stone. So don’t let this trip unsettle you, or turn your mind from the idea of going in for hard and regular work. Turn it to the best possible account you can while you’re on it, but make up your mind that it isn’t going to last, and that when you come back your plan is to settle down to regular work. You are made of far better stuff than to slide into the mere knockabout, harumscarum adventurer, as some of these upcountry going chaps are only too ready to do, especially when they begin young. So keep that before your mind is my advice to you. And now I dare say you’re wondering whether you are ever going to get to bed, or whether a certain prosy old fellow intends to keep preaching to you quite all night. So, good night, my lad. I won’t

say goodbye, for we shall most of us be up before you start. Good night; I need hardly say I wish you every success.”

Chapter Ten.

A Piece of Zulu Jockeying.

After leaving Doorn Draai they trekked on through the Umsinga district, and, turning off the main road at Helpmakaar on the Biggarsberg Heights, descended to Rorke's Drift. And it was while making their way down to that now historical point that Gerard began to realise what a waggon could do; what an incredible amount of hard knocking about it could stand; for the track seemed a mere succession of ruts and boulders, and as the huge vehicles went creaking and grinding over this, they seemed literally to twist and writhe, until it looked as though each fresh bump must shatter the whole fabric into a thousand crashing fragments. Once, but for his promptitude, the waggon of which Gerard was in charge would infallibly have overturned. However, they reached the drift without accident, and crossed the next day into the Zulu country.

At first Gerard could hardly realise that he was no longer under the British flag. This side of the Buffalo river presented no appreciable difference to the side they had just left. A line of precipitous hills rose a few miles in front, and to the eastward a great lionshaped crag, the now illfamed Isandhlwana. But few Zulus had come to the waggons, and they struck him as wearing no different aspect to the natives on the Natal side, nor, by the by, did they seem in any way keen upon trading.

We fear it may hardly be denied that the rosecoloured spectacles through which Gerard had first looked upon the trip and its prospects had undergone some slight dimness, and for this May Kingsland's blue eyes were wholly responsible. For he remembered he was very young, and the consciousness that a long time a whole year, perhaps must elapse before he should see her again, cast something of a gloom upon his spirits. Goodnatured John Dawes saw through the change in his young companion's lightheartedness, and laughed dryly to himself. Gerard would soon find the right cure for that sort of complaint, he said, when the real business of the trip should begin.

One morning a party of half a dozen young Zulus, driving an ox, came up to them as they sat outspanned. The one who seemed to be the leader was a tall, straight, wellbuilt fellow, with a pleasing intelligent countenance. He, like the rest, was unringed, but held his head high in the air, as though he were somebody. All carried assegais and shields. The young leader and two of the others strode up to where Gerard was sitting, and uttering the usual form of greeting, "Saku bona," squatted down on the grass before him.

Now, it happened that Dawes was away, having ridden off to some kraals a few miles distant. Gerard, thus thrown upon his own resources, began to feel something of the

burden of responsibility as he returned their greeting and waited for them to speak next. But the leader, stretching forth his hand, said

“Give me that.”

Gerard was cleaning a gun at the time, the doublebarrelled one, rifle and shot. The Zulu’s remark had come so quick, accompanied by a halfmove forward, as though he might be going to seize the weapon, that Gerard instinctively tightened his grasp on it.

“Who are you?” he said, looking the other in the eyes.

“Nkumbikazulu, son of Sirayo, the king’s induna,” replied the youth, with a haughty toss of the head, denoting surprise that anybody should require to be informed of his identity. “Give me the gun; I want to look at it,” he continued, again stretching forth his hand.

Gerard realised the delicacy of the situation. There was a greedy sparkle in the young Zulu’s eye as it lighted upon the weapon, which caused him to feel anything but sure that it would be returned to him again. On the other hand, Dawes, he remembered, had a poor opinion of Sirayo and his clan, and he did not want to offend the chief’s son, if he could help it. His command of the language beginning to fail him, he summoned Sintoba to the rescue.

“Ask him if, he wants to trade, because, if so, the Baas (Master) will be back soon. Here is some snuff for him, meanwhile.”

Nkumbikazulu condescended to accept the snuff, then, through the driver, he explained that his father had sent the black ox as a present to “Jandosi” for such was John Dawes’s name among the natives, being of course a corruption of his own and he, the speaker, had come to do a little trade on his own account. First of all, he wanted that gun, and as many cartridges as he could have. What was the price?

Gerard replied that the gun was not for sale. It was wanted to shoot buck and birds during their trip further upcountry.

“Au!” exclaimed Nkumbikazulu. “You are so near the border, you can easily send back for another gun. I will give five oxen for it. Ten, then,” he added, as Gerard shook his head in dissent. Still Gerard refused.

“Hau! Does he want all the Zulu country?” muttered the others, forgetting good manners in their impatience and eagerness to possess the weapon, and for this, Sintoba, who was of Zulu descent and a ringed man at that, rebuked them sternly.

“Since when has the son of a chief learnt to talk with the loud tongue and windbag swagger of the Amabuna?” (Boers) he said. “Have you come here to trade or to play the fool?”

“Hau, listen to the Kafula!” cried the young Zulus, springing to their feet and rattling their assegais threateningly. “Since when is the son of a chief to be reviled by a Kafula, who is doing dog at the heels of a travelling white man?”

Gerard, who by this time could understand a great deal more than he could speak, looked apprehensively at Sintoba, expecting an immediate outbreak. But to his surprise the man merely uttered a disdainful click, and deliberately turned his broad back upon the exasperated Zulus. He almost expected to see it transfixed with their assegais, and stood ready to brain with his clubbed gun, for he had no cartridges handy, the first who should make an aggressive move. But no such move was made.

“I return,” said Nkumbikazulu, darting forth his hand, with a malevolent look directed especially upon Gerard, “I return to my father to carry word that Jandosí rejects his present, and has left a Kafula with his waggons, and a white umfane (boy) to revile the son of a chief.” And turning, the whole party walked rapidly away, driving the ox before them.

When they had gone a little distance, they began staging an improvised strophe the burden of whose veiled insolence took in the white race in general, and the last specimen of it the singers had seen in particular, and thus bawling, they eventually receded from sight.

Gerard was terribly put about by this occurrence, and was disposed to blame himself bitterly. Surely he had been over cautious, and had brought about this hostile termination by his own awkwardness and stupidity. But to his inexpressible relief John Dawes, to whom on his return he narrated the whole affair, was not at all of this opinion.

“It couldn’t have been helped,” the latter declared. “If I had been here the result would likely have been the same, for they’re cheeky young dogs those sons of Sirayo, and the old man himself is a thoroughpaced old sweep. If you made any mistake at all, it was a mistake on the right side that of firmness and I’m not sure you made any.”

Which dictum lifted a weight from Gerard’s mind.

“I’m only afraid they’ll play us some trick,” he said. “Hadn’t we better get away from here as soon as possible?”

“Nno. They might construe that into an act of running away. We’ll just trek on a few miles further, and see what turns up, but I don’t mind telling you I hardly like the look of things. The people are very unsettled, thanks to this disputed boundary question, and the badgering of the Natal Government. They are sulky and sullen, and flatly refuse to trade. I think we’ll get away north pretty soon.”

That evening an incident occurred which, taken in conjunction with the events of the day, looked ominous. The “boy” who was sent to bring in the two horses, which were turned loose to graze, returned with only one; the other he could not find. He had hunted for it high and low, but without result.

By this time the two horses had become so accustomed to the waggons that they would never stray far, and often return of their own accord; consequently, it was not thought worthwhile even to kneehalter them. Now, however, the one which the “boy” had brought back had been found much further afield than was usual, and of the other there was no trace. And the missing steed was Gerard’s mousecoloured Basuto pony.

Saddling up the horse that remained and giving orders where the waggons were to outspan, Dawes cantered away into the veldt. He returned in two hours. He had lighted upon the spoor, which led in the contrary direction from that which might have been expected, for it led in the direction of the Blood River, and therefore right away from Sirayo’s and out of the Zulu country, instead of farther into the same; and then darkness had baffled further investigation. Nevertheless, he would wager longish odds, he declared, that the missing quadruped would spend that night not a mile distant from Sirayo’s kraal.

“It’s a most infernal place, Ridgeley,” he said gloomily. “It’s overhung by a big krantz, which is a pretty good lookout post, and surrounded by holes and caves you could stow anything away in. I don’t know how we are going to get Mouse back again short of paying through the nose for him. I must sleep on it and think out some plan. That young brute, Nkumbi! I feel quite murderous as if I could shoot him on sight.”

In view of the late occurrence, Sintoba received instructions to keep watch a part of the night, while Dawes himself took the remainder, not that he thought it at all probable that any attempt at further depredations would be made, still it was best to be on the safe side. And in fact no further attempt was made, and the night in its calm and starry beauty, went by undisturbed.

The place where the waggon were outspanned was open and grassy. Around stretched the wide and rolling veldt; here a conical hillock rising abruptly from the plain, there the precipitous line of a range of mountains. About half a mile from the site of the outspan ran a spruit or watercourse, the bed of which, deep and yawning, now held but a tiny thread of water, trickling over its sandy bottom. The banks of this spruit were thickly studded with bush, and out of them branched several deep dongas or rifts worn out of the soil by the action of the water.

It was a hot morning. The sun blazed fiercely from the cloudless sky, and from the ground there arose a shimmer of heat. Away on the plain the two spans of oxen were dotted about grazing, in charge of one of the leaders, whose dark form could be seen, a mere speck, squatting among the grass. In the shade of one of the waggons, Dawes and Gerard sat, finishing their breakfast, while at a fire some fifty yards off, the natives were busy preparing theirs, stirring the contents of the threelegged pot, and keeping up a continual hum of conversation the while.

“No, I don’t like the look of things at all,” repeated Dawes, beginning to fill his pipe. “It is some days now since we crossed into the Zulu country, and the people hardly come near us. It looks as if all this talk about a war was going to lead to something. I’m afraid they are turning ugly about that boundary question. I meant to have trekked north on the west side of the Blood River, and taken this part of the country on our way back, if we had anything left to trade that is, but with all these reported ructions between the Zulus and Boers in the disputed territory, I reckon we’d be quieter and safer in Zululand proper.”

“How ever will they settle the claim?” said Gerard.

“Heaven only knows. Here we have just annexed the Transvaal, and got nothing for our pains but a bankrupt State whose people hate us, and a lot of awkward liabilities, and not the least awkward is this disputed boundary. If we give it over to the Dutch, Cetywayo is sure to make war on them, and therein comes the fun of our new liability. We shall have to protect them, they being now British subjects, and when we have squashed the Zulus, the Boers will turn on us. If, on the other hand, we give it over to the Zulus, we are giving away half the district of Utrecht, and turning out a lot of people who have been living there for years under what they thought good and sound title from their own government, which doesn’t seem right either. And any middle course will please neither party, and be worse than useless.”

“I suppose, if the truth were known, the Transvaal claim is actually a fraud?”

“I believe it is. They claim that Mpande ceded them the land. Now I don’t believe for a moment the old king would have been such a fool as to do anything of the kind, and even if he had been inclined to for the sake of peace, Cetywayo, who practically held the reins then, would never have let him. Well, if that Commission don’t sit mighty soon, it’ll be no good for it to sit at all, for there’ll be wigs on the green long before.”

“I wonder if we shall ever see poor Mouse again,” said Gerard.

A sound of deeptoned voices and the rattle of assegai hafts caused both to turn. Three Zulus were approaching rapidly. Striding up to the waggons they halted, and gazing fixedly at the two white men, they gave the usual greeting, “Saku bona” and dropped into a squatting posture. They were fine specimens of humanity, tall and straight. One was a kehla, but the other two were unringed. For clothing they wore nothing but the inevitable mútya. Each was fully armed with large warshield, knobkerrie, and several murderous looking assegais.

The first greeting over, Gerard asked to look at some of these. With a dry smile one of the warriors handed over his weapons, but to a suggestion that he should trade one or two of them he returned a most emphatic refusal.

“What is the news?” asked Dawes, having distributed some snuff.

“News!” replied the ringed man. “Ou! there is none.”

“Do men travel in such haste to deliver no news?” pursued Dawes, with a meaning glance at the heaving chests and perspiring bodies of the messengers, for such he was sure they were. “But never mind. It is no affair of mine. Yet, do you seek the kraal of the chief, Sirayo? If you do, you might carry my ‘word’ to him.”

The man, after a shade of hesitation, answered that Sirayo’s kraal happened to be their destination. He would carry the “word” of the white trader.

“Tell him then I have lost a horse. If the chief has it found and returned to me, I will send him a bottle of tywala (Note 1), a new green blanket, and this much gwai (tobacco), measuring a length of about a yard. I will further send him a long sheathknife.”

“We hear your words, Umlúngu. They shall be spoken into the ears of the chief. Now we must resume our road, Hlalanigahle!”

With which sonorous farewell the Zulus turned and strode away across the veldt at the same quick and hurried pace as before.

“Just as I told you, Ridgeley,” said Dawes, lighting his pipe with characteristic calmness. “We shall have to pay some sort of blackmail. Lucky if we get Mouse back at all.”

They remained outspanned all day on the same spot. About an hour before sundown two Zulus were seen approaching. They made their appearance suddenly and at no great distance, emerging from the line of scrub which bordered upon the water spruit.

“Hau!” exclaimed Sintoba. “It is Nkumbikazulu.”

The chief’s son, with his companion, drew near, and greeted those around the waggon in an easy, offhand fashion, as though he were quite willing to forgive and forget any little unpleasantness of the day before. His father, he said, had received Jandosí’s message, and had sent him at once and in all haste to talk about it. He thought the horse might be found, but what Jandosí offered was not quite enough. There were few people at his father’s kraal. Sirayo could not get them to turn out for so little as the promised reward would amount to when divided among the searchers. Now Sirayo’s “word” was this. If Jandosí would offer, say six bottles of tywala the white tywala that is drunk out of square bottles to be distributed among the people, together with the gwai and the other things, and a gun and some cartridges for the chief himself, something might be done; in fact, the horse was pretty sure to be found. But the gun was what the chief desired most; and in fact the gun he must have, hinted Nkumbikazulu, with a grin of hardly concealed triumph.

The barefaced impudence, the open rascality of the demand, would have made the blood boil in the veins of any less eventempered man than John Dawes. The latter, however, took it quite coolly. But all the while he was thinking out some plan whereby he might recover possession of the horse, and at the same time turn the tables on the rascally old chief and his scamp of a son. To this end, and with a view to gaining time, he engaged the latter in a protracted haggle, and mixed some gin and water for his refreshment. To his surprise, however, Nkumbikazulu refused the proffered tywala saying he did not like it. The other Zulu, however, less particular, drained the pannikin to the very last drop, and asked for more.

Would not some knives do instead of the gun? asked Dawes; or a coloured umbrella, anything in fact? The gun was almost a necessary of life, and he could not part with it. He could get another horse from the Boers on the Transvaal border, but not another gun. But Nkumbikazulu was firm. His father must have a gun, he said. There was nothing else that would be acceptable.

Now while this haggle was in progress one of the spans of oxen, which had been out grazing in charge of the leader of Gerard's waggon, was being driven leisurely in. Wondering why half the oxen should thus be left behind, Gerard drew off from the talkers, whom he understood but imperfectly, and turned to meet the "boy" in order to learn the reason. But the latter, without seeming to notice his presence, waited until he was quite near, and going behind the animals, so as to be momentarily screened from the group at the waggons, said in a low tone

"I hasheLapa." ("The horseover there.")

The wordsthe quick side glance towards the line of bushwere sufficient. Gerard's pulses tingled with excitement, but he refrained from any further questioning. With an effort preserving his selfpossession, he strolled leisurely back to the waggon. He took in the situation, and his coolness and promptitude at once suggested a plan.

The remainder of the oxen were in almost the contrary direction to that indicated by the native as being the hidingplace of the stolen horse. Shading his eyes to look at them, he said to Dawesspeaking slowly, and with rather a tired drawl

"I think I'll ride out and bring in the oxen. When I'm halfway there, I shall turn and bring in something else. Don't let these two chaps stir from here till I come back. Hold them here at any price."

Even the quick observant senses of the two Zulus were baffled by the slow carelessness of the tone. They half started as they saw him fling the saddle on the remaining horse, and ride off; but, noting the direction he took, their suspicions were quite lulled. They dropped back into their easy, goodhumoured, halfimpudent tone and attitude.

"Well, Jandosi, what do you say?" said the chief's son. "The sun is nearly down and I must return to my father. Is he to have the gun?"

"I suppose there is no help for it," replied Dawes. "After all, I can get another gun. But that horsehe is a good horse. Wait, I will see which of the two guns I will give." And he climbed into the waggontent.

"That is the one, Jandosi. The doublebarrel. That is the one!" cried NkumbikaZulu, half starting to his feet as Dawes reappeared. But he dropped again into his squatting position, with marvellous celerity and a dismayed ejaculation.

This change was brought about by one quick, stern, peremptory wordthat and the perception that both barrels were covering him full and pointblank. And behind those

barrels shone a pair of steel grey eyes, which the chief's son knew to go with the coolest brain and steadiest hand on the whole Zulu border.

"Stir a finger, Nkumbi, and you are a dead man!" continued Dawes. "The first of you who moves is dead that moment!"

"Whau!" cried both Zulus, their eyes starting from their heads. But they made no attempt to move, for they knew this white man to be absolutely a man of his word. For a few minutes this singular group remained thus immovable. The cool, resolute white man, and the two savages staring in petrified consternation into the mouth of the deadly weapon that threatened them. Then, not even the certainty of a swift death could avail to repress the sudden start and halfstifled cry of rage and mortification which escaped them. For Gerard, having covered about half the distance towards the outlying span of oxen had now suddenly turned and was riding back at full gallop towards the line of bush.

"Don't movedon't move!" repeated Dawes, and the ominous flash in his eyes was sufficient. Immovable as statues, the two Zulus squatted. Then a sound of distant neighing was heard, and in a few minutes Gerard was seen to emerge from the bushes, leading a second horse. It was the missing Mouse.

Still Dawes did not alter his position, nor did he suffer his prisoners to. He heard his young companion arrive and tie up the horses. He heard him climb into the waggon; then, when he saw him at his side armed with the other gun, he spoke.

"Since when have the Zulu people become thieves, and the son of a chief a common ishingal (rascal) I have always boasted that in the Zulu country my property was safer than even among my own people, but I can do so no more, since my horse was stolen by the son of a chief, and his father connived at the theft." The tone, the words, bitter and scathing, seemed to sting them like a lash.

"You have found your horse, not we, Jandos, that is all," retorted Nkumbikazulu with a scowl of sullen hate. "How did we know he was there any more than you did yourself? You have found your horsebe content."

"I promised your father certain things, Nkumbi, if he found the horse. He has sent it back and I will keep my word. But he deserves to receive nothing at all; nor will I ever again trade in his district."

Then he lowered his piece and instructed Gerard to fetch out the articles agreed upon. In silence the Zulus received them. Rage and shame was depicted on their countenances,

and their efforts to laugh off the situation were a dead failure. Among the Bantu race nothing is more disconcerting than to be caught lying, and these two scions of it felt extremely foolish accordingly.

“Whau! Jandosi,” mocked Nkumbikazulu. “We are only two, armed with spears and kerries. You have fireweapons, and four Amakafula. Yet we fear you not. Come forth from your waggons, you alone. Leave the fireweapons behind and bring sticks, I will meet you hand to handman to manand we will fight it out. I who am only a boy.”

But of this valiant offer John Dawes, who was giving orders to inspan, took no immediate notice. At length he said

“You will get quite as much fighting as you can well take care of, Nkumbikazulu, if you go on a little longer on your present tack. And, mark me, anybody who tries to interfere with me will get more than enough. Farewell to you. Trek!”

This last to the drivers. The whips cracked, the drivers yelled, and the waggons rolled ponderously forward. The two Zulus were left standing there a picture of mortification and disgust.

“You’ve got to be firm with these chaps, Ridgeley, once you do have a difference with them,” said Dawes, in his ordinarily selfpossessed and careless tone. “Well, it’s lucky we’ve got Mouse back again so cheap. That was really an uncommonly smart idea of yours, and a wellcarried out one.”

They trekked on the best part of the night, Gerard and Dawes thoroughly armed. Each rode on horseback, keeping a careful watch lest the treachery of the now exasperated chief should prompt some aggression under cover of night; but none took place. In the morning they beheld two large bodies of Zulus in the distance, marching to the northwestward, and could distinguish the glint of spears, and the echo of their marching song. But on whatever errand these impis were bound, they evinced no desire to molest the trekkers, or even to investigate nearer; in fact, their object seemed to be rather to avoid these latter.

“There’s trouble brewing,” said Dawes, with a grave shake of the head as he watched the impis disappearing over a distant ridge. “Those chaps are bound for the disputed territory, and if they fall foul of the Boers it’ll start the war going in fine style. I don’t like the look of things at all. The sooner we get into Swaziland the better. The Zulu country’s just a trifle too disturbed.”

Note 1. This word, which properly applies to native beer, is used for any intoxicating liquor. In this instance it would mean spirits.

Chapter Eleven.

A New Terror.

Several months later than the events last recorded, a large trek might have been seen, wending its way southward along the rugged bush veldt lying beneath the Lebombo mountains, just outside the Zulu boundary.

It is evening, and the lustrous glow of the setting sun reddens the great precipices of the craggy range, tingeing with vivid gold the green roll of the bush. The lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep and goats are harmoniously mingled on the still and balmy air; and over and above this comes the rumble of the waggons and the occasional crack of a whip. A little duikerbuck springs from his form, to stand a moment, his soft eye dilating, the black tips of his tiny, horns pricked up as he listens, then darts away noiselessly into the scrub. Brightplumaged birds flash screaming from the path as the unwonted tumult draws near, for not often are they alarmed in this wise, here in their bosky solitudes.

First come a number of cattle, the varicoloured hides dappling the prevailing green and brown of the veldt; a mixed lot too, for among the small but compact Zulu breed, towering in elephantine proportions above them, is here and there the buffalolike frame of a Boer trekoos with its strongly pronounced hump and great branching horns. Cows with their calves, too, are there, and an occasional thrust and clash of horns and angry low betoken the collision of two or more quarrelsome beasts, whom the herd's kerries, however, avail to pacify even if his voice suffices not. These travel leisurely, feeding as they go, and are in excellent condition. Some little way behind comes a flock of sheep and goats, also feeding as they go, and propelled by as travelstained and dustylooking a native as the one who herds the cattle aforesaid. The rear is brought up by two waggon, one behind the other, each drawn by a full span of sixteen oxen. The native driver of each, walking alongside, wields his whip languidly and lazily, and the leader is so tired that he can hardly put one foot before the other, for the day has been a sweltering hot one. Even the two horses fastened behind the last waggon have no elasticity in their step, as with drooping head they plod mechanically on, and the dust hangs in a cloud above the line of march.

Seated in front of the foremost waggon, smoking their pipes, are two white men, also travelstained and dusty. In one of them we have no difficulty in recognising the weathertanned lineaments and impassive expression of John Dawes. The other countenancewell, we might have some difficulty in recognising the owner, might excusably hesitate before pronouncing it to be that of our friend, Gerard Ridgeley. Yet he it is.

For those few months of healthy openair life have done wonders for Gerard have wrought a greater change in him than the same number of years spent under ordinary conditions would have done. They have, in fact, made a man of him. His frame has broadened and his muscles are set. There is a firm, selfreliant look in his face, now bronzed to the hue of that of John Dawes himself, and he has grown a beard. In short, any one who saw him now would pronounce him to have become a remarkably finelooking fellow.

By no means all fun has Gerard found that upcountry trading trip. Of toilhard, prosaic, wearying plenty has come his way. There have been times, for instance, when every muscle has been strained and aching with the labour of digging out the waggons, stuck fast over axledeep in a mud holedigging them out only to see them plunge in again deeper than ever; or again in offloading everything, and carrying the whole cargo piecemeal up some short but rugged acclivity impossible to avoid, and up which the great vehicles could only be drawn empty. Half fainting beneath the burning glare of a wellnigh tropical sun toiling amid the sheeting downpour of days of rain, and that too often on a ration of mealies or hard biscuit, and a little brack or muddy water he has never yet dreamed of shirking, never complained.

That trek, too, of nearly fortyeight hours over a parched land, where each expected waterhole was a mere surface of cracked and baked mud, and the oxen with hanging tongues and salivadropping jaws could hardly pull half a mile per hour, and the night was as brassy as the day, and their wanderings and divergences far and wide in search of the necessary fluid was rewarded with greater exhaustion than ever, and the red surface of the burning veldt stretched grim and forbidding to the skyline, mocking them now and again with a fair miragethat terrible time when they sat together on the waggon in silence and wondering what the end would be, or rather when it would be, then, too, no word of complaint had escaped Gerard.

Of dangers too he has borne his share. He can recall the horde of turbulent and aggressive natives crowding round the waggon of which he was in sole charge, when during a whole day his life and the lives of the two "boys" seemed to hang upon a hair, nights spent in lonely watches, in an insecure and semihostile land, expecting the spears of predatory savages in the treacherous darkness. That other night, too, when he was lost in the veldt and had to lie out in the open, with hardly time to construct a hurried enclosure and collect sufficient firewood ere darkness fell, and to this slender protection alone had he been forced to trust for the safety of himself and his horse. Hardly till his dying day will he forget those terrible eyes flaming red in the light of his scanty fire, as a pair of prowling lions roared around his frail breastwork the long night through. These are but some of the dangers, some of the privations which have fallen to

his lot. Yet as he looks back upon them all it is regretfully. He cannot feel unqualified satisfaction that the trip is drawing to a close.

For it is drawing to a close. With all its perils and hardships it has been a very fairly successful one, as the sheep and cattle which they are driving before them serve to show. So also do such other articles of barter as can be carried in the waggons, which latter, however, are travelling light; for nearly all the stockintrade has been disposed of.

Rumours have from time to time reached them in Swaziland and beyond, with regard to the state of Zulu affairs, and the latest of such reports has moved Dawes to decide to avoid the Zulu country, and reenter Natal by way of the Transvaal. So tomorrow the southward course will be changed to a westward one, and the trek will be pursued along the north bank of the Pongolo.

During the months our friends had spent upcountry, diplomatic relations between the Zulus and the British had become strained to a dangerous tension. Both parties were eyeing each other and preparing for war.

Seated on the waggon as aforesaid, our two friends are talking over the situation.

“We had better give them a wide berth, Ridgeley, until we get all this plunder safe home,” Dawes was saying. “Even now we are nearer the Pongolo than I like, and in the north of Zululand there’s a pretty thoroughpaced blackguard or two, in the shape of an outlying chief who wouldn’t think twice of relieving us of all our travelling stock, under colour of the unsettled times Umbelini, for instance, and that other chap they’re beginning to talk about, Ingonyama; though I don’t altogether believe that cockandbull story about the blooddrinking tribes the Igazipuza. It’s too much like a Swazi lie. Still, I shall be glad when we are safe home again.”

Gerard made no answer beyond a halfabsent affirmative. His thoughts were far away. In point of fact, although he looked back regretfully upon his past experiences and adventures, yet he was not entirely sorry that the trip was over. For he had not ceased to think of May Kingsland’s blue eyes and bright winsome face had not ceased to wonder how the latter would look when he should see it again. And that would be very soon now.

“My word, Ridgeley, but you’ll have some yarns to spin to old Kingsland when we look in upon him on our way,” went on Dawes. “Why, he’ll hardly believe you’re the raw Britisher he was with on board ship! I never saw a fellow take so kindly to roughing it, and things. And you’ve filled out too, and become twice the chap you were all round.”

“I feel that I have,” answered Gerard, with something of a guilty start at the queer coincidence that Dawes’s thoughts should have been located on the same spot as his own. “And whatever this trip has done for me it’s thanks to you. Well, Dawes, I don’t mind telling you that I’m your debtor for life.”

“Tut, tut, man! Why you’ve been worth it all to me. We’ve had a rough time minda rougher time by far than I expected, or than a trip of this kind’s got any business to beand I never want a better mate than yourself, and I’ve known a good few fellows in that line, too. I say though, I wonder how your friend Maitland would have got on in your place. Not over well, I fancy. Too much of a masher collars and cuffs kind of a bandbox chap, you know not even good enough for a store clerk.”

“He thinks himself many removes too good for me, I can tell you,” laughed Gerard, remembering the lofty contempt with which Harry had reproached him for “turning counterjumper,” as he was pleased to put it.

“He’s a chap who won’t come to over much good, I’m afraid,” said Dawes. “I wonder what has become of him.”

“So do I,” said Gerard.

We don’t see why the reader should share the enforced, ignorance of the two; wherefore we may as well state that Harry Maitland was at that moment seated on the counter of one of the most fifth-rate bars in Maritzburg, swinging his legs and bawling out a not overrefined song for the benefit and amusement of an audience of loafers a trifle less drunk than himself; for, without wishing inordinately to moralise, the incident throws a suggestive sidelight on the contrast of the divergence of the ways of these two English lads, each stranded on his own hook in a faraway colony.

“Let’s saddle up and ride on ahead, and find a good place to outspan,” suggested Dawes.

This was done, and the two were soon cantering further and further from the waggons. The country, which had hitherto been bushy and rolling, now began to assume a somewhat different aspect. High conical hills rose on either hand, their slopes streaked with black, forest-clad kloofs, and the two horsemen, wending their way beneath, noticed that the long winding valley they were pursuing was carpeted with a smooth, green, meadowlike sward.

“I’m rather uneasy about those Swazis of ours,” said Dawes, as they rode along. “They’re brewing some dog’s trick, I know. My impression is that they mean to desert. I can see by their sulky and hangdog manner what it all amounts to, and this morning while they

were sitting round their fire I happened to pass near enough to catch a word or two of their conversation. I heard 'Igazipuza' mentioned more than once. It's quite wonderful how this form of funk has sprung up along this border, and in fact it was a long way inside Swaziland that we heard it."

"Yes. The wonder is that we got a single Swazi to go with us. But is there really such a chap as Ingonyama? You know the Zulu country pretty well."

"I never heard of him till lately," answered Dawes. "Still he may be some petty chief, who has suddenly sprung into fame, and has gathered around him all the ruffians of the Zulu nation. Well, a few days more will show. But I don't like our Swazis turning rusty. If they make off we can't replace them, for this strip of country seems absolutely uninhabited. Hallo! quickjump down, Ridgeley!"

This in harried staccato. For in rounding a spur, there, in front of them, right out in the open stood a fine bushbuck ram. Roused by the tramp of the horses' feet he stood, his head thrown back, gazing curiously upon the intruders. The last idea apparently that occurred to him was that of flight.

"Two hundred yards sight, not too fine," whispered Dawes, as Gerard dropped into a sitting posture.

But before the latter had time to press trigger the buck was seen to leap high in the air, and fall over kicking; then, after another plunge and a kind of gasping bellow, it lay still.

"By Jove! What does that mean?" cried Gerard.

"It has been assegaid," said Dawes. The buck was lying some thirty yards from the edge of the bush. Out of the latter there now emerged a tall savage, who without deigning to take any notice of the presence of strangers, walked straight up to his quarry and proceeded to cut its throat with the blade of a huge assegai.

This man, as the pair rode up to him, growled out a sullen "Saku bona," and proceeded with his work of cleaning the buck, just as if they were not there. Seen face to face he was unmistakably a Zulu, and though of fine frame and splendid proportions, both agreed that he owned about the most villainous countenance they had looked upon for many a long day. His shaven pate was crowned with the usual black shiny ring, and he wore round his loins the usual mútya of cats' tails. But they noticed that he was armed with several broadbladed, closequarter assegais, as well as two or three lighter casting ones, also a huge knobkerrie, and a fullsized warshield of red and white ox hide.

"It was a fine shot or rather couple of shots," said Dawes, as they stood watching the process. "Look, Ridgeley. The first assegai half hamstrung the buck just under the shoulders, the second must have gone through the heart, or very near it. Yes, it's powerful throwing."

To Dawes's suggestion that he should sell them the buck which he had so deftly slain, or at least a part of it, the Zulu returned a surly refusal. All the while he was cleaning the carcase he was devouring what he considered tidbits raw the heart, the liver, and part of the entrails. Then making a cup of his two hands, he scooped up a quantity of blood which had collected in the hollow of the carcase, and deliberately drank it. Gerard could hardly conceal his disgust, but there was something in the action that struck Dawes.

"Who are you?" he asked. "Of the people of Zulu?"

"Of the people of Zulu? Au!" returned the savage in a sneering tone, as he flung the carcase of the buck across his shoulder. Then standing drawn to the full height of his almost gigantic frame, his villainous countenance rendered more repulsive still with the smears of blood from the bits of raw meat he had been eating wreathed into a most evil grin, he shouted

"Where have you dwelt, abelúngu (white men), that you have never heard of Vunawayo? Of the people of Zulu? Ou! Igazipuza. The people who drink blood."

The last words were uttered almost in a roar a roar of defiance and hatred and wild beast ferocity. The huge barbarian turned and disappeared among the bush.

"We had better get on and find our outspan," said Dawes, after the momentary silence which had fallen upon the pair. The apparition, coming as it did, had been rather startling. Zulus are by nature wellmannered people, and the brutal rudeness of the man they had just met could betoken nothing less than the most undisguised hostility, but, worse than all, his last words were an abundant confirmation of the ugly rumours which had been taking shape of late with regard to this mysterious and redoubtable clan.

"Well, if this fellow is a specimen of them all, the Igazipuza must be a lot of picked men, both in the matter of physique and character," said Gerard. "I never saw a finer built chap, nor a more utterly irredeemable looking villain. And he choused me out of my shot."

“We may as well keep the affair dark as regards the other boys, but we’ll take Sintoba into counsel,” said Dawes. “The Swazis would hook it at a moment’s notice if they got wind of it. This is a good spot to outspan, and here come the waggons.”

The rumble of wheels, and the sound of voices and whipcracking drew near, and already the cattle and sheep came into view, scattering over the meadowlike valley bottom, and soon the waggons. Then, having reached the spot, a broad level, which Dawes had selected, the waggons were outspanned, and the oxen turned out to graze, and all hands who could be spared from the duties of herding were despatched to the adjacent hillside to cut thorn bushes. With these a fairly substantial kraal or enclosure was built, the two waggons forming one side of it, and into this the cattle and sheep were driven for the night. There was a lion or two still frequenting that broken and desolate hillcountry, and any number of hyaenas or wolves, as they are called in South Africa, and against such the thorn fence, frail as it was, constituted a fairly efficient protection; for wild animals are desperately suspicious of anything in the nature of a fence, and will hesitate to leap within it, fearing a trap.

Hardly were these precautions completed than the night fell, and then the cheery glow of the campfires shone forth redly upon the darkness, and the savoury contents of cookingpots gave out a welcome aroma. But somehow a damp seemed to have fallen upon the spirits of all. The ordinarily lighthearted natives conversed sparingly and in subdued whispers, and even Dawes and Gerard could not altogether feel unaffected by the general depression. It was as though some hidden danger were hanging over them, the more terrible because mysterious. The night wore on, and soon all sounds were hushed but the rhythmic champ champ of the ruminating cattle, and the occasional trumpetlike sneeze of a goat, and, beneath the dark loom of the hills against the stargemmed vault, the tigerwolves howled as they scented the flock which they dare not approach. But it was upon the first faint streak of dawn that all the alertness of those two watchers was concentrated, for that is the hour invariably chosen by the savage foe for the sudden, swift, demoralising rush, which shall overwhelm his doomed victims before they have time so much as to seize their weapons in order to sell dearly their miserable lives.

Chapter Twelve.

Mutiny.

At the time when Dawes and Gerard were commencing their return journey from Swaziland having achieved, as we have said, a fairly successful enterprise there began to get about rumours with regard to a certain tribe, or rather clan, which was credited with strange, and, to native ideas, most gruesome and repellent practices. The principal of these was a custom, or a rule rather, that each member of this weird confraternity should drink a portion of the blood of some human being slain by him. It need not be an enemy slain in battle, or even an enemy at all. Any one would do, whether man, woman, or child. From this practice the clan was said to take its name Igazipuza "blood drink," i.e. "Blood drinkers."

Rumour could not yet quite locate its habitation nor its numerical strength. Whether, again, it inhabited the grim natural fastnesses of the Lebombo range, or the hill country just south of the Pongolo, was equally uncertain. What was certain, however, was that its sporadic raids, and the ruthless massacre of all who fell in its way, had about depopulated the strip of debatable borderland between the Swazi and the Zulu countries. Kraals were deserted, and crops left standing, as the inhabitants fled northward in blind panic at the mere rumour of the approach of the Igazipuza, so complete was the terror inspired by the very name of this ferocious and predatory clan.

Its chief was one Ingonyama, a Zulu, to which nationality belonged the bulk if not the whole of its members. Indeed, on this consideration, if on no other, would Dawes have scouted the imputed blood drinking custom as absolutely mythical, for no one has a greater horror of coming in contact with human blood than he has not himself shed than the Zulu, and even when he has shed it, he takes the earliest opportunity of undergoing a very elaborate series of purifying rites. True, he is far from unwilling to render himself liable to the latter process, but he is scrupulously particular on the point of the observance. The clan was far more likely to owe its weird name to the warcry of its members than to any such legendary practice. But, however sceptical John Dawes, and, through him, Gerard, might be upon the point, certain it is that the Swazis were firm believers in the lurid and repulsive legend; and, as Dawes had said, the wonder was that any of that race had been induced to enter into their service at all; indeed, they had only done so as part of their bargaining. The cattle they had acquired would need herds and drivers, and these the Swazi chiefs had agreed to supply as a portion of the barter.

Now the said chiefs, talking matters over quietly with Dawes, had given their opinion that the existence of such a predatory clan was an undoubted fact. Ingonyama was a Zulu of rank, and a man of the Qulusi tribe. He was known as a skilful and dashing

fighter, and had gathered around him, in his mountain stronghold, an increasing number of kindred spirits, and now had rendered his name and theirs a terror to the whole northern border. That Cetywayo should allow such a growing power to spring up within the pale of his own rule was accountable perhaps by the consideration that, pending his quarrel with the English and the probable invasion of the country, he could not afford to alienate so valuable an ally as this influential vassal; also, it might be, by the fact that Ingonyama, over and above his skill and valour as a warchief, was accounted a witchdoctor or magician of no small cleverness and renown. Such, then, was the nature of this new form of terror which overhung the return path of the trading expedition; and gazing up at the fantastic contours of the succession of conical hills, and the gloomy belts of forest around their base the wild fastnesses of this fierce horde every man who took part in that trek was fully capable of appreciating the peril of the situation.

The night passed without disturbance; so, too, did the somewhat dreaded hour of dawn. While making up the fire for the early cup of coffee, Sintoba took the opportunity of saying to his master

“There is going to be trouble, Inkose. Those Swazi dogs intend to run away.”

“So?” said Dawes, as calmly as though the other had told him the fire was rather difficult to light.

“I heard them talking it over, and Fulani says they told him all about it. They are coming to you in a body to ask for their pay, and then they are going to leave.”

“So?” said Dawes again. “Now, listen, Sintoba. No one ever played me any such trick with impunity, and it is not going to be done today. Do you and Fulani stroll up to me while I am talking to them quite quietly, you know, as if you were looking for a ram or something which might be in the waggon. My answer to them shall not be given in a corner. Now go away, or they will suspect.”

“What is to be the programme?” said Gerard, when they were alone; for although far from having attained Dawes’s ease and fluency in the Zulu language, still he had learned a great deal, and understood the burden of the above, if not every word.

“Simplicity itself, Ridgeley, as you’ll see directly,” replied Dawes, sipping his steaming coffee with the utmost deliberation. “But I think our Swazi friends will not shape a course for their own country today. Ah, here they come.”

The Swazis, to the number of six, were approaching from their side of the camp. It could be seen that they had rolled up all their effects into bundles, which were lying where they had slept. Their spokesman, a tall, lanky, wolffaced fellow, named Kazimbi, asked if they could speak to the Inkose.

“Not yet, Kazimbi,” replied Dawes, imperturbably. “Wait until I have done my coffee.”

The men drew back and stood talking in smothered whispers. Dawes finished his cup, and filled himself up another, taking rather longer over it than he would ordinarily have done. Then he lighted his pipe.

“Now I am ready,” he said, rising and strolling over to the waggon, where he seated himself on the disselboom. Gerard, who had hardly been able to restrain his impatience, followed.

“The people want to go home, Inkose,” began Kazimbi, when they had ranged themselves in front of the two white men. “They are tired.”

“Or frightened?” said Dawes, quietly.

“They are grateful to you, Inkose, and call you their father. But the way is long they say, far longer than they expected it would be when they were induced to leave their own country. They are tired and footsore and want to return.”

“That is not all, Kazimbi. They are frightened.”

“Whou!” exclaimed the man with a half smile, and bringing his hand to his mouth with a rapid gesture. Then realising the futility of any further humbug, he said. “That is so, Inkose. We Amaswazi are not as you white people. The Amazulu hate us. There is an impi of them sent to harry our border, to kill our people, although we are not at war. We fear to go any further. This is the country of the Igazipuza. We fear them. We do not want to be killed by the Igazipuza.”

And an emphatic hum of approval arose from his compatriots at the speaker’s words.

“I cease to wonder that the Amazulu despise you,” said Dawes, calmly. “I cease to wonder that brave men such as they should look upon you Amaswazi as a nation of dogs, when six of its men, at the first chance of danger, wish to run away, and leave those who have paid and fed them, to bear its full brunt. Are you not dogs even to hint at such a thing?”

The Swazis looked at each other, sullen but not ashamed.

“It is this way, Inkose,” pursued the spokesman. “It is we who are in danger, not you. The Amazulu have no enmity against you white people. They will not harm you. They respect you. But it is us they hate. The Igazipuza will kill us and drink our blood. We must save our lives while there is yet time.”

“Now have my ears been filled with the words of a fool, Kazimbi,” replied Dawes. “Listen! You say you wish to return to your own country because you fear these Igazipuza. You say in the same breath that they respect us whites and hate and despise you Amaswazi. Now are you not therefore far safer when with us, as part of ourselves, as the hands and feet of the people these Igazipuza respect, than you would be when wandering through the country by yourselves? Then indeed would they not cut the hearts out of you and drink your blood, O fool, Kazimbi, tongue and mouthpiece of five other fools? And would you not deserve it?”

Disconcerted, abashed, and somewhat angry at the quiet but cutting irony thus turned upon him, Kazimbi made no immediate reply, while murmurs of impatience began to arise among his countrymen. Gerard, who had followed every word of the dialogue with the keenest of interest, noticed that Sintoba and Fulani, the other waggondriver, a big, strong, trustworthy native had edged up close behind the group, though apparently engaged on some other business. The leaders, too, a couple of ordinarily intelligent native lads, were squatting hard by, watching the proceedings. None of these apparently were armed, whereas the Swazis all carried sticks.

“Au!” exclaimed Kazimbi sullenly, and throwing off all disguise. “Pay us our wage, and let us depart.”

“If you depart it will be without your wage, which you will have forfeited by breaking your agreement and the agreement of your chiefs,” said Dawes. “Are you prepared to face your chiefs with such a story? Are you willing to throw away the wage of all this service?”

But the malcontents were past reason. The turbulent murmurs grew in volume.

“We must go!” they cried. “Wage or no wage we will go. We do not want to be killed by the Igazipuza.”

“Well, I say you shall not go,” said Dawes, rising to his feet.

“Hau!” burst from the group. “Hau! we are going now.” And an insolent laugh went up.

“Stand! The first who moves is a dead man.”

The defiant laugh died in their throats. They gazed in direst consternation at the revolver presented full at them, at the resolute grey eyes behind it at the two revolvers, for Gerard, quick to grasp the situation had covered them with his. The complete turning of the tables was ludicrous.

“We hold twelve lives here,” said Dawes, “and you are but six. The first man who moves will be shot dead, and once we begin shooting, in half a minute there will not be one of you left standing. Now you, Kazimbi, walk six paces away from the rest. Only six.”

Grey with apprehension, the Swazi obeyed. No sooner had he gained the requisite distance than he was seized from behind by Sintoba and Fulani, and securely bound with reims. The others standing huddled together like sheep, still covered by the deadly sixshooters, whose dread capacities they knew only too well, were roundeyed with fear. And behind them they caught a glimpse of the two leaders, each armed with a broadbladed stabbing assegai, which had come forth from some cunning place of concealment.

“Tie him across the waggon wheel,” said Dawes. And in a trice the spokesman of the malcontents was spreadeagled across the wheel, triangled in such wise that he could move neither hand nor foot.

Dawes took a couple of reims from an afterox yoke, and deliberately tied a knot in each. No longer was there any necessity to hold the others covered with the pistols. They were completely cowed. Then speaking, he said

“You are a set of miserable cowards, you Amaswazi. You thought yourselves just strong enough to defy me and run away and leave me in the lurch, but you have found out your mistake. Now this is my word to you. You will return to your duties as before, until I choose to dismiss you, and it will depend upon your future behaviour whether I shall fine you a part of your wage for this mutinous conduct or not. You will either do this or face the other alternative. Here it is. If you refuse, you may go. But you go without food or blankets or arms, not even a stick. Very likely I shall follow you up in the bush, and shoot some or all of you. But I shall not shoot you dead, only in the leg or somewhere that will disable you. Then when the Igazipuza find you, as I have no doubt they will, it is no swift and easy death that will be yours. I should not wonder if they spent the whole day burning you with fire. Even if you escape them and return home, what will your chief say to you for deserting me, and thus causing him to break his word, for by some means or other I will take care to let him know. But, first of all, I shall spend

the whole morning flogging Kazimbi here. I believe him to be the fomenter of all the discontent. I think he may very likely die under the lash before I have done with him, but am not sure. Now take your choice. Which is it to be?" concluded Dawes, whirling the knotted reins in the air, and bringing them down with a sounding swish upon the disselboom of the waggon.

The Swazis, completely cowed, stared stupidly at the speaker. Kazimbi, triced up all ready for the lash, turned grey with fear, and moaned piteously for mercy. Whatever course the others might decide to follow, he would not desert, he protested. He would be the white men's dog to the end of time, only let them spare him now. It was hard that his skin should depend on the decision of the others, he pleaded drawing down upon himself the somewhat grimly ironical retort that, whereas he had been their spokesman, now they were his.

"We will remain as before," said the others, almost immediately. "We will fulfil our duties until we are no longer wanted."

"Very good," said Dawes, with the selfpossession of a man who had foreseen this result all along. "Untie Kazimbi."

On returning to where they had left their property, such of the Swazis as possessed assegais found that those weapons had been removed. Their sticks only were left them. Then orders were given to inspan and the trek was resumed.

As though to obliterate their former misconduct, the behaviour of the malcontents was admirable. But the eye of their masters was ever upon them. Dawes and Gerard, riding on horseback, had a knack of turning up here, there, and everywhere during the trek. No opportunity for desertion was allowed them.

"I don't know quite what to think, Ridgeley," said Dawes, as they rode on a little ahead, about an hour before the evening outspan. "We've squashed their devilment for the time being, but, after all, we are very much at their mercy. The schelms might hook it any hour of the night they chose, for all we'd be the wiser. We can't mount guard over them all night besides, it's bad policy."

"Why shouldn't we mount guard over them all night one of us by turns? It would be no joke if they did clear out. We should be mighty short handed with all the trek stock. Besides, they might betray us to these Igazipuza they seem in such a mortal funk of."

“Not the least chance of that. They’d get the worst of it themselves. Besides the Igazipuza know all about us by this time even if they haven’t been watching us all along. Remember that fellow who killed our buck Vunawayo!”

“The idea of being watched is distinctly demoralising,” said Gerard. “There’s a sort of creepy, eerie feeling about the notion, don’t you know.”

“I’m inclined to plead guilty to something of an error of judgment,” said Dawes. “A fellow of my experience ought to have known better than to poohpooh any native story however tall. I didn’t believe in the existence of these people, and now I do. The chap we met yesterday left us under no sort of doubt as to their existence. I’m afraid we shall have trouble with them yet. All this stock we’ve got along is temptation enough to any thieving gang. No. We ought to have avoided this border altogether, and trekked straight down to Luneburg. Well it’s of no use now talking of what ought to have been done. We must just push on and trust to luck to get us through.”

Nothing in Nature suggested the brooding peril which overhung their path. The deep blue of the sky was without a cloud. The scenery of this beautiful wilderness, with its boldly outlined hills, was wild and romantic, but not forbidding. There was plenty of the smaller species of game to be shot for the going after partridges and francolin, and a bushbuck or so and the warm air was musical with the voices of ringdoves, with many a strange birdcall from the black strips of bush which belted the slopes of the hills.

“Hallo, hallo! What’s all this?” said Dawes, suddenly, as they rounded a spur.

There was a prodigious flapping of wings, and a cloud of great white vultures rose from the ground to join a number of others which were wheeling lazily overhead. At sight of the horsemen, however, the swooping circles widened and the great birds darted off. In a moment they seemed to disappear.

“Here’s a chap who can’t fly!” cried Gerard, eagerly, putting his horse at one of the aasvogels, who, thoroughly gorged, could only waddle along like a puffin. And then a cry of horror escaped him, and his face paled. Boiling gently down the slope of the ground, where the vulture had let go of it, was a severed head—the head of a native child of about nine or ten years of age. Grim and gory, with the eyes picked out by the carrion birds, the frightful object rolled. Gerard felt nearly sick with horror. At the same time Dawes’s horse, shying violently, nearly unseated his rider.

The slope of the hill here was covered by a low, bushy scrub. Lying about among this, contorted into ghastly attitudes, were several bodies, all natives, and representing all ages and sexes. They had been torn by the vultures, and ripped and mangled by their

slayers, and the appearance they presented to those who thus came upon them wholly unexpectedly in the midst of the wilderness was inexpressibly hideous and horrible. Three of the bodies were those of fullgrown men, the rest women and children thirteen persons in all. They were covered with assegai stabs, out of which the blood seemed yet to ooze, and they were all ripped up, a circumstance which pointed to their slayers being of Zulu nationality. Why had these poor creatures, thus travelling peaceably through the country for fragments of mats and other articles pointed to the probability of it being a family trek been thus fallen upon and ruthlessly butchered men, women, and children, even to the monthold baby speared again and again on its mother's back? Who had done it? The two white discoverers of the massacre looked at each other, and the mind of each shaped the same reply Igazipuza.

A shadow passed between them and the sun, then another and another. The vultures, having become accustomed to the cause of their first alarm, had gathered again, impatient to drop down to their horrible feast. To Gerard it seemed that all the virtue had gone out of the sweet golden sunlight, yielding place to a flaming brassy glare, and the atmosphere seemed to reek of blood.

"Poor devils!" said Dawes. "They're 'eaten up' and no mistake. We had better not let on about this to the 'boys,' or all that diplomacy this morning is just thrown away. Nothing on earth would keep them from taking to their heels."

After all, it is human to err, and Dawes for once was wrong in his judgment. Had the Swazis but stumbled upon the horrid sight, it would most effectually have killed in them any further desire to tempt their fate in a journey on their own account. They would have demanded nothing better than to hug the vicinity of the waggons as closely as possible.

With a dire foreboding of impending peril upon them the two quitted the spot, and rode back upon their track, for they had come on ahead rather further than they had intended. They had not progressed far, when Dawes said quietly

"Don't start, Ridgeley. But if you can do so without turning your head, look up to the left."

Gerard did so. High up on the slope of the hillside was a flash and shimmer of something. The slanting rays of the afternoon sun glinted upon the points of spears, upon the smooth surface of great shields. A group of armed savages sat watching the two horsemen.

Whatever their intentions might have been, whether hostile or the reverse, they made not the slightest attempt at concealment. There they sat out in the open. Had they been watching them when they discovered the massacre; could they, indeed, have been seen from that point of vantage? That these were the perpetrators of that barbarous deed Dawes had little doubt. They were but few, certainly a dozen at most but how many more were concealed close at hand, ready to spring out upon them!

It was a terribly trying situation. While feigning to talk at their ease as they rode along, the nerves of both of our two friends were strung to the uttermost. Every moment might come the whiz of assegais from the bush, which in places grew right down to the path every moment the roar of the warshout, the swift and tigerlike charge. To Gerard especially, less accustomed to peril than his companion, and by nature less cool, the situation was desperately trying; and by the time they reached the waggons, and the spot being convenient, ordered an outspan then and there, the dark cloud of peril hovering above them seemed to brood thicker and thicker. Even the very sun seemed to set in a lurid sea of blood.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Igazipuza.

“Bolted! Every man Jack of them!”

Thus John Dawes, as he and Gerard stood looking dubiously at each other in the faint sickly light of dawn. A thick mist lay heavy on the earth, so thick that, as the former said, a man could hardly see the end of the nose upon his face. The place occupied by the Swazi herdsmen and drivers knew them no more, nor was there any trace of those worthies in or around the encampment. Moreover, their traps had eke disappeared. The thing John Dawes feared had come to pass, and, shaking his head, he could only repeat blankly

“Bolted! Every man Jack of them!”

Gerard could not but feel relieved in his innermost heart that this defection had not befallen during his period of watching. He and Dawes had gone the round together when the latter had relieved him. Then the Swazis were rolled up, snug and snoring, in their blankets. An hour before dawn a thick mist had rolled up, covering everything, and then it was that their faithless retainers had seen their opportunity, and had slipped away under cover of its folds.

“Overhaul them? Not we?” said Dawes, in answer to Gerard’s suggestion. “This mist may last for hours, and even if it didn’t they’ll have made the most of their legbail by now, depend upon it. Besides, it would be courting plunder to leave the waggons here in charge of ‘boys’ only, as we should have to do if we started to chevy those schelms. No. We must get on as best we can without them, but it’ll mean a goodish handful for you and me. We shall have to drive and herd the stock ourselves.”

“What if we have to?” said Gerard, heartily. “It won’t hurt us, and, for the matter of that, I dare say I could undertake the whole lot of it myself, leaving you as free as before.”

“You can’t, Ridgeley. Sheep and cattle can’t be driven in one lump. I wish we hadn’t brought along that confounded small stock; taken something else instead, only we couldn’t get it. Now we’d better make coffee, and be all ready to inspan as soon as the mist lifts.”

They were seated at the fire, and had just filled up steaming pannikins of the strong black brew, when the sound of deep voices was heard, and immediately there appeared a group of figures out of the mist. That these were their defaulting retainers was an idea

which the first glance served to dispel. There were more than twice the number; besides, the tall fine frames, the haughty poise of the head, the large warshields, bespoke them Zulus.

They halted a brief moment as they came in sight of the fire, then strode up to half a dozen paces of the two white men, and halting again, eyed the latter in silence for a moment, and one of them said

“Saku bona.”

Dawes, as he returned the greeting, with one quick keen glance scrutinised the group, and noted two things. The man they had met two days before, Vunawayo, was not in it, and though all were fully armed, they had not, in accordance with Zulu etiquette, deposited their weapons a few paces in the background. They, for their part, he fancied, looked meaningly at the two guns which lay beside himself and Gerard, and ready to the hand of each. They were, as we have said, tall, fine men, and most of them ringed. But though they carried the large warshield instead of the little ornamental shield usually employed on pacific journeyings, and were fully armed with assegai and knobkerrie, and here and there a battleaxe, their persons were bedizened by no martial gearbeing, in fact, devoid of little other adornment than the *mútya*. These men, he decided, were either the whole or part of an “eatingup” expedition (Note 1), or they were members of the dreaded Igazipuza.

The Zulus had squatted down on their haunches in crescent formation. There were fifteen of them. Dawes handed them the large horn snuffbox he always carried. It was passed round, and for a few minutes they were all taking pinch after pinch in silent contentment. Then one of them said

“What have you got to sell, Umlúngu?”

“Very little,” was the answer. “We are at the end of our trip, not at the beginning, and have got rid of nearly everything.”

“Among the Swazi dogs? Why did you not come through the Zulu country?”

“We heard there had been too many traders there before us,” replied Dawes, unveraciously. “And in the part we did touch we could do nothing. The people were not inclined to trade.”

“Are these all your people?” went on the Zulu, with a glance at the four Natal natives, who, Sintoba excepted, had been gazing at them with a curiosity strongly dashed with

awe. Sintoba, however, had given them the “Saku bona” as on terms of perfect equality, and they had returned it. “They are few to take care of so much property,” went on the spokesman.

“They are,” said Dawes. “We had some Swazissix of thembut they ran away in the night.”

“Whau! They will not run far,” said the Zulu, and a meaning grin played upon the faces of his countrymen.

“Do you know Sobuza?” asked Gerard, handing them a huge pannikin of strong black coffee, well sweetened, of which, in accordance with custom, he took a preliminary sip.

They looked at each other, and then followed a discussion as to whether it was Sobuza the son of Panhla, or that other Sobuza who was once in command of the king’s bodyguard, or Sobuza the son of somebody else.

Gerard added that he didn’t know who Sobuza’s father was, but his father’s son, at any rate, was a chief in the Udhloko regiment.

“Ehé!” cried the warriors in concert. “That is Sobuza the son of Panhla. He has his kraal by the Intaba’nkulu. Do you know him, Umlúngu?”

“I did, once. But, next time you see him, ask him when he is inclined for another swim in the Umgeni river.” And then, as well as he could, he described the incident of the chief’s misadventure, and how, indeed, he was able to come to his aid twice in the same day. The Zulus listened attentively, and Gerard hoped that his object in telling the story was gained, viz. to establish some sort of a claim upon their friendship in case they should belong to the dreaded freebooting clan.

“Do you belong to the chief Ingonyama?” said Dawes, when he had done.

“Ingonyama?”

“Yes.”

“Ingonyama’s kraal is out Hlobane way. Are you going to visit him?” said the Zulu, in true native fashion avoiding a direct answer, and further, replying to one question by another.

“We know not. Perhaps, if we have time,” answered Dawes, rising. “And now, amadoda (men), it is becoming light. We must get upon our road again.”

With magical suddenness the sun had burst forth. The sky overhead was a vivid blue, which had almost a shade of the most lovely green in it, in direct contrast to the white and solid masses of fleecy vapour which was giving way before the arrowy rays. The curtain of mist, rolling back from the slopes of the hills, was disclosing a carpet of sheeny dewdrops, sparkling, glittering in the sun like a sea of diamonds. Dawes was about to give orders to inspan, when there burst forth from around the spur of the hill a most horrible and startling tumult.

A wave of dark figures surged into view, shouting, whistling, leaping. On they poured like a pack of wolves. But some distance ahead of them fleeing for their lives, their eyes starting from their heads in deadly fear coming straight for the camp, ran five or six men, natives, hard pressed by the surging mass in their rear. Then arose from a multitude of fierce throats, drawn out into a half chant, half roar, but deafening in its thunderous volume, a most hideous and appalling shout

“Igazipuza!”

Assegais hurled from the onrushing mass whistled through the air. One of the fugitives fell. In a moment a howling, raving crowd was around him, upon him, their tigerlike roars drowning the shrieks of the wretched man being literally hacked to pieces. Another staggered into camp, and fell almost at Gerard’s feet, covered with spearwounds. And in the fleeing refugees frenzied with terror, they recognised the treacherous and defaulting Swazis.

“Save me, save me, father!” yelled Kazimbi, rolling like a log at Dawes’s feet.

“Keep cool, Ridgeley,” muttered the latter. “Don’t fire a shot, on your life.”

Anything more ferocious and appalling than the aspect of these savages as they poured like a torrent upon the camp it would be hard to conceive. There seemed to be hundreds of them. Naked save for their mútyas, each had a red disc painted on his breast, and another between the eyes. They leaped high in the air as they ran, brandishing their assegais and great shields, and, roaring in longdrawn, bloodthirsty cadence, their terrible slogan. It seemed as though no living thing there, whether man or beast, would survive the blind fury of their overwhelming rush.

And indeed it was a fearful moment for all concerned as they swarmed around the waggon. Gerard, wellnigh carried off his feet by the surging rush, doubted not but that his last moment had come, as the sea of spearblades, some red and reeking with blood, flashed in front of his eyes, as the deafening vibration of the hideous shout stunned his

ears. Still, his presence of mind never deserted him; still through it all he remembered Dawes's emphatic injunction to keep cool and offer no violence.

It was hard all the same, as he felt himself hustled here and there by the fierce horde. However, he was of strong and athletic build, and with a wellaffected, goodhumoured bluntness, he was able to push back the foremost aggressors without having recourse to any weapon.

"What have you got to sell, abelúngu?" shouted the wild crowd, with a roar of boisterous laughter. "We come to tradewe come to trade."

"The way to trade isn't to raise all this abominable din," replied Dawes, coolly. "Sit down, can't you, and talk quietly."

A roar of derision greeted this.

"We are the Igazipuza, 'mlúngu," they shouted. "HaCome forth, you dogs!"

This to the Swazi fugitives who had slunk under one of the waggons, in the desperate hope that these terrible and dreaded warriors might take their departure as suddenly as they had appeared.

"Come forth, dogscome forth!" they vociferated again. And daring no longer hesitate, the wretched Swazis crept trembling from their wouldbe hidingplace.

"Ha, you longlegged, wolffaced jackal," cried a savagelooking villain, seizing Kazimbi by the throat, and placing the point of his assegai against his breast. "What is your name?"

"Kazimbi, Inkose!" faltered the trembling Swazi.

"Kazimbi? Hau! not much iron about you," jeered his tormentor in a great mocking voice. "Whau! I did not do that," he laughed, as some of the crowd behind wantonly or accidentally jogged his elbow, causing the blade of the assegai to pierce the chest of Kazimbi, eliciting from that unfortunate a startled shriek, for the wound was a deep one, and the blood spurted forth in a warm jet. The bystanders yelled with laughter. The jest was excellent.

"I did not do it, but now I will." And maddened by the sight of blood, the ferocious savage drove the broad spear blade up to the hilt into the chest of the miserable Swazi, and continuing the blow by a swift, powerful, downstroke, ripped open the whole body, which fell to the earth a horrible weltering mass. Raising their terrific warcry, these

human wolves clustered around it, stabbing, ripping, hacking, till soon the only distinguishable remains of the wretched Kazimbi was his bleeding heart, plucked out and reared aloft upon an assegai point.

This shocking and appalling scene the two white spectators of it were powerless to prevent. Themselves hemmed in by the fierce crowd, now infuriated in its growing bloodlust, their own lives hung upon no more than a hair. Another of the wretched Swazis was set upon and barbarously slaughtered, and then Gerard could stand it no longer. Scattering all considerations of prudence to the winds, he threw himself in front of the three remaining victims, and drawing his revolver as being more readily handled than the gun which he carried presented it full at the mass of infuriated savages. And Dawes, himself hemmed in, seeing this, held his breath for the life of his young companion.

“Stand back!” thundered Gerard. “Stand back, you cowardly dogs!”

The voice, the act, the deadly weapon pointing right in their faces, the resolute countenance and flashing eyes, had an extraordinary effect. That one man should thus dare to beard them, the dreaded Igazipuza, in their might, to stand before their reddened spears in the thick of their blood fury, to wrest the prey from the raging lion in the act of devouring it, to throw himself between their wrath and a few miserable dogs of Swazis, struck these ferocious savages as little short of miraculous. To the wild fierce hubbub there succeeded a dead silence. The forest of bristling spearblades tossing aloft, dropped motionless. Heads were bent forward and a sea of rolling eyeballs glared upon the intrepid form of the young Englishman. Then from every chest went up a quick, deep-toned gasp of wonder of amazement.

“Who is your chief?” cried Dawes, who had taken advantage of their momentary confusion to edge his way to the side of his young companion. “Is this a horde without a leader? We are not at war with the Zulu people that an impi should ‘eat up’ our camp and kill our servants. Where is your chief?”

“Your servants have not been harmed, Umlúngu,” said a voice in the crowd. “There they are, your Amakafula. These were not your servants, only some miserable Swazi dogs, who had run away from you, as you yourselves just now told us. Have they not been well and rightly served?”

The crowd had parted, making way for the speaker, in whom our friends now recognised the man who had been talking with them prior to the startling interruption. He with the remainder of the group now came forward.

“Well, three of them have been killed, let the rest now be spared,” said Dawes, who was not inclined to dispute the logic of the Zulu’s dictum, and whose matteroffact nature was in the last degree averse to running any quixotic risk on behalf of the worthless fellows who had treated him so scurvily. “And now, if the Igazipuza wish to trade, let them sit down quietly and say so, if not, let them go their way in peace, and we will proceed upon ours.”

This was pretty bold, considering how absolutely at the mercy of these turbulent barbarians was the speaker and his mere handful of companions. But he thoroughly knew his ground. A bold and resolute attitude is the only one which commands their respect, as indeed Gerard’s intrepid and apparently foolhardy act served to show. And in pursuance of this idea he would not offer them even the smallest gift, at any rate until they became civil, lest they should construe the act into a concession to fear.

“We want to trade, abelúngu, but not here,” shouted several voices. “Not here. At the kraal of our father, Ingonyama.”

“Yes, yes. To the kraal of our father,” repeated the crowd.

“You have not enough people to drive all that stock,” cried a voice. “We will help you.”

“We willwe will,” echoed the crowd, with a shout of boisterous laughter. And tearing away the thin fence of bushes which enclosed them, the savages began to drive out the cattle and sheep, pricking them with their assegais, and roaring with laughter at the pain and terror of the poor beasts.

“Wait one moment!” cried Dawes. “We have hardly anything to trade, and are returning home. It will be very inconvenient to us to go out of our way. Take a couple of oxen and half a dozen goats as a present to your chief, Ingonyama, and tell him we hope to visit him at some future time. Now we will keep on our way.”

“Nono!” roared the crowd. “Nono! You cannot pass so near the kraal of our chief without paying him a visit. So come with us, abelúngu. We will help drive your cattle.”

The tone though effusively goodnatured was not to be mistaken. The best policy was to affect to believe the good nature genuine, and that these playful barbarians really were consumed with anxiety to show hospitality to the two white traders, instead of practically taking them prisoners. And that such they were admitted of no shadow of a doubt. In a second the minds of both had grasped the situation. If they refused to proceed to Ingonyama’s kraal, the Igazipuza would assuredly plunder them of every hoof, for they were already driving off the stockplunder them even it might be of the

trekoxen and the two horses. They might even take it into their heads to massacre them, but this was improbable. So making a virtue of necessity, and giving his companion a hint to do the like, Dawes replied that since they and their chief were so anxious to have them as guests, why, they should have their wish. Then he gave orders to inspan.

Shouting, singing, and indulging in horseplay the savages crowded round, watching the process. Then as the waggons rolled slowly off, they would clamber into the huge vehicles, or hang on behind in clusters, roaring with laughter as some fellow tumbled off, or a whole bunch of them got jerked into the air by an unexpected bump. Indeed, it became difficult to drive the oxen at all. Gerard and Dawes were riding their ponies, surrounded by the group of ringed men who had first visited their camp. These, though evidently men of authority, seemed little inclined to exert that attribute, and made no attempt to check the rowdiness and horseplay of the younger warriors. Among these latter the poor Swazis were having a bad time; being jeered and threatened, and in momentary fear of sharing the fate of their countrymen whose mangled corpses lay behind, another feast for the vultures. The Natal natives were treated with more respect especially Sintoba, who, marching beside his span, seemed perfectly indifferent to all the brag and swagger of the armed crowd. Indeed, once or twice, when they pressed him too close, he menaced them with the butt end of his long whiphandle.

Thus in the midst of their most unwelcome escort did our two friends proceed upon their enforced visit across the border of northern Zululand.

Note 1. The process of carrying out sentence pronounced against anybody for witchcraft or other offence, and which may consist of the slaughter of the individual and the confiscation of his cattle and wives, or the massacre of himself and his whole family, or even of his whole kraal.

Chapter Fourteen.

“The Lion’s Den.”

The principal kraal of the Igazipuza lay in a great natural crater, surrounded by cliffcrowned heights. Like all the Zulu kraals it wore an excessively neat and symmetrical appearance in its perfect circular formation; the domeshaped huts, which could not have numbered less than five hundred, standing between the double ring fences, which latter rose as high as a man’s chin, and being constructed of the thorniest of mimosa boughs tightly interlaced, presented a formidable chevauxdefrise to whosoever would cross or break through them. It was a large and imposing kraal, as became the residence of an influential chief, the head quarters of a powerful clan.

The situation of the place had evidently been chosen with no insignificant eye to strategy. Shut in by its amphitheatre of heights, the bushy hollow wherein it lay was accessible from one side alone, and that could only be approached by an exposed and toilsome climb up a long and rugged slope. A sentinel posted on the heights around could descry the advance of an enemy for miles, and all the fighting force could concentrate their efforts on the one accessible point. Of course a couple of fieldpieces planted on the nearest cliff could have banged the place to rubbish in half an hour, but to foemen armed as themselves, or even with rifles, this stronghold of the Igazipuza was a very formidable fastness indeed, and not far short of impregnable.

All these points did Dawes and Gerard take in as, upon the afternoon of the third day following their compulsory enterprise, the waggons creaked and groaned behind their panting, toiling spans, up the rugged acclivity aforesaid, whither their live stock, urged on by its very willing if selfconstituted drivers, had already preceded them in a now vanishing cloud of dust. They noticed, too, on gaining the ridge whence they could look down upon the great kraal lying a mile or so before and beneath them, that the valley was one of considerable area, and though bushclad was green and grassy. There was yet one thing more they noticed. Rising abruptly from the bush, about a mile and a half in the rear of the kraal, was a conical toothshaped rock, the more noticeable because it seemed to have no business to be there at all. It was a kind of excrescence on the natural formation of the ground, which was there smooth. Yet this strange pyramid, with its precipitous cliff face, thus shot up abruptly to a height of nearly a hundred feet.

Their cogitations on this and other matters were interrupted suddenly, and in a manner which was somewhat alarming. From the treeclad hillsides arose the same wild roaring shout which had preceded the massacre of the unfortunate Swazi runaways, and they beheld charging down upon them from either side a band of armed men, shaking their shields and assegais by way of adding to the strength and hideosity of the uproar.

“All this dancing and bellowing is getting just a trifle thineh, Ridgeley?” said Dawes, with a touch of illhumour, as the savages came surging round the waggons, and amusing themselves by yelling at, and now and again goading, the already panting and terrified oxen. The Swazis, who had not dared leave the sides of their white protectors, turned grey with fear. This was too much like what had preceded the slaughter of their companions.

But the Zulus in the present instance confined their aggression to mere boisterous noise. And then the kraal in front seemed suddenly in a turmoil. Heads could be seen peering over the palisades, and another body of warriors came swarming from its gates. These advanced, marching in regular orderly column, to meet the wild uproarious crowd which was swaying and surging around the slowly progressing waggons; and as they approached they began to sing. The burden of their song might be translated in this wise

“Ho! the Lion’s teeth are sharp,
They bite, they tear;
And the land is white with bones
Round the Lion’s lair.
Lo! the prey comes home of itself
To the Lion’s den,
Where the Lion’s cubs grow fat
On the blood of men.
Há, há, há!
Grow fat on the blood of men!”

The repetition of this ferocious refrain was, under the circumstances, anything but reassuring; the fell imagery of it only too alarmingly plain. Were they not indeed walking of themselves right into the “lion’s den” the lair of this savage and freebooting chieftain whose very name meant lion in the Zulu language! However, there was nothing for it but to preserve a cool and unconcerned demeanour, as the singing warriors drew near; and thus marshalled, amid an indescribable din, the shrill chatter of women and children, the clamorous yelping of a hundred curs, mingling with the rattle of shields and assegai hafts, the rumble of tramping feet and the deeptoned, measured warchant of the warriors, our two friends made their entrance into the Igazipuza kraal, after a fashion which, as Gerard remarked, was a cross between a procession to the scaffold and a Caesar’s triumph.

Dawes had wanted to leave the waggons outside, but this his escortor captors would not hear of. They must all enter, had urged the latter. To act otherwise would be to make the

reception invalid, maimed, unlucky. They could go out again afterwards if they liked, and Dawes for his part sincerely wished they might.

Large as it was, the open space in the centre of the kraal, was nearly filled up with the two waggons and spans of oxen, besides their cattle and small stock which had been driven into it. A bush had now fallen upon the swarming throng, for Dawes had intimated his desire immediately to see the chief; and heads were bent forward in eager curiosity, and voices were hushed to whispers as, escorted by a group of ringed men, he and Gerard, leaving their waggons in charge of Sintoba and the other driver, but still inspanned, were ushered upon that errand.

The chief's hut was no larger than the others, nor was there anything to distinguish it from them, except perhaps an open space in front of it. It faced, too, a gate in the inner kraal, and through this our two friends were marshalled accordingly.

The chief, Ingonyama, was a large, stoutly built Zulu of about fifty. He had a shrewd, intelligent face, and his shaven head, surmounted by the inevitable isicoco or ring, rendered his high broad forehead almost commandingly lofty. His jaw was square and resolute, but there was a shifty look in his somewhat deepset eyes a look of cunning which was uncomfortably suggestive of treachery. His nails, after the custom of Zulus of rank, were enormously long and claw like. Such was the outward appearance of the chief of the redoubted Igazipuza.

He was seated on a dried bullockhide in front of his hut. A large white warshield was held above his head to shelter him from the sun. Beside him sat his favourite induna, and in the mighty frame and evil countenance of this man, our two friends recognised the rival hunter who had so inopportunately stepped between them and their game a few days previously, Vunawayo.

Dawes, knowing in such matters, and, moreover, keenly alive to all that passed, observed that the headringed men, who had marshalled them into the presence of the chief, saluted the latter with almost royal acclamation, although they did not give the "Bayète," (Note 1), a fact which, taken with the white shield held above Ingonyama's head a royal custom struck him as significant. He, himself, merely greeted the chief in the ordinary way, "Saku bona."

The greeting was acknowledged, rather stiffly. Then Ingonyama spoke

What he saw before him was strange, he said. Here was a man who spoke with their tongue fluently, though a white man who was conversant with their customs. Yet this man, with his companion, appeared before him with arms in hand, came right up to

him, their host and entertainer, holding guns. And the chief cast a meaning glance at the weapons.

“Yes, I allow it isn’t precisely in accordance with good manners, as Zulus understand them, to do this,” returned Dawes. “But then neither is it for a crowd of people to rush into my camp and kill three men under my nose insist on my accompanying them whither I don’t particularly want to go and drive off my cattle in that same direction to ensure my following them. Yet this is what your people have done, O chief of the Igazipuza.”

“Am I armed?” spoke Ingonyama, very conveniently ignoring the other’s explanation and complaint. “Behold me,” stretching forth his hands; “I have not even a stick.”

This was true. Yet if the redoubted head of the Igazipuza could afford to sit unarmed, surrounded by his fierce warriors, in perfect safety, it was an experiment which Dawes, in the light of recent experience, had no intention of trying. Indeed, as regarded himself and his companion, he considered it a highly dangerous one. To submit to coercion wellgilded and concealed like a pill, was good policy up to a certain point. When such coercion took the form of open and undisguised bullying, to submit was impolitic. In fact Dawes had resolved at all costs not to submit.

“It is as the chief says,” he replied. “But if the chief is not armed, all his people are, and they are numerous. Now we are but two men we are our own chiefs and people, too. Under these circumstances it is our custom to carry arms, and it is a custom we cannot lay aside.”

“Whau! This white man has a valiant tongue,” muttered Vunawayo with a sneer.

“And now, O chief, we will begin by demanding redress,” went on Dawes in vigorous pursuance of his policy of boldness. “Your people have treated us with something very like hostility have forced us out of our way and have overdriven our cattle and oxen. Yet we are not at war with the people of Zulu, nor have we quarrel with any tribe or clan within the same.”

“Surely there is a mistake,” spoke Ingonyama. “The hostility you mention is but their method of showing delight. They hoped to help make you rich by bringing you hither to trade. What have you got to sell?”

“Before I trade here, O Ingonyama, there is another matter I would speak about,” said Dawes. “With our waggons were certain Amaswazi. These people have been set upon by your warriors and three of them killed. What now shall we say when their chiefs ask,

‘Where are our children whom we hired to you to drive your cattle? Where are they, that they return not to their own land?’”

“But they were not your servants, Umlúngu,” said Vunawayo. “Were they not already fleeing to their own land, when our people met them and turned them back? They had broken faith with you.”

“Yet what shall we say when their chiefs ask for their return?” pursued Dawes. “What reply can we make?”

“Reply? Say? Say that the spears of the Igazipuza are sharp,” returned Vunawayo with an evil laugh.

“I think we have talked enough concerning a few Swazi dogs,” said Ingonyama, taking snuff. “And now, abelúngu, what have you got to sell?”

“Yes. What have you got to sell?” echoed a chorus of voices from the spectators. And then the two, glancing around noticed that they were encompassed by a considerable force of armed warriors, who had gathered in groups, casually and as if by accident, but in reality with meaning and design.

The chief had risen, and intimated his intention of proceeding to the waggons. Dawes, recognising the necessity of extreme wariness, offered no further objection. The armed warriors poured into the central space till it was full to overflowing, while others clustered about the outer side of the fence like a swarm of bees.

Ingonyama was graciously pleased to accept a large pannikin of ginandwater, which, having half emptied, he passed on to his induna Vunawayo. He further relaxed over the gift of some snuff and a few other things of no great value intrinsically. With each present a chorus of thanks burst from the throats of all the spectators. This became a perfect roar as a gaudy umbrella, striped with all the colours of the rainbow, was added to the gifts.

“What is this?” said the chief, now in high good humour, laying his hand on a great tufted tassellike thing, which protruded from a bale.

“This? A skin. Fine one, isn’t it?” answered Dawes, dragging it forth. And, unrolling it, he spread out the skin of a huge lion. A great shout went up.

“Hau! The thing that roars! the thing that roars!” cried the warriors, in accordance with the strange custom which obliged them to use some other term to express the word which happened to be the name of their chief.

(Ingonyama, means “a lion.”)

Ingonyama’s eyes sparkled.

“Wonderful!” he cried. “Wonderful! It is, indeed, a great skin! Whau!” And spreading it out, he stood contemplating it admiringly, walking around it and every now and then stooping to touch the massive mane, the great tufted tail.

And in fact a fine skin it was, and had been well taken off and preserved head and claws complete even the skull, with the jaws and teeth.

“And was it this one hole that let out the life?” said the chief, pointing to a single bullethole fair between the eyes. Dawes nodded.

“And where was it killed?”

“In Swaziland. I killed it.”

“Ha! My ghost has grown fat and large upon Swazi dogs,” said Ingonyama, the reference being to the Zulu belief that every man has one or more guardian spirits which take the shape of some animal, and his of course, would be the lion. “I would possess it,” he went on. “What is the price?”

“I had not intended to trade it,” answered Dawes. “But since you particularly want it, Ingonyama, ten cows is the price.”

“Au!” cried the chief, with wellfeigned amazement. “It is not worth five. Ten cows? Mamo! Was ever such a thing heard!”

“I told you I did not want to trade the skin. You asked me my price and I have named it. It is too high. Good. We are both satisfied.” And Dawes proceeded to roll up the skin with the most perfect coolness.

“Waitwait! Do not be in a hurry. Let us talk,” said Ingonyama, while a murmur of astonished indignation went up from the warriors. Who was this dog of a white man who laughed at the wishes of their chief! They began to grip their assegais significantly.

“It is too dear,” went on Ingonyama. “Yet I would have it. Take seven cows.”

“My price is ten, and it is not a great price. Consider. If the chief of the Igazipuza were taking a new wife, he would require to pay more than that for her. Is not a splendid lion’s skin like this of more value than the mere price of a girl? Look at the size of it, the strength and blackness of the mane, the fine preservation of the head and teeth.”

And again the trader jerked open the skin, before the eyes of the covetous chief.

“Há!” said the latter. “I am not sure it will be a lucky deal for me. The lion is my ‘ghost,’ Umlúngu, and see! this one has a ball between the eyes between the eyes has its life been let out.”

“May that never be your own lot, Ingonyama,” said Dawes. And as he uttered the words some strange instinct moved him to fix his eyes full upon those of the chief. Under the circumstances the look was a significant one.

“Hau! This begins to look like tagati,” (witchcraft) muttered Vunawayo, scowlingly. “And ‘The Tooth’ is near.”

“Take ten cows then,” said Ingonyama with a sigh. And he stretched forth his hand to take the skin. But Dawes did not tender it.

“Where are the cows?” he said. “May I not see them?”

“They are out grazing now, Umlúngu. At milkingtime they will be here. Then they shall be driven to your herd.”

“Quite so. And then the skin shall be carried to your hut, O chief,” returned Dawes, coolly. “And now I will drive my waggons hence and outspan them outside the kraal.” Then he proceeded to give orders to his native servants as unconcernedly as though he were starting from Maritzburg instead of moving through the armed ranks of hundreds of lawless and turbulent savages.

In the evening the ten head of cattle were duly delivered. They were indifferent looking beasts for the most part. Dawes surveyed them critically.

“I don’t know that old Ingonyama hasn’t done us now, Ridgeley,” he said. “These are weedy looking brutes, but three, or perhaps four of them, ain’t bad; and I suppose we must take what we can get. I shall be glad enough to say goodbye to this place, and as

soon as the stock and things are rested, we will try our hand at trekking away. And now let's take the skin over."

Followed by Sintoba, bearing the lion's skin, the two proceeded to Ingonyama's hut. As before, the chief was seated outside on a bullockhide, with Vunawayo and half a dozen other amakehla, or ringed men, around him. This time he waxed quite friendly and conversational, and invited his involuntary visitors to sit down and drink tywala. This liquor, which is a species of beer brewed from maize or millet, was brought in huge bowls of baked clay. A gourd was apportioned to the two white men, but the Zulus contented themselves with the simple process of picking up the clay bowl and drinking therefrom; and Gerard, who had seen some beerdrinking among natives, still found room for astonishment over the enormous quantities which his present entertainers were able to absorb.

The sun had gone down, and the afterglow had faded red on the surrounding cliffs, then merged into the pearly grey of twilight. The picturesque circle of the great kraal was alive with the figures of its wild denizens, lounging in groups or stalking among the huts. Files of girls returning from the spring, calabash on head, made melody on the evening air, lifting up their voices in song as they walked; and though the strain was monotonous and barbaric, the effect was not unpleasing; and the deep tone of men's voices mingled with the shrill laughter and shriller shriek of children. The wavy glow of fires shone out upon the deepening twilight, and above the domed huts rose many a smoke reek.

"What a strange rock that is," remarked Gerard, referring to the great solitary pyramid which we have already described, and which, looming out in its isolation, seemed to gain in size. "What is it called?"

"It is called Izinyo 'The Tooth,'" answered Vunawayo, after a momentary hesitation on the part of any one to reply.

"That is a strange name," said Gerard. "Is it so called because of its shape?"

"And because it eats."

"It eats!" echoed Gerard, mystified. "How? What does it eat?"

"Wizards, and other people," said Vunawayo, darkly. And both Gerard and Dawes thought they saw more than one significant look exchanged, and both remembered the muttered remark of their informant while they were chaffering over the lion's skin. That remark stood now explained, and in a very grim and boding sense did the explanation strike them.

Note 1. The salute royal, only accorded to the king, as distinct from the “Inkose” or “Baba” (“Chief Father”), employed in hailing a lesser potentate.

Chapter Fifteen.

“The Tooth.”

In announcing his hearty desire to bid goodbye to the Igazipuza kraal as soon as possible, John Dawes had stated no more than the barest truth, but its fulfilment seemed destined to be postponed indefinitely, failing the conversion to his views of the Igazipuza themselves. They, apparently, did not share his aspiration. They were not nearly so anxious to part with him as he was to part with them, and objected most strenuously to all and every suggestion to that end. In sum, he and his companion and servants, and all their possessions, were practically prisoners. Ingonyama's motives in thus holding them in restraint they were up till now at a loss to fathom. It was not trade, for they had long since bartered everything negotiable. It certainly was not friendship, for the chief's manner had become sullen and distrustful, not to say gruff. John Dawes, who understood natives thoroughly, and knew that they are nothing if not practical, confessed himself utterly baffled, failing a motive.

Once they had actually inspanned, but before they had trekked half a mile from the kraal they were met by a large force of armed warriors, and deliberately turned back. There was no help for it. Might was right, and comply they must. But, after that, under pretence that the chief had forbidden any grazing within a certain radius of the kraal, all their trekoxen were driven away to a small outlying kraal in a distant corner of the hollow. No obstruction was placed in the way of them looking after the animals, counting them occasionally, and so forth. But any attempt at inspanning was very promptly frustrated.

As with the chief, so with his followers. Taking their cue from him, these had become more and more insolent, ruffianly, and bullying in their demeanour. They would swagger around the waggons, hustle and annoy Sintoba and the other native servants, pull things about, and behave in general in such fashion as would almost put to the blush a crowd of the worst kind of British yahoos. Once, indeed, yielding to an uncontrollable impulse of exasperation, Gerard had given one of these sportive young savages a sound thrashing. It was an imprudent not to say a perilous thing to do. But again a bold attitude answered, and the Igazipuza became a little more respectful.

Days had merged into weeks, and weeks had almost lengthened into months, and still no chance of getting away. Taking Sintoba into complete confidence the pair would, on such few occasions as they could find themselves absolutely and entirely beyond the reach of prying eyes and ears, discuss the situation earnestly and in all its bearings. The only motive either Dawes or Sintoba could guess at was that an AngloZulu war was imminent, if it had not actually broken out. This would supply a sufficient reason for

their detention. Ingonyama was holding them as hostages. In the event of hostilities with the British, his intention was probably to carry them captive to the king's kraal. Or he might be keeping them with the design of sacrificing them to the manes of such members of his clan who might eventually be slain. This aspect of the case was not a pleasant one.

Seldom indeed could they feel sure they were out of hearing of their gaolers, out of sight never. The latter were ever around them, on one pretext or another. If they so much as strolled down to a waterhole to take a swim, a group of armed warriors was sure to start up at some unexpected point, and hover around them until their return. If they rode out to see how their stock was getting on, it was the same thing, a band was sure to makebelieve to be proceeding in the same direction, and they had long since ascertained that the sole entrance to the place was indefatigably watched and strongly guarded day and night. Now, all this surveillance, at first galling and irksome in the extreme, eventually became more serious in its results. It told upon their nerves. It was ominousdepressing. They were as completely shut away from the outer world in this wild and remote fastness of the Igazipuza as though shipwrecked on a desert island. Those grey cliff walls that encircled them became hateful, horrible, repellent. They were even as the walls of a tomb.

"Well, Ridgeley, I own this is getting serious," said Dawes, one morning as they sat on the waggonbox moodily smoking the pipe of bitter reflection. "And the worst of it is I see no way out of it. I've been in a queer corner or two in my time, but never did I feel so thoroughly like a rat in a trap as now. There's no way of climbing these infernal cliffs; leastways, not with our horses, and without them, we might almost as well stop here, for we should be overhauled and lugged back to a dead certainty. The way we came up is no go, either."

"No, it isn't," agreed Gerard, despondently. "I don't want to croak, Dawes; but it strikes me the tenure of our lives is not worth a great deal to any one who thought to do a good spec by purchasing it."

The suspense, the daily, hourly apprehension under which they lived, had made its mark upon Gerard, and even his cheerful spirits and sunny good humour had begun to fail him. He thought of his young life, and the joy and exhilaration of living which until lately had been his. He thought of those he had left behind him in the Old Country. But, most of all, full oft and continuallyand he had plenty of time for thinking, little else, in facthe thought of May Kingsland, and that bright golden day and happy peaceful evening he had spent in her society. How would she feel, he wondered, when she came to hear of his deathGod grant it might not be a barbarous and lingering oneat the hands of cruel and merciless savages?

“Don’t lose heart, Ridgeley, whatever you do,” said Dawes, looking at him earnestly. “The situation is pretty black, but, please Heaven, we’ll get through to talk over it snug and safe at home one of these days. The worst of it is that it’s all my doing you’re in this fix at all. That’s what I blame myself for, my lad.”

“Then don’t think of doing that,” returned Gerard, with all his old alacrity. “Aren’t we in it together, share and share alike, risks as well as good times. Come now, Dawes, if I think you’re bothering over that, it’ll go far towards knocking the bottom out of me. Hang it all, can’t we get on the horses some dark night, and make a dash for it?”

“We can’t, Ridgeley, and for this reason. It would simply be the death warrant of all our people if we succeeded, and of ourselves if we didn’t. I’m not a more straightlaced chap than most, but, you see, I can’t exactly bring myself to slope off and leave Sintoba and the rest of them in the lurch. No. We must either march out as we came, with all the honours of war, or stay here.”

“I never thought of it from that point of view, I admit,” said Gerard.

“There is another scheme I’ve been plotting, but it don’t pan out overmuch,” went on Dawes. “If one could manage to smuggle you out, by hook or by crook, you might find your way to Ulundi, and lay the case before the king, always provided there’s no such thing as a British war, of course. But, bar that event, Cetywayo would soon bring Master Ingonyama to book. He’s a straight man, is Cetywayo, and well-disposed towards Englishmen, though we have been badgering him more than enough of late. But he’d never allow a couple of British subjects to be put upon in this outrageous manner by one of his own subordinate chiefs.”

“By Jove! that is an idea,” said Gerard. “But would it be better than knocking up a rescue expedition among our own people in Natal for instance?”

“Rather. About five hundred per cent, better. Why such an expedition would mean a young war, and do you think Government would embark on that for the sake of a brace of poor devils of traders? Not much. It’d say we travelled at our own risk, and if we’d got into difficulties we must get out of them on the same terms. Even if otherwise, just think of the red tape! No. My plan is the best, and, I’m afraid, the only one.”

For a few moments both men sat puffing at their pipes in silence. Gerard felt his pulses beginning to throb already with the excitement and prospect of such an adventure. Then he said

“It won’t do, Dawes; I’m not going to leave you. We must go out together or not at all.”

“That’s no sort of good sense,” was the other’s rejoinder. “I shall be all right here, and it’s the only way out of the difficulty.”

“But, on your own showing, they will take it out of you,” urged Gerard, speaking quickly. “Didn’t you give that as a reason just now for not leaving Sintoba and the others behind? You go, and leave me to take my chance here.”

“Yes; but the cases are different, I can manage them better. You see, I understand them thoroughly, and you, after all, are a good bit of a novice. Still, you know enough of the country and people to get along among them, and find your way to Ulundi as quick as possible; but if you were left here on your own hook you’d likely make a mess of it. Tell the first you meet you are the bearer of a message to the king, and they will be bound to help you. They dare not refuse. We must pan out the thing, though, with every care. The main difficulty will, of course, be that of getting you clear out of this place, in the first instance. The rest is simplicity itself in comparison.”

In the dead of night, by the light of a lantern, the two would sit in the waggontent, while Dawes, with surprising accuracy, drew from memory, and in as small a compass as possible, a map of that section of the Zulu country which comprised their present place of captivity and the king’s capital and night after night, with their heads together, they would sit studying this rough plan, while Dawes pointed out the general features of the countrythe lay of the mountains and the most convenient and least frequented route to be chosen. With extra good luck, he reckoned Gerard might make Ulundi in a little over two dayswith ordinary luck it might take him four. But that Cetywayo would order their immediate release he never entertained or uttered the smallest doubt.

One day Gerard saddled up his pony, and started off alone to see how their stock was getting on. And, indeed, it really seemed that he was alone, for strange to say, none of the Igazipuza offered to accompany him, nor did he meet with a soul on the way. But between seeing nobody and being himself seen by nobody, he well knew there lay a wide difference, and he must be careful accordingly; indeed, he almost began to fear that this unwonted immunity from surveillance concealed a trapwas designed to draw him into some indiscretion, which might be turned into a reason for his destruction.

The intense longing to escape, however, soon overweighed all prudential consideration to the extent of causing him to scan for the fiftieth time every cranny and crevice in the face of the cliffs, which might by any chance afford exit. Surely there was some such a cleft, a gnarled tree, a concealed passage. Hardly could he believe there was not. But,

even as heretofore, he could not find it, and despondently he once more turned his horse to ride back to the waggons.

Suddenly the animal shied, and dropping his nose to the ground sniffed at something and then backed away, snorting. The white round object which had caused the alarm needed no second glance. It was a human skull.

Yet another lay there, its fleshless eyeholes staring upward from the grass. Scattered around were fragments of broken bones.

Gerard looked up. In his meditative fit he had ridden abstractedly, not seeing where he was going. Now he found himself at the foot of a great rock, and a cold shiver ran through his frame, for he recognised it as the rock called Izinyo, "The Tooth." It was the rock of slaughter "the tooth that eats," as Vunawayo had grimly put it.

For various reasons he had always avoided this locality. He had no sort of an inclination to explore it very much the reverse and he feared lest in doing so he might unconsciously be offending the superstitions of the people. Now, thus brought by chance to its very base, he looked up at it with a cold, creepy sensation of shuddering awe. He contemplated it much as a Liberty, Equality and Fraternity "citizen" during the thick of the Reign of Terror, may have contemplated the guillotine, as an institution with which he might any day be called upon to cultivate a much closer acquaintance.

He looked down at the shattered bones, then up at the cliff. This was the mode of death then. The victims were taken to the summit of this latterday Tarpeian rock and hurled therefrom. But as he looked something seemed to be flapping softly against the face of the cliff high overhead. Ropes? Reims? Were people then hanged from the brow not merely thrown over? Hanging was not a Zulu method of slaughter. Gerard was more mystified than ever.

And with this mystification came a great and growing curiosity. As he was here he determined to explore further. He would take advantage of being alone and unwatched to ascend the rock. A horrible fascination, which was more than mere curiosity, seemed to beckon him on, and with it ran an instinctive feeling that the knowledge thus gained might possibly be of use to him. Acting upon this impulse he rode round to the other side and began the ascent.

The latter was not difficult. Precipitous only on its front face, the further side of the pyramid, though steep, was smooth enough to enable him to ride nearly to the top. Here, however, he was obliged to leave his horse and ascend on foot by a roughhewn but wellworn path.

The summit was large enough to hold about fifty persons. It was smoothly rounded, with a hollow depression in the centre. And as Gerard's glance fell upon this, every drop of blood within him seemed to turn to ice.

A sharp, tough stake, pointed at the top, rose upright in the centre of the hollow, and upon this stake, in a sitting posture, shrivelled, half mummified, was impaled a human body. The head lay over on the shoulder, and on the features, drawn back from the bared teeth in a grin of ghastly torment, was the most horrible expression of fear and agony. The eyeballs, lustreless and shrunken, stared upon the intruder with a stare that might haunt him to his dying day, and gazing upon the grisly contortion of the bound and trussed limb the terrible attitude the foetid odour of the corpse for in this dry atmosphere decomposition had been a long and gradual process it seemed to the petrified and unutterably horrorstricken spectator that the tortured wretch must still have life in him.

Recovering by a strong effort of will some degree of selfpossession, for the horrid sight had turned him sick and faint, Gerard drew nearer to the corpse. The stake, burnt and hardened to a point, was of the umzimbili or ironwood. This was clearly not the first time it had been so used, and now as he remembered the skulls and bones lying beneath, he thought with a shudder on the numbers of wretches who might have suffered this most hideous of deaths. Heavens! and might not he himself, and Dawes, be called upon to suffer in like fashion, at the mercy, as they were, of this horde of cruel barbarians?

He turned his face outward to look over the valley. The sweet golden sunshine, now declining, shed a softened and beautiful light upon the verdure of the bush, toning down the angles of the grey cliffs. Blue smoke clouds curled lazily upward from the great circle of the kraal, lying below in the distance, and the sound of faraway voices floated melodiously, pleasingly upon the clear still air. It was a lovely scene, a scene that many might travel any distance to look upon, but to him who now gazed upon it from this grim and horrid Golgotha it was darker, blacker than the Tartarus of Dante.

Then another sight arrested Gerard's attention. Along the brow of the cliff was a row of stout pegs driven firmly into the ground, and round each was tied a reim, or rawhide rope, whose other end dangled over into space. These were what he had seen flapping overhead when he was below. With a shuddering loathing he drew up one of them. Its end was not a running noose as he had expected, only a loop, so small that he could not even put his hand through it. What new horror did this represent?

And then a quick, deep-toned ejaculation behind made him start so violently in the sudden unexpectedness of the interruption in the then state of his nerves, that he was

within an ace of losing his balance and pitching headlong over the height. Recovering himself, however, he turned to confront a tall Zulu who stood contemplating him with an expression of ironical mirth, and recognised the great frame and evil countenance of Vunawayo.

“Ha, Umlúngu!” said the latter. “So you have come to look at the point of The Tooth?”

“Yes,” answered Gerard, as composedly as possible. “But, Vunawayo, what is that?”

“This?” said the savage, reaching up his hand to the point of the stake. “It is the point of The Tooththe part it eats with.”

“No; that, I mean,” pointing to the impaled corpse.

“Hau! That isits last morsel,” replied Vunawayo, with the laugh of a demon. “When The Tooth bites, it bites hard. Wizardsand such people. I told you it did.”

“What, then, are these used for?” went on Gerard, showing the rawhide rope which he had drawn up.

“These? Ha! not all who come here to be eaten by The Tooth are bitten by its point. This loop you see was tied round a man’s wrists. He was then flung over to the full end of the rope, and his arms being fastened behind him, were broken by the jerk. He dangled there until he dropped loose. The last to suffer in this way was a woman who had been a captive, and was taken to wife by the chief. She killed her newborn child, saying that she would die rather than increase the strength of the Igazipuza. She did diebut she took a long time about ita long, long time.”

“And who was the man who was impaled, Vunawayo? What did he die for?”

“Be not too curious, Umlúngu,” was the answer. “Have patience. There may soon come a time when you shall attend at the ‘eating of The Tooth.’ Have patience.”

To Gerard, in his then frame of mind, it seemed that the other’s tone was fraught with grim irony, with fell significance.

“Let us go down,” resumed Vunawayo. “Ha! our meeting up here has been short and unexpected. But it may be that we shall meet again upon the point of The Tooth, and then our meeting will be a much longer one. Oh yes; we shall meet again up here,” added the savage, with a sinister laugh, as he turned to lead the way down.

And Gerard, unnerved by these evidences of the sickening barbarities practised by this ferocious clan, could hardly bring himself on his return to tell Dawes what he had seen.

Chapter Sixteen.

The Attempted Escape.

Dawes, prompt to discern that his young companion had seen or heard something to unnerve him, was not long in getting at the whole story of the latter's discovery.

"It's a pity you turned your explorations in that direction, Ridgeley," was his verdict, "for I'm afraid the result has knocked you out of time some and it's still more a pity that Vunawayo should have stumbled across you up there, because of course he saw that you were a bit upset, and it gives them a sort of a hold on us. Well now, you see, my plan is the best in the long run. You must try and make a break for it, and see what you can do for the rest of us."

But still Gerard refused, refused uncompromisingly to leave his comrade alone in the power of these barbarians. At length it was agreed they should toss up which should make the attempt.

"Here, you'd better do the throwing, or you'll be swearing I've hocussed the coin," said Dawes, with a dry smile. "By Jove, I've tossed for many a thing, from drinks upwards, but never for quite such a life and death business as this. Still, I hope you may win, for I tell you candidly you would stand a bad chance if left here. Well, heads you go, tails I stay. What's it to bet two out of three, or 'sudden death'?"

"Sudden death sounds unlucky. Two out of three we'll say. You throw."

"All right," said Dawes, producing a shilling and contemplating it with that dry, quizzical look of his that did duty for most men's laugh. "Her most Gracious Majesty isn't in it up here compared with Ingonyama confusion to the latter. Now call." And up went the coin.

"Heads!" sang out Gerard. Heads it was.

Up went the coin again. This time "tails" turned up.

"So far a draw. Now for the casting vote," said Dawes.

"Heads!" cried Gerard again. "Hurra No. I've lost though I've won the toss," he ended, as the coin, having wobbled indecisively, settled down, head uppermost, on the waggon box.

“That’s as it should be,” said Dawes. “The next thing is to choose our time. A rainy, dark night would be the best. Zulus, you know, hate being out of doors at night. They’re as frightened of bogies as so many children. But there’s no chance of any such luck, I’m afraid. Well, we must just watch our opportunity.”

The latter came. Two nights after the decision by lot there was a gathering and a wardance at the Igazipuza kraal. Throughout the afternoon the warriors were parading and singing, and towards sundown there was a great beefkilling, at which Gerard himself assisted, and in order to lull suspicion, affected great interest in the spearing of the doomed cattle, half of which, frenzied with apprehension and the clamour of the crowd, broke loose and temporarily escaped their slayers, affording much sport to the excited savages in hunting them down one by one, and slaughtering them, amid an indescribable uproar.

“Now, Ridgeley, you have got everything you will require,” said Dawes. “The map, ammunition, everything. The row will be at its thickest in less than an hour. That will be the time. Even the guards at the entrance to this hole will be so taken up watching the fun down here, you may be able to slip past them.”

But Fortune was destined to prove unfavourable. As the moment for making the attempt drew near, and even John Dawes the imperturbable felt his pulses beat quicker, messengers arrived from the chief requesting though the request was really a command their presence at the gathering.

It was disconcerting, at first. But Dawes’s keen faculties saw in the apparent difficulty his opportunity. The messengers were few in number, and eager to get back themselves to the scene of the festivities. He readily fell in with the request, and with great deliberation replied that they would saddle up their horses and ride over forthwith. This proposal, so far from being received with suspicion, excited no surprise. Zulus are great sticklers for etiquette; therefore it struck the messengers as in no wise strange that the two white men should elect to put in their appearance with every adjunct of state at their command to wit, on horseback.

“God bless you, Ridgeley,” said Dawes, with unwonted seriousness, contriving, under cover of saddling up, to exchange a firm handclasp with his young companion, unseen by the messengers. “When we get near the kraal, then edge off and make a dash for it. I’ll give you the word.”

Their outspan was some three or four hundred yards distant from the kraal. As they approached the latter, they could see that the wardance was in full swing. In the red glow of the great fires the forms of hundreds of excited savages, in all their wild

paraphernalia, showed forth weird, monstrous, fantastic, as they went through their barbarous performance, and the thunder of the warsong gathered in volume, swelling up to the starlit heavens like the fierce roar of ravening beasts. Gerard's heart was beating like a hammer.

"Now, Ridgeley! Now is your time!" whispered Dawes, as the messengers who were escorting them had in their eagerness been gradually increasing their distance in advance.

Gerard, who had learnt promptitude in a sufficiently hard and practical school, said not a word. Wrenching round his horse's head, for the animal was loath to part from its companion, he spurred away into the dark bush, straight for the head of the valley. And as he rode, from all the agonised suspense of his young heart, went up an unspoken prayer that he might succeed, that he might be the means of rescuing his companion from the deadly peril which lowered over him, which lowered over them both.

The kraal was already left behind on his right, the wild tumult of the wardance began to grow fainter. A puff of cool air fanned his face. He had almost gained the ridge. Could it bedared he hopethat he was after all to meet with no opposition? Could it be that the guards had all been summoned to attend the revelry? Ha! what was that?

In the light of the starsand South African starlight can be very brighthe saw dark forms running, converging on his line of flight, could even distinguish the white on their shields, the occasional glint on the point of an assegai. Then a line of figures started up right before him, as it were out of the earth itself, barring his way, and a deeptoned, peremptory voice called upon him to halt.

It was a critical, a fearful moment, yet he hesitated not. Putting his horse right at the foremost, he charged through. And then the wild Igazipuza warcry rent the night, and he could hear the whiz of flying assegais past his head.

Even then he would not use a weaponwould not fire. Like lightning it flashed through his brain that he must get through bloodlesslywithout taking a lifeor not at all. He might kill one or more of his assailants. He might even thus ensure his own escape; but in that case would he not be dooming to death his comrade? Would not the latter be inevitably sacrificed? Would not the revengeful and exasperated barbarians demand life for life, blood for blood? Seldom, we trow, has one so young in years been called upon to face so difficult and delicate a dilemma, seldom has he disposed of it so resolutely, so judiciously.

He heard the swarming rush of his pursuers as they charged down the hill on either side of him. His pulses bounded, and his steed, maddened with excitement and terror, snorted and tugged at the reins as the terrible slogan rang forth from those fierce throats, expressing in curdling meaning their veritable thirst for blood

“Igazipuza!”

And now with a thrill of unspeakable exaltation, he realised that he was going downhill, that he was actually outside that hated and illomened hollow which had been their drear prisonhouse all these weary weeks. Every drop of blood in his veins tingled; every nerve thrilled. But the pursuers kept up their pace horribly, and the way was rough, fearfully rough. Even the surefooted Basuto pony stumbled and floundered in the darkness; once or twice came down nearly on his knees.

“Igazipuza!”

The frightful shout thundered still in his wake, still as close as before. In the darkness, on the steep and ragged descent the fleetfooted savages could almost keep pace with the horse. With the very brief start he had been able to obtain, they would surely run him down sooner or later. His steed could not keep on at that pace for ever. Besides, a hole, an excrescence in the ground, a false step, anything, and he would be at their mercy.

On he kept. The air seemed to tear past his ears as he sped. The stars overhead were as a whirling wheel of fireworks. Would not Nature even come to his aid, afford him a hidingplace, a refuge? The rugged mountains loomed black to the sky in all their savage wildness. Oh for a few miles of level stretch to yield him the precious start which should be the saving of him, the saving of them both! And then it seemed that his despairing wish was answered. A black line rose right across his way. It was a wide belt of forest land. Here at any rate he might find hidingsheltersome means of baffling the pursuers.

For although the fierce shouts of the latter had long since ceased, not on that account did he flatter himself they had given up the chase. These bloodhounds would not abandon their prey so readily. Even though the morning might see him a long distance from their haunt, yet would he by no means be safe. The Igazipuza were drawn mainly from the Aba Qulusi clan, who inhabited almost exclusively the mountainous region of northern Zululand. Not among these could he look for help, for guidance in reaching the kraal of the king.

And, indeed, could he so look to any? What if the war with the English had actually broken out? In that case he would be a lawful prey to the first armed band he should meet. The hand of every man, woman, and child in the country would be against him.

The first thing, however, was to evade those now in pursuit of him, and with feelings of the deepest thankfulness, Gerard plunged into the dark, welcome shades of the forest. But here a new drawback, a new peril arose to confront him. The ground was hardly less rough than the open hillside, and being in shadow, he could not see to guide his horse, with the result that now and again the animal would crash right into a bush, or stumble and slide over the roots of a tree, at the same time nearly braining his rider against a limb of the same. Or a buck would start up and rush away headlong through the covert, making a prodigious clatter, and, as sound travels far at night, the keen ears of his enemies would have no difficulty in following him by their sense of hearing alone.

How long he thus pursued his course Gerard could hardly have told; but at length the deepdrawn breathing and stumbling gait of his steed warned him that it was high time the latter had a rest, however brief. So he dismounted, and having listened a moment, loosened the girths, but without removing the saddle, and then stood listening again.

If he had come upon this expedition in search of adventure, assuredly he had found it, thought Gerard, as he stood there by his horse, with the bridle in his hand ready to mount at the very first alarm; as he stood there in the midnight darkness of the forest, listening with beating heart for the stealthy footsteps of his pursuing enemies. As a situation of wild, adventurous peril, assuredly this one would be hard to surpass.

He might thus have been standing about half an hour, when a faint, faraway rustling was borne to his ears. At the same time his horse began to show signs of uneasiness. That was enough. In a moment he had tightened up the girths, and was in the saddle again.

The rest, though brief, had meant new life to the horse. The game little Basuto stepped briskly out, but the kloof suddenly narrowed into a steep defile, a dry watercourse in fact, and here the hoofs made such an abominable clatter on the stones as to bring Gerard's heart into his mouth. It could be heard for miles in the still silence of the night.

On he pressed, obliged to follow the lay of the land a long, narrow defile between steep mountain slopes. Would it never end? It seemed not, as each fresh rise surmounted, only revealed the same winding gloomy gorge, black in the darkness.

Another rest, this time of longer duration, and he pressed on again. And then as the first streak of dawn began to tinge the sky, Gerard noted that he had got clear of the mountains, and was riding over rolling, bushclad, and comparatively level country, but always gradually descending. One thing puzzled him however. By the position of the rising dawn he had travelled too much to the westward. That he had not travelled in a circle he felt sure. Then as the dawn lightened he saw in front of him a straggling

irregular rift in the expanse of bush beneath, and listening intently his ear thought to detect the sound of water. Yes, it was water a river. Drawing out the rough map Dawes had prepared for him, he decided that it must be the Black Umfolosi. If so he had made very fair distance. Surely he was nearly out of danger as far as his pursuers were concerned.

The next thing was to discover a place to cross. A little further on was a rocky conical eminence. By ascending this he could command a view of the river, and would thus save the time occupied by riding up and down, it might be for any distance, in search of a practicable drift. His horse needed another rest, and while the animal was benefiting by this he himself could ascend the hillock and take his observations, thus killing two birds with one stone. A fatally erroneous move.

But having resolved upon it, Gerard lost no time in carrying it out. Leaving his horse with the bridle drawn over its head, and the saddle girths merely loosened as before, he set to work to climb the kopje.

The sides were rugged and steep, and the rocky summit was crowned with bush and prickly aloes. A good view of the lay of the land rewarded his efforts. For miles the bush country stretched away, and here and there the dim blue line of a mountain in the distance. Beneath, the river seemed to flow around a bend in a long smooth reach. It was probably deep at this point, in which event he would have to ride eastward along its bank in search of a drift. By comparing the direction it took with the position of the sunrise he felt sure he had reached the Black Umfolosi.

And now as the glorious hues of sunrise began to flush and glow in the east, and the varying voices of the wilderness arose in glad and joyous greeting of another day, the piping of birds, and the hum of insects, Gerard's pulses beat with an unwonted sense of exhilaration, of vivid delight in his newfound freedom. Fatigue or exhaustion he had not as yet begun to feel, for, as we have shown, he was in splendid condition by reason of his openair life. But he began to feel uncommonly hungry, and the only food he had been able to bring with him were a few pieces of bread, crammed hurriedly into his pockets. These, however, hard and stale as they were, came in uncommonly acceptable now, and he devoured them ravenously.

"That's better," he said to himself, rising slowly. "Now for one farewell survey, and then on again." And then he dropped back among the bushes and aloes as if he had been shot.

He had left his horse in an open glade. From his elevated perch he could see the animal peacefully grazing, and he saw something more. Stealing upon it, flitting from bush to bush, came a number of armed Zulus.

With a fatal fascination he watched their movements. On they crept, half crouching, half gliding, but approaching with incredible rapidity. He could mark them signalling to each other, then as two or three of them rose to peer forward, he saw on their foreheads and chests the bloodred disc, the ominous distinguishing mark of the Igazipuza. That these were his pursuers of the previous night was established beyond a doubt.

He watched them as they drew near the horse. But instead of running forward to secure the animal, they suddenly crouched down and lay motionless. The significance of this manoeuvre was plain enough to Gerard. They reckoned that he would return to the horse, and their plan was to lie in wait and pounce out upon him when he should do so.

He had a rifle with him the double gun had been left with Dawes and now he thought how he could astonish them, how easily he could pick off, at any rate, one or two of them. But what good purpose would that serve? It would draw the whole band on to his hidingplace, and he could not hope to resist them ultimately. Besides, the objection to blood shedding which had held good at first held good still. Dawes was still in their power.

Then he thought thought hard and coherently. He must abandon the horse and steal away. The savages would get tired of watching there for ever. They would quit their ambush and come in search of him, or, at any rate, some of them might. They would light upon his spoor, and easily track him. He must make good his own escape while there was yet time.

Acting on this resolve he sent one more look at the lurking barbarians; then, crawling carefully down the other side of the kopje so as to leave it between himself and them, he made for the river, judging that upon its banks he was likely to find a hidingplace if anywhere.

To gain it took him some little time. We said that the river here flowed in a long smooth reach, and this reach was thickly bordered with trees and overhanging bushes. Nothing could have answered his purpose better. But, as he gained it, he sent one look backward at his late restingplace, and that look was sufficient to show him that he had left that refuge not a moment too soon. There was a flash and movement of something upon the rocky apex. His enemies had taken up the spoor and had followed it thither.

In this conjecture he was, as it happened, wrong, the real fact being that the same idea had entered their heads as had entered his; viz. that the kopje would make a convenient observatory, and two or three of them had ascended to explore accordingly. Once there,

however, they promptly lighted upon the spoor leading away from it, and were at that very moment engaged in signalling the discovery to the residue of the band below.

And now Gerard knew that further flight was useless. With his horse still under him he might have stood some chance, and bitterly did he reproach himself for his carelessness and folly in cutting himself loose from his staunch little steed. On foot the fleet barbarians would run him down with the untiring persistency of bloodhounds. His only chance was to hide.

But where? Eagerly, anxiously he explored the riverbank. Plenty of hidingplaces were there, for as we have said, the trees and bushes overhung the water in thick profusion. It was not sufficient, however, merely to conceal himself, he must do so in such wise as to leave no spoor, no clue to his hidingplace.

And as the young adventurer fled swiftly along the riverbank his heart was filled with a bitter despair. Death stared him in the face at every turn, death, violent but swift, on the weapons of his enemies, or death by torture at their hands, or when they dragged him back captive to their wild stronghold. The ruthless persistency of their pursuit seemed to point to no other intention. The sight of the grisly stake and its impaled burden came back to his recollection and rendered him desperate. All considerations of policy were thrown to the winds. He would sell his life dearly now.

Still there was a chance, and he resolved to make the most of it. Casting his eyes keenly around he noticed a quick rapid movement, then a splash. An iguana lying along a tree trunk which sloped out almost horizontally over the water, alarmed by his presence, had run to the end of the boughs and dived in. The idea struck him as an inspiration. In a moment he was up the tree; then, following the example of the iguana, he let himself drop into the water as noiselessly as possible.

It was over his head, but his feet touched ground almost immediately. Then he rose again, and keeping under cover of the bank began to swim upstream. The current being deep was sluggish, and Gerard, who was a strong, powerful swimmer, made good headway. Carefully avoiding the slightest splash he had swum about two hundred yards, when he became sensible of a strange, but ever so slight vibration. It was caused by the tread of footsteps on the bank.

He dived and swam beneath the surface in order to avoid leaving any ripple. When at last he arose to breathe he found he was beneath a huge overhanging bush, whose branches trailed down into the water. Nothing could be better for his purpose.

Holding on by a bough, he drew a long deep breath. Then peering cautiously forth through the foliage he watched and listened. Again came that barely perceptible vibration of the bank, and he thought he could detect the muffled sound of voices.

The shadow of the treefringed bank lay in an irregular line upon the water. The sun was now almost straight upstream, reducing the shadow to a mere three or four yards of width. And, a short distance below him, projecting from this line of shadow, Gerard, from his concealment could make out the moving silhouettes of three or four heads. His ruthless pursuers were right over his hidingplace. Would they discover it or pass it by?

Chapter Seventeen.

How Dawes Fared.

Having parted with his young companion, John Dawes rode on, outwardly cool and unconcerned, though in effect his mind misgave him. For he knew that in all human probability he had but a few minutes more to live. The critical moment would be that of the discovery of Gerard's defection, and if he and his party escaped massacre in the outburst of fury which was sure to follow, why their escape would smack of the nature of a miracle about as much as anything he had ever known in his life.

Fortune favoured him, favoured them both, so far. In their impatience to get back to the scene of the revels, the messengers had increased the distance between themselves and the horsemen, and when Gerard had made his dash for it, the shouting and stamping of the wild wardance had so far deadened all other sounds that the receding of his horse's hoofs passed unnoticed by the escort, to whose ears, in fact, during the general tumult, the tread of one horse made as much noise as that of two.

Not until he entered the kraal did they make the discovery that he was alone, and even then, to a quick suspicious query as to what had become of his companion, Dawes's reply that he supposed the latter had gone back to the waggons for something he had forgotten, suggested no distrust. These white men had been their prisoners for weeks, they thought, and the guard on the ridge was as strong tonight as ever.

Familiar as he was with such sights, the appearance of the Igazipuza kraal as he rode into it that night, struck John Dawes as about the most wild and terrific aspect of savagery unchecked as he had ever beheld. The great open space of its inner circle was crowded with figures. Equidistant from each other, far enough from the palisade to be safe from accident, and yet sufficiently at the side to be out of the way of the dancers, four huge fires were burning. Facing each other in two great crescents, fully armed with shield and assegai, knobkerrie and battleaxe, their leaders standing out a little in advance of the lines, the warriors stood, and the red gushing flames of the great fires, lighting up the wild fantastically arranged figures with a truly demoniacal glare, imparted to these raving, howling human wolves an aspect of indescribable ferocity. Starting, softly at first, by the leaders of the chorus, the fierce thrilling chant of the warsong, taken up by the ranks, gathered in strength with every repetition, soon rising to a perfect roar of deep chest notes as the savages, rattling their shields and weapons, threw themselves into the excitement of the thing, beating time with the rhythmic thunder of their feet as the tread of one man, turning themselves hither and thither, muscles quivering, eyeballs rolling in the fierce frenzy of the stimulating exercise. The while the women, squatted around against the palisade, were keeping up a high, shrill

accompaniment to the deepthroated roar of the warriors, but never for a moment did that fierce, wild thrilling chant lose its rhythm or degenerate into discord.

Ingonyama, with four or five indunas stood at the upper end of the kraal overlooking the ceremonies. The chief was arrayed in a warshirt of flowing hair. Over this he wore the magnificent lion's skin purchased from Dawes. It was arranged in such wise that the grinning open jaws crowned him as a headdress, which, with the sweeping black mane falling around his shoulders, and the skin and tail, trailing far behind him on the ground, gave him a most formidable and ferocious appearance, as of course he intended it should. In his hand he held a shorthanded, heavy battleaxe, and between his eyes was painted the small red disk.

He took no notice of Dawes, as the latter rode up and dismounted. Indeed his attention was occupied with other matters, for the dance had ceased, and the warriors, forming up into companies, were marching up to where he was seated with his attendants. Then halting before their chief they began to sing, in longdrawn recitative, a series of strophes in which he was hailed by every extravagant title, and endowed with every attribute of wisdom and valour and ferocity. This being ended, shields and weapons were raised aloft, and the companies, wheeling, filed back into the central place, and falling into their crescent formation took up the wardance again with unabated vigour.

Ingonyama, not illpleased that his white "guest" should witness this testimony to his power and influence, sank back into a sitting posture, and motioned to the latter to follow his example. But Dawes pretended not to notice the invitation, and remained standing. He did notice, however, the shieldbearer holding the great white shield behind the chief, which instance of affectation of royal state he stored up for future use.

"Greeting, Jandosi," said Ingonyama, graciously, for by this time the native corruption of the trader's name had leaked out through his servants, and by it he was now known to all. "Where is your brother?" meaning Gerard.

"Where?" repeated Dawes, taming to look round, as it were with indifferent surprise. "He should be here, though. He must have returned to the waggon for something. Still, he should be here."

It happened that just at that moment the chant of the dancing song had sunk rather low. Borne upon the still night air, faint and distant, there floated to the ears of those who were not taking part in the revelry, a longdrawn roar.

"Igazipuza."

“Hau!” exclaimed Ingonyama, with a start, listening intently.

Again from the far hillside came the wild slogan. And now the indunas echoed the astonishment of their chief. The guard on the ridge was aroused.

All manner of expressions flitted across Ingonyama’s face, mortification, intense puzzlement. The cry should have rung out loud and clear, considering the short distance which lay between the kraal and the ridge, whereas it sounded miles and miles away. The real fact, however, being that the first alarm was completely drowned by the noise and uproar of the wardance, and the song in honour of the chief, and by this time the guards were far enough away in pursuit of Gerard. John Dawes felt every nerve thrill within him. The critical moment had arrived.

“Thou liest, Jandosi,” said Ingonyama, and a look of stern and deadly meaning came over his features, grim and ferocious, scowling beneath the great jaws of the lion. “Thou liest, Jandosi. Thy brother has fled; attempted to flee, rather,” he added significantly; “for no man ever quitted the kraal of the Igazipuza without bidding farewell to its chief.”

“Am I responsible for what he has done?” answered Dawes, coolly. “He is young, remember, and young blood is restless blood. Perchance he was tired of sitting still for ever.”

“Am I a childare these children, Jandosi, that you fill up our ears with such tales as this?” said the chief sternly. “Where is your brother?”

“Am I an owlam I a bat, Ingonyama, that you would strain my eyes into seeing through the dark? If, as you say, my brother has fled, how then can I tell where he is at this moment? Rather should the question come from me to yourself, whom men name as an Isanusi (witchdoctor, or seer) of renown.”

“Hau!” burst from the councillors in wild amaze at the audacity of this white man.

“Your eyes?” echoed Ingonyama, and his voice came low and trembling with suppressed fury. “Your eyes, Jandosi? Há! You shall not indeed strain your eyes seeing through the dark, for I will make them dark for ever.”

The full meaning of the tone and words was plain to John Dawes. The crisis had come.

“Move not,” he returned quickly, his decisive ringing tone arresting as by magic the signal which the chief was about to make. “Before that happens we will sit in darkness

together. Stir but a finger, Ingonyama, and the tribe Igazipuzi may proceed to the election of a new chief."

With the muzzle of a revolver pointing full at his breast, the butt in the hand of a man whose daring and resolution was known to all, no wonder Ingonyama should sit rigid and paralysed. His councillors shared his dazed immovability. What marvellous thing was to happen next, they thought?

Dawes, who was standing beside his horse, prepared for the first hostile move, had not raised his arm. He had merely brought the weapon to bear after the method known as "firing from the hip." To all outward appearance he was merely conversing rather animatedly with the chief.

The latter stared at him as though he could hardly believe his senses. But there was the little round ring, pointing full upon his breast from barely six yards off. The merest pressure of a finger, and it would let out his life as he sat.

"You have treated us ill, Ingonyama," went on Dawes, sternly. "We have no quarrel with the people of the Zulu; on the contrary, we are at peace. Yet you have kept us here against our will, and treated us as enemies. In two days 'my tongue' speaks at Undini, in the ears of the Great Great One, by whose light you live."

This reference to the king, by one of his favourite titles, had a strange effect upon this chief, whom the speaker by this time more than half suspected of being a rebellious and plotting vassal. For an instant it seemed that the latter's uncontrollable rage would triumph over his fear of death. But he only said, with a sneer

"Not so, Jandosi. 'Your tongue,' however long, will be brought back here. Long before the end of two days it will have ceased to speak for ever. When a tongue is too long, we cut it. Ha! We have a Tooth here which can bite it short. Your 'tongue' shall be bitten on the point of The Tooth, Jandosi. Ha!"

Which being rendered out of the vernacular of "dark" talking, dear to the South African native, into plain English, meant that in the chief's opinion Gerard would assuredly be recaptured, and in that event would be adjudged to the hideous fate of the wretch whose body he had found impaled on the summit of The Tooth.

"I think not, Ingonyama. I think my 'tongue' will speak at Undini in words that will move the Lion of the Zulu to wrath. It may be that it will speak of another Lion, who sits beneath the white shield as a king, who within the territory of the great king levies war upon and treats as enemies the friends of the Lion of the Zulu. Yet it is not too late. You

have but to give the word, now this night, that I and mine may depart unmolested, and I can draw back my 'tongue' before it reaches as far as Undini, for I am a peaceable trader, and have no wish to mix myself up in anybody's quarrels."

A deepchested gasp of wonder escaped his listeners.

"You are a bold man, Jandosi," exclaimed the chief.

"My life has its value, but the life of the chief of the Igazipuza has a far greater one. And this I hold in my hand."

Another astonished gasp escaped the hearers. This statement was only too true. Here, in the heart of the Igazipuza kraal his ferocious warriors going through their appalling wardance, with the aspect of fiends let loose, but a few paces distant Ingonyama in his heart of hearts quailed before this solitary white man dictating terms. Again had a policy of boldness succeeded.

"Return to your waggons, Jandosi," said the chief at length. "I would think this matter over. You shall know my answer in the morning."

Most men would have pressed for a reply there and then, but John Dawes was nothing if not judicious. He thoroughly understood the policy of providing a broad bridge for a fleeing foe. His object was gained, viz. to secure himself at the moment of the popular outburst, and he had nearly succeeded.

"Now are the counsels of good sense about to triumph," he replied. "Take till the morning to consider, even then may my 'tongue' be recalled. And now, send one of these indunas to go with me to the waggons and to remain the night, for your people are turbulent and rude at times, Ingonyama, and I would avoid trouble with them."

The chief thought a moment, then uttered a word or two. One of the councillors stood up.

"Good," said Dawes. "Fare thee well, O wearer of the lion's skin. Between the eyes was the life let outmay that never be the lot of its wearer, O chief of the Igazipuza."

He knew that Ingonyama was for the time being cowed, and that it was incumbent upon him to return to his waggons before the reaction should set in. Yet as he rode at a footpace out of the kraal, with the induna walking beside him, as he passed behind the ranks of excited barbarians almost within touching distance, he honestly expected every moment to be his last. A word from the chief, a cry, a signal, and that armed mass would

fall upon him in a moment and hack him into a thousand pieces. Still, for some unaccountable reason, the “word” remained unspoken, the signal was not given. It might be that Ingonyama had further and more fell designs; it might be that he was acting in good faith, anyhow Dawes reached his waggons unmolested.

But he had ample reason to congratulate himself in securing the presence of the indunaor hostage as the latter really was for by and by, as the warriors discovered the escape of Gerard, they came surging around the waggons in a wild, clamorous, threatening crowd. Even then, in the presence of one of the most trusted councillors of the chief, a massacre seemed imminent, but eventually they drew off.

Throughout that night as Dawes lay, feigning sleep but never more fully awake in his life, he was wondering how his young companion had fared. So far, the latter must have effected his escape, inasmuch as he had not been brought back. Whether he would ultimately succeed depended largely on the vigour and persistency wherewith the Igazipuza should prosecute the pursuit.

But that he himself was the right man to remain behind, John Dawes was now more than ever convinced. Where would Gerard have been, for instance, under the critical circumstances of that night? The only thing to do now was to await with what patience he might the result of his comrade’s enterprise.

Chapter Eighteen.

How Gerard Fared.

Gerard, up to his chin in water, concealed by the sweeping boughs, stood back within his hidingplace hardly daring to breathe.

Then it was that his quickness of foresight in swimming rather than wading, in swimming beneath the surface rather than in the ordinary way, stood him in good stead, for the first would have troubled the water, while the second would have sent a line of bubbles floating down the sluggish current, revealing the method of his escape to his pursuers. Now they were puzzled.

By the greatest good luck the manner and place of his entering the river had been perfect for its purpose. He had got upon the tree trunk in such wise as to leave no spoor. Even in letting himself down into the water by the branches, he had managed so as to avoid breaking off a shower of twigs and fresh leaves, or even bark, to float down and indicate the way of his disappearance. The spoor seemed to come abruptly to an end as if the fugitive had been whisked up to the skies. The Zulus were puzzled.

They squatted in a ring with their heads together and discussed matters. What did it mean? The fugitive could not have climbed a tree. In the first place there was no tree with sufficient foliage to afford him cover; in the second, he was not in any tree within sight; in the third, the spoor did not lead up to the foot of any tree. For Gerard, by a deft spring of a couple of yards, had landed himself upon the nearly horizontal trunk without treading beneath it. They came to the unanimous conclusion that he must have got into the river. But how? The spoor no more led to the river than it did to any tree. Still, there he must be.

Acting upon this idea they spread themselves out to search along beneath the bank, and then it was that Gerard first discovered their shadowed heads upon the water. But searching along the bank was no simple matter, for the bank itself was a high clayey wall, perpendicular for the most part, and often overhanging. Moreover it was concealed by profusion of bushes, whose tangled boughs swept right down into the water itself, as we have shown.

Gerard, in his hidingplace, could hear the muffled hum of conversation, though he could not distinguish the words. Then he heard the rustle of the bushes drawing nearer and nearer above his head. To keep his balance he was obliged to hold on to a bough with one hand, while the other held his rifle, not even above water. He himself was

submerged to the chin; fortunately the weather was hot, and his involuntary bath, so far, was not in itself unpleasant.

A sound over his head caused him to look upward then start back as far as he could go. Something shot down from above, and there passed within a few inches of Gerard's horrified eyes the broad blade of a great stabbing assegai. It was immediately withdrawn, then down it came again, this time narrowly failing to transfix the hand by which he supported himself on the bough. The blood ran chill within his veins, as he saw what had happened. The Igazipuza had spliced a shorthanded broadbladed assegai to a pole, and with this improvised lance were going along the bank prodding down into every likely looking place which they could not otherwise reach.

He flattened himself as far back as he could against the perpendicular bank, and again the murderous blade came stabbing down, grazing his shoulder this time. Heavens! he could get no further back. The next thrust would transfix him. The perspiration stood in cold beads upon his forehead, and his brain seemed to be whirling round as again and again he watched the deadly spear descend. Then hope returned. He seemed far enough in under the bank to be just outside any thrust they could make from above. They appeared unable to get his angle. Surely they would decide that he was not there, and move on.

And this was in fact what happened, and Gerard began to breathe freely again. He need not have thought.

There was silence for a few minutes. Had they gone on given up the search? It almost seemed like it. And then just as hope was beginning to burn once more, there travelled to his ears a sound which quenched it utterly.

He heard a splash, as of somebody entering the water, nearly a hundred yards up the stream a guarded, would-be noiseless sort of splash then another and another, and the purport thereof was plain. His pursuers had adopted another plan. They intended to search along beneath the bank in person.

Silently, and with the most intense caution, Gerard worked himself into such a position that he could watch this new move. By the ripples on the water, by the shaking of the bushes, he could see they were drawing nearer and nearer. Then the dark forms of three warriors came full into view as, half swimming, half wading, they passed an exposed point. And now they were barely sixty yards off.

If only it was dark dusk even! But the day had only just begun. His enemies had the whole of it before them. In despair he looked around. Was there no escape? None.

Yet in the blackest moment of dead despair there leapt forth hope, a hope so wild, extravagant, that Gerard was almost unnerved by the extravagance of it. The riverbank, as we have said, was perpendicular, and the soil of the nature of clay, and the action of the water had worn along the base of this a number of holes, all now below the surface, for the river was a trifle above its normal level. All? We are wrong. All save one.

In the high bank immediately behind his head, some few inches long and barely an inch above the surface of the water, was an aperture, hardly in fact distinguishable. But Gerard, his quickness of resource sharpened by his imminent peril, saw it, saw in it a possible means of escape.

The hole continued under the water, almost to the ground. He thrust his foot in, then his entire leg. He could not touch the end. He thrust his hand into the portion above water and reached upward. It seemed a hollow dome, just large enough for his head. If he could stand upright in this strange recess the searchers might pass within a few inches of him without discovery.

But he must attempt it at once, so that the slight disturbance of the water which was unavoidable should have time to clear off before they arrived. Holding his breath and his rifle, which though soaked and useless for the time being, he would not let go as long as he could avoid it he dived into the aperture, and as he felt his footing and his head rose above water, he found it was even as he had expected. He was in darkness, save for the light which came in under the water and through the narrow crevice exposed. He could, however, breathe without difficulty, for the air came in by the same way. But there was a terribly damp and earthy exhalation about it, which suggested an unpleasant sensation of being entombed alive.

No room was there, however, for any mere fanciful and imaginative apprehensions, for scarce was he ensconced within his strange and wellnigh miraculous place of refuge than a disturbance of the water which came rippling into the hole in little wavelets, momentarily shutting out the air, pointed to the near approach of his enemies. Hardly daring to breathe himself, he could hear the laboured breathing and the stealthy splash of someone swimming or wading. They had almost gained his late hidingplace, then! Where would he have been but for this later one?

And then oh, horror! was he not premature in his congratulations? He had discovered the recess. Why should not they? And having discovered it, why should they not resort to the same plan as that which they had adopted to sound his other possible or actual hidingplaces, viz. to thrust in their assegais as far as they would go? He would in that case be slaughtered like a rat in a trap, denied even the option of selling his life. Could

he not get back far enough into the hole to be beyond the reach of spears? No. For even if it went back far enough as to which he was in ignorance he dared not trouble the water to anything like the extent such a change of position would involve. He must take his chance.

He heard the splash draw near, then the rustle of the overhanging boughs as the searchers put them aside. The savages had gained his late hidingplace. They stood upon the very spot which he had up till a minute or two ago occupied. He expected each moment to feel the sharp dig of the spearpoints cleaving his vitals.

Not thus, however, was his suspense destined to be interrupted, but in a different manner, hardly less startling, hardly less fatal. From those on the bank there thrilled forth a warning cry, loud, quick, terrible

“Xwaya ni ’zingwenya!” (“Look out! Alligators!”)

There was silence for a moment. Gerard heard a quick, smothered ejaculation of dismay; then a sound of splashing, and once more the bushes were put aside. His enemies had precipitately abandoned the search, and were intent on securing their own safety. And now the horror of his own position came fully home to him. This new and truly hideous peril was one he had not foreseen. The alligator is scarce enough in the rivers of Zululand, still it exists, or did at that time. So intent had he been on escaping from his human enemies, that he had not given a thought to the existence of the grisly denizens of these long, smooth reaches. And here he was at their mercy. Even this very hole which had afforded him so opportune a refuge might be the den of one of these voracious monsters. And with the thought, it was all that poor Gerard could do to keep his nerves in hand, to retain his selfpossession. With this new horror and his long immersion he began to feel chilled to the bone. That dark deathtrap was like a tomb. His teeth chattered and his knees shook beneath him. His head seemed whirling round and round. He expected to feel himself seized by those horrible grinding jaws, gnashed to fragments while utterly powerless to make a struggle against his loathsome assailants. An unspeakably terrible fate!

Meanwhile the first sharp warning cry had changed into a wild uproar. Shouting, stamping with their feet, hurling sticks and stones into the water, the Igazipuza on the bank were endeavouring to scare off the voracious reptiles until their comrades should be safe ashore again, and indeed the frightful din of which they were guilty was enough to scare the life out of every alligator between the Tugela and the Zambesi. Gerard could stand the position no longer. Under cover of the noise, and in the certainty that the attention of his enemies would be folly occupied, he slipped from the recess back into his former and more open hidingplace, and, parting the branches peered eagerly forth.

At first he could distinguish nothing. The surface of the smooth reach gleamed like a mirror in the sunlight. Then he perceived a dark, moving object gliding down stream, furrowing up the dazzling surface into lines of fire, and his heart wellnigh failed him for horror and despair. In the long bony head just showing above water, the bullnosed snout, the stealthy glide, he recognised the most hideous and repulsive of reptiles, an alligator, and not a small one, either.

The brute seemed to care not overmuch for all the shouting and turmoil on the bank. Whether it was that he knew instinctively there were no firearms in the party, or was conscious of his superiority in his own element, his selfpossession was complete. He glided quietly on, then halted, then turned himself hither and thither, wheeled in a circle, and halted again, his flat, ugly head lying on the water like the stump of a tree.

Now that their comrades were safe on land again, the Igazipuza had ceased their clamour. Indeed, they rather laid themselves out to observe quietness, for the appearance of the alligator suggested a new idea. If the fugitive was still hiding along the bank he would assuredly come forth, preferring to take his chances at their hands to the certainty of death at the jaws of the horrible brute. Even if otherwise it would still be rather fun to see him dragged forth and devoured. The alligator was their huntingdog, they must not scare it away when it was about to show them some sport. So they sat still, eagerly watching it.

Not less eagerly was it watched by the fugitive himself. Gerard, from his hidingplace stared forth upon the monster with a frightful fascination. It was lying out in the stream barely fifty yards distant. As he gazed, it sank out of sight suddenly and noiselessly. Only a few bubbles marked the place where it had been.

The situation was becoming, if possible, more horrible still. As long as he could see the enemy it was bad enough. Now that he no longer could, it was ten times worse, and he pictured the amphibious demon gliding beneath the water to seize him. What chance had he, standing in it up to his neck? The water, though not altogether clear, was sufficiently so to enable him just to see the bottom, and now he hardly dared look down in it, lest he should descry the hideous squab form of the frightful reptile, and gaping jaws opening to close upon him. Then he looked out again. There was the flat, dark object lying on the surface exactly where it had disappeared, and near it was another. Oh, Heavens! There were two of them!

The cunning plan of the Igazipuza nearly succeeded. So inexpressibly revolting did the prospect of such a fate appear, that Gerard was on the point of quitting his concealment, of coming forth to meet his death in open day on the spears of his enemies rather than

remain there to be torn limb from limb beneath the water by these loathsome monsters. But still something kept him back, a resolution to hold out as long as life was left; for not only did his own life hang upon the ultimate carrying out of his mission, but that of Dawes and those dependent on them. So he summoned all his determination to his aid, and resolved to hold out courageously.

With the instinct of a true adventurer, he began to sum up his resources, and they were practically nil. His firearms were soaked, and even if they would go off, he might just as well surrender to his enemies as fire a shot. He had a knife a large sheath knife which had formed part of his original outfit, and of which he was secretly proud. It was an elaborate concern, with a brass-studded sheath and a blade like a young claymore, and had been the object of much good-natured banter on the part of Dawes, who pronounced it of doubtful ornamentality, and still more doubtful utility, for it was too awkward and cumbersome for a hunting knife, though he conceded it might come in handy some day to throw at a fellow, the only conceivable purpose to which it could be turned. Now, however, the great dagger-like weapon seemed to Gerard to be worth its weight in gold, for in it lay his sole resource. To be sure, a hand-to-hand conflict with a full-sized alligator in his own element, perhaps with two, armed only with a knife however large, is a formidable undertaking enough, yet Gerard was strong and athletic, and his courage was now the courage of despair.

He could hear the muttered conversation of his human enemies on the bank, where they sat overlooking the river a little higher up than his place of concealment, and again he looked at the alligators. The latter were moving again, slowly gliding to and fro, approaching somewhat nearer his position. Were they beginning to scent his presence? It seemed like it, from their uneasy suspicious movements.

And now Gerard made up his mind that if he was to fight, he must himself be out of the water. But how? seeing that the clay bank was perpendicular, and the bush that screened him was not high enough to shelter him, even if he could get out of the water, not to mention the prodigious rustle which would certainly betray him to the quick ears of the watchful savages, did he attempt to spring into its branches. Ah! He thought he saw a plan. By cutting a step or two in the clay bank, he could raise himself almost entirely out of the water. It would only be up to his knees, at any rate, and he could hold on to a bough with his left hand, while he fought desperately for his life with his right. But he must abandon his rifle.

And then his very reluctance to do this suggested to him a further expedient. Those terrible jaws must be held at something more than mere arm's length. Fishing out of his pocket some reimpjes, or strips of raw hide, which no dweller in the South African veldt, somehow or other, ever seems to be without, he spliced his great knife quickly but

securely to the end of the rifle, thus turning the latter into a most efficient bayonet, instead of being forced to abandon it. Having thus made his preparations, he again peered forth to watch the alligators.

And what a lifetime did it seem to him, standing there submerged, a hunted fugitive, the spears of his enemies lying in wait for him on the bank, possibly the stake of torture, the ravenous jaws of the loathsome monsters below. The hot rays of the sun, mounting higher and higher, beat down fiercely upon his hidingplace, which, in this instance, was fortunate, since it neutralised the shivery chill engendered by his long immersion. Minutes seemed hours. He could not hold out for ever. Exhaustion would come upon him, and then Ha! Now for it!

The alligators, which had been cruising to and fro in an aimless sort of way, were now heading straight for his place of concealment. Had they scented him? Forty yardsthirtytwentyhe watched them with a horrible fascination. Then they both disappeared. Now was the time. Placing a foot in the nick he had cut in the clay bank, and with his left hand firmly grasping a bough overhead, Gerard drew himself up. By cautiously shifting his position, he gained a little more height, and thus hanging by the grip of his left hand, his body bent out over the water, in which he had stood up to his knees, Gerard awaited the attack of the formidable reptiles.

Chapter Nineteen.

Between Two Perils.

Nothing is so prone to defeat its own end as the fixed, overstrained attentiveness of intense expectation. The eye, riveted on one point, almost ceases to see it; the mind, dwelling on one person or object, confuses the idea of that person or object twenty times over. Thus Gerard Ridgeley, hanging there, staring down into the waters of the Black Umfolosi, momentarily expecting the swift stealthy rush, to behold the current darkened by the hideous shape of the huge lizard rising beneath him, soon lost the power of seeing almost anything at all, so intense was the strain upon his faculties of sight and hearing. Minutes were like aeons. His muscles seemed cracking. The terrible suspense seemed to tell upon him physically, to exhaust him. Then suddenly there rose out of the water a pair of great bony jaws, and closing with a vicious snap within half a yard of his body, sank back again out of sight as suddenly and noiselessly as they had appeared.

Appalling as this occurrence was, its effect was salutary. The presence of real and tangible danger broke the spell of his terrible suspense. Gerard was himself again now. So narrowly had the monster failed to seize him, that he had almost seemed to be looking into those hideous jaws with their sawlike and curvedback teeth, could distinguish the scales on the gaunt bony head, and mark the fiendlike expression in the beady cruel eye. Certainly the brute would come again, and this time it would be one or the other of them.

Grasping his impromptu bayonet, Gerard waited, cool and calm now, but every faculty on the alert. There was a ripple and a swirl on the water, showing that something was moving beneath; and so strange are the fancies that flash through our minds at critical times, that at that moment Gerard remembered how often he had marked that same ripple and swirl, though on a smaller scale, where some big trout was on the feed, and had stolen down to throw in his cast. Now he himself was being "risen."

Again came that bubbling swirl, and now again that grisly head rose up. And, as it did so, Gerard, with all the strength of his arm struck the blade of the knife right down into the reptile's eye. In it went, nearly to the hilt. The blood spurted forth in a great jet, and the strong, thickbacked knifeblade snapped like a bit of rotten stick, as the stricken monster wrenched himself round, and, with a convulsive plunge, sank out of sight.

It was all done in a moment so suddenly, so quickly, that Gerard could at first hardly believe it had actually happened, but for the deep streak of blood upon the surface and the seething bubbles where the water was lashed into spume by the frantic blow of the monster's tail. But as he realised that he had defeated and probably slain his formidable

enemy, a feeling of elation set in, which, however, was not destined to last. True, he had slain one alligator, but then there were two. Would not the other attack him next, even if the blood did not attract yet more of them? He could not go on killing alligators in this fashion all day; besides, his cleverly devised bayonet was snapped and useless. Not altogether, though. There was still enough left of the knifeblade to make a sufficiently serviceable weapon if planted straight in the eye as before.

Suddenly his attention was diverted to another matter a sound of quick ejaculations and the vibration of footsteps running upon the bank above. Gerard's first thought was that he was discovered, but, by the sound, he knew that they had run past. Ha! They had discovered the alligator wounded or slain!

From his present position he could not see out, and he dared not move from it without exposing himself to the twofold danger of being seized in the water, and thus at every disadvantage, by another alligator, or by the agitation of the branches making his presence known to his enemies. So he strove to make up for it by listening with all his might.

That the savages had made a discovery of some sort was, from their conversation, inevitable. From the sound of their voices he estimated that they were about fifty yards below.

"Ha! The blood!" he heard one say. "It has taken him; picked him up under the bank. Ou!"

"We could not find him, but the alligator has been a good huntingdog. It has nosed him out." And there was a general laugh.

Then followed a volley of quick, excited ejaculations.

"See there!" cried one. "He still struggles! Look! Out in the middle. Ha!" And Gerard, listening, with all his ears, could hear the sound of the distant splashing, and knew what had happened. The wounded alligator had risen again in the middle of the river and was struggling in its agony or perchance in the throes of death. The savages, watching from the bank, were under the impression that it was engaged in devouring him. His heart bounded with the thought. If such was their belief, assuredly they would abandon the search and go away. But as against this, it occurred to him that if the alligator should die the carcase might float; he was not sure whether it would or not. If it did, why then he was in worse case than ever, for they would discover that the monster had been slain by him, instead of the other way about, and redouble their efforts at finding him.

“Hau!” he heard one say after a minute of silence. “What a struggle! The white man dies hard.”

“Not so,” said another. “They are fighting for his carcase. Au! What a number of them. They are making as much splashing as a steamvessel I once saw at Tegwini!” (Durban.)

Again there was an interval of silence, broken only by the sound of splashing. Then a voice said

“He is gone! They have eaten him up among them; a leg here, and an arm there a head to another, and so on. There is nothing left of the white man. He is distributed among all the alligators in the river. But, perhaps, that is better than being bitten on the point of The Tooth.”

A general laugh greeted this remark, and then a voice called out, “Hlala gahle! Rest easy, white man! Sleep peacefully inside all the alligators. Don’t cause them bad dreams. Farewell. Rest easy!”

This witticism seemed to the listener to be the parting one, for with the roar of laughter which greeted it the sound of voices seemed to be receding. With unspeakable and heartfelt thankfulness Gerard realised that the savages had at length abandoned the search.

Even then he was not without misgivings. Their last words might have been but a blind to draw him from his concealment. He would cling to the latter as long as prudence should dictate.

Time went by. Gerard, listening with all his ears, could hear no sound which betokened the presence of his enemies, not a murmur, not a footstep. A bird alighted, twittering, on the branches just over his head, then another and another. A pair of yellow thrushes in the brake behind set up their halfgrating, halfpiping, duet; and he could hear the raucous croak of a whitenecked crow, sailing lazily along the riverbank. Relieved of the presence of its natural enemy, man, the life of this solemn wilderness was beginning once more to come forth.

Gerard, however, delayed long to follow its example, as we have said. His enemies might have left some of their number at a little distance to watch; or the very birds whose presence now assured him of his safety, might by their calls of alarm, attract the notice of the receding Igazipuza. So for upwards of an hour he waited there, momentarily expecting another attack from an alligator; but whether it was that the struggle and the fate of the one had scared away the others from the spot, he was spared the ordeal of a

second conflict. At length, cramped and shivering, every bone and muscle in his body aching, poor Gerard hauled himself cautiously up by the overhanging branches and stood, or rather rolled, upon the bank again.

To a feeling of unspeakable elation and thankfulness succeeded one of depression. He had escaped so far had escaped a double peril, in a manner that was little short of miraculous. But here he was, alone in a semihostile, if not entirely hostile country, which was completely unknown to him, without food, and not daring to fire a shot lest it should bring his enemies down upon him. Moreover, he was numbed and shivering from his long immersion, which might result in fever, ague, and such evils, not unknown in the belts of bush country. Again, he was still on the wrong side of the river, and now, bearing in mind his recent experience of its grisly denizens, the contingency of being obliged to cross it alone, and that by wading or swimming, he contemplated with shrinking and horror. But then again would come the thought of his almost miraculous escape. Surely he had been preserved for some purpose, and what purpose could be more worthy of accomplishment than that which he had in hand. No; this was not the time to despair, not it, indeed.

The day was now well advanced. Gerard, thinking hard, resolved that he had better not begin to move until dusk. It was dangerous now. He might be sighted from afar, or fall in with wandering bands, and not yet did he consider such a meeting a safe one or likely to result in the furtherance of his object. Moreover, he was deadly tired. He had slept but little of late, what with the anxiety of their position and the excitement of anticipating his own attempt and not at all the previous night. He would find some sequestered hidingplace and take the rest he so greatly needed; would sleep, if possible, until evening. Then he would contrive to cross the river, and travel the night through. Thanks to the repugnance of Zulus to being abroad during the hours of darkness, he stood a pretty good chance of moving unmolested, and by morning he ought to have put a wide enough space between the Igazipuza and himself, to feel comparatively safe.

Acting upon this idea, he started off along the riverbank to find a snug and convenient place of concealment; and when he had gone about a mile, wending carefully and quietly so as to disturb as little as possible the very birds, keeping well under cover of the bush, he found one. It was a small hollow, in the midst of which rose a great boulder. The heat and the exercise had dried his clothes and restored circulation to his veins, and now at the foot of this boulder where the sun struck in dry and warm, Gerard lay down.

The sense of restfulness was indescribably delicious. His mind in its dreamy halfwakeful state went off into retrospect. Could it, indeed, be barely a year since he had received the twofold welcome news that he was to leave school immediately, and proceed scarcely less immediately to shift for himself in a far colony; that dream of Utopia to the average

English boy, that too frequently rough awakening? He saw himself again on board the Amatikulu, gazing with wonder and a touch of mysterious awe upon the green shores of his "promised land." Once more he was leading the old disillusioning monotonous and rather sordid life at Anstey's, and an uneasy longing to take that specious rascal by the throat for he was quite asleep now was forgotten in the more pleasant vision of May Kingsland. And then his dreams took no further shape merging into the complete unconsciousness of the more restful form of sound slumber.

The hours followed each other, and even the live creatures of the wilderness ceased to fear the motionless sleeping form of the young adventurer, but a year ago a hearty unsophisticated English schoolboy, now the bearer of his own life and the lives of others; thrown upon his own resources, alone, in the then scarcely known wilds of northern Zululand. Birds began to flit from spray to spray, balancing themselves on swaying twig, and chirruping and twittering just over the sleeper's head. Little lizards, creeping along the face of the rocky boulder, dropped upon the sleeping form and ran tentatively over it, and a bushbuck, stepping gingerly through the hollow, turned its full bright eye upon the prostrate figure, and resumed its way as though finding no cause for alarm.

Hour followed hour, and now the sun's rays began to decline, to slant more and more horizontally upon the green sprays of the foliage. Gerard stirred uneasily in his sleep, for with the approach of the waking hour he was beginning to dream again. Once more he was in the Igazipuza kraal with Dawes, discussing the seriousness of the situation. He had made the attempt to escape, and was being brought back had been brought back. And then into his dreams there stole a vague sense of danger, strange, indefinable, but none the less present. It was fearful. Some weight was upon him, boding, terrible. He could neither straggle nor call out. Then breaking the spell with a mighty effort, he started up from his sleep awoke to a reality more fearsome, more formidable than the nightmarish delusion. For, as he started up into a sitting posture, he nearly brought his face into contact with a dark grim visage which was peering into it, and a cry of surprise, dismay, despair escaped him. He was surrounded by a crowd of armed Zulus!

Chapter Twenty.

An Error of Judgment.

Never in the whole course of his hard, chequered, adventurous life, could John Dawes recall a day spent in such wearing, intolerable suspense, as that following the night of his young companion's escape. That it was an escape he now entertained no doubt. The hours wore on, and still no return of a triumphant band bringing with it the recaptured fugitive. This augured well as regarded Gerard.

As regarded himself the trader knew that any hour might be his last. There was an ominous stillness brooding over the Igazipuza kraal following on the night of furious revelry. None of its denizens came near him; but for all that he knew that every one of his movements was intently watched. Try as he would he could not altogether conceal his anxiety from his own people. The Swazis cowered beneath the waggons in terror, and even the sturdier Natal natives, with their strong admixture of Zulu blood, sat together in gloomy silence. Every one of them, however, had a short stabbing assegai concealed beneath his blanket, ready to sell his life as dearly as possible, and these preparations they hardly took the trouble to dissemble from the chief's councillor, Sonkwana, who still remained at the waggons, squatting on the ground tranquilly taking snuff from time to time, a very model of taciturnity.

Thus the day wore on, and still no sign of the returning pursuit. With great good luck Gerard would have reached the king's kraal by that time tomorrow. Then from speculating as to how his brave young companion had fared, Dawes's mind went back to the scene of the previous night. His shaft had told. The threat to appeal to Cetywayo had not been without its effect upon Ingonyama, and that effect a considerable one. Still, with morning no message of emancipation had come from the chief, and Dawes did not think it advisable once more to trust himself within the kraal; and not being the man to ask another to go where he preferred not to venture himself, he refrained from sending one of his servants upon this errand. Still he was very uneasy.

Still more uneasy would he have been, could he have overheard the conference then proceeding in the chief's hut. Seated around in a half circle, Ingonyama, Vunawayo, and some three or four councillors were engaged in earnest discussion, the subject nothing less than the advisability of putting him and his to the assegai forthwith. The chief could hardly contain his chagrin and impatience.

"If they return and fail to kill or bring back the boy," he was saying, "six of their leaders shall die. The Tooth shall bite them. They deserve that for allowing him to slip through them."

“We have kept this white man and his Kafula dogs too long,” said Vunawayo, darkly. “Why not begin with him, now, this very day?”

“Ha! He is no fool, this Jandosi,” said Ingonyama, with a ferocious scowl. “What if his dog already barks in the ear of the king?”

“Even then, is not the bark of one dog, less than that of two of several?” urged Vunawayo. “The king might not listen to one where he might to many. Besides, he has less and less reason to love the English; who, men whisper, are trying to pick a quarrel with him about one thing after another. Such is not the time for whispering into his ear tales against his own chiefs against the best of his fighting men. Is the king a fool that he would exchange the hundreds of the Igazipuza spears for the lives of two miserable white dogs? No. Let Jandosi’s ‘tongue’ go prate at Undini if it can reach there. It is as likely to be cut there as here.”

“What, then, would you counsel, my brethren?” said Ingonyama, looking round.

The indunas shrugged their shoulders, and all glanced tentatively at Vunawayo. He, evidently, was the Mephistopheles of the group.

“We think Vunawayo speaks clearly,” said one of them at length. “This white man and they that are with him should die.”

“I have long thought so,” said the chief, scowling ferociously at the recollection of the indignity he had suffered the previous night, held at the muzzle of the trader’s pistol. “And now the manner of it. Shall they die by the bite of The Tooth?”

“That must depend,” replied Vunawayo. “This white dog has teeth of his own, and he will show them. They, too, can bite. He will die; but it will be biting hard. He will not leave his waggons, and he is well armed and brave. Now my counsel is this. He cannot always live without sleep, no man can. Wherefore towards dawn, when sleep is heaviest, let a company be told off to rush in upon and surprise him. They will be on him before he can wake, and thus will take him alive.”

“I doubt them finding any such easy capture,” muttered the chief, with a dissentient headshake. “Is there no better plan?”

“Only this, father,” said Vunawayo, with a grin of ferocious exultation. “Have you not said that they who let the boy slip through them and escape should supply meat for The Tooth? Now, therefore, let us spare them their lives on condition that they find such

meat for The Tooth instead of themselves. Thus will they dare and do all to secure Jandosí alive.”

“So be it, then,” said Ingonyama, after a moment’s reflection. “This night shall he be taken.”

Meanwhile the object of these amiable intentions was meditating a bold stroke. Seated at his waggons, carefully thinking out the situation, he decided that once more a bold line might better serve his purpose; in pursuance of which plan he hailed a boy who was passing.

The latter stopped, stared, hesitated; then reassured by a signal from the induna Sonkwana, he drew near wonderingly.

“I have a fancy to see my oxen here,” said John Dawes. “What is your name, boy?”

“Sicalu,” was the rather sullen reply.

“Well, Sicalu, you shall go with my driver, Fulani, and help to bring them in. When you return this little lookingglass shall be yours. But you will carry the ‘word’ of your father, Sonkwana, the induna of the chief, that those who guard the oxen may know I require them.”

The lad stared, as well he might. So, too, did Sonkwana. Indeed, it was hard to say which was the more amazed of the two. As for the trader’s own people, such thorough confidence had they in him, that they were astonished at nothing, in which spirit Fulani no sooner heard the above order than he stood prepared to carry it out.

“Will you not ride out yourself and look at your cattle Jandosí, as you have ever done before?” said the councillor.

“Not so, Sonkwana. This time they shall be brought to me. Give the boy the ‘word,’ induna of the chief.”

Sonkwana cast a sidelong glance toward the kraal, then looked slyly at the speaker. What did it matter! Let him be humoured this once.

“Go,” he said to the boy.

The hours of the afternoon crept on, and still Dawes sat there, outwardly calm, inwardly in a state of indescribable suspense. By this time, he was sure Gerard had got through,

otherwise he would have been brought back. Sonkwana, too, sat wondering. He would fain have departed, but that his involuntary "host" never left him out of his sight, and to undertake to cross several hundred yards of open ground contrary to the wishes of a man who could hit a small pebble at almost any distance with the rifle ever ready in his hand, was not in Zulu human nature, at any rate, in cold blood. So in outward tranquillity Sonkwana vied with his "host" aforesaid, and sat and took a great deal of snuff.

More surprise, however, was awaiting both him and his clansmen. Towards sundown, the trader's outspan became alive with the lowing of cattle and the shout and whistle of those in charge. Then in the most matteroffact way, John Dawes gave orders to inspan.

Prompt, intelligent, and as we have said, having every confidence in their employer, the two drivers, Sintoba and Fulani, and their welltrained subordinates, were quick to act. In an incredibly short space of time, the waggons were ready for the road. But during the process, Dawes had never left the side of the hostage.

The latter, for his part, looked with a kind of contemptuous amusement upon the whole affair. Did this fool think he was going to walk off in any such free and easy sort of fashion without the "word" of the chief. He glanced towards the kraal.

So too, we may be sure, did Dawes, with wellconcealed, but infinitely greater anxiety. Heads could be seen clustering at the palisades, but still no armed force issued from the gates. What could it mean?

"Trek!" he cried, when the inspanning was completed.

"Trektrek!" echoed the drivers, and the whips cracked to the accompaniment of a running gamut of the names of the horned members of the span. The oxen plunged forward to the yokes, and the great vehicles rolled heavily from their standing place of many weeks.

"Whau, Jandosi!" said Sonkwana. "If you are leaving us, had I not better carry your word of farewell to the chief?"

"Not so, Sonkwana. The road is not very familiar to me; besides, it is fitting that a councillor of the chief should start me in safety on my journey. There is safety on the road, but off it there is death," he added darkly.

No shade of his meaning was lost upon his hearer, who made a virtue of necessity, and accepted the position in such wise as though it had been himself who had suggested it. Besides, the guard on the ridge was strong. That had yet to be passed.

On moved the waggons; on moved the whole trek; deliberately making for the exit of the hollow, the leader and driver of each in their places, the three Swazis driving the cattle, for the sheep and goats had been bartered away for cows and oxen; John Dawes walking beside the first waggon, with Sonkwana. Onpast the kraal with its great circle of domed huts, but still no opposition. What did it mean? This silence, this passiveness on the part of their hitherto aggressive and turbulent gaolers was portentous.

It was a critical time for Dawes. Each moment he expected the air to be rent with the ferocious warcry, to hear the ground rumble beneath the advance of running feet. How came it that he was allowed to march out thus with colours flying and drums beating, to march out with all the honours of war? The chief's councillor was in his power.

No sooner had he arrived at this conclusion than his sense of security was rudely interrupted. They had gained the ridge, and now, with loud and threatening shouts, the guards rushed down upon them.

"Order them back, Sonkwana. Order them back," said Dawes, in a quick low tone. "To hesitate is death," he added.

The induna glanced at Dawes. The latter's attitude, though apparently careless, he well knew was not really so. He himself would receive a bullet in the brain without being able to lift a finger, and save for a short stick he was unarmed. Reluctantly, therefore, he obeyed.

But even his authority hardly seemed to avail here. The guards, some two score of stalwart and boisterous savages, continued to advance, but with less demonstration of hostility, with less fell intent of purpose. Finally, in compliance with the energetic signalling of the councillor, they halted and began to parley.

The while the trek had not halted, and the two waggons already over the ridge were proceeding down the rugged hillside with the utmost care and deliberation. Suddenly Dawes beheld a quick, cunning expression of triumph flit across the face of the hostage, and following the glance of the latter, the curtain of despair descended in black folds once more upon his heart.

For the veldt was alive with warriors, swarming down from the ridge, charging forward in silence, swift in deadly fixity of purpose. They had already passed the cattle herds, and were making straight for himself.

“Order them back, Sonkwana! Order them back!” cried Dawes again, this time drawing his revolver and pointing it straight at the head of the hostage.

But the latter saw his chance, or thought he did. Ducking his head suddenly, he made a rapid plunge to the side, intending, so near were his tribesmen, to fling himself into their ranks. The trader in his flurry and dismay would be certain to miss his aim, he reckoned.

He reckoned without his host, however. Instead of the ball whistling through empty air where his head had been but a moment before, Dawes’s eye, keen as a razor, quick as lightning, had marked the move. By a sort of backward throw of the hand he covered the fleeing form of the foolhardy Sonkwana, and pressed the trigger. The chief’s councillor toppled heavily forward on his face, and lay with outstretched arms. He was stone dead.

What followed was appalling. The report of the pistol was completely drowned in the wild roar of rage that went up. The first life had been taken, and that life a valuable one.

“Stand back!” cried Dawes, his eyes flashing fire.

He might as well have tried to make his voice heard amid the thunder of an Atlantic gale beating among the rocks of the Lizard, or have tried to force back the power of its gigantic surges. His double gun levelled low, he poured the contents of the smooth barrel, loaded heavily with loopers a large variety of buck shot into the dense crowd. The result was terrible.

It was all he had time to do, though. The wild, shrill yells of pain were drowned in the thunderous din, as the resistless volume of the charge poured over him. He had a vague recollection of once again raking the closely packed assailants with his other barrel ere he was swept from his feet, and hurled halfstunned to the earth, and of a fierce, grim feeling of satisfaction that he had sold his life pretty dearly. Then the gleaming blades of spears flashed before, his eyes, and he knew his last hour had come.

Still their points did not pierce him. Halfstunned, halfdazed, he became aware that some one was standing over him, averting the threatened blows. Collecting his scattered senses, he stared and stared again at this unexpected preserver. He recognised Vunawayo.

He was seized and held fast, and amid many a brutal kick and blow, his hands and feet were securely bound, and he was flung into the waggon like a log of wood. Then with wild yells and shouting, the Igazipuza forced round the oxen, and compelling the terrified servants to obey their behests, and lead and drive the spans, they started upon their triumphant return amid an indescribable scene of tumultuous rejoicing.

At the first onset Sintoba had drawn the assegai which he carried concealed about his person, and had leaped to the assistance of his master. Had tried to, that is, for he, too, had been overwhelmed and borne down by the impetuous fury of the rush. The same fate had overtaken those in charge of the hindmost waggon, except one of the young leaders whom the savages had slaughtered in the first fierce caprice of their bloodlust, and whose corpse, ripped up and otherwise hideously hacked, lay by the wayside as they returned. The other servants, as we have said, they compelled to engineer the waggons.

Battered, bruised, his bones nearly broken, his joints racked wellnigh to dislocation point by the terrific jolting, poor Dawes lay where they had thrown him, grinding his teeth in his impotent rage and pain. Better to have been killed outright, he thought. He was only spared for some lingering torture the hideous stake of impalement, most likely. Many had fallen at his hand in that brief moment their spirits would be satisfied by no less a sacrifice.

The savages, running beside the waggons, jeered at his sufferings.

“Does it hurt does it hurt, Jandosi?” they cried, as an extra big jolt would nearly brain the unfortunate man. “Ah! ah! there are some things that hurt far more far more!”

Thus in wild and riotous shouting the whole crowd arrived once more at the gate of the Igazipuza kraaland here the terrible confusion of the tumult beggars description the shrill nasal singing of the women who turned out to meet them, the yelping clamour of dogs, the howling of those whose relatives were slain, and the sonorous rhythm of the war song, all mingled together in the most earsplitting, brainstunning din.

Sintoba and his fellows, having outspanned in compliance with the peremptory orders of their captors, were seized and unceremoniously bound. Then poor Dawes was hauled out of the waggon and brutally dragged through the kraal, amid kicks and cuffs, to where the chief was sitting. Then he was flung roughly and anyhow upon the ground.

For some moments did Ingonyama contemplate the helpless form of his captive in silence, and in his massive countenance was a gleam of ruthless, vengeful ferocity. He had sat in fear, here on this very spot, the last time this white man occupied it with him in fear of his life, be, Ingonyama, the chief of the redoubted Igazipuza. Now the

tables were turned. This miserable captive, bruised, helpless, lying there halfstunned, should taste what it meant to tread on the paw of the lion.

“Well, Jandosi?” he began sneeringly. “You are a bird whose song is over loud; yet now surely are your wings cut.”

If John Dawes’s bodily attitude was abject, it was only through force of circumstances. His mental one was very far from having attained that state. With a painful effort he succeeded, amid the jeering laughter of the spectators, in raising himself to an upright sitting posture.

“You are right, Ingonyama,” he replied. “My song is over loud for you. It is even how being sung at Undini, in ears in which it is bad for you that it shall be poured. Did I not tell you my ‘tongue’ was a long one and spoke far? Even now it speaks.”

“Hi! And did I not tell you that we have a Tooth here which can bite it short? You and your ‘tongue’ shall be bitten on The Tooth, Jandosi!”

“Ehé! Ehé!” roared the listeners. “To The Tooth, to The Tooth with him!”

It was the hour of sunset, and the sweet golden glow fell upon a wild sea of ferocious figures, of hideous mouthing faces and gleaming spearblades. The whole population had mustered within the kraal, and were crowding up, striving to obtain a view of the chief and his councillors and the white prisoner; and again and again from the savage roaring throats went up the fiendish shout.

“To The Tooth! to The Tooth!”

“Even now I do not fear you, Ingonyama,” went on the trader, intrepidly. “For my death will surely be avenged, as surely as yonder sun will rise tomorrow. It may be that the might of the king will rise up and stamp flat this tribe of abatagati (those who practise arts of wizardry); it may be that my own countrymen will. But it shall surely be done, ye who call yourselves Igazipuza, and my death shall be avenged.”

Again the wild, roaring clamour drowned his words. The intrepidity of the man exasperated them while compelling their admiration. Of the latter, however, Ingonyama felt none. He only remembered his own humiliation at this man’s hands, here on this very spot. His features working, his eyes rolling in fury, he said slowly

“Let him be bitten on the point of The Tooth.”

“Ha! on the point of The Tooth! on the point of The Tooth!” roared the ferocious crowd in deafening chorus. And a multitude of eager hands were stretched forward to seize the unfortunate man, and drag him away to his hideous death of torture.

Chapter Twenty One.

The King's "HuntingDogs."

To attempt to describe the fearful despair, the agony of selfreproach, which took possession of poor Gerard's heart as he awoke to find himself once more in the power of the savages is impossible. The very stars in their courses seemed to be fighting against him. Had he not gone through enough in all conscience? And now all his past perils and experiences were thrown away. He and his comrade were no better off than before his attempted escape, probably indeed worse. Again, it was while he slept that the enemy had stolen upon himwhile he slept. He had sacrificed his companion for the sake of a few hours' sleep! Well, he himself deserved all he might meet with; but Daweshe had sold himhad fallen asleep at his post like a cowardly and untrustworthy sentinel. The poor fellow was in agonies of selftorture at the thought.

But for the perturbed and flurried state of mind, into which these reflections had thrown him, he would have perceived that the Zulus were every bit as astonished at his appearance as he was at theirs. As it was, he only saw the same dark resolute countenances and ringed heads, the same great broadbladed assegais. These men, however, carried great white shields with black facings.

"Who are you, Umlúngu, and where do you come from?" said one of them after a moment of silence.

Gerard looked at the speaker, and collecting his ideas, replied, with all the dignity at his command, that he was carrying a message to the king.

A smothered ejaculation burst from the group, and they exchanged glances.

"Does a white man, carrying a message to the king, travel through the country in that state?" said the first who had spoken.

Gerard followed his glance, and appreciated the meaning with which the words were uttered, as he remembered the travelworn and rather disreputable appearance which he must present. His rifle, too, was beginning to rust, for in the fatigue and exhaustion which had come upon him before falling asleep, he had neglected to do more than just wipe it. The broken huntingknife was still spliced to the muzzle.

"I lost my horse, and an alligator attacked me in the river," he replied. "I speared him with this, struck him through the eye, and I believe I killed him."

“Hau!” broke from the listeners, staring at the broken knifeblade. “That was well done, Umlúngu. But where do you come from?”

“Who is your chief?” said Gerard, fencing the question after their own fashion.

“He is not here,” was the characteristic reply. “But he is close at hand.”

“Take me to him.”

And Gerard rose, as decisive apparently in purpose as he was in speech.

“Come!” said the spokesman, laconically.

Then, with Gerard in their midst, the group moved off. For upwards of half an hour they filed through the bush at a rapid pace, in process whereof Gerard’s attempts at further enlightenment were met by an intimation, terse but not discourteous, that under present circumstances silence was preferable to speech. But he noticed one thing, overlooked at first in his despair and confusion. These warriors, whoever they might be, did not show the redpainted disc on forehead and breast which distinguished the dreaded Igazipuza.

The way had grown wilder and wilder, and instead of the straggling and more or less scattered bush, the party was now proceeding beneath tall forest trees, from whose gnarled and massive boughs dangled monkey ropes and trailers. The shade was almost a gloom, into which the last rays of the now setting sun shot redly. And now a strange, eerie, fluttering sort of life seemed to spring up within the gloom of those forest shades, and Gerard could not repress an exclamation of astonishment as he looked. For the place was alive with armed warriors, starting up like ghosts, silently, noiselessly, out of nowhere. There seemed to be no end to their number, and he could mark the surprise on each dark face, could hear the low ejaculation and the quivering rattle of assegai hafts as they became aware of his presence.

“Whowhat are these?” he asked.

“You wanted to see the chief, Umlúngu,” was the reply. “Have patience. You shall see him.”

Gerard’s first thought was that the talk of AngloZulu war had actually broken out, and this was a force proceeding against his countrymen, and his heart sank. For if that were so, what chance was there for Dawes, in the power of one of Cetywayo’s savage vassals? The king was not likely to risk offending one of his most influential chiefs by demanding

the release of a member of the race which was making war upon his nation and dynasty. His meditations on this head were promptly cut short, for his escort had emerged upon a small open glade overhung by a high rock, whose summit was plumed by a dark line of straightstemmed euphorbia, and beneath this sat a group of men, in whose aspect there was something which instinctively told him they were men of the highest authority.

His escort made a sign for him to halt, while a couple of them went forward to confer with these. Then he was told to advance.

“The chief that is he!” said one of them.

The man indicated, a large finely built Zulu, was seated in the centre of the group. As his gaze fell upon him Gerard stared; then he started with astonishment this time openly and undisguisedly then stared again.

“Sobuza!” he cried. And to the unbounded amazement of his escort, and indeed of all beholders, he dropped his rifle and stepped forward to the chief with outstretched hand.

The latter, indeed, was hardly less astonished than himself, but, with the selfcontrol of his race and rank, showed it but little. A slight smile came over his face, and there was a twinkle in his eye as he shook Gerard by the hand with a hearty grip.

“Au! Jeriji. I remember you,” he said kindly.

There was that in the act, in the tone, which went straight to Gerard’s heart. Here, in this unknown wilderness, after his perilous escapes, he felt that he had found a friend. In the hands of this savage chieftain, surrounded by his armed host, he felt perfectly safe. Whatever the errand of destruction upon which this formidable force was engaged, in the presence of the man he had succoured twice in the hour of danger and difficulty he felt no distrust, no misgiving.

The astonishment of the onlookers at this strange and unexpected recognition knew no bounds. They bent eagerly forward, with many a smothered “whou!” of amazement. But the frank, open, impulsive way in which Gerard had greeted their chief had made the best of impressions, for the Zulu in those days was not without his share of real chivalrous feeling, and the complete absence of any lingering distrust on the part of their prisoner or guest appealed powerfully to them. His rifle lay on the ground exactly where he had placed it. Not one of them would pick it up, lest the act might be construed into one of distrust, of disarming him, so to say.

“Sit here, Jeriji,” said the chief, motioning him to a place at his side. “Did you come into the Zulu country all alone to kill alligators, or to pay me a visit?” he went on, with a comical smile, as Gerard promptly acted upon the invitation.

“Neither the one nor the other, Sobuza. But, first tell me, are you and your men out against my countrymen?”

“Not so,” said the chief. “We are not at war with the English.”

“I am glad of that. Now listen. You asked me why I came into your country. I did not come into it; I was brought into it.”

“Brought into it?” repeated the chief in some astonishment. “By whom?”

“By Ingonyama’s people. Those, who call themselves Igazipuza.”

“Hau! Igazipuza!”

The astonishment, emphatic and unfeigned, with which his statement was echoed, not by the chief only, but by the whole group, might well strike Gerard.

“You know him you know them?” he said.

A humorous flash flitted across each dark face, the corners of every mouth turned down grimly. Sobuza proceeded to take snuff.

“Tell us about it,” he said. “Begin at the very beginning, Jeriji, for this is no light matter.”

Then Gerard began his tale from the very outset of their enforced visit to the fastness of that redoubtable clan, throughout the period during which their condition had become one of open and undisguised captivity, down to his own headlong dash for liberty and succour, their untiring and persistent pursuit of him, and his perilous hidingplace on the riverbank. His feat in slaying the alligator caused great sensation; and Sobuza having ordered the rifle, on which was still spliced the broken knife, to be brought, he and his assembled chiefs examined this cleverly devised weapon with the greatest interest. Gerard went up a hundred per cent, in their estimation.

Now our friend’s knowledge of the Zulu tongue comprised a prodigious number of words, but his grammar was of the shakiest description. However, the vital importance of his narrative soon rendered him oblivious to any mere selfconsciousness, and in his hearers he found a most eager and patient audience. Once or twice only did they

interrupt him when his meaning was unintelligible, and then only to help him through. But, when he had finished, they questioned him on every conceivable detail, crossexamined him so deftly, that they had promptly got out of him his own plans, his own errand, without his being in the least aware of it. More than one there present knew “Jandosi,” from trading trips which he had made among them.

“How many fighting men has Ingonyama, Jeriji?” said Sobuza again.

Gerard replied that he thought there must be at least five hundred. Besides the large kraal there were two smaller ones under the rocks at the further end of the hollow. There was only one approach to the place, and they used to boast that by massing at this point they could hold their own against any odds. He had already sketched on the ground an elaborate map of the place.

“Good!” said Sobuza, grimly. “Life is full of deceptions, and that is one of them, as they shall find out. Listen, Jeriji. You may spare yourself the trouble of carrying Jandosi’s ‘word’ to the king. You asked against whom we were out. Well, we are the king’s huntingdogs, and the Igazipuza are the game.”

Gerard stared as though he could hardly believe his ears. He had thought the whole population of the northern country, including these among whom he had fallen, was in league with that evil and bloodthirsty clan, if not actively in membership with it. But the armed warriors around him had actually been sent forth to suppress it. Then he remembered how different was their bearing and demeanour to that of his late enemies. There was no boisterous swashbuckling savagery about these. They were king’s troops, the flower of the Zulu nation, they and their chiefs, even as the Igazipuza were the scum.

“It is as I say,” went on Sobuza, smiling at his air of incredulity. “The Great Great One has long borne with this rebellious dog of his, and these were his words to us, to me Sobuza the son of Panhla, second in command of the Udhloko, and to Gcopo, the third induna of the Ngobamakosi,” designating the chief at his side, whose magnificent physique had struck Gerard the moment he arrived

“There sits among the mountains in the north, a dog who dares call himself by my name (Note 1) who dares to insult the majesty of my state by his miserable imitation of the same; who gathers around him all the evildoers of the nation, and levies tribute from my subjects, and kills and plunders men of nations between whom and myself there is peace, so that I am in danger of becoming embroiled by their illdoings. Moreover these claim the power of immunity from harm by sundry abominable practices abhorrent in the eyes of the People of the Heavens, (Note 2.), and make it their boast that they drink the blood of men. To such lengths have these abatagati carried their enormities, that not

only is there no longer peace or security for any who dwell near the northern border on either side thereof, but there is a danger that men may be led to think this dog greater than his master.

“Further, this dog who calls himself lion, plots that one day he may roar where the Lion of the Zulu roars alone. Now shall he feel the Lion’s paw, for the time has come when such disturbances and such abominations shall cease out of the land.

“Now, Sobuza, and you Gcopo, pick from the Udhloko and the Ngobamakosi one thousand of your best warriors, half from each for I hear these abatagati, who call themselves blooddrinkers, are numerous and hold a strong place and go up against them. If they dare to resist eat them up every man who bears a weapon otherwise, slay only the dog who calls himself Ingonyama, also Vunawayo, and all who hold rank or standing among this pestilent clan. The remainder, with their women and cattle, drive before you hither. Burn their kraal that no stick or straw be left, and return here by the sixth day from this. Depart.’

“Such were the words of the king to us, Jeriji. Whau! We leaped up shouting the bonga (Note 3), and that same evening we left Undini, as you see us. By this time tomorrow there will be nothing left of the Igazipuza kraal but its smoke, and the vultures of the northern heights will be gorged. It is good that you have fallen in with us, Jeriji, you who are familiar with the place. We will strike them at dawn tomorrow, and Jandosi shall be brought out alive. See the sun is nearly down. Then we will march.”

“I am very hungry, Sobuza,” said Gerard.

The chief started. Zulus on a war expedition seldom eat more than once a day, and that in the morning. Then he laughed, and gave orders accordingly.

“It is war rations,” he said, as some dried meat and mealies stamped to a kind of flaky paste were produced.

The first was rather “high,” but Gerard was, as he had said, very hungry, and fell to, untroubled by overmuch fastidiousness. While thus engaged he heard a voice say in a jaunty, bantering tone

“Saku bona, ’mlúngu! Surely we have met before.”

The group of chiefs had temporarily left him, to supervise the few simple preparations for their march. Looking up he saw a young Zulu, unringed, who stood there, laughing

all over his face. The features were familiar, but Gerard, who had seen so many natives of late, could not quite locate them.

“Have you any more guns to sell, Umlúngu?” said the young fellow, roguishly.

And then Gerard knew him in a moment.

“Nkumbikazulu,” he said, holding out his hand to show that he bore no illwill from their previous very decided misunderstanding. “Why, how is it that you are here?”

“Há!” said the other, with a laugh, “I am in the Ngobamakosi regiment. I am going to help ‘eat up’ the Igazipuza.”

“Well, Nkumbi, you wanted that double gun badly. Listen to me now. Jandosí is in the midst of those Igazipuza, and when we attack them they may rush upon him and kill him. If you are the first to reach his side that double gun shall be yours. I promise it.”

“What if the gun is broken in the battle?”

“Then you shall have as good a one. Only collect some of your companions, and manage to get near Jandosí when we attack, and that gun shall be yours.”

“You are a straight man, Umlúngu, and I believe your word. I will try and win the gun.” And then a short and sharp mandate from his superiors interrupting him, the young warrior turned away abruptly to fall into his place in the ranks.

Note 1. “The Lion” was one of the titles of the Zulu kings.

Note 2. “Izulu” means “the Heavens.”

Note 3. A royal acclamation demanded by Zulu etiquette on such occasions, and which generally consists in a string of extravagant titles.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The Two Emissaries.

The long sound sleep he had had stood Gerard in good stead as he fell into the march of the impi whose work was indeed cut out for it, for it would take all the hours of darkness before them, and rapid marching at that, to get into position by earliest dawn, that being the time appointed for falling upon the Igazipuza kraal. But these picked men of the king's troops seemed thoroughly up to their work. Hour after hour they marched, with no sign of flagging, ever the same swift elastic stride, and lucky indeed was it for Gerard that he was in excellent condition or he might have found serious difficulty in keeping pace with them.

There was another thing, too, that stood him in good stead the foresight of Dawes to wit, which had provided against the very emergency in which he had been placed. More than half of his rifle and revolver cartridges had been done up in several rolls of the most completely watertight wrapping, waxed at the seams. He might have to swim more than one river, Dawes had reasoned. It was as well to be prepared for every contingency. So here he stood, provided with a supply of dry cartridges; and as by this time he was an adept at that sort of thing, he had employed the few minutes of daylight before setting out on the march in taking his weapon to pieces and carefully drying and greasing the mechanism.

Hour followed hour, and still the impi kept on its way. Now and again a brief halt of a few minutes would be called, in order to take a rest and a pinch or two of snuff, then on again; now through jungly tracts of grass and forestbelts, now over spurs of rugged and desolate mountain ranges, now splashing through quaking reedy morasses, where the deep boom of the bullfrog rose above the more treble croak of his smaller kin, and the willofthewisps glinted in many a sickly blue corpsecandle. On, unflagging, strode those iron warriors, grim, silent angels of Death, speeding through the night.

"We are not far from the place now," said Gerard at length, touching Sobuza's arm. "Just beyond that spar the slope leading up to the entrance to the hollow begins."

It was the last hour of the night, that dark and chilly hour which precedes the dawn. They had entered that forestbelt which had been of such service to Gerard in first throwing off his enemies, and now Sobuza had convened his subordinate chiefs around him to hold a council of war. This was not a lengthy process, for the plans had been already laid. These were simplicity itself. The impi, in compact formation, was to advance swiftly to the ridge overlooking the hollow, then to charge down upon the kraal, throwing out "horns," so as to surround the latter. The inhabitants, thus utterly taken by

surprise, would probably offer no resistance; but any who did were to be slain without mercy. Everything depended upon the successful carrying out of the surprise part of the arrangement, otherwise a severe and bloody battle might be reckoned on; for the Igazipuza were not made of the stuff which would submit to be “eaten up” without a struggle. Moreover, in their own stronghold they would prove a terribly formidable enemy, and the king’s troops were only twice their number, odds which the advantage of the ground would go far to neutralise.

“Whau!” muttered Sobuza, taking a final pinch of snuff and rising to his feet. “I fear we are not going to have things all our own way. Ingonyama is no fool, still less is Vunawayo. They may believe you were eaten by the alligator, Jeriji, or they may doubt it; but if they think there is the least chance of you having escaped, they will be upon their guard. Now, if you had been taken and brought back, our work would have been easy. Only,” he added, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, “it might not have been so easy for you. We might have arrived too late.”

The words struck a chill into Gerard’s heart. What if they had arrived too late too late as far as his friend was concerned. He hoped and prayed not, and then an outlet to his impatience came in the mandate that was issued for the advance.

And now, as the grey light of dawn broke over the earth, Gerard was able for the first time to obtain a view of the barbarous but splendidly disciplined host in whose midst he was to fight today. Debouching from the forestbelt in the most perfect order came this pick of the king’s troops, marching in four companies. Two of these consisted of amakehla or ringed men, and the great warshields borne by these were white, or nearly so; for this was the draft out of the Udhloko regiment, a part of the royal corps, warriors of long training and experience, mostly middleaged. The other two consisted of young men, unringed, carrying shields of all sorts of colours, blackandwhite, redandwhite, black or red, but none entirely white. These were the Ngobamakosi warriors, fiery young fellows, burning to be led against some enemy, no matter who, in order that they might prove their valour and thus win distinction. The leader of these, Gcopo, walked with Sobuza during the march, and the towering stature of the two chiefs was conspicuous even in that muster of splendidly built men.

Beyond their shields and weapons, there was little or no attempt at martial display or personal adornment; for this being an expedition against their own countrymen, though on a large scale, came more within the category of a police undertaking than an impi sent forth to war, and thus ceremonies and paraphernalia which would have figured in the latter event were dispensed with. But bound round his head, every man wore a narrow strip of hide; the Udhloko, white; the Ngobamakosi, red. This was to distinguish them from the Igazipuza, and that they should not fall upon each other by mistake in the

thick of the battle. Thus viewed against the open hillside, marching in splendid order, a forest of bristling spears and tufted shields, a thousand eager and disciplined warriors burning for action, the impi was an imposing sight indeed, and Gerard felt his heart thrill at the consciousness of going into battle for the first time with such men as these.

Suddenly a gasp of wonderment went like a wave through the ranks. All came to a standstill, and every eye was turned upon the same point. There, bounding down the hillside, making straight for the impi, came two men, Zulus. Who were they? Runaways? Refugees? Some of the trader's people who had escaped? Such were among the conjectures that rose to the minds of the astonished spectators. But, as they drew nearer another and deeper gasp of wonder heaved through the impi, for on forehead and chest of the approaching warriors was now discernible the red mark of the Igazipuza.

On they came, bounding like bucks, heading straight for the impi, and it was seen that they were young men and unringed, and fully armed with shield and assegai. The king's troops watched them in grim silence.

"We are Igazipuza, the cubs of the Lion. Who are you?" began the spokesman, as the two pulled up within twelve paces of the foremost rank of the Udhloko. An ominous and threatening growl greeted these words, and spears quivered.

"Whelps of the dog, say rather," exclaimed a deep voice. "Drop your weapons and advance."

They laughed, those two. Standing before one thousand men, who had come forth expressly to slaughter them and theirsthey laughed.

"We cubs of the Lion shed not our claws," replied the one who had spoken, a tall, straight young fellow who, panting slightly after his run, stood with his head thrown back contemplating the king's troops as though he were the king himself. "Our claws may be cut, though they tear badly first. But we do not shed them."

Again that ejaculation of anger went up, this time mingled with contempt. A rapid movement had been executed. The two young men were surroundedstood now in the very centre of the impi. Still utterly fearless, they looked around and laughed defiantly.

"As the child makes a plaything of the sleeping serpent, so now are you walking over your graves, you two children," said Sobuza, contemptuously. "Who are you?"

"Greeting, induna of the king's impi," returned the speaker, after a steady stare at the chief. "We are sent by our father, the Lion of the Igazipuza, to warn you to return. There

is múti (medicine, or philtre) spread on the mountainside leading to his kraal, which is death to twenty times the number you have here.”

“Have done with such childishness,” returned Sobuza, sternly. “Is your father, the Lion of the Igazipuza, as you name him” with a sneer “prepared to come down here and proceed to Undini to lay his neck beneath the paw of the Lion of the Zulu whose wrath he has incurred?”

The two emissaries fairly laughed.

“Not he,” was the reply. “This is the word of Ingonyama: ‘There is a white man named Jandosi here. When the king’s huntingdogs first behold the home of the Igazipuza, they shall view many things. They shall see the white man, Jandosi, writhing upon the point of The Tooth and all his following. The English will then make war in their anger upon the people of Zulu, and will set up a white king. They shall find their game, but the game of the king’s huntingdogs will be not jackals, but lions. Now let them come!’”

The utter audacity of this speech seemed to take away everybody’s breath. They stared at the foolhardy speaker as men who dream. He, before they had recovered, catching sight of Gerard among the group of chiefs, broke into a loud laugh.

“Ha! The other white man! The alligators have spat him up again whole. Well, Umlúngu. New friends are better than old ones. You and your new friends shall see your ‘brother’ being bitten by The Tooth.”

“Seize them!” said Sobuza.

There was a rush and a struggle. Lithe, quick as they were, the two emissaries were overpowered; the blows which would have let the life out of one or more were beaten down by the solid fence of the Udhloko shields. As they lay on the ground, powerless, disarmed those holding them gazing eagerly, hungrily, at the chief, awaiting the word to bury the broad spears in their prostrate bodies Gerard recognised, in him who had spoken, the man who had so barbarously slaughtered the unfortunate Swazi, Kazimbi.

“Ho, Umlúngu,” called out the fearless young barbarian. “With the first advance of the king’s impi, your ‘brother’ shall be bitten on The Tooth. Ha, ha!”

The words, the fiendish laugh, sent Gerard nearly off his head. Beckoning Sobuza aside, he besought the chief to delay his advance, to try and make terms with Ingonyama. But Sobuza shook his head. The thing was impossible, he explained. The king’s orders were absolute. Little or nothing was left to his own discretion, who was merely the king’s

“dog,” and entrusted with carrying them out. Poor Gerard, with the horrible picture he had discovered that day upon the rock of death now vividly before his eyes, besought and implored. In vain. He even appealed to the recollection of the aid he had been able to render the chief thing that at any other time he would have died rather than have done. Still in vain. Sobuza was firm. The king’s orders were imperative and had to be carried out, though one man or a thousand perished. What Jeriji asked was impossible. They had delayed enough already. Then he turned to those who were holding down the emissaries.

“These dogs of Ingonyama’s! Could he not even send me a kehla, instead of talking to me, Sobuza, an induna of the king, through the mouths of two common dogwhelps like these. Let your spears devour them both!”

Eagerly the signal was watched for, eagerly it was obeyed. Down struck the spearpoints, bright and flashing, up they rose again, ruddy and goredimmed, then down again. The quivering bodies of the foolhardy emissaries lay pierced with a dozen great gashes.

Covered with blood, one of them half rose. It was that of the spokesman.

“Hamba gahle (‘Farewell;’ literally, ‘Go in peace.’), Sobuza, induna of the king,” he gasped, ironically. “Hamba gahle, Umlúngu! The Tooth bites! The Tooth bites!” And, with a devilish chuckle, ferocious, untamable, fearless to the last, the young warrior, choked with the torrents of his own blood, sank back and died.

“Au!” growled the chief impatiently, with an angry scowl. “We have lost more than enough time over this carrion. Yet if all these dogs, who call themselves ‘blooddrinkers,’ care as little for their lives as you two, by the headring of the Great Great One we shall have a merry fight before we ‘eat up’ Ingonyama’s house.” Then aloud “Forward, children of the king!”

Chapter Twenty Three.

The Work of “Suppression.”

The chiefs and Gerard were unanimous in the opinion that it would be too much luck to expect to find the Igazipuza unprepared, and the appearance of Ingonyama's emissaries had set at rest all doubt upon that head; and what with the desperate fearlessness of the outlaw clanfighting, so to say, with its neck in the halter and the advantage of fighting on its own ground, the battle that day, as Sobuza had said, was likely to prove a right merry one.

All further necessity for concealment being now at an end, the impi advanced swiftly and in silence, moving at a brisk ran, and now the gleam of battle was in every eye, as gripping their formidable broadbladed assegais, the warriors pressed forward, in their own expressive idiom beginning to “see red.” Bounding the spar pointed out by Gerard, they surged up the last slope.

Here they formed up into line of battle. Each flank consisted of a company of the Ngobamakosi, and these were to constitute the “horns” when the surrounding had to be done. That on the right had Gcopo for leader, that on the left, another subchief, named Matela, while the centre, which was composed of the Udhloko, was led by Sobuza, who, as commander of the expedition, directed the movements generally. Beside him, Gerard had resolved for the present to remain, in order, if called upon, to give assistance by his knowledge of the place.

But for the incident of the two emissaries the king's impi might have supposed it was going to take the doomed Igazipuza completely by surprise, according to the original plan, for as it advanced swiftly up the slope not an enemy showed himself, not a sign of life was there. Had the Igazipuza elected to choose their own fightingground, and retired to some spot strategically more favourable for resisting the invaders? Or was there some secret way out of the hollow, known only to a few, and kept for an emergency such as this? It almost began to look like it. Sobuza and his captains, however, were not the men to trust to appearances or to leave anything to chance, and well indeed for them that such was the case.

They had reached the critical point. A hundred yards further and they would stand upon the ridge overlooking the hollow. Suddenly the stillness was broken in a startling manner. There was a crash of firearms, and from the slope there arose a mass of warriors springing up as though out of the very earth. Covered by their great warshields, the broad spear gripped in the right hand, they charged like lightning upon the right

flank of the king's force, and the roar of their ferocious bloodshout went up as the roar of a legion of tigers.

Prepared as they were, the surprise, the terrible impetuosity of the charge, momentarily staggered the untried and youthful warriors of the Ngobamakosi. It almost seemed as though they must give way. But Gcopo, their leader, was the right man in the right place.

"Strike, children of the king! Death to the abatagati!" he thundered, waving his great shield as he sprang to meet the onrushing horde, "Usútu! 'Sútu!"

"Igazipuza!" roared the latter, answering the king's warcry with their own wild slogan. And then as the rival forces met in jarring shock there fell a silence, save for the flutter and crash of shields, the scuffle of feet, the gasp of deepdrawn breaths, the shiver of spears, and the thud of falling bodies. It was all done in a moment.

By hurling his whole force upon that of the daring foe, Sobuza could have crushed it in a very few minutes. But that astute leader knew better. He saw at a glance that the attacking Igazipuza, though better men, hardly equalled in numbers the company of the Ngobamakosi with which they were engaged. So he passed a peremptory word to the remainder of his force to hold itself in reserve, and his strategy was justified, for almost immediately another band of the enemy arose with equally startling suddenness, and fell furiously upon his left flank.

In obedience to a mysterious signal, the king's impi divided. Half the Udhloko hurled themselves to the support of the wing first attacked, while the remainder sprang forward in the wake of their chief.

"Ho! huntingdogs of the king, here is your game! Usútu!" roared Sobuza, whirling his battleaxe aloft as he leaped to meet these new assailants. The latter were led by a chief of gigantic stature and hideous aspect, beneath whose wildly fantastic adornments of flowing cowhair and long trailing crane's feathers, Gerard, keeping at the side of Sobuza, had no difficulty in recognising Vunawayo.

"Hah!" growled the latter, as the ringed leader came at him. "Now we have men to deal with!"

Gerard, recognising his old enemy, had covered him with his revolver, and drew the trigger. But with incredible quickness Vunawayo bounded aside, and the ball found its billet in the body of a warrior behind him. Before he could fire again, Sobuza had met the leader of the Igazipuza in full shock.

Then it was as a battle of the giants to behold these two. Their shields clashed together, and remained held at arm's length, pressing against each other as the heads and interlocked horns of two fighting bulls, each striving to beat down the other's guard, to draw the other's stroke by a deft and clever feint; and a false stroke would mean the death of whichever should make it. The warriors on either side had rallied around their respective chiefs and champions, to neither of whom could they render any aid by reason of the desperate fierceness wherewith they were themselves pressing each other. Gerard, carried away by the indescribable savagery and excitement of the combat, began himself to "see red," was hardly, in fact, conscious of his acts. A sharp sting in the ear, as of a red-hot iron, brought him to himself. Grinding his teeth in fury he emptied his rifle pointblank into the body of a warrior whose assegai stroke had so narrowly missed him, then he was knocked down by the violent contact of a great shield. The bearer of it had raised his spear to strike when he himself was felled by a blow of a battleaxe, and at the same time Gerard was seized by friendly hands and set upon his feet again. Half dazed he continued to load and fire. He saw men stagger beneath their death wound and sink to the earth, now foul and slippery with gore. He saw others almost hacked to pieces as they stood, and then fall to their knees, still thrusting and stabbing as long as there was life in them; but ever the deafening roar of the opposing warcries, the tossing of weapons and shields, the blows and the gasping, and the spouting blood. It could not last; it could not last.

Even the desperate valour of the Igazipuza, together with the fact that they were on higher ground, for they had charged down upon the king's impi, could not avail for long against the superior numbers of the latter. Vunawayo, finding his efforts against Sobuza unavailing, and noting that more and more of the latter's warriors were free to come to their chief's assistance, sprang suddenly back, and waving his shield, gave out in thunder tones the order to retreat.

But if the king's troops imagined that victory was theirs they were destined to be undeceived. All this while the Igazipuza had been pressed farther and farther back until they had nearly reached the top of the ridge, and now as they poured over this in their retreat, through the point where the slopes narrowed to a kind of gateway, the pursuers thundering on their rear were met by a small but fresh force which had been placed there to cover the retreat of the bulk.

"By the headring of the Great Great One, but these are abatagati indeed!" growled Sobuza at this fresh evidence of the desperate pertinacity of the enemy. "At them, my children! Hew them down!"

And shouting the king's warcry he leaped upon the opposing Igazipuza.

If the fighting had been fierce before, it was doubly so now. This band of heroes in their way, savage, bloodthirsty freebooters as they were, had been placed there in this latterday Thermopylae, to die in order that the rest might renew the combat under more favourable conditions, and what more formidable foe can there be than a cornered combatant? They went down at last before the Udhloko spears, but the struggle was a fearful one, the result almost man for man. When the victors, panting, bleeding, maddened with bloodshed and fury, stood on the ridge looking down into the hollow upon the Igazipuza kraal, those who had originally withstood them, and of whom they were in pursuit, had disappeared. This would mean hunting them down hunting down a cornered and desperate foe who had not hesitated to assume the offensive and attack a force twice as strong as itself, and who still mustered in sufficient numbers to be of formidable menace; hunting down such as these, at bay among the bush and rocks of their own stronghold. A redoubtable undertaking indeed.

There lay the great kraal, apparently deserted, for it and its surroundings showed no sign of life. Eagerly Gerard's glance sought the waggons, and then his heart turned sick. They were still there, but around them also was no sign of life. What had happened? But the next glance was destined to sicken him yet more.

"Looklook!" he gasped, gripping Sobuza by the arm. "That is The Tooth. Oh, good God!"

The last ejaculation escaped him in his grief. There rose the great pyramid, clear and distinct in the light of early dawn. Something was moving on its apex, and against the cliff face several dark objects were plainly discernible. To the sharp eyes of the Zulus, and, indeed, to Gerard himself, the nature of them was unmistakable. They were human forms, and they were hanging from the brow of the cliff.

Sobuza, to whom Gerard had imparted this novel and hideous form of torture practised by the savage freebooters, gave a grunt of interest and surprise as he beheld with his own eyes the actual process; for to hang a man up by his dislocated arms wrenched round in the sockets was unique and a novelty to him barbarian as he was.

"We are too late we are too late!" groaned Gerard.

"Not so, Jeriji," said the chief, sending another look at the grisly cliff and the dangling bodies. "There are three of them. But not one of them is a white man."

The rush of hope that rose in Gerard's heart was dashed.

“We cannot see the stake from here,” he said “the thing they call the ‘point of The Tooth.’ Oh, Heavens, if we are too late! Let us get forward! Quick! We may be in time we may be in time!”

But the Zulu chief, though concerned because of the agony of mind of his young friend, was not there out of any considerations of sentiment. He was there to carry out the orders of the king in all their drastic severity, and was not going to risk failure and court ruin because one unknown white man was in danger of a barbarous death at the hands of the rebel clan. He had got to pursue the fighting force of the latter, and leave it no time to master in any position favourable to itself.

“It can’t be done, Jeriji,” he replied. “Afterwards, when we have eaten up all these dogs, then we will turn our attention to The Tooth.”

“It will be too late then too late!” said Gerard, angrily. “Listen, Sobuza!” he almost shouted, as an idea struck him. “Give me a few men, and I will go myself. Don’t you see! That peak commands all the hollow. I know, for I have been on it. And there are people on it now who can signal to the others. Now is it not in your interest that it should be cleared?”

“Hau!” cried the chief, on whom this idea came with a new light. Then he turned, and after a rapid conference with his colleagues, agreed to the plan, and as by this time the impiles those who had fallen had mustered on the ridge, the word was given to advance.

And what a different appearance did they now present. Covered with dust and sweat, many of them gashed with wounds and dripping with blood, shields hacked and weapons splintered, still panting with the exertion and excitement of the battle, there was none of that spick and span parade ground appearance which had characterised them during their march upon them now. But instead there was a grim light in their eyes, a fell meaning in the low murmurs that issued now and then from their lips, as the growls of a wounded lion. Here a man might be seen passing his fingers along the blade of a broad assegai, foul and clotted with blood; there another, balancing his heavy shorthanded kerrie and explaining how he had just failed to beat down his adversary’s guard; another again, with a gash which had cut through his headring and sliced away a portion of the head beneath. Others again, had lost a finger, an ear, and Sobuza himself was wounded in three places, though not seriously. But on every countenance there was a grim and vengeful rigidity, which showed that when the “suppression” of the Igazipuza should come to be proceeded with, the king’s orders would be carried out in no halfhearted manner.

Leaving a detachment on the ridge to hold the enemy in check in case he should double back and endeavour to break through, Sobuza ordered the advance. The Igazipuza had fled towards the further end of the hollow, where the rocky jungly nature of the ground would be favourable to them making their last stand, and Gerard, who had thoroughly explored the place, was able to estimate pretty accurately the spot where this was likely to be.

“Shall we burn it, my father?” said one of the subchiefs, as they passed the great silent kraal. “It would make a merry blaze.”

“And a most troublesome smoke,” returned Sobuza. “Burn it not. When we have done with these jackals we will warm ourselves by the flames of their straw. For the present let it be.”

“We are near The Tooth now, Sobuza,” said Gerard. “Send the men with me that we may clear it.”

But here a fresh difficulty arose. None seemed eager to accompany him. Although the discipline of a Zulu regiment on a war expedition is of iron rigidity, there were mutterings of discontent at the bare idea. The warriors had not come there to take up the quarrel of an unknown white trader, but to exterminate the rebellious subjects of the king. Having tasted its delights, they were burning once more for the mad shock of battle, and with such a foe. They were not keen on falling out of this for the sake of dislodging three or four spies from an elevated position, nor were they eager to place themselves under the command of a white man. The chief himself was but lukewarm in the matter, and it seemed in danger of being abandoned.

“If no one will go with me I will go alone!” cried Gerard, in despair. Then, as his glance fell upon a face in the ranks, he was inspired with new hope. “Come now, Nkumbikazulu,” he went on. “Are you not ready to win the double gun? It is waiting for you. Are there none of your friends who will go with you? We shall be back with the impi long before the fight is at an end.”

The young warrior stepped forth. It was the dream of his life to possess that double gun which he had so vainly tried to jockey out of its owner. Now, by a strange turn of events, he might only hope to possess it by saving the life of that owner.

“I am ready,” he said, turning deferentially towards Sobuza for permission.

Another and another stepped forward, friends and kinsmen of his.

“Nine of you. With yourself there will be ten. You must do the best you can, Jeriji, for I can spare no more,” said Sobuza impatiently. And the pursuit was resumed.

Lying back from the hollow in a lateral spur, shut in by ironstone cliffs, was a small kraal, and this place had been chosen by the Igazipuza for their last stand. Hither all their women and cattle had been sent, and here they were resolved to die fighting hard. And no better place could they have chosen than this grim cul de sac. It would be impossible to surround them. Only when they had been driven back step by step forced against the very face of the iron cliff itself, would the last man be exterminated.

Over this weird deathtrap there towered a great cloud of dust, and the rocks reechoed the lowing and trampling of the cattle and the shouts of their drivers, the shrill voices of women, and the squalling of children. And still the messengers of retribution marched on, a fell purpose in each grim countenance; eyeballs rolling with a lurid fury, weapons gripped, step elastic and eager. The dawn had broken lowering and murky, and there was no sun. The wind sang mournfully through the hollow; moaning among the cliffs, as with the wail of spirit voices over the drama of carnage and massacre which was here to be played out. As in the first instance, the Igazipuza had selected a place where their assailants would be obliged to approach them from below.

Sobuza having satisfied himself that all the fighting force of the rebel clan was before him, sent back two swift runners to order forward the detachment he had left on the outer ridge, with the exception of a few who were to remain to cut off any stray fugitives who might break through. The contingency that anything like a number might do so seemed hardly worth reckoning on. Then he ordered the immediate attack.

As the king's troops came sweeping up the slope, in perfect line of battle, regular and unbroken, there floated to their ears, rising in dull menace on the fitful puffs of the morning, the weird rhythmical chorus of a warsong.

“Cubs of the Lion we,
Whose roar sounds Death;
Vultures who sit on high,
Whose swoop means Death;
Serpents who creep below,
Whose fangs deal Death
We drink of the blood of men,
We laugh at Death!

“Wizards of thunder we
Whose voice rolls Death;

Wizards of lightning we
Who flash forth Death!
Ho! 'huntingdogs of the king,'
Come, taste our Death!
We drink of the blood of men
We drink your Death!"

The great ironstone cliffs echoed back the weird words of the savage strophe with almost the effect of articulate repetition, and when, in its final paean of defiance, the chorus swelled to a clamorous, threatening roar, the disgust and hatred and repulsion which ran through the minds of the king's soldiers knew no bounds. For to the average Zulu nothing is more repellent than any suggestion of dark dealing, and the gruesome import of the song of the Igazipuza, who had already earned a reputation for wizardry in its foulest form, inspired in the minds of these a fell determination to rid the earth of the whole evil brood.

"Usútu!"

"IgaziPuZa!"

The warshout of the royal house and the defiant slogan of the rebel clan, mingled in booming echoes from the overhanging cliffs, as the dark crescent line swept unswervingly on; the line of white shields, and the flanking companies of particoloured ones, the bristling groups of bright spears. In their wild and fantastic array, the red disk, the hideous stamp of their dreaded order, freshly painted on forehead and chest, the strength of ten men in the hopeless desperation of each, the doomed clansmen stood awaiting the shock. It came.

Then again was the silence of voices, but the tramp of striving feet as the conflicting crowd surged backwards and forward with the hiss and heave of a dark billow split up on a halfsubmerged rock the crash of shields and weapons, the stagger of falling bodies, and the gasp of the slain beneath the savage slashing blows of the infuriated slayers. The Igazipuza are fighting like a race of giants. At this rate barely half the king's force will return to Ulundi. All three of its leaders are wounded; Sobuza is streaming with blood, but still his gigantic form towers in the thick of the fray, still his battleaxe shears aloft in wavy circles of light, still his white shield shivers that of an opponent like the shock of a charging elephant.

Suddenly a sharp shrill warning cry rings forth. Even above the din of the strife there rises a dull, rambling sound which shakes the ground. Nearer, nearer it draws. Thunder? No. Even the combatants pause. A dense cloud of dust is rolling down the kloof, and

through it can be seen a forest of bristling horns, a sea of rolling eyes. Even the combatants take up the warning shout, "Xwayaxwaya! 'Zinkomo!"

("Look outlook out! The cattle!")

Like a whirlwind the frantic herd sweeps down the narrow gorge. Bellowing, leaping, throwing up their horns, the maddened beasts plunge onward, hundreds and hundreds of them, shaking the earth with the thunder of their hoofs, smothering and blinding all with the cyclone of their dust, heading for the outlet. There is no staying the headlong course of the stampeded beasts. The whole impi will be crashed to pulp by the horned terror. In dismay the combatants spring helter-skelter up the rocks, and it goes roaring and thundering by, crushing many as it does so.

Whether the move was a spontaneous one, and that the animals, frantic with the shouting and the reek of blood, and all penned up moreover in such small compass, had stampeded of their own accord, or whether it was a last desperate resource on the part of the Igazipuza to crush and destroy the king's impi, could not at the time be determined. Both parties, for the moment dazed, now rushed at each other with renewed access of fury but it could not last. The numbers of the Igazipuza had dwindled frightfully; all cohesion among them was at an end. They were now broken up into groups, still fighting desperately.

"Yield, wizards!" roared Sobuza. "To fight on is death."

"Ha, ha! We laugh at death, leader of the king's huntingdogs!" came the jeering reply.

"Taste it, then!" thundered the chief, springing at the largest of these groups, and, whirling a heavy knobkerrie aloft, for his battleaxe was broken, he smashed in the skull of the speaker like an eggshell. With a roar and a rush the king's impi surged forward, overwhelming the now scattered groups by sheer weight of numbers. The battle was at an end.

In ghastly staring heaps, their splintered weapons still gripped in their dying throes, still half covered by their hacked shields, the corpses of the Igazipuza warriors lay, gashed and streaming with blood. Grimly, sullenly, to the death had they fought, and now there were none left to fight. The king's troops, too, had suffered severely. Gcopo, the leader of the Ngobamakosi, had been killed, and Matéla, the subchief, was badly wounded with assegai thrusts, and many a staunch fighting man of that regiment and of the Udhloko had fallen.

“On, on!” cried Sobuza, waving his arm. “The king’s work is not yet done. Where is Ingonyama? Where is Vunawayo?”

A shout of dismay, of baffled fury, answered him. Rolling their eyes over the groups of slain, the warriors sought the now familiar features of the fighting leader. In vain. Vunawayo was not among them. Had he succeeded in breaking through the lines during the confusion caused by the rush of the cattle? It began to look like it.

Again, roaring out the king’s warcry, the whole force charged eagerly forward. There stood the small kraal. In a moment it was entirely surrounded.

“Come forth! come forth!” thundered Sobuza, his voice almost drowned by the dismal clamour of shrieks and terrified howling kept up by the women and children hiding away in their huts in terror of their lives. “Come forth, ere the torch is put in! To linger is death!”

Screaming, grovelling in abject fear, the miserable herd crept forth.

“Spare us, father! Crush us not, Foot of the Elephant! Bend us not, Paw of the Lion!” they howled, rolling on the ground before the chief, beside themselves with fear as they looked upon the bloodstained weapons and threatening scowls of the king’s warriors. The old hags, especially, kept up their dismal, quavering screech. The younger women were for the most part less scared or stonily resigned. All, however, expected immediate massacre.

“Peace, witchesnight cats!” thundered Sobuza. “Say, while ye may. Where is Ingonyama?”

Whether in the bewilderment of her terror, or out of sheer force of habit, the foremost of the women, a hideous wrinkled hag, to whom the question seemed in particular addressed, replied

“We know not, father; we know not”

“Ha! Ye know not!” said Sobuza, making a sign.

Immediately a warrior stepped forward, and without a word, drove his great assegai through the hag’s body.

“I give you all one more chance,” roared the chief again, cutting short the howl of terror which went up. “Where is Ingonyama?”

“On The Tooth, father. On The Tooth!” eagerly yelled a whole chorus of voices.

“If this is a lie, then shall every one of you be even as she,” said the chief, sternly, pointing with his foot at the corpse of the one who had been illadvised enough to protest ignorance.

“It is no lie, father!” they cried lustily. “He is there. It is no lie.”

“Ill will it be for yourselves if it is,” said Sobuza, darkly. “And now, witches, this nest of yours shall burn.”

Half a dozen warriors sprang eagerly forward, and in as many moments flames were bursting from the straw huts. Disappointed in their hopes of thus smoking out any fighting men who might have crept in there for shelter, the warriors amused themselves by spearing the dogs as they rushed forth, shouting with laughter as a whole cloud of assegais whizzed past some one more fortunate or more fleet than the rest, without transfixing him. But no further violence was offered to the women and children. The king’s sentence had gone forth only against such as should offer resistance, and did not include these.

Chapter Twenty Four.

The Last of the Freebooters.

Meanwhile Gerard, with a perfect agony of dread and apprehension at his heart, was speeding with his young Zulu allies in the direction of "The Tooth." Though they could hardly hope to gain it unobserved, yet by way of neglecting no precaution, they crept along as much as possible under cover of the bush. Fortunately, the approaches were wellknown to Gerard, who was thus able to guide his party straight to the point by which alone it was accessible.

"See, there!" exclaimed Nkumbikazulu, suddenly, touching his arm. "Au! the wizards!"

They had got the face of the great rock pyramid almost in section. Looking up, Gerard beheld with a shudder the hanging bodies, which he had first seen from a distance. They were very near now, quite near enough to make out the features of the tortured victims, who, however, appeared to be dead, for they hung motionless against the cliff. Shuddering again, Gerard recognised in the drawn, ghastly countenances those of the three Swazis.

There were still only the three, yet from this he augured no good thing. That horrible stake on the apex of the mountain could not see that. Did it, too, hold its tortured writhing victim? What had they done with John Dawes, with Sintoba, Fulani, and the other natives? And then he began to hope that for some purpose they might yet have been spared. If so, it might not be too late.

"Now, Nkumbi," he whispered eagerly. "Up we go! This is the side. I will be first at the top; do you keep close behind me. There cannot be many up there. The place will not hold more than a few, and besides, all their fighting force will be busy with Sobuza."

As they drew near the summit of the gruesome rock of death, a strange, unwonted stillness reigned. Could it be that the place was deserted? Had the savages already accomplished their horrible work and gone away? Gerard's heart beat like a hammer as he climbed the last bit of steep rocky path, and he could hardly see. His brain seemed to swim.

Suddenly a strange, rumbling, scuffling sound met his ears, the sound as of a struggle. Mingling with it were quick, deep-toned ejaculations. A wave of a great relief surged round his heart, for he recognised one of the voices. He was not, then, too late.

In a moment he gained the summit, and this was what he saw.

In the centre of the depressed hollow, arrayed in all the grotesque and hideous paraphernalia of a witchdoctor, the great lion's skin draping him from head to foot, stood Ingonyama, surrounded by half a dozen warriors. Beside him rose the grim, pointed stake, empty now, and ready to receive another victim. And the victim was there. Struggling in the grasp of four athletic savages, struggling with all the might of a powerful and sinewy frame, bound as he was, straining every nerve and muscle, was a white man. They had passed a reim round his neck, and were trying to draw his head down almost to his knees, in a word, to truss him like a fowl, preparatory to impaling him upon that hideous stake. And in this man, Gerard recognised at a glance John Dawes.

So intent were all upon the execution of their barbarous task, that the approach of the party took place absolutely unheeded. To fling himself upon the warriors who were straggling with his friend was to Gerard the work of a fraction of an instant. To empty his revolver into the head of one, and the body of another was that of the same iota of time. Then as the remaining two with a yell of surprise started back to seize the weapons, which they had dropped while engaged in their straggle with the prisoner, they were speared by the Zulus who had followed close behind Gerard.

"Usútu! Death to the abatagati!" thundered Nkumbikazulu, hurling a casting assegai full at the chief.

Ingonyama, however, caught it deftly on his shield, and charged forward upon the thrower, followed by his six remaining warriors. Bending the air with their ferocious bloodshout, the Igazipuza, having recovered from their momentary surprise, strove now to bear back the assailants, to press them over the cliff's brow. But the blood of the young Ngobamakosi warriors was up. Not an inch did they give way, and numerically the odds were in their favour. Hand to handslashing, parrying, thrustingthey fought.

So swift was the attackso hard pressed by the ferocious and desperate freebooters was Gerard and his allies, that the former had not even so much as a moment of time wherein to release Dawes. He could only stand before him to protect him with his life. Then suddenly seizing his opportunity, he slipped his rifle between the shoulders of two of the striving Ngobamakosi, and hardly taking aim pressed the trigger. Ingonyama leaped in the air, and fell heavily forward, the blood pouring from a small round hole in his forehead.

“Au! Between the eyes has his life been let out!” cried Nkumbikazulu, unconsciously echoing the words of the dead chief himself, uttered so prophetically over the lion’s skin which he still wore.

And, remembering the words, despair was in the hearts of the bystanders; but despair to the intrepid, almost fanatical Igazipuza meant only a fresh access of desperation. So far from the fall of their chief inspiring them with dismay, it only nerved them to resistance more stubborn, more ferocious than ever.

Three out of the six were already slain, one almost disabled from wounds. Three likewise of the Ngobamakosi were down so far man for man. The remaining three, pressed back inch by inch, were already at the cliff’s brow. As for asking quarter that was the last thing in the world they would ever have dreamed of. Gerard now found the opportunity to cut the reims which bound his friend, and thrust his revolver into the hand of the latter.

Hardly had he done so when a terrific uproar arose beneath the royal shout of Usútu. On it came, surging upward, and immediately there sprang upon the apex of The Tooth some five or six warriors. The red circle showed them to be enemies, the panting chests and hacked shields and the quick eager way in which they turned to glance back as soon as they had gained the summit, showed them to be fugitives. A gasp of surprise escaped the two white men as they caught sight of the foremost. It was Vunawayo.

“Ha! Umlúngu!” cried the latter, as he sighted Gerard, “I told you we should meet again on the point of The Tooth! And we have.”

There was something so terrific, so appalling in the very aspect of the gigantic savage, as covered with blood, his evil features working in a most fiendish and malignant grin, he darted like lightning upon Gerard, that even the latter might have been excused if he had felt momentarily unnerved. Unluckily, too, his foot slipped, so that his rifle bullet, instead of meeting his assailant full in the chest, only hummed past the latter’s ear. He was at the mercy of his formidable foe. Parrying with his shield the blow aimed at him by Gerard’s dabbled rifle, Vunawayo made a furious stab. But Gerard, avoiding it, gripped his assailant by the legs and threw him. The agile and powerful Zulu, however, was half up in a moment, and the straggle became a hand-to-hand one. No assistance either could Dawes or the Ngobamakosi give, all their efforts being fully taxed to hold their own against this new accession of strength to the side of their enemies.

“Au, ’mlúngu! I told you our meeting would be a long one,” growled Vunawayo, between his set teeth, as they rolled nearer and nearer to the brow of the cliff. Gerard the while

felt every muscle in his powerful young frame cracking, strained as it was to prevent the savage from freeing the hand which held the assegai. Moments seemed years nearer and nearer to the fatal brink the combatants rolled. Then the fierce and desperate savage, suddenly jerking free his left wrist, seized his adversary by the throat.

Then Gerard felt that his end had come. His eyes seemed squeezed out of his head. The whole world was spinning round with him. A tuga final effort this opponent had got him to the edge of the height. He was going both were going

The air rang with the deepthroated "Usútu!" as Sobuza and his followers came swarming over the edge of the summit. Gerard was conscious of a spout of warm blood over his face, for the moment blinding him; of the relaxing grip of his adversary; of a plunge and scuffle as the body of the latter crashed over the brink of the grasp of powerful hands dragging him back to life and safety. Then, half choked, his brain swimming, he rose to his feet, and took in what had happened what was happening the last act in the suppression of the redoubtable freebooting clan.

It all took place in a moment. The summit was alive with warriors, with tossing shields and bristling weapons, all pressing forward upon one man.

He was standing fronting them like a stag at bay standing on a projecting pinnacle of rock, balancing himself right over the abyss. He was a man of large, fine stature, and his eyes flashed with the elation of a heroic courage, as covered by his great shield, and a broad assegai flourished aloft in his right hand, he defied his slayers to approach.

"Ho, hunting dogs of the king, here is your quarry! Come and seize it," he shouted, in deep, mocking tones. "What, afraid? The king's impi afraid of one man! What a sight for the spirit of Tyaka! Ha! I am the last of the Igazipuza, and the whole of the king's impi fears me fears me!" he repeated, in a kind of longdrawn chanta very deathsong, in fact.

Now the summit sloped down to the pinnacle of rock whereon the man stood. To attack him hand to hand was certain death, for his object was plain to seize and drag into the abyss with him whoever should approach, and thus to die true to the traditions of his order, an enemy's life in his hand. Assegais thrown at him from above he only laughed at, parrying them easily with his shield. Sobuza and his warriors were beside themselves with helpless rage. The jeering laughter and contemptuous defiance of the man goaded them to madness. But how to get at him? The chief was too proud to admit himself beaten by asking the aid of the firearms of his white allies, whereas they, in sheer admiration of the man's desperate intrepidity, forebore to use them. Even John Dawes, notwithstanding his recent rough treatment and narrow escape from the most

barbarous of deaths, could hardly bring himself to fire upon this sole survivor of the race which had so abominably illused him.

But the difficulty solved itself unexpectedly. The savage, seeing Gerard pushing his way to the frontseeing, too, the rifle in his hand, mistook his intentions. If they were not going to purchase the pleasure of taking his life at the price of losing one of their own, they should not have it for nothing.

“Ho, cowards!” he roared with flashing eyes. “Ho, cowardly dogs who fear one man. Go, tell your king I spit at his headring! Igazipuza!” And as the last longdrawn note of the ferocious warshout of his tribe escaped his lips, he turned and sprang out into empty air, and a dull, heavy thud and the clink of metal upon stones rising upward to the ears of those above, told that the last of the Igazipuza warriors had died even as those who had gone before him had diedfierce, stubborn, formidable to the end, but unyielding.

A gasp of relief, admiration, awe, went up from the spectators of this powerfully tragic scene. Then they turned to leave the mount of death.

“Whau! these are abatagati indeed!” quoth Sobuza. “But they are right valiant fighters.”

“And this, my father, what shall we do with it?” said one of the warriors, designating the body of Ingonyama, which lay just as it had fallen, covered with the great lion’s skin. “Shall we not place it on ‘the point of the Tooth,’ that even the very birds may behold the fate of the enemies of the Great Great One?”

“The king’s orders did not say that,” replied Sobuza, who was not free from motives of classfeeling. “Ingonyama was a chief, and a brave man, and now he is dead. Let him lie in peace, for was he not a chief?”

“What of this?” said Dawes, touching the lion’s skin.

“We want it not,” answered Sobuza. “It, too, looks like tagati. See! The life was let out of it and its wearer by the same hole.”

“That’s a fact,” said Dawes. “But, if you’re so particular, we are not. We are going to have thiseh, Ridgeley?” And he plucked the lion’s skin from the body of the dead chief.

The Zulus stared, then shrugged their shoulders. A white man might do all kinds of things which were not lawful for themselves, wherefore they did not think so very much of the act.

As they descended from the dreadful hill of slaughter, Dawes narrated all that had befallen him since Gerard had left this jeopardy in the kraal, and how he had held Ingonyama at the point of his revolver, and that within a few yards of his dancing warriors; then his bold attempt at trekking away, the shooting of the councillor, Sonkwana, the fight, and his own recapture. Nothing on earth had saved him from the frightful fate to which he had been adjudged, but the fact of the lateness of the hour that and the arrival of the king's impi at dawn. It was too dark to put him to death that evening, and so he had spent the night a close prisoner, with so many hours of silence and darkness before him wherein to look forward to the terrible torture which awaited him the next day.

Before dawn, however, had come tidings that the king's impi was marching upon the place, and he was dragged forth into the midst of the whole horde of exasperated barbarians, clamouring like wolves for his blood. But it had been decided to send emissaries to the king's induna, and meanwhile he was taken to the summit of The Tooth.

"It's a mercy you turned up when you did, Ridgeley," he concluded. "Five minutes later, and I'd have been kicking on that stake. Faugh!"

Then Gerard, in turn, related his own experiences. Dawes listened attentively and gravely.

"It was a lucky day for both of us when you dragged that same Sobuza out of the water, over the Umgeni Falls, and a lucky day for me when Cetywayo took it into his head that it was time to suppress the Igazipuza," he said seriously. "And it was a lucky day, too, for me the day I ran against you knocking around Maritzburg, down on your luck; for I don't stick at telling you, Ridgeley, that there's not a chap in forty would have carried through that blockaderunning business with the pluck and dash and, above all, cool soundness of judgment you showed. And but for that, where should I have been?"

Gerard reddened.

"Have you quite done making a speech, Dawes?" he said, laughing confusedly. "Because, if so, let's talk about other things. What has become of Sintoba, and the rest of them?"

Dawes's countenance fell.

"Hang me if I know," he said. "From the time they strapped me up I saw no more of the people. The Swazis were hung over here, poor devils, as you saw; but I didn't see that. It was done just before they lugged me up. I'm afraid though these brutes have made mincemeat of them."

“What are we going to do, now?” said Gerard. “I suppose we can trek home again.”

“Do? Why, just this. We’ll go to the king’s kraal and claim compensation for the loss of our time and liberty and all the funk we’ve been put in. And we’ll get it, too.”

“Hadn’t we better let well alone?” suggested Gerard. “We have got our stock back. Would it not be best to inspan quietly, and trek right away out of the country?”

“Perhaps it would be best in this instance,” allowed Dawes, after a moment’s pause; “though I had not intended to do things by halves. By the way, I did show an error of judgment the last time I decided to trek. I ought to have waited quietly until the upshot of your undertaking came off. Yes, I made a mistake that time. It was a direct challenge to them, so to speak. But I say, Ridgeley, what a yarn we’ll have to spin to old Bob Kingsland, when next we see him. Why, he’ll vote us a brace of the biggest liars in Natal.”

Gerard laughed. Then, at the thoughts suggested by the mention of Mr Kingsland, he subsided into silence. Not long, however, was he suffered to enjoy his own thoughts, for as they reached the foot of the pyramid a considerable hubbub greeted them.

The remainder of the king’s impi had come up. In the midst of this, hustled, pushed, occasionally kicked, and threatened at every step by a multitude of spears, were three unfortunate natives.

“Kill them!” “Cut them to pieces!” “They are Igazipuza!” “We saw them in the fight!” “They have washed off their red wizard’s mark!” were some of the tumultuous shouts which went up from the crowd.

“Amakafula? Hau! Only listen to that! No. They are Igazipuza, cowardly dogs, not like the rest, who were brave!” roared the savages, who, having tasted what should have been enough blood, clamoured for more. The lives of the wretched men seemed not worth a moment’s purchase. An exclamation escaped both Dawes and Gerard simultaneously. They elbowed their way right into the excited crowd.

“They speak truth, amadoda!” cried Dawes. “They are not Igazipuza. They are my servants.”

The Zulus stared, then fell back. The delight wherewith the Natal natives hailed their master, who had come to their aid in what they imagined a most critical time, beggars description.

“How did you escape, Sintoba, and where have you been hiding?” said Dawes, wonderingly.

Then Sintoba proceeded to explain how he and Fulani and the boy had been put into a hut together, but, unlike their master, had been left unbound, and fairly well treated in general. But something they had overheard led them to attempt their escape, and in the confusion which had followed daring the mastering of the warriors to resist the invasion of the king's troops, and the despatching of the women and cattle to a place of safety, they had succeeded in slipping away and hiding among the rocks on the opposite side of the hollow to that whereon the battle had taken place. Here they had been discovered by the victorious impi, and being taken for Igazipuza, would have been massacred on the spot but for the intervention of the subchief, Matela, who suggested that they should be led before Sobuza, who, with his advance guard, was then in pursuit of Vunawayo and a few surviving fugitives.

“Whau, Jandosi! Your Amakafula have had a narrow escape from the spears of our people,” said Sobuza, quizzically. “Almost as narrow a one as you yourself had from the bite of The Tooth of the Igazipuza. And now let us stand beneath the rock of death and see if these wizards have been able to take to themselves wings and fly down unhurt.”

All misgivings on that score, however, was soon set at rest. At the foot of the cliff, shattered, shivered into a horrible mangled mass, lay the body of Vunawayo a great gash over the heart, showing where it had received the stab which had, as by a hair's breadth, saved Gerard from being dragged over by the fierce and desperate savage. At this ghastly evidence of the terrible fate from which he had so narrowly escaped, Gerard shuddered.

“Há! Jeriji!” said Sobuza, with a grim smile. “My broad umkonto (the shorthanded stabbing spear) has done its work well, as well as your fists did among those Amakafula dogs near the Umgeni. That was a great day; but this has been a greater one.”

“It has indeed, Sobuza,” answered Gerard. “And so yours was the stroke that saved my life? Well, we are very much more than quits now, at any rate.”

Close beside the shattered remains of Vunawayo, lay those of the warrior who had leaped of his own accord from the summit, choosing rather to die by his own act than that his enemies should have the satisfaction of boasting that they had slain him.

“The wizards have died hard, and we have had a right merry fight,” said Sobuza, turning away. “With more men we could have crushed them quicker, but then we should not have had so grand a fight. I think, Jeriji, that the Great Great One knew this when he

sent but a thousand men, for in such bloodletting do we keep our spears sharp in these peaceable times.”

As they rejoined the impi, it became evident that an altercation of some kind was going forward; the parties thereto being a young unringed man and an Udhloko warrior.

“It is mine, I say!” vociferated the former, who was being backed up by more and more of his friends. “It is mine! I won it!”

“You won it!” was the contemptuous reply of the kehla. “Ha! umfane (‘Boy,’ i.e. an unringed man). I have it. I took it. Come now, you, and take it!”

“I will,” shouted the other in answer to this direct challenge. And supported by a gathering number of his friends he rushed upon the ringed man. The latter, however, seemed equally well supported. Spears waved threateningly as the parties confronted each other. It seemed as if civil strife was going to follow upon the extermination of the legitimate enemy.

“Peace!” cried Sobuza, sternly. “What is this, that the king’s huntingdogs snarl against each other?”

“This, father,” appealed the young warrior. “That gun is mine. I won it fairly. Jeriji promised it. He said, ‘If you get near Jandosi when we attack, if you are the first to reach his side, that double gun shall be yours. I promise it.’ That was the ‘word’ of Jeriji. And was I not the first to reach his side, I and my kinsmen? Whau! There is Jeriji. Ask him, my father. Ask him if such was not his word?”

“Nkumbikazulu speaks every word of the truth, induna of the king,” said Gerard. “I did promise him the gun on those terms, and he has won it fairly.”

Thus called upon to adjudicate, Sobuza heard what the other side had to say, and the fact that the warrior in whose possession it now was had only picked up the gun instead of having taken it from an enemy in battle went far towards simplifying matters. It had been thrown away early in the conflict by Vunawayo, who, not understanding firearms, had been so violently kicked at the first discharge that he had elected, and wisely, to fight with such weapons as he did understand. So the chief decreed that Nkumbikazulu had fairly earned the weapon, and it was handed over to him forthwith, to the huge delight of the young warrior and his friends, and as Gerard promised to make some sort of present to the man who had been dispossessed, the dispute was settled to the satisfaction of all parties.

“Pooh! Don’t mention it!” declared Dawes, in reply to Gerard’s apologetic explanation of how he had come to pledge away what was not his property. “You could not more completely have hit upon the right thing to do. If you had been as near that beastly stake as I was, Ridgeley, you’d think you had got off dirt cheap at the price of a gun, I can tell you. Besides, are we not in the swim together and jointly? That young scamp, Nkumbi! Well, he has earned it fairly this time, more so than by jockeying us over it as he tried to do before. Eh, Nkumbi?” And Dawes translated his last remark for the benefit of the young warrior, who, with his confederates, received it with shouts of laughter and great good humour.

The open plain in front of the kraal was one great sea of stirring life as the impi came up. Thither were gathered all the cattle of the Igazipuza, upwards of a thousand of them, and numbers of sheep and goats. Among these squatted or moved dispirited groups of women, sadfaced and resigned; even the children seemed to have lost their lightheartedness, and cowered, roundeyed with awe and apprehension. All had been collected and assembled there by a portion of the king’s force told off for the purpose, and were to be taken as captives and spoils to the king’s kraal; and these were started off thither there and then.

But before this was done an earnest conference had been held between the two white men and the Zulu leaders. After all that had taken place, said John Dawes, he and his comrade were extremely anxious to trek away home. It would be highly inconvenient to travel all round by Ulundi, though on another occasion they hoped to pay a special visit to the king. Meanwhile they had now recovered their cattle and trekoxen, and they would like to leave the Zulu country for the present. But in consideration of the valuable aid rendered, at any rate, by Gerard, to the king’s troops, and further as some compensation for the detention and peril they had undergone, at the hands of those who were, after all, the king’s subjects, he proposed that Sobuza should award them a share in the cattle seized from the Igazipuza.

The chief took snuff and began to deliberate. He was not sure whether he could do this upon his own responsibility, he said. Recovering their own property was one thing, claiming an award out of the “eatenup” cattle seemed very much another. How many did Jandosini think would meet his requirements?

Dawes replied that seventyfive head about represented a moderate compensation. Sobuza, however, did not receive the proposal with enthusiasm. Finally it was agreed that sixty head should be allowed, on the express stipulation that no further claim should be made upon the king or the Zulu nation either by the two white men or any of their native followers. As for driving them, he, Sobuza, could not assist them. He was responsible to the king for every man in the impi, and could not upon his own

responsibility send any of the king's subjects out of the Zulu country. The difficulty, however, might be met by pressing into the service two or three of the Igazipuza boys who were young enough to have escaped the massacre of the fighting men and old enough to understand cattledriving. So, having obtained their share of the spoil, Dawes and Gerard bade a cordial farewell to Sobuza and the Zulu impi, and inspanned, and once more the crack, crack of the whips and the shouts of the drivers, Sintoba and Fulani, resounded cheerily as they started for home.

But the errand of the king's troops was not quite completed. The hollow had been effectively scoured in search of fugitives hiding away, but none such had been found. Save the few who had broken through, only in order to make their last stand upon the summit of the Tooth, none had thought of escape. All had fallen where they had stood, fighting desperately to the last.

"Now will we put in the fire to this nest of wizards!" cried Sobuza aloud.

Hardly had he given the signal, than smoke was seen rising from the huts, gathering in dense volumes, and, lo, from four different points simultaneously, bright flames broke forth, and as the whole huge kraal, now one vast sheet of leaping, devouring fire, gave forth in uninterrupted salvo its heavy crackling roar, there went up from the ranks of the king's warriors, mustering in crescent formation to watch the completion of their errand of retribution, the thunder of a fierce warsong of victory and exultation.

"As lightning we smote them,
Where, where are they now?
The sons of the lightning,
The wizards of thunder?
Where, too, is their dwelling,
Their cattle, their cornfields?"

"The bolt fell upon them,
The thundercloud smote them;
The might of 'The Heavens'
In fury it burned them
It smote and it burned them
Its ruin destroyed them!"

"The wizards are scattered
In blood and in ashes;
The roar of the Lion
In thunder pursued them;

The praise of the Lion
His children reecho;
The praise of the Lion,
The Lion of Zulu,
The Lord of the Nations!"

The flames sunk low, sunk into red heaps of ashes pierced with bright and glowing caverns. A dense cloud of smoke overhung the hollow; and now the king's impi, marching in companies, was moving up towards the ridge. The two waggons, with their full spans of oxen creaking up the rocky way, had already gained the entrance to the hollow, and their owners, riding on horseback, for both the steeds had been recovered too, paused for a moment on the ridge to look back. Their peril and captivity was at an end. They were being brought out in something like a triumphal procession. Far on in front, the dust was rising from the great herd of cattle and the crowd of captives. Behind, below, lay the gruesome and bloodstained hollow. The thunder of the warsong echoed from the slopes, and the rhythmic movement of the lines of shields of marching warriors was a fitting accessory to the lurid background of the picture, the amphitheatre of cliffs, "The Tooth," the pyramid of Death in the centre, its dismal burdens still dangling against its face, and below, the great smouldering circle of blackening ashes, while the dense smoke cloud mounting to the heavens in the grey and murky noontide, as from the crater of a volcano, proclaimed to all, far and near, that the king's justice had been executed, and that the power of the dreaded, indomitable, bloodthirsty Igazipuza had now become a thing of the past.

Chapter Twenty Five.

The Last of all our Friends.

Maritzburg again. Gerard, strolling through the busy streets, keenly enjoying the bustle and stir of civilised life after his wild experiences in savage lands, now no longer to him a sealed book, can hardly realise that it is the same place, that he is the same being. Could it be through those very streets that he hurried so eagerly in search of what might bring him a bare subsistence; returned so despondently from each successive failure? Now he felt himself the equal in experience and resource of pretty nearly every man he met. He felt his feet, so to say, and felt them firmly. He felt now that wherever he was put down he could make his way.

“A little civilisation doesn’t come amiss after the long spell of trekking we’ve had, eh, Ridgeley?” said John Dawes, as they sat smoking their pipes beneath the verandah of the Imperial Hotel towards the close of a hot day. “But the contrast of it! I suppose, now, you can hardly bring yourself to believe that old Ingonyama, Vunawayo, and the rest of ’em weren’t just so many chaps in a dream?”

“A dream!” echoed Gerard, vacantly. “Ohah! Yes, of course.”

John Dawes’s humour being of the “dry” order, he did not laugh outright. His young friend was in a dream; and of its nature he was not ignorant, for Gerard had given him just such vacant answers since a wire had been handed in some two hours ago, announcing that Mr Kingsland and his daughter would take up their quarters in the Imperial Hotel during their two or three days’ sojourn in the capital, and would, in fact, arrive that evening.

“Remember what I said, just before we made acquaintance with the Igazipuza,” went on Dawes, “that you’d have some rare yarns to spin to old Kingsland? Why, those will be skim milk to all that’s happened since.”

“Rather!” assented Gerard, still vacantly, all his attention being directed towards obtaining as good a view of the gate as was possible through the sunflowers. And the other, seeing he was in no mood for conversation, forebore to tax the attention aforesaid.

On the arrival of our two friends in Maritzburg, they had been met by John Dawes’s brother William, his joint partner in that and all undertakings, who had taken the waggons and cattle except such of the latter as had been there and then sold by public auction away to his farm, leaving John to enjoy a spell of city life. But before he left, the

two brothers had put their heads together and decided to allow Gerard a third of the profits of the expedition by way of his share. The generosity of this arrangement, far in excess of that which had been agreed upon, touched Gerard not a little.

“Shut up, man alive,” had cut in William Dawes, with a goodnatured slap on the shoulder, as Gerard blurted out his thanks. “I’ve heard enough about you from Jack here to know you’ve jolly well earned whatever share we can give you. So you and he had better have a little fun after your trip, and when you’ve had enough of the city come over and give us a look up. There are a few bucks and partridges left on the place still.”

So William Dawes had departed to his farm, and Gerard had fallen upon his feet at last; which satisfactory position, what with the comfortable sum this arrangement would give him, coupled with the invaluable experience he had gained, it would be a strange thing if he did not manage to keep.

Just as the first gong was sounding for dinner, a light American “spider” drew up at the gate, and from it there descended two persons.

“By your leave, my good fellow. Would, you mind letting me pass?” said Mr Kingsland, rather testily, as struggling with a large and weighty Gladstone bag he found his ingress barred by some one who showed not the smallest disposition to stand aside.

“Don’t you know me, Mr Kingsland?”

“Know you? Ehwhat! ’Pon my life I don’t,” answered the other, staring inquiringly at the bronzed, bearded young fellow before him. Then, as in a flash, “Why, it’s Ridgeleyyoung Ridgeleyof course! But who’d have known you! How are you, my dear fellow, how are you?”

And the cheery old settler, dropping the weighty Gladstone, wrung his young friend’s hand in a manner that left no sort of doubt as to the genuine pleasure wherewith he regarded the meeting.

“Why, what a man you’ve grown!” he went on, looking Gerard up and down with an approval that made the latter feel and look extremely foolish. “May!” he called out. “Where are you, May? Here’s young Ridgeley, come back looking twice the chap he was when he went, as I always said he would.”

As the girl came forward with extended hand, and a look of unaffected pleasure in her eyes, Gerard was not quite sure whether he was standing on his head or on his heels. He thought he had never seen a sweeter, lovelier vision in his life. And, indeed, from an

impartial standpoint, and outside the enthusiasm of our young friend, May Kingsland certainly was a very sweet and winsome girl, and one calculated, as she stood there in all the brightness of her fresh young beauty, to damage a far less susceptible heart than that which she had so easily taken captive.

“We are so glad to see you again, Mr Ridgeley,” she said simply, though this time there was ever so faint a tinge of constraint, which had Gerard read and understood would have lifted him into the seventh heaven of delight. “You will have such a lot of adventures to tell us byandby. I am dying to hear if you ever met your friend the Zulu againyou remember I predicted you would. But now the second gong is about to strike, and I must run away and make myself presentable.” And with a bright little nod she left him.

“Hallo, John Dawes! You here, too?” sung out old Kingsland, as the former strolled leisurely up. “Why, when did you fellows get back?”

“The other day. We looked in at your place on the way, but there was nobody there. It was all shut up.”

“Ah yes, of course. My boy Tom is going to leave me, going to get married, and is looking out for a farm of his own. Dare say Arthur was away helping him. May and I have been down at Durban the last three weeks. Ah, thanksbut have we got time?” taking the tobaccopouch which Dawes tendered, and hurriedly cramming his pipe for a brief beforeddinner smoke.

We may be sure that a very cheery, happy group were those four persons, as they sat out beneath the verandah that evening after dinner, and the events of the trip were narrated and discussed. And one of them, at any rate, was silently, radiantly, thankfully happy. One, did we say? Two, perhaps But there, softly! for are we not on the verge of betraying a secretor anyhow what is likely to be a secret of the future.

We may be sure, further, that as far as our young friend was concerned, that blissful frame of mind extended over the next two days, for during that period he contrived to be very much in May Kingsland’s society, whether walking about the town or seated under the cool shady verandah of the hotel. To him, further, it was surprising how the time had slipped away, and how much of her company he had had all to himself during the process. Time, however, as we know, has a knack of taking to itself wings under the circumstances, and so as this period drew to a close Gerard’s spirits began to sink with a rapid motion towards zero. But there was a further surprise awaiting him. The evening before their departure Mr Kingsland said

“By the way, Ridgeley, you haven’t asked after our former shipmate, Maitland.”

Gerard started guiltily. During those past two days it was little enough he had given a thought to, outside one allengrossing subject which held possession of his mind.

“I’m afraid I did forget,” he said. “But what has become of him, Mr Kingsland? Have you seen anything of him lately?”

The old settler looked grave as he filled his pipe in silence.

“I’m sorry to say he came to no good,” he said at length. “The fact is, he came to something like utter grief. He wouldn’t start doing anythinggot into a habit of loafing around barewent the way of, unfortunately, many another young fellow who comes out to the Coloniestook to drink. Once he did that he was done for. Some of us did try to get him into something and keep him straight, but it was no good. He was off again and on the spree like a journeyman stonemason. Well, his father, a parson of some sort, I believe, got angry when he heard how he was going on, and cut off the supplies; and then Master Harry, after getting into a serious scrape or twoin fact, I had to bail him out once myselfgoes and enlists in the Mounted Police. I myself should have left him there to serve his time if I had been his peopleit might have done him good. But no; as soon as they heard of it they must move Heaven and earth and the Government to get him out of it; and it wasn’t easily managed, I can tell you, only Master Harry proved such a shocking bad hat that the police authorities were only too glad to get rid of him. His father wrote to me about him, asking me to take his passage and send him straight home again. And I didshipped him on boardwhat do you think!our old hooker the Amatikulu; and as she’s a direct boat and touches nowhere on the way, he can’t get ashore again.”

“I’m sorry the chap should have turned out so badly,” said Gerard, his mind reverting to the almost direct cut Harry Maitland had given him on the last occasion of their meeting, and when he himself was down on his luck. “By the way, what has become of Anstey?”

“They sold him up just after you left. One of his creditors took out a writ of imprisonment against him, but finding he’d got to pay so much a day while Anstey was locked up, he soon got sick of throwing good money after badand friend Anstey was turned loose again. He cleared out soon afternobody knows where.”

The speaker paused for a minute or two. Then he went on

“And now, Ridgeley, if it’s not an impertinent question from an old fellow who’s interested in your welfare, what are your own plans? I remember you telling me when you first came out here you were anxious to take to farming. Is this still your idea, or has your year of adventureand, by Jove, you have had some adventures too!unsettled you, unfitted you for anything but a wandering life?”

“Rather the other way, Mr Kingsland. The old idea holds good more than ever. I would like above all things to get on a farm.”

“You would, eh? Well now, look here, Ridgeley. You’ve learnt a good deal, but you’ve still a good deal to learn. I wouldn’t help you in this line at the time you landed, because, as I told you, I had two boys of my own, who were amply sufficient to manage things. Now Tom, as I also told you, is leaving me, and setting up on his own hook, and it occurs to me that if you’d like to come and take his place for a spell, and help Arthur and myself, you are heartily welcome to do so. You’d be learning your business, and also you could see whether you still liked going into the life altogether.”

Was Gerard standing upon air, or only upon very solid and rather dry ground? He himself could hardly have told. Could he believe his ears? Did he grasp aright the other’s meaning? Why, such an arrangement as that suggested, apart from being in itself just the very thing that suited him thoroughly, would mean a sojourn beneath the same roof as May, and that for an indefinite period. He managed, however, to reply coherently, and to the effect that he considered himself most fortunate, etc., etc.

“Well, think it over,” was the reply, “and if you’re in the same mind this day week by which time I expect you will have had about enough of town life drop us a line, and follow it yourself. We are leaving for home tomorrow, and shall expect to hear from you in any case when you have made up your mind.”

When he had made up his mind! The only part of the arrangement which did not commend itself to Gerard was this very delay. A week is a pretty short time but to him, under the circumstances, it seemed an age.

We must now take leave of our friend, Gerard Ridgeley, and we do so in a spirit of prophecy. We need hardly predict that he will betake himself to Doorn Draai at the expiration of that week, there to learn farming under the auspices of Mr Kingsland, for it is too obvious that he will inevitably do so. But, having done so, what we venture to predict, in no uncertain mind, is that he will inevitably make his way. To this we will append another prophecy; no, rather we will only hint at one but softly, cautiously, for are we not treading on delicate ground? and the future is uncertain. Be it remembered, however, that Gerard is young, and rather a fine fellow And have we not said that May Kingsland is a very pretty and sweet girl?

The End