

Man Quatermain

By H. RIDER HAGGARD.

ADAPTATION OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "JESUS," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

We no longer perspire, for the perspiration had been arrested out of us; we simply lay in the bottom of the boat, which we were now physically incapable of directing, feeling like hot embers, and I fancy undergoing very much the same sensation that the poor fish do when they are dying on land, namely, that of slow suffocation. Our skins began to crack, and the blood to throb in our heads like the beating of a steam engine.

This had been going on for some time, when suddenly the river turned a little, and I heard Sir Henry call out from the bows in a hoarse, startled voice, and looking up saw a most wonderful and awful thing. About half a mile ahead of us, and a little to the left of the center of the stream—which we could now see was about ninety feet broad—a huge pillar like jet of almost white flame rose from the surface of the water and sprang fifty feet into the air, when it struck the roof and spread out some forty feet in diameter, falling back in curved sheets of fire shaped like the petals of a full blown rose. Indeed, this awful gas jet resembled nothing so much as a great flaming flower rising out of the black water. Below was the straight stalk, a foot or more thick, and above the dreadful bloom. And as for the fearfulness of it, and its fierce and awesome beauty, who can describe it? Certainly I cannot. Although we were now some 500 yards away, it notwithstanding the steam, lit up the whole cavern as clear as day, and we could see that the roof was here about forty feet above and washed perfectly smooth with water. The rock was black, and here and there I could make out long, shining lines of ore running through it like great veins, but of what metal they were I know not.

On we rushed toward the pillar of fire, which glared fiercer than any furnace ever lit by man.



On we rushed toward the pillar of fire.

"Keep the boat by the right, Quatermain—to the right," shouted Sir Henry, and a minute after I saw him fall forward senseless. Alphonse had already gone. Good was the next to go. They lay as though dead; only Umslopogias and I kept our senses. We were within fifty yards of it now, and I saw the Zulu's head fall forward on his hands. He lay gone, too, and was alone. I could not breathe; the fierce heat dried me up. For yards and yards round the great rose of fire the rock roof was red hot. The wood of the boat was almost burning. I saw the feathers on one of the dead swans begin to twist and shrivel up, but I would not give in. I knew that if I did we should pass within three or four yards of the gas jet and perish miserably. I set the rudders as to turn the canoe as far from it as possible, and held on grimly.

My eyes seemed to be bursting from my head, and through the closed lids I could see the fierce light. We were nearly opposite now; it roared like all the fires of hell, and the water boiled furiously around it. Five seconds more, and we were past; I heard the roar behind me.

Then I, too, fell senseless. The next thing that I remember was feeling a breath of air upon my face. My eyes opened with great difficulty. I looked up. Far, far above me there was light, though around me was deep gloom. Then I remembered, and looked. The canoe still floated down the river, and in the bottom of it lay the naked forms of my companions. "Were they dead?" I wondered. "Was I left alone in this awful place?" I knew not. Next I became conscious of a burning thirst. I put my hand over the edge of the boat into the water and drew it up again with a cry. No wonder; nearly all the skin was burnt off the back of it. The water, however, was cold, or nearly so, and I drank and splashed myself all over. My body seemed to suck up the fluid as one may see a brick wall suck up rain after a drought; but when I was buried the touch of it caused intense pain. Then I thought of myself of the others, and dragging myself towards them with difficulty, I knelt down with water, and to my joy they began to recover—Umslopogias first, then the others. Next they drank, absorbing water like so many sponges. Then, feeling chilly—a queer contrast to our recent sensations—we began as best we could to get into our clothes. As we did so Good pointed to the port side of the canoe; it was all blistered with heat, and in places actually charred. Had it been built like our other boats, Good said that the planks would have certainly warped and let in enough water to sink us; but fortunately it was dug out of the soft, willow wood of a single great tree, and had sides nearly three inches and a bottom four inches thick. What that awful flame was we never discovered; but I suppose that there was at this spot a crack or hole in the bed of the river through which a vast volume of gas forced its way from its volcanic home in the bowels of the earth towards the upper air. How it first became ignited it is, of course, impossible to say—probably, I should think, from some spontaneous explosion of sulphuric gas.

As soon as we had got some things on and shaken ourselves together a little we set to work to make out where we were now. I have said that there was light above, and on examination we found that it came from the sky. Our river that was, Sir Henry said, a literal realization of the wild vision of the poet, was no longer underground, but was running on its darksome way, not now through cavernous measureless to man, but between two frightful cliffs which cannot have been less than 8,000 feet high. So high were they, indeed, that though the sky was above us, where we were dense gloom—not darkness, indeed, but the gloom of a room closely shuttered in the daytime. Up on either side rose the great straight cliffs, grim and forbidding, till the eye grew dizzy with trying to measure their sheer height. A little space of sky that marked where they parted lay like a thread of blue upon a sea of scorching blackness, which was unrelieved by any tree or creeper. Here and there, however, grew ghostly patches of a long gray lichen, hanging motionless to the rock, as the white board to the chain of a dead man. It

seemed as though only the dogs or heavier part of the light had sunk to the bottom of this awful place. No bright winged sunbeam could fall so low; they died far, far above our heads.

By the river's edge was a little shore formed of round fragments of rock washed by the constant action of water, and giving the place the appearance of being strewn with thousands of fossil cannon balls. Evidently when the water of the underground river is high there is no beach at all, or very little, between the border of the stream and the precipitous cliffs; but now there was a space of seven or eight yards. And here, on this beach, we determined to land, in order to rest ourselves a little after all that we had gone through, and to stretch our limbs. It was a dreadful place, but it would give an hour's respite from the terrors of the river, and also allow of our repacking and arranging the canoe. Accordingly we selected what looked like a favorable spot, and with some little difficulty managed to beach the canoe and scramble out on to the round, impenetrable pebbles.

"My word," called out Good, who was on shore the first, "what an awful place it's enough to give one a fit." And he laughed.

Instantly a thundering voice took up his words, magnifying them a hundred times. "Give one a fit—hot hot hot!" "A fit—hot hot hot!" answered another voice, in wild accents, from far up the cliff. "A fit a fit a fit," chimed in voices after voices, each flinging the word to and fro with shouts of awful laughter to the invisible lips of the other till the whole place echoed with the words and with shrieks of fiendish merriment, which at last ceased as suddenly as they had begun.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" yelled Alphonse, startled quite out of such self command as he possessed.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" the Titanic echoes thundered, shrieked and wailed in every conceivable tone.

"Ah," said Umslopogias, calmly, "I clearly perceive that devils live here. Well, the place looks like it."

I tried to explain to him that the cause of all the hubbub was a very remarkable and interesting echo, but he would not believe it.

"Ah," he said, "I know an echo when I hear one. There was one lived opposite my kraml in Zululand, and the Intombes (maiden) "used to talk with it. But if what you hear is a full grown echo, mine at home can only have been a baby. No, no—they are devils up there. But I don't think much of them, though," he added, taking a pinch of snuff.

"They can copy what one says, but they don't seem to be able to talk on their own account, and they dare not show their faces," and he relapsed into silence, and apparently paid no further attention to such contemptible flimsies.

After this we found it necessary to keep our conversation down to a whisper—for it was utterly unbearable to have every word one uttered tossed to and fro like a tennis ball, as precipice called to precipice.

But even our whispers ran up the rocks in mysterious murmurs, till at last they died away in the drawn sighs of the wind, which was delightful and romantic things, but we had more than enough of them in that dreadful gulf.

As soon as we had settled ourselves a little on the round stones we proceeded to wash and dress our burms as well as we could. As we had but a little oil for the lantern we could not spare any for this purpose, so we skinned one of the swans and used the fat of its breast, which proved an excellent substitute. Then we repacked the canoe and finally began to take some food, of which I need scarcely say we were in need, for our insensibility had endured for many hours, and it was, as our wretched selves showed, middly. Accordingly we sat ourselves in a circle, and warsoon engaged in discussing our food most with such eagerness as we could muster, which in my case at this rate was not much, as I felt sick and faint after my sufferings of the previous night, and had besides a reeking headache. It was a curious meal. The gloom was so intense that we could scarcely see the way to our food and convey it to our mouths. Still we got on pretty well, although the meat was tainted by the heat through which it had passed, till I happened to look behind me—my attention being attracted by a noise of something crawling over the stones—and perceived sitting upon a rock in my immediate rear a huge species of black fresh water crab, only it was five times the size of any crab I ever saw. This hideous and loathsome looking animal had projecting eyes that seemed to glare at one, very long and flexible antennae, or feelers, and gigantic claws. Nor was I especially favored with its company. From every quarter dozens of these horrid brutes were creeping up, drawn, I suppose, by the smell of the food from between the round stones and out of the holes in the precipice. Some were so near, and some so close, that I stared, quite fascinated by the unusual sight, and as I did so I saw one of the beasts stretch out its huge claw and give the unsuspecting Good such a nip that he jumped up with a howl and set the "wild echoes flying" in sober earnest. Just then, too, another, a very large one, got hold of Alphonse's leg, and declining to part with it, and as may be imagined, a considerable commotion ensued. Umslopogias took his ax and cracked the shell of one with the flat of it, whereon it set up a horrid sort of screaming which the echoes multiplied a thousand fold, and began to foam at the mouth, a proceeding that drew hundreds more of its friends out of unsuspected holes and corners. These all set to work, and in a few minutes the air was hurt, full upon it like creditors on a bankrupt, and literally rent it limb from limb with their huge pincers, and devoured it, using their claws to convey the fragments to their mouths. Seizing whatever weapons were handy, such as stones or paddles, we commenced a war upon the monsters, whose numbers were increasing by leaps and bounds, and whose strength was overpowering. So fast as we cracked their armor others seized the injured ones and devoured them, foaming at the mouth, and screaming as they did so. Nor did the brutes stop at that. When they could they nipped hold of us—and awful nips they were—or tried to steal the meat. One enormous fellow got hold of the swan we had skinned, and began to drag it off. Instantly a score of others flung themselves upon the prey, and then began a ghastly and disgusting scene. How the monsters foamed and screamed, and rent the flesh and each other! It was a sickening and unnatural sight, and one that will haunt all who saw it till their dying day—emulated as it was in the deep, oppressive gloom, and set to the unceasing music of the many toned, nerve shacking echoes. Strange as it may seem to say so, there was something so shockingly human about these fiendish creatures—it was as though all the most evil passions and desires of man had got into the shell of a magnified crab and gone mad. They were so dreadfully voracious and intelligent, and they looked as if they understood. The whole scene might have furnished material for another canto of Dante's "Inferno," as Curtis said.

"I say, you fellows, let's get out of this, or we shall all go off our heads," said Good; and we were not slow to take the hint. Pushing the canoe around which the animals were now crawling by hundreds and making vain attempts to climb, off the rocks, we bundled into it and got out into midstream, leaving behind us the fragments of our meal, and the

screeching, foaming, stinking mass of monsters in full possession of the grounds.

"These are the devils of the place," said Umslopogias, with the air of one who has solved a problem; and, upon my word, I felt almost inclined to agree with him.

Umslopogias' remarks were like his ax—very much to the point.

"What's to be done next?" said Sir Henry, blankly.

"Drift, I suppose," I answered, and we drifted accordingly. All the afternoon and well into the evening we floated on in the gloom beneath the far off line of blue sky, scarcely knowing when day ended and night began; for down in that vast gulf the difference was not marked, till at length Good pointed out the stars, but all we saw, which, having nothing better to do, we observed with great interest. Suddenly it vanished, the darkness became intense, and a familiar murmuring sound filled the air.

"Underground again," I said, with a groan, holding up the lamp. Yes, there was no doubt about it. I could just make out the roof. The channel had come to an end and the tunnel had recommenced. And then began another long, long night of danger and horror. To describe all its incidents would be too wearisome; so I will simply say that about midnight we struck on a flat projecting rock in midstream, and were as nearly as possible overturned, and went upon the uneven tenor of our way. And so the hours passed until it was nearly 3 o'clock. Sir Henry, Good and Alphonse were asleep, utterly worn out. Umslopogias was at the bow with the pole, and I was steering when I perceived that the rate at which we were traveling had perceptibly increased. Then, suddenly, I heard Umslopogias make an exclamation, and a next second came a sound as of parting branches, and I became aware that the canoe was being forced through hanging bushes or creepers. Another minute and a breath of sweet open air fanned my face, and I felt that we had emerged from the tunnel and were floating upon clear water. I say felt, for I could see nothing, the darkness being absolutely pitchy, as it often is just before dawn. But even this could scarcely damp my joy. We were out of that dreadful river, and wherever we might have got to, this at least was something to be thankful for. And so I sat down and inhaled the sweet night air and waited for the dawn with such patience as I could command.

CHAPTER XI THE FROWNING CITY.

For an hour or more I sat writing (Umslopogias having meanwhile gone to sleep alone, till at length the east turned gray and huge misty shapes moved over the surface of the water like ghosts of long forgotten dawns. They were the vapors rising from their watery bed to greet the sun. Then the gray turned to primrose, and the primrose grew to red. Next, glorious bars of light sprang up across the eastern sky, and through them the radiant messengers of the dawn came speeding upon their arrowy way, scattering the ghostly vapors and awaking the mountains with a kiss, as they flew over range after range, and lit up the longitudes to longitude, and the golden gates were another moment, and the sun himself came forth as a brigadier from his chamber, with pomp and glory and a flashing of 10,000,000 spears, and embraced the night and covered her with brightness, and it was day.

But as yet I could see nothing save the beautiful blue sky above, for over the water could be seen a range of mist exactly as though the whole surface had been covered with billows of cotton wool. By degrees, however, the sun sucked up the mists, and then I saw the radiant messengers of the dawn came speeding upon their arrowy way, scattering the ghostly vapors and awaking the mountains with a kiss, as they flew over range after range, and lit up the longitudes to longitude, and the golden gates were another moment, and the sun himself came forth as a brigadier from his chamber, with pomp and glory and a flashing of 10,000,000 spears, and embraced the night and covered her with brightness, and it was day.

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verify with our own eyes, threw us into a considerable flutter. That the natives of this unknown lake should understand the art of sailing seemed to suggest that they possessed some degree of civilization. In a few more minutes it became evident that the occupant or occupants of the advancing boat had made our boat. For a moment or two we hung in the wind as though in doubt, and then came tacking toward us with great swiftness. In ten more minutes she was within a hundred yards, and we saw that she was a neat little boat—not a canoe "dugout," but built more or less in European fashion with planks, and carrying a singularly large sail for her size. But our attention was soon diverted from the boat to the crew, which consisted of a man and woman nearly as white as ourselves.

We stared at each other in amazement, thinking that we must be mistaken; but no, there was no doubt about it. They were not white, but the two people in the boat were decidedly of a white as distinguished from a black race—as white, for instance, as Spaniards or Italians. It was a patent fact. So it was true, after all; and, mysteriously led by a Power beyond our own, we had discovered this wonderful people. I could have shouted for joy when I thought of the glory and the wonder of the thing; and as it was, we all shook hands and congratulated each other on the unexpected success of our wild search. All my life had I dreamed of a white race, the civilized in the highlands of the interior of this vast continent, and longed to put them to the proof, and now here I saw it with my own eyes and was dumfounded. Truly, as Sir Henry said, the old Roman was right when he wrote: "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi," which he tells me means that out of Africa there always comes some new thing.

The man in the boat was of a good but not particularly fine physique, and had straight, black hair, regular aquiline features, and an intelligent face. He was dressed in a brown cloth garment, something like a flannel shirt without the sleeves, and in an unmistakable kilt of the same material. The legs and feet were bare. Round the right arm and left leg he wore thick rings of yellow metal that I judged to be of gold. The woman had a sweet face, wild and shy, with large eyes and curling brown hair. Her dress was made of the same material as the man's, and consisted, as we afterwards discovered, first of a linen under garment that hung down to her knee, and then of a single long strip of cloth, about four feet wide by fifteen long, which was wound round the body in graceful folds and finally flung over the left shoulder so that the end, which was dyed blue or purple or some other color, according to the social standing of the wearer, hung down in front, the right arm and breast being, however, left quite bare. A more becoming dress, especially when, as in the present case, the wearer was young and pretty, is quite impossible to conceive. Good, who has an eye for such things, was greatly struck with it, and so indeed was I. It was so simple and yet so effective.

Meanwhile, if we had been astonished at the appearance of the man and woman, it was clear that they were far more astonished at us. As for the man, he appeared to be both a good and a bad fellow, and for a while looked round our canoe, but would not approach. At last, however, he came within halting distance, and called to us in a language that sounded soft and pleasing enough, but of which we could not understand one word. So we hailed back in English, French, Latin, Greek, German, Zulu, Dutch, Spanish, Kikuyuana, and a few other native dialects that I am acquainted with, but our visitor did not understand any of them; indeed, they appeared to bewilder him. As for the lady, she was busily employed in taking stock of us, and Good was returning the compliment by staring at her hard through his eyeglass, a proceeding that she seemed rather to enjoy than otherwise. At length the man, being unable to make anything out of us, suddenly headed his boat round and began to head off for the shore, his little boat skimming away before the wind like a swallow. As she passed across our bows, the man turned to attend to the large sail, and Good promptly took the opportunity to kiss his mistress on the cheek. I was horrified at this proceeding, but on general grounds and because I feared that she might take offense, but to my delight she did not, for, first glancing round and seeing that her husband, or brother, or whoever it was, was engaged, she promptly kissed her back.

"Ah!" said I, "it seems that we have at least found a language that the people of this country understand."

"In which case," said Sir Henry, "Good will prove an invaluable interpreter."

I frowned, for I do not approve of Good's frivolities, and he knows it, and I turned the conversation to more serious subjects. "It is very clear to me," I said, "that the man will be before long with a boat full of fellows, so that we had best make up our minds as to how we are going to receive them."

"The question is, how will they receive us?" said Sir Henry.

As for Good, he made no remark, but began to extract a small square tin case that had accompanied us in all our wanderings from under a pile of baggage. Now, we had often recommented with Good about this tin case, inasmuch as it had been an awkward thing to carry, and he had never given any very explicit account as to its contents; but he had insisted on keeping it, saying mysteriously that it might come in very useful one day.

"What on earth are you going to do, Good?" asked Sir Henry.

"Don't worry, of course; you don't expect me to appear in a new country in these things, do you?" and he pointed to his soiled and worn garments, which were, however, like all Good's things, very tidy, and with every tear neatly mended.

We said no more, but watched his proceedings with breathless interest. His first step was to get Alphonse, who was thoroughly competent in such matters, to trim his hair and beard in the most approved fashion. I think that if he had had some hot water and a cake of soap at hand he would have shaved off the latter, but he had not. This done, he suggested that we should lower the sail of the canoe and take to the beach, which we did, greatly to the horror and astonishment of Alphonse, who lifted his hands and ejaculated that these English were indeed a wonderful people. Umslopogias, who, though he was, like most high bred Zulus, scrupulously cleanly in his person, did not see the fun of swimming about in a kilt, also regarded the proceeding with mild amusement. We got back into the canoe much refreshed by the cold water and sat to dry in the sun, while Good undid his tin box and produced first a beautiful clean white shirt, just as it had left a London steam laundry, and then some garments wrapped first in brown, then in white, and finally in silver paper. We watched this unfolding with the tenderest interest and much speculation. One by one Good removed the dull husks that held their splendors, carefully folding and replacing each piece of paper as he did so; and there at last lay, in all the majesty of its gold epaulettes, lace and buttons, a commander of the royal navy's full dress uniform—dress sword, cocked hat, shiny patent leather boots and all. We literally gasped.

"What?" we said, "what! Are you going to put those things on?"

"Certainly," he answered, composedly; "you see so much depends upon a first impression, especially," he added, "as I observe that there are ladies about. One at least of us ought to be decently dressed."

We said no more; we were simply dumfounded, especially when we considered the contents of that box for all these months. Only one suggestion did we make, namely, that he should wear his small shirt next his skin. He replied that he feared it would spoil the set of his coat, now carefully spread in the sun to take the creases out, but finally (To be continued.)

A Remarkable Growth.
The many friends of Messrs. Montgomery Ward & Co., formerly at 237 and 239 Wabash Av., Chicago, will be glad to know that the rapid growth of their business has forced them to remove from Wabash Ave. to 111, 113, 115 and 117 Michigan Ave., where they have purchased a magnificent building, the seven floors of which they will occupy exclusively. These seven floors are each 100 by 165 feet, aggregating nearly 120,000 square feet (about 3 acres) of floor surface. The new quarters will enable them to handle their large business to the better advantage of their thousands of customers. Fifteen years ago Messrs. Montgomery Ward & Co. occupied but one room and that only 25 by 40 feet. The enormous growth of their business during fifteen years can only be explained by the fact that they sell direct to consumers, supplying all their wants, and never misrepresent any article. The success of this house proves the old saying, that "Honesty is the best policy," and from from this policy they never deviate. The Fall catalogue issued by Messrs. Montgomery Ward & Co. ought to be in every family.

—Catherine Junker died in Galveston, Tex., Aug. 13, aged 87.

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