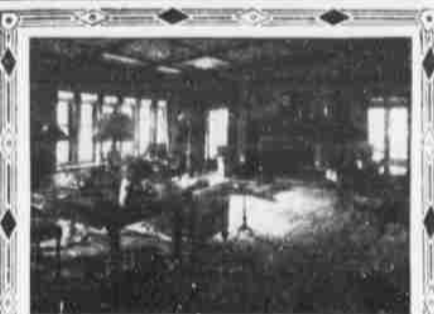




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"Well, I worked everything out, down to the last axe and the last sack of meal, and within the week I had a letter to tell me my offer was accepted and I could get to work as quick as I liked. Now can you imagine anything safer or more conservative than that? Can you, now?"

The younger of the Young Men with Capital coughed judicially. "Your estimate, of course, had to be done carefully."

"It was right down to the last dot," said Mr. Carey. "I was great at figures in these days. I used to put down twenty pounds owing to me and twenty pounds I'd got, and think it made forty pounds. Yes, the figures were all right."

"Then I don't see what was wrong," said the young man.

Mr. Carey smiled and continued:

"I told one of two fellows what I was up to," he said, "and I let 'em know, too, my opinion of wood-cutting contractors who'd send in a figure without looking at things themselves. I noticed at the time that they seemed to listen to me very earnestly, and then a kind of soft and holy look would come into their eyes and they'd agree with me that for shrewdness and sound business sense it was me first and Cecil Rhodes a bad second. They'd call up other chaps to hear it and praise me and they'd stand me drinks and listen for an hour to me gassing and blowing about Rhodesia only needing a few keen intelligent men to make it into a thriving country. Even then I could n't understand the expression of calm joy with which they heard me. When I did understand it, afterward, I'd have left Africa, if I could, rather than face them again."

"I GOT my niggers on the way and trekked them down to the mine, going easy and taking a week to the journey. We made a camp close to the stream, up by the woods, and some fellows from the mine came out to look me up. Word had got down from Salisbury ahead of me, and these, too, had that same happy peaceful way of looking at me when they'd led the talk round to my business methods and all that rot. You can't give a fool too much chance to be a fool, I suppose."

"I set my eighty niggers to work right away. My idea was, they should all cut and stack wood for a week; then we'd float the lot down; then cut again; and so on. Now, just think for a minute what kind of a faithful ape the Mashonaland Kafir is. Here were these eighty ornaments of mine, born and raised in the country, with money owing to them. They must have seen what my plan was and just where it would n't work; and not one of them had the originality to open his mouth, and tell me. No; I said 'cut' and in they whooped and cut like blazes and stacked the wood on the bank of the stream, and ate their grub like sharks and gave me bright obedient grins whenever they saw me. The piles grew and grew; I was eager to get hold of a first payment from the mine manager and I speeded them up, and they took and made that wood vanish by the acre and the piles on the bank grew."

"Was there some question of water-right involved?" inquired the elder of the Young Men with Capital.

"Not a single question," replied Mr. Carey, emphatically. "If there had been, eighty big niggers and me with my gun could have answered it; but it was worse than that."

"Well, the day came for floating the stuff down. Six o'clock in the morning was my hour for turning to, and the fellows from the mine, the battery manager and the bookkeeper and two others, turned up at five to see the fun. They'd brought out some champagne with them, to give a splice to breakfast, they said, and they were acting as if they'd already had some for supper. Giggling and trying to be solemn, you know; I could n't

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