

Allan Quatermain

By H. RIDER HAGGARD.

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SHE," "JESSE," "THE WITCH'S DEAN," ETC.

quite young. When he got opposite to us he halted, put down the basket and struck the spike of his spear into the ground, so that it stood upright.

"Let us talk," he said. "The first messenger we sent to you could not talk; and he pointed to the head which lay upon the paving of the steep—a ghastly sight in the moonlight; but I have words to speak if ye have ears to hear. Also I bring presents, and he pointed to the basket and laughed with an air of swaggering insolence that is perfectly indescribable, and yet which one could not but admire, seeing that he was surrounded by enemies.

man, and we would see," and again he turned to go, still laughing. "Thou shalt stand against me man to man, be not afraid," replied Umslopoggas, still in the same ominous voice. "Thou shalt stand face to face with Umslopoggas, of the blood of Chuka, of the people of the Amazulu, a captain in the regiment of the Nkomabakosi, as many have done before, and bow thyself to Inkosi-kanas, as many have done before. Ay, laugh on, laugh on! to-morrow night shall the jackals laugh as they crunch thy ribs."



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"I am the 'Lygonani' (war captain) of a part of the Masai of the Guasa Amboni. I and my men followed these three white men, and he pointed to Sir Henry, Good, and myself, but they were too clever for us, and escaped hither. We have a quarrel with them, as I am going to kill them.

"Are you, my friend," said I to myself. "In following these men this morning caught two black men, one black woman, a white donkey, and a white girl. One of the black men we killed—there is his head upon the pavement; the other ran away. The black woman, the little white girl, and the white ass we took and brought with us. In proof thereof have I brought this basket that ye carried. Is it not thy daughter's basket?"

Mr. Mackenzie nodded, and the warrior went on.

"Good! With thee and thy daughter we have no quarrel, nor do we wish to harm thee, save to see to thee, which we have already gathered, 240 head—a beast for every man's father."

Here Mr. Mackenzie gave a groan, as he greatly valued this herd of cattle, which he bred with much care and trouble. "So, save for the cattle, thou mayest go free; more especially," he added, frankly, glancing at the wall, "as this place would be a difficult one to take. But as to these men it is otherwise; we have followed them for eight days, and must kill them. Were we to return to our kraal without having done so, all the girls would make a mock of us. So, however troublesome it may be, they must die.

"Now, I have a proposition for thee. We would not harm the little girl; she is too fair to harm, and has besides, a brave spirit. Give us one of these three men—a life for a life—and we will let her go and throw in the black woman with her also. This is a fair offer, white man. We ask but for one, not for three; we must take another opportunity to kill the other two. I do not even pick my man, though I should prefer the big one," pointing to Sir Henry; "he looks strong, and would die more slowly."

"And if I say I will not yield the man?" said Mr. Mackenzie. "Nay, say not so, white man," answered the Masai, "for then thy daughter dies at dawn, and the woman with her says thou hast no other child. Were she older I would take her for a servant; but as she is so young I will slay her with my own hand—ay, with this very spear. Thou canst come and see an' thou wilt. I give thee a safe conduct," and the fiend laughed aloud at his brutal jest.

Meanwhile I had been thinking rapidly, as one does in emergencies, and had come to the conclusion that I would exchange myself against Flossie. I scarcely like to mention the matter for fear it should be misunderstood. Pray do not let any one be misled into thinking that there was anything heroic about this, or any such nonsense. It was merely a matter of common sense and common justice. My life was an old and worthless one, hers was young and valuable. Her death would pretty well kill her father and mother also, while nobody would be much the worse for mine; indeed, several charitable institutions would have cause to rejoice thereat. It was indirectly through me that the dear little girl was in her present position. Lastly, a man was better fitted to meet death in such a peculiarly awful form than a sweet young girl. Not, however, that I meant to let these gentry torture me to death—I am far too much of a coward to allow that, being naturally a timid man; my plan was to see the girl safely exchanged, and then to shoot myself, trusting that the Almighty would take the peculiar circumstances of the case into consideration and pardon the act. All this and more went through my mind in very few seconds.

"All right, Mackenzie," I said, "you can tell the man that I will exchange myself against Flossie, only I stipulate that she shall be safely in this house before they kill me." "Eh!" said Sir Henry and Good, simultaneously. "That you don't."

"No, no," said Mr. Mackenzie, "I will have no man's blood upon my hands. If it please God that my daughter die this awful death, his will be done. You are a brave man" (which I am not, by any means) "and a noble man, Quatermain, but you shall not go." "If nothing else turns up I shall go," I said, decidedly.

"This is an important matter," said Mackenzie, addressing the Lygonani, "and we must think it over. You shall have our answer at dawn." "Very well, white man," answered the savage, indifferently. "Only remember, if thy answer is late thy little white girl will never grow into a flower, that is all, for I shall cut it with this," and he touched the spear. "I should have thought that thou wouldst play a trick and attack us at night, but I know from the woman with the girl that your men are down at the coast, and that thou hast but twenty men here. It is not wise, white man," he added with a laugh, "to keep so small a garrison for your 'boma' (kraal). Well, good night, and good night to you also, other white men, whose eyelids I shall soon close one and for all. At dawn thou wilt bring me word. If not, remember it shall be as I have said." Then turning to Umslopoggas, who had all the while been standing behind him, and shepherding him, as it were, "Open the door for me, fellow, quick now."

This was too much for the old chief's patience. For the last ten minutes his lips had been, figuratively speaking, positively watering over the Masai Lygonani, and this he could not stand. Flushing his long hand on the Elmorani's shoulder, he gripped him and gave him such a twist as brought his face to face with himself. Then, thrusting his fierce countenance to within a few inches of the Masai's evil, feather-framed features, he said, in a low, growling voice: "Seest thou me?" "Ay, fellow, I see thee."

"And seest thou this?" and he held Inkosi-kanas before his eyes. "Ay, fellow, I see the toy; what of it?" "Thou Masai dog, thou boasting windbag, thou capturer of little girls, with this 'toy' will I hew thee limb from limb. Well for thee that thou art a herald, or even now would I throw thy members about the grass." The Masai shook his great spear and laughed long and loud as he answered, "I would that thou stoodst against me man to

stone wall, and were now to be seen—men, women and countless children—huddled up together in little groups, and all talking at once in a wondrously low, awfuless Masai manner and customs, and of the fate that they had to expect if those bloodthirsty savages succeeded in getting over the stone wall.

Immediately after we had settled upon the outline of our plan of action as suggested by Umslopoggas, Mr. Mackenzie sent for four sharp boys of from 15 to 25 years of age, and dispatched them to various points whence they could keep a lookout upon the kraal camp, with orders to report from time to time what was going on. Other lads, and even women, were stationed at intervals along the wall, in order to guard against the possibility of surprise.

After this the twenty men who formed his whole available fighting force were summoned by our host into the square formed by the house, and there, standing by the hearth of the great conifer, he earnestly addressed them and our four Askari.

"Men," said Mr. Mackenzie, after he had put all the circumstances of the case fully and clearly before them, and explained to them the proposed plan of our forlorn hope—"men, for years I have been a good friend to you, protecting you, teaching you, guarding you and yours from harm, and ye have responded with me. Ye have seen my child—the Waterily, as ye call her—grow year by year, from tender infancy to tender childhood, and from childhood on toward maidenhood. She has been your children's playmate, she has loved to tend you when sick, and ye have loved her."

"We have," said a deep voice, "and we will die to save her." "I thank you from my heart—I thank you. Sure am I that now, in this hour of darkest trouble, now that her young life is like to be cut off by cruel and savage men—who of a truth 'know not what they do'—ye will strive your best to save her, and to save me and her mother from broken hearts. Think, too, of your own wives and children. If she dies, her death will be followed by an attack upon her home, and the best of you will be slain, your houses and gardens will be destroyed and your goods and cattle swept away. I am, as ye well know, a man of peace. Never in all these years have I lifted my hand to shed man's blood; but now I say strike, strike, in the name of God, who bade us protect our lives and homes. Swear to me that while a man of you remains alive ye will strive your utmost with me and with these brave white men to save the child from a bloody and a cruel death."

"Say no more, my father," said the same deep voice, that belonged to a stalwart elder of the mission; "we swear to you, and our dear dead, the death of dogs, and our bones be thrown to the jackals and the kites, if we break the oath! It is a fearful thing to do, my father, so few to strike at so many, yet will we do it or die in the doing. We swear!" "Ay, thus say we all," chimed in the others. "Thus say we all," said Mr. Mackenzie. "Ye are true men, and I have needs to lean on. And now we will begin our preparations in good earnest."

The men who were to form each little party were carefully selected, and still more carefully and minutely instructed as to what was to be done. After much consideration it was agreed that the ten men led by Good, who had the most ready supply of arms, were not to carry firearms; that is, with the exception of Good himself, who had a revolver as well as a short sword—the Masai "sime" which I had taken from the body of our poor servant who was murdered in the canoe. We feared that if they had firearms the result of three cross fires carried out at once would be that some of our own people would be shot; and it appeared to all of us that the work they had to do would best be carried out with cold steel—especially to Umslopoggas, who was, indeed, a great advocate of cold steel. We had with us four Winchester repeating rifles, besides half a dozen Martini. I armed myself with one of the repeating rifles; an excellent one, though for his kind of work, the great rapidity of fire is desirable, and fitted with ordinary flap sights, instead of the usual cumbersome sliding mechanism which they generally have. Mr. Mackenzie took another, and the two remaining ones were given to two of his men, who understood the use of them and were noted shots. The Martini and some rifles of Mr. Mackenzie's were served out to the other natives who were to form the two parties whose duty it was to be open fire from separate sides of the kraal on the sleeping Masai, and who were fortunately all more or less accustomed to the use of a gun.

As for Umslopoggas, we know how he was armed; and it may be remembered that he, Sir Henry, and the strongest of the Askari were to hold the thorn stopped entrance to the kraal against the anticipated rush of men striving to escape. Of course, for such a purpose as this guns were useless. Therefore Sir Henry and the Askari proceeded to arm themselves in like fashion. It happened that Mackenzie had in his little store a selection of the very best steel English made hammer backed ax heads. Sir Henry selected one of these, weighing about two and a half pounds and very broad in the blade, and the Askari took another a size smaller. After Umslopoggas had put an extra edge on these two ax heads, we fixed them to three feet six inches of which Mr. Mackenzie fortunately had some in stock, made of a light but exceedingly tough native wood, something like English ash, only more springy. When two suitable helms had been selected with great care, and the end of the belt notched to prevent the hand from slipping, the ax heads were fixed on them as firmly as possible, and the weapons immersed in a bucket of water for half an hour. The result of this was to swell the wood in the socket in such a fashion that nothing short of burning would get it out again. When this important matter had been attended to by Umslopoggas, I went into my room and proceeded to open a little deal case, which had not been undone since we left England, and which contained—what do you think?—nothing more or less than four mail shirts.

It seems almost laughable to talk of steel shirts in these days of bullets, against which they are, of course, quite useless; but where one has to do with savages, armed with cutting weapons such as spears or battle axes, they afford the most valuable protection, being, if well made, quiet invulnerable to them. I have often thought that if only the English government had in our savage wars, and more especially in the Zulu war, thought fit to serve out light steel shirts, there would be many a man alive today who, as it is, is dead and forgotten.

To return to the present occasion we blessed our foresight in bringing these shirts, and also our good luck in that they had not been stolen by our rascally bearers when they ran away with our goods. As Curtis had two, and, after considerable deliberation, had made up his mind to wear his combination one himself—the extra three or four pounds weight being a matter of no account to so strong a man, and the protection afforded to the thighs being a very important matter to an individual not armed with a shield of any kind—I suggested that he should lend the other to Umslopoggas, who was to share the danger and the glory of his post. He readily

consented, and called the Zulu, who came bearing Sir Henry's ax, which he had now fixed up to his satisfaction, with him. When we showed him the steel shirt, and explained to him that we wanted him to wear it, he at first declined, saying that he had fought in his own skin for thirty years, and that he was not going to begin now to fight in an iron one. Thereupon I took a heavy spear, and spreading the shirt upon the floor, drove the spear down upon it with all my strength, the weapon rebounding without leaving a mark upon the tempered steel. This exhibition half convinced him; and when I pointed out to him how necessary it was that he should not let any old fashioned prejudices he might possess stand in the way of a precaution which might preserve a valuable life at a time when men were scarce, and also that if he wore this shirt he might dispense with a shield, and so have both hands free, he yielded at once, and proceeded to invest his great frame with the "iron skin." And indeed, although made for Sir Henry, it fitted the great Zulu like a skin. The two men were almost of a height; and though Curtis looked the bigger man, I am inclined to think that the difference was more imaginary than real, the fact being that, although he was plumper and rounder, he was not really bigger, except in the arm. Umslopoggas had, comparatively speaking, thin arms, but they were as strong as wire ropes. At any rate, when they both stood, ax in hand, invested in the brown mail, which clung to their mighty forms like a web garment, showing the swell of every muscle and the curve of every line, they formed a pair that any ten men might shrink from meeting.

It was now nearly 11 o'clock in the morning, and the spies reported that, after having drunk the blood of the oxen and eaten enormous quantities of meat, the Masai were going to sleep round their watch fires, but that sentries had been posted at each opening of the kraal. Flossie, they added, was sitting not far from the wall in the center of the western side of the kraal, and by her were the nurse and the white donkey, which was tethered to her. Her foot was bound with a rope, and warriors were lying about all round her.

As there was absolutely nothing further that could be done then we all took some supper and went to lie down for a couple of hours.

The bed whereon I lay was near an open window that looked out to the veranda, through which came an extraordinary sound of groaning and weeping. For a time I could not make out what it was, but at last I got up, and putting my head out of the window stared about. Presently I saw a dim figure kneeling on the end of the veranda and beating his breast in which I recognized Alphonse. Not being able to understand his French talk, or what on earth he was at, I called to him and asked him what he was doing.

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"It is well," went on Mr. Mackenzie. "Ye are true men, and I have needs to lean on. And now we will begin our preparations in good earnest."

The men who were to form each little party were carefully selected, and still more carefully and minutely instructed as to what was to be done. After much consideration it was agreed that the ten men led by Good, who had the most ready supply of arms, were not to carry firearms; that is, with the exception of Good himself, who had a revolver as well as a short sword—the Masai "sime" which I had taken from the body of our poor servant who was murdered in the canoe. We feared that if they had firearms the result of three cross fires carried out at once would be that some of our own people would be shot; and it appeared to all of us that the work they had to do would best be carried out with cold steel—especially to Umslopoggas, who was, indeed, a great advocate of cold steel. We had with us four Winchester repeating rifles, besides half a dozen Martini. I armed myself with one of the repeating rifles; an excellent one, though for his kind of work, the great rapidity of fire is desirable, and fitted with ordinary flap sights, instead of the usual cumbersome sliding mechanism which they generally have. Mr. Mackenzie took another, and the two remaining ones were given to two of his men, who understood the use of them and were noted shots. The Martini and some rifles of Mr. Mackenzie's were served out to the other natives who were to form the two parties whose duty it was to be open fire from separate sides of the kraal on the sleeping Masai, and who were fortunately all more or less accustomed to the use of a gun.

As for Umslopoggas, we know how he was armed; and it may be remembered that he, Sir Henry, and the strongest of the Askari were to hold the thorn stopped entrance to the kraal against the anticipated rush of men striving to escape. Of course, for such a purpose as this guns were useless. Therefore Sir Henry and the Askari proceeded to arm themselves in like fashion. It happened that Mackenzie had in his little store a selection of the very best steel English made hammer backed ax heads. Sir Henry selected one of these, weighing about two and a half pounds and very broad in the blade, and the Askari took another a size smaller. After Umslopoggas had put an extra edge on these two ax heads, we fixed them to three feet six inches of which Mr. Mackenzie fortunately had some in stock, made of a light but exceedingly tough native wood, something like English ash, only more springy. When two suitable helms had been selected with great care, and the end of the belt notched to prevent the hand from slipping, the ax heads were fixed on them as firmly as possible, and the weapons immersed in a bucket of water for half an hour. The result of this was to swell the wood in the socket in such a fashion that nothing short of burning would get it out again. When this important matter had been attended to by Umslopoggas, I went into my room and proceeded to open a little deal case, which had not been undone since we left England, and which contained—what do you think?—nothing more or less than four mail shirts.

It seems almost laughable to talk of steel shirts in these days of bullets, against which they are, of course, quite useless; but where one has to do with savages, armed with cutting weapons such as spears or battle axes, they afford the most valuable protection, being, if well made, quiet invulnerable to them. I have often thought that if only the English government had in our savage wars, and more especially in the Zulu war, thought fit to serve out light steel shirts, there would be many a man alive today who, as it is, is dead and forgotten.

To return to the present occasion we blessed our foresight in bringing these shirts, and also our good luck in that they had not been stolen by our rascally bearers when they ran away with our goods. As Curtis had two, and, after considerable deliberation, had made up his mind to wear his combination one himself—the extra three or four pounds weight being a matter of no account to so strong a man, and the protection afforded to the thighs being a very important matter to an individual not armed with a shield of any kind—I suggested that he should lend the other to Umslopoggas, who was to share the danger and the glory of his post. He readily

consented, and called the Zulu, who came bearing Sir Henry's ax, which he had now fixed up to his satisfaction, with him. When we showed him the steel shirt, and explained to him that we wanted him to wear it, he at first declined, saying that he had fought in his own skin for thirty years, and that he was not going to begin now to fight in an iron one. Thereupon I took a heavy spear, and spreading the shirt upon the floor, drove the spear down upon it with all my strength, the weapon rebounding without leaving a mark upon the tempered steel. This exhibition half convinced him; and when I pointed out to him how necessary it was that he should not let any old fashioned prejudices he might possess stand in the way of a precaution which might preserve a valuable life at a time when men were scarce, and also that if he wore this shirt he might dispense with a shield, and so have both hands free, he yielded at once, and proceeded to invest his great frame with the "iron skin." And indeed, although made for Sir Henry, it fitted the great Zulu like a skin. The two men were almost of a height; and though Curtis looked the bigger man, I am inclined to think that the difference was more imaginary than real, the fact being that, although he was plumper and rounder, he was not really bigger, except in the arm. Umslopoggas had, comparatively speaking, thin arms, but they were as strong as wire ropes. At any rate, when they both stood, ax in hand, invested in the brown mail, which clung to their mighty forms like a web garment, showing the swell of every muscle and the curve of every line, they formed a pair that any ten men might shrink from meeting.

It was now nearly 11 o'clock in the morning, and the spies reported that, after having drunk the blood of the oxen and eaten enormous quantities of meat, the Masai were going to sleep round their watch fires, but that sentries had been posted at each opening of the kraal. Flossie, they added, was sitting not far from the wall in the center of the western side of the kraal, and by her were the nurse and the white donkey, which was tethered to her. Her foot was bound with a rope, and warriors were lying about all round her.

As there was absolutely nothing further that could be done then we all took some supper and went to lie down for a couple of hours.

The bed whereon I lay was near an open window that looked out to the veranda, through which came an extraordinary sound of groaning and weeping. For a time I could not make out what it was, but at last I got up, and putting my head out of the window stared about. Presently I saw a dim figure kneeling on the end of the veranda and beating his breast in which I recognized Alphonse. Not being able to understand his French talk, or what on earth he was at, I called to him and asked him what he was doing.

quietly indeed, but at a good pace; after that we crept forward as silently as a leopard on his prey, gliding like ghosts from bush to bush and stone to stone. When I had gone a little way I glanced to look behind me, and saw the redoubtable Alphonse staggering along with white face and trembling knees, and his rifle, which was at full cock, pointed directly at the small of my back. Having halted, and carefully put the rifle at "safety," we started again, and all went well till we were within 100 yards or so of the kraal, when his teeth began to chatter in the most aggressive way.

(To be continued.)

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