

KING Solomon's Mines.

BY H. RIDER HAGGARD.

It was a momentary sight to see him seated there, his left hand on his side, his right hand on his breast, with but one crown for company, and notwithstanding his emaciated and misdeared, a pang of compassion shot through me as I saw him thus "fallen from his high estate." Not a soldier of all his armies, not a courier out of the hundreds who had cringed round him, not even a solitary wife, remained to share his fate or to share the bitterness of his fall. Poor savage! he was learning the lesson that fate teaches to most who live long enough, that the eyes of mankind are blind to the discredited, and that he who is defenseless and fallen finds few friends and little mercy. Nor, indeed, in this case did he deserve any. Flinging through the kraal gate we marched straight across the open space to where the evening sat. When within about fifty yards the regiment was halted, and accompanied only by a small guard we advanced toward him, Gagool reviling us bitterly as we came. As we drew near, Twala, for the first time, lifted up his plumed head, and fixed his one eye, which seemed to flash with suppressed fury almost as brightly as the great diadem bound round his forehead, upon his successful rival—Ignosi.

"Hail, oh, king!" he said, with bitter mockery; "thou who hast eaten of my bread, and now by the aid of the white man's magic hast seduced my regiments and defeated mine army, hail! what fate hast thou for me, oh, king?"

"The fate thou gavest to my father, whose throne thou hast sat on these many years?" was the stern answer.

"It is well. I will show thee how to die, that thou mayest remember it against thine own time. See, the sun sinks in blood," and he pointed with his red battle-axe toward the fiery orb now going down; "it is well that my son should sink with it. And now, oh, king! I am ready to die, but I crave the boon of the Kukuana royal house, to die fighting. Thou shalt not refuse it, or else those cowards who led to-day will hold thee shamed."

"It is granted. Choose with whom thou wilt fight? Myself I cannot fight thee, for the king fights not except in war."

Twala's somber eye ran up and down our ranks, and I felt, as for a moment it rested on myself, that the position had developed a new horror. What if he chose to begin by fighting me? What chance should I have against a desperate savage six feet high, and broad in proportion? I fought as well as I could, but I made up my mind to decline the combat, even if I were booted out of Kukuana as a consequence. It is, I think, better to be booted than to be quartered with a battle-axe.

Presently he spoke.

"Incumbent, what sayest thou, shall we encamp here to-day, or shall I call thee coward, white—even to the liver?"

"Nay," interposed Ignosi; "thou shalt not fight with Incumbent."

"Not if he is afraid," said Twala.

It was a mighty struggle and an awful thing to see.



Twala's head seemed to spring from his shoulders.

and came rolling and bounding along the ground toward Ignosi, stopping just at his feet. For a second the corpse stood upright, the blood spouting in fountains from the severed arteries; then with a dull crash it fell to the earth, and the gold torque from the neck went rolling away across the pavement. As it did so Sir Henry, overpowered by faintness and loss of blood, fell heavily across it.

In a second he was lifted up, and eager hands were pouring water on his face. Another minute, and the great gray eyes opened wide.

He was not dead.

Then I, just as the sun sank, stepping to where Twala's head lay in the dust, unloosed the diadem from the dead brow, and handed it to Ignosi.

"Take it," I said, "lawful King of the Kukuanas."

Ignosi bound the diadem upon his brow, and then advancing placed his foot upon the broad chest of his headless foe and broke out into a chant, or rather a psalm of victory, so beautiful, and yet so utterly savage, that I despair of being able to give an adequate idea of it. I once heard a scholar with a fine voice read aloud from a Greek poet called Homer, and I remember that the sound of the rolling lines seemed to make my blood stand still. Ignosi's chant, uttered as it was in a language as beautiful and sonorous as the old Greek, produced exactly the same effect on me, although I was exhausted with toil and various emotions.

"Now," he began, "now is our rebellion swallowed up in a victory, and our evil-doing justified by strength."

"In the morning the oppressors rose up and shook themselves; they bound on their plumes and made them ready for war. They rose up and grasped their spears; the soldiers called to their captains, 'Come, lead us'—and the captains cried to the king, 'Direct thou the battle.' They rose up in their pride, twenty thousand men, and yet a twenty thousand. Their plumes covered the earth as the plumes of a bird cover her nest; they shook their spears and shouted, yea, they hurled their spears in the sunlight; they lustred for the battle and were glad. They came up against me; their strong ones came running swiftly to crush me; they cried, 'Ha! ha! he is one already dead.' Then breathed I on them, and my breath was as the breath of a storm, and lo! they were not. My lightnings pierced them; I licked up their strength with the lightning of my spears; I shook them to the earth with the thunder of my shouting. They broke—they scattered—they were gone as the mists of the morning. They are food for the crows and the foxes, and the place of battle is fat with their blood. Where are the mighty ones who rose up in the morning? where are the proud ones who tossed their plumes and cried, 'He is as one already dead?' They bow their heads, but not in sleep; they are stretched out, but not in sleep. They are forgotten; they have gone into the blackness, and shall not return; yea, others shall lead away their wives, and their children shall remember them no more. And I—I the king—like an eagle have I found my prey. Behold! far have I wandered in the night-time, yet have I returned to my little ones at the day-break. Creep ye under the shadow of my wings, oh people, and I will comfort ye, and ye shall not be dismayed. Now is the good time, the time for spoil. Mine are the cattle in the valleys, and the virgins in the kraals are mine also. The winter is overpast, the summer is at hand. Now shall evil cover up her face, and prosperity shall bloom in the land like a lily. Rejoice, rejoice, my people! let all the land rejoice in that the tyranny is trodden down, and that I am the king. He paused, and out of the gathering gloom there came back the deep reply: 'Thou art the king.' Thus it was that my prophecy to the herald came true, and within the forty-eight hours Twala's headless corpse was stiffening at Twala's gate.

CHAPTER XV. GOOD FALLS SICK.

head was aching violently from the blow I had received in the morning, when I was knocked senseless.

Somehow, with the assistance of the beautiful Foulata, who, since we had been the means of saving her life, had constituted herself our handmaiden, and especially Good's, we managed to get off the chain shirt, which had certainly saved the lives of two of us that day, when we found that the flesh underneath was terribly bruised, for though the steel links had prevented the weapons from entering, they had not prevented them from bruising. Both Sir Henry and Good were a mass of bruises, and I was by no means free. As a remedy Foulata brought us some pounded green leaves, with an aromatic odor, which, when applied as a plaster, gave us considerable relief. But though the bruises were painful, they did not give us such an anxiety as Sir Henry's and Good's wounds. Good had a hole right through the fleshy part of his "beautiful white leg," from which he had lost a great deal of blood; and Sir Henry had a deep cut over the jaw, inflicted by Twala's battle-axe. Luckily Good was a very decent surgeon, and as soon as his small box of medicine was forthcoming, he, having thoroughly cleansed the wounds, managed to stitch up first Sir Henry's and then his own pretty satisfactorily, considering the primitive light given by the primitive Kukuana lamp in the hut. Afterward he plentifully smeared the wounds with some antiseptic ointment, of which there was a pot in the little box, and we covered them with the remains of a pocket-handkerchief which we possessed.

Meanwhile Foulata had prepared us some strong broth, for we were too weary to eat. This we swallowed, and then threw ourselves down on the piles of magnificent karosses, or fur-rugs, which were scattered about the dead king's hut. By a very strange instance of the irony of fate, it was on Twala's own couch and wrapped in Twala's own particular kaross, that Sir Henry, the man who had slain him, slept that night.

About eight o'clock next morning we had a visit from Infados, who seemed but little the worse—though old warrior that he was—for his exertions on the previous day, though he informed us he had been up all night. He was delighted to see us, though much grieved at Good's condition, and shook hands cordially; but I noticed that he addressed Sir Henry with a kind of reverence, as though he were something more than man; and indeed, as we afterward found out, the great Englishman was looked upon throughout Kukuana as a supernatural being. No man, the soldiers said, could have fought as he fought, or could, at the end of a day of such toil and bloodshed, have slain Twala, who, in addition to being the king, was supposed to be the strongest warrior in Kukuana, in single combat, sheering through his bull neck at a stroke. Indeed, that stroke became proverbial in Kukuana, and any extraordinary blow or feat of strength was thenceforth known as "Incumbent's blow."

Infados told us also that all Twala's regiments had submitted to Ignosi, and that like submissions were beginning to arrive from chiefs in the country. Twala's death at the hands of Sir Henry had put an end to all further chance of disturbance; for Serazza had been his only son, and there was no rival claimant left alive.

Afterward in the course of the morning, we had a visit from Ignosi, on whose brow the royal diadem was now bound. As I contemplated him advancing with kindly dignity, an observation made following his steps, I could not help recalling to my mind the tall Zulu who had presented himself to us at Durban some few months back, asking to be taken into our service, and reflected on the strange revolutions of the wheel of fortune.

"Hail, oh, king!" I said, rising.

"Yes, Macumazahn. King at last, by the grace of your three right hands," was the ready answer.

All was, he said, going on well; and he hoped to arrange a great feast in two weeks' time in order to show himself to the people.

I asked him what he had settled to do with Gagool.

"She is the evil genius of the land," he answered, "and I shall kill her, and all the witch-doctors with her! She has lived so long that none can remember when she was not old, and always she it is who has trained the witch-hunts and allowed the land evil in the sight of the heavens above."

"Yet she knows much," I replied; "it is easier to destroy knowledge, Ignosi, than to gather it."

"It is so," he said, thoughtfully. "She, and she only knows the secret of the Three Witches' yonder, whither the great road runs, where the kings are buried, and the silent ones sit."

"Yes, and the diamonds are. Don't forget your promise, Ignosi; you must lead us to the mines, even if you have to spare Gagool's life to show the way."

"I will not forget, Macumazahn, and I will think on what thou sayest."

After Ignosi's visit I went to see Good, and found him quite delirious. The fever from his wound seemed to have taken a firm hold of his system, and to be complicated by an internal injury. For four or five days he believed that had it not been for Foulata's indefatigable nursing he must have died.

Women are women, all the world over, whatever their color. Yet somehow it seemed curious to watch this dusky beauty bending night and day over the fevered man's couch, and performing all the merciful errands of the sick-room as swiftly, gently, and with as fine an instinct as a trained hospital nurse. For the first night or two I tried to help her, and so did Sir Henry as soon as his stiffness allowed him to move. He believed that had it not been for our interference with impatience, and finally insisted upon our leaving him to her, saying that our movements made him restless, which I think was true. Day and night she watched and tended him, giving him his only medicine, a native cooling

plaster, gave us considerable relief. But though the bruises were painful, they did not give us such an anxiety as Sir Henry's and Good's wounds. Good had a hole right through the fleshy part of his "beautiful white leg," from which he had lost a great deal of blood; and Sir Henry had a deep cut over the jaw, inflicted by Twala's battle-axe. Luckily Good was a very decent surgeon, and as soon as his small box of medicine was forthcoming, he, having thoroughly cleansed the wounds, managed to stitch up first Sir Henry's and then his own pretty satisfactorily, considering the primitive light given by the primitive Kukuana lamp in the hut. Afterward he plentifully smeared the wounds with some antiseptic ointment, of which there was a pot in the little box, and we covered them with the remains of a pocket-handkerchief which we possessed.

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