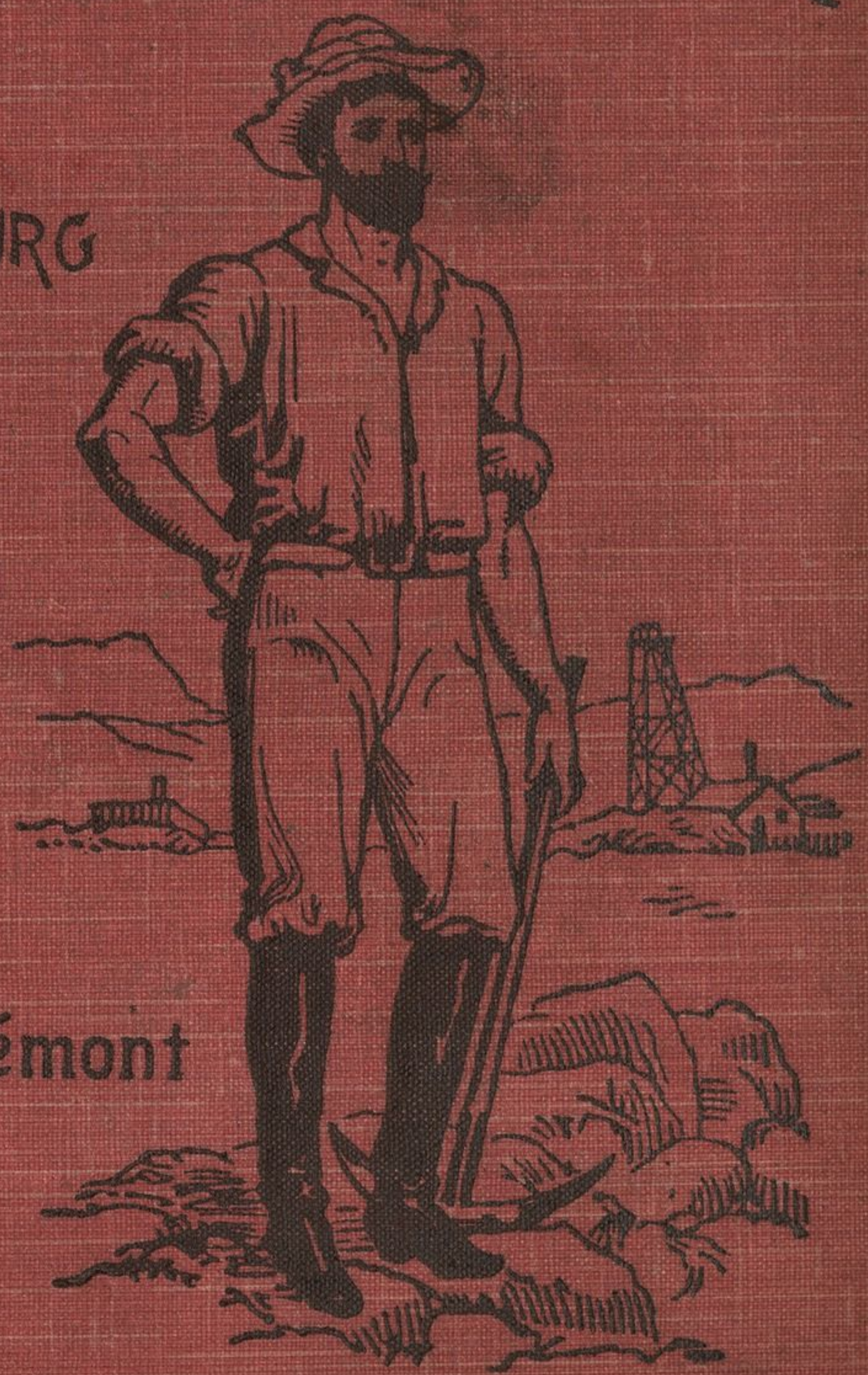
The Gentleman Digger

A Study of Johannesburg Life



By Anna Comtesse de Brémont

THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER

A FEW PRESS OPINIONS

OF THE FIRST EDITION OF

THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER.

MORNING POST—"A graphic, cleverly written story of South African life."

GLASGOW HERALD—"Decidedly smart, the production of a clever writer."

VANITY FAIR—"An interesting portrayal of life at the Cape."

FINANCIAL NEWS—"It is very fine and thrilling and impressive."

ACADEMY—"The Comtesse de Brémont presents us with a terribly realistic picture of life in Johannesburg during the raging of the gold fever."

REVIEW OF REVIEWS—"Considered apart from its merits as a story, which are by no means inconsiderable, this work possesses special value as being a vivid and accurate picture of life in the South African gold-fields in Johannesburg."

GRAPHIC—"The Comtesse de Brémont has the advantage of an unhackneyed subject, with which she has fortunately shown herself competent to deal in an interesting manner, and with a freedom from sentimentality which is promising for the future."

ATHENÆUM—"The Comtesse de Brémont has a facile pen. . . . . The story fulfils its purpose as a study of Johannesburg life during the famine, the crisis, and collapse of the share market. It is obviously truthfully drawn, and gives a lurid picture of the mingled sordidness and luxury of that remarkable example of a mushroom city."

DAILY TELEGRAPH—"Those who like a good story, pleasantly told, should read *The Gentleman Digger*. . . . . Readers who turn their attention to this volume will, apart from the interesting plot, gain much insight into the manners and customs of a land which is only just breaking into civilization as we understand it."

CITY PRESS (London)—"Such a story cannot but serve to greatly strengthen the hands of those who, in Parliament and elsewhere, are seeking by every means in their power to remove a stain that at the present moment mars the fair fame of Great Britain."

SPECTATOR (London)—"The characters are true to life, and the narration is continuous and spirited. The Comtesse de Brémont knows how to describe people and places, and there is local colouring."

ARGUS (Cape Town)—"Positively startling in the freedom with which the authoress has allowed herself to deal with well-known characters at the Rand. The portraits are sketched with so little disguise that we tremble to think how Johannesburgers will look into each other's eyes, and ask, 'Is it I?' . . . . The Comtesse de Brémont has a sprightly style, and the sketches in its pages are wonderfully vivid, and give a picture of life at the Rand which no sober narrative could convey."

JOHANNESBURG STANDARD—"The book will be seized on with avidity, doubtless for the reasons above stated, and because Crœsus—a well-known millionaire—journalists, brokers, the *jeunesse dorée*, and other individuals are offensively portrayed, not only with such impertinent detail as to make them easily recognisable, but with such spices of scandal and gossip that one-half of the world, which delights in reading anything that is 'down on' the other half, will purchase the book and read it with voracity. . . . . It is served up warm—very!"

COURT JOURNAL—"Smart and realistic to a degree, which induces us to advise the author to ride the Pegasus with a bearing-rein for the future, there can be no doubt as to the readability of *The Gentleman Digger*, by Anna, Comtesse de Brémont, in which are painted in vivid colours the wild life of Johannesburg and the African gold-fields at the time of the 'boom' in Rand mines. The book is virtually a graphic description of a sort of Bohemianism run wild, and both characters and incidents are often so strongly drawn as to be calculated to give the more sensitive class of readers something of a shock. 'Which his language is free' might be applied to many of the characters in this curious story, interesting in its way as a study of men and manners—or want of them."

THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER

BEING STUDIES
AND PICTURES OF
LIFE IN JOHANNESBURG

BY

ANNA, COMTESSE DE BRÉMONT

AUTHOR OF "SOUTH AFRICAN STORIES"
"A SON OF AFRICA"
"THE RAGGED EDGE"
"SONNETS AND LOVE POEMS
"THE WORLD OF MUSIC, ETC.

A NEW AND REVISED EDITION

LONDON
GREENING & CO., LTD
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née DUNPHIE

August 1899

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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY HUSBAND

LE COMTE EMILE LEON DE BRÉMONT

A HERO OF THE CRIMEA

A FRIEND OF SUFFERING HUMANITY

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FOURTH IMPRESSION

WITH A NEW PREFACE

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH says: "A book by an anonymous author always arouses a certain inquiry, and when the book is clever and original the interest becomes keen, and conjecture is rife, endowing the most unlikely people with authorship. . . . . It is very brilliant, very forcible, very sad. . . . . It is perfect in its way; in style clear, sharp, and forcible; the dialogue epigrammatic and sparkling. . . . . Enough has been said to show that *The Hypocrite* is a striking and powerful piece of work, and that its author has established his claim to be considered a writer of originality and brilliance."

JOHANNESBURG IN 1899. COMMISSIONER STREET.

JOHANNESBURG IN 1899. COMMISSIONER STREET.

PREFACE TO THE NEW EDITION

TEN years have elapsed since I wrote these studies of Johannesburg in the Transvaal.

The book has lived to reappear in this New Edition.

Why?

Because the book has grown in interest with its subject.

After ten years Ariadne's prayer has been answered.

England has awakened to the realisation of her duty towards Englishmen in the Transvaal.

Ten years have accomplished the fulfilment of Ariadne's prophecy of the future of Cecil Rhodes.

Ten years have beheld the storming by Crœsus of social and financial London—and witnessed the tragic end of his greatness.

Peace be to his ashes!

In ten years Johannesburg has emerged from the chrysalis of Darkness, Drought, Shanty-dom, Fever, and Mud.

To-day! Johannesburg is the Queen City of the Veld.

Palaces of marble, brick, and stone adorn her streets.

Electricity illumines her nights. Its splendour radiates from Mine to Mine along the great Reefs.

Villas and Gardens, Parks and Pleasure-grounds, revel in the beauty of perpetual light.

Roads of asphalt and stone welcome the tread of many feet.

The Railway, the Tram, the Motor-car have vanquished the Coach, the Bullock-waggon, and Cape-cart.

The reign of the Cycle brings the pleasures of travel to poor as well as rich.

The best of the Fourth Estate has been brought to bear on the enlightenment of the multitude.

The Wild Cat Promoter has vanished to the limbo of Justice.

The Gold output has leapt from ten-thousand to half-a-million ounces a month.

Last year's (1898) *value was* £16,240,630.

The present output amounts to nearly half-a-million ounces per month.

Ten years ago the value of output was £1,490,568; this year it exceeds £20,000,000 sterling.

The total value of the output of gold from the Transvaal up to the end of last year was £70,228,603.

All this Progress in one decade of the nineteenth Century!

Yet, Behold!

Johannesburg, the most amazing Miracle of Progress the world has ever seen.

Behold her! Boer-ridden! With the heaviest taxation in the world. A prey to the evils of Illicit Liquor traffic.

Behold! the men who have worked this miracle of progress.

Behold them: gagged with the muzzle of Uitlander.

Behold them: without Liberty of Franchise, without Liberty of Speech, without Liberty of Home, and without Liberty of Religion.

Johannesburg! Beautiful without: rotten within.

Shall Britain wait another decade to work out thy redemption?

ANNA DE BRÉMONT,
Née DUNPHIE.

LONDON, *August* 1899.

ORIGINAL PREFACE

In the process of civilisation there are many evils, some of which are necessary — others totally unnecessary. The greatest of these is the introduction of intoxicants among the savage nations whom the white man has conquered in his march of progress. It is an awful crime practised without compunction against the black humanity of Africa.

A crime crying out daily and hourly, in the wilderness and in the town, in the night and in the blessed sunshine, for vengeance on the unscrupulous men who, through the lust for gain, degrade and ruin the helpless native by the indiscriminate sale of alcoholic drink.

The incident, portrayed in this brief study, of the cruel murder of an Englishman by five drunken natives, and the details of the trial, are facts that can be verified by the principal Johannesburg evening paper.

ANNA DE BRÉMONT,
Née DUNPHIE.

JOHANNESBURG, 1890.

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER I

A Tap at the Window 1

CHAPTER II

How the Shareholders' Money Went . . 15

CHAPTER III

Poverty tries the Door—but Love locks Him out 33

CHAPTER IV

Ariadne's Vision 44

CHAPTER V

The Little Brown House in Doornfontein . 56

CHAPTER VI

The Price of a Single Flower 73

CHAPTER VII

The Millionaire's Dinner 81

CHAPTER VIII

The Last of the Boom 91

CHAPTER IX

A Typical Lady of the Bar 107

CHAPTER X

A Cry in the Night—the Vanquisher Vanquished 124

CHAPTER XI

One More Unfortunate 139

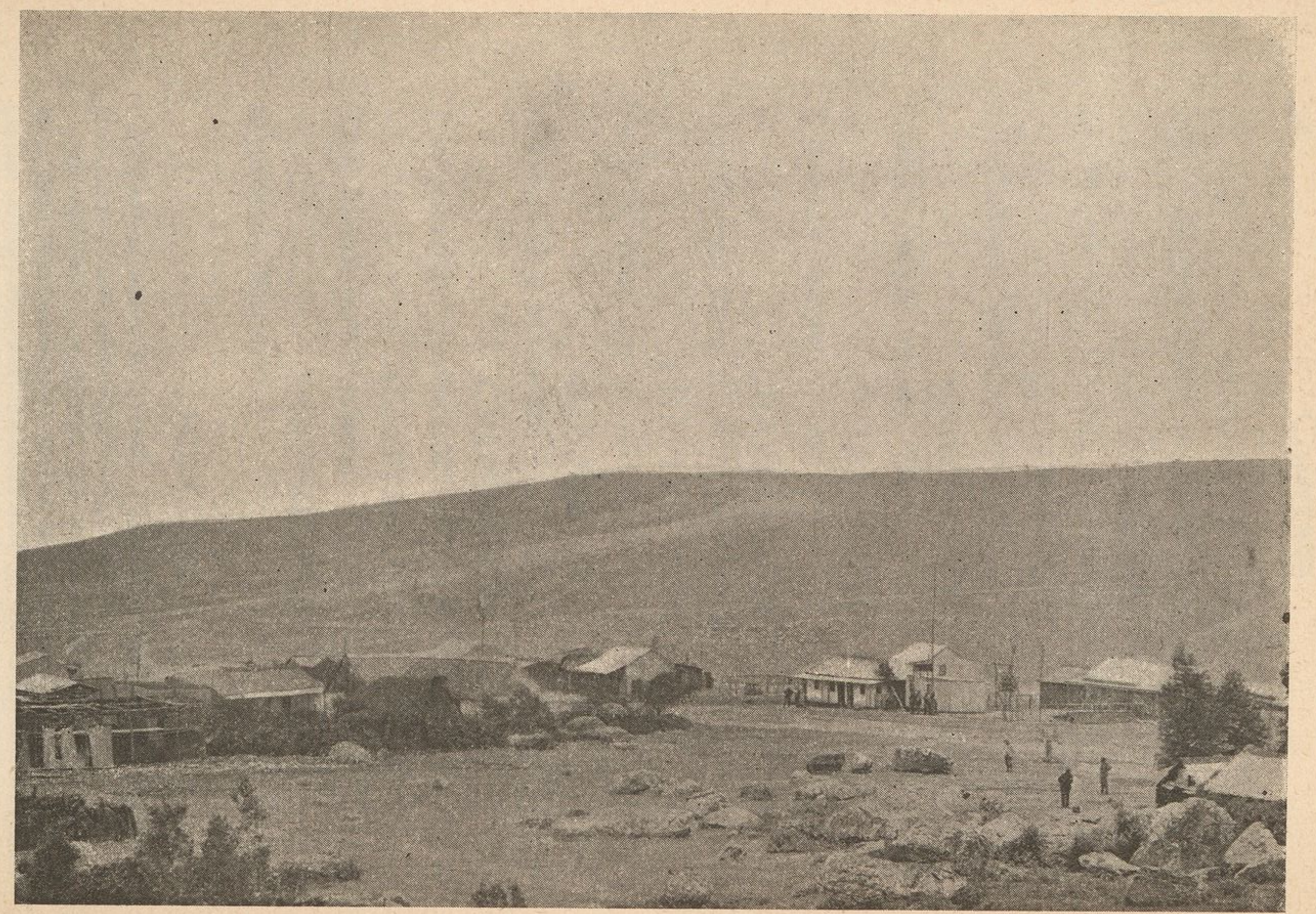
CHAPTER XII PAGE
THE "ARGUS" HOUSE-WARMING 150
CHAPTER XIII
EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO SPEAK HIS MIND . 159
CHAPTER XIV
A SATURDAY NIGHT'S DEBAUCH 181
CHAPTER XV
SUNDAY DOINGS ON THE REEF 197
CHAPTER XVI
A SUNDAY NIGHT'S CRIME 210
CHAPTER XVII
A MORNING RIDE TO WILLOW GROVE . . . 220
CHAPTER XVIII
CAPTAIN ACHILLES PLAYS THE ROLE OF IAGO . 234
CHAPTER XIX
A BIG LITTLE MANAGER 248
CHAPTER XX
THE ASSISTANT LANDDROST HOLDS COURT . . 256
CHAPTER XXI
KING FEVER THE AVENGER 277
CHAPTER XXII
HOMEWARD BOUND 288

SCENARIO

THE action covers six months passed in Johannesburg during the famine, crisis, and collapse of the share-market.

Only incidents peculiar to the life in the Rand have been described, through which is woven a love interest, the two actors being from their respective callings intimately connected with the life studies herein depicted.

LONDON, 1899.



THE BEGINNING OF JOHANNESBURG.

THE GENTLEMAN DIGGER

CHAPTER I

A TAP ON THE WINDOW

NEARLY six thousand feet above the level of the sea lies the vast veld of the Witwatersrand—a bare wind-swept plateau unbroken by mountains—bound by gently-rising hills or kopjes. No verdure save the karroo bush relieves these grey mounds of gigantic boulders outlined in rugged grandeur on the confines of the great plain.

Over all dips the edge of the horizon like a vast inverted basin of gorgeous blue and silver.

Very deep is the red hue of the sandy soil, the vital colour of the virgin gold sleeping beneath in the far depths of the wild barren land.

It was the magnet of this gold that drew to the bleak and trackless region the mighty band of diggers who have since blazoned to the world the glittering fame of the South African Gold Fields. Whereupon, as though conjured by the wand of a magician, appeared the wonderful city of Johannesburg. A city set like a dust-covered gem in the bosom of the great plateau.

Truly a city of Dust, Dogs, and Men. A city of startling incongruities. Dubbed by the pioneer diggers 'The Camp.' There amber 'Old Highland' whisky flowed, the staple drink. As plentiful—I was going to say as water—but purer and better than the limpid element could be found at that time in the Golden City.

The shadows of night were gathering adown the west. They threw into brilliant relief the silver disc of the new moon and her attendant star fast sinking in the wake of the setting sun.

A narrow band of pale golden light flickered for a brief spell in the shimmering after-glow. Suddenly it swept below the purple horizon, leaving behind a veil of darkness faintly tinged by the yellow light of the moon. The warm October evening grew chill and damp. A thousand crickets tuned their even-song. Lights gleamed like twinkling beacons, here

and there, from Kafir hut and digger's cottage on the mines along the reef.

A man rode leisurely over the road skirting the outer edge of the reef. He was enjoying the beauty of the sunset and the easy canter of his horse across the springing veld. The abrupt disappearance of the after-glow roused him from his reverie and to the fact that the evening was advancing. He had still a mile of veld to cross before he entered 'The Camp' to meet an engagement to dine at six.

A light touch of the whip sent the horse speeding along. Soon the bridge separating the young suburb of Jeppes-Town from Johannesburg was passed. There was still an open space of veld to cross. Through this he rode quickly, taking no heed of the many transport waggons obstructing the way. He took no note of the picturesque grouping of the bullocks outspanned on either side, their dark forms weirdly outlined against the light of the family fire. He saw not the fat Boer women and their Kafir servants preparing the sundown meal.

The lights behind the red-curtained windows of a canteen proclaimed that he had gained the entrance of Commissioner Street. A short distance ahead, on the opposite side of the

road, suddenly flared the lights of the Theatre Royal. The sight of these caused him to urge the horse anew. He realised that the hour of six was merging into seven.

The street before him was long and wide. The roadway extended from one side to the other. It was guiltless of side-walk or paving stones. A slow-going municipality had not yet provided this marvellous city with street lamps, drainage, or water.

Deep holes in the mud road caused the horse to stumble frequently. The lights of the New Rand Club pierced the darkness, and just saved horse and rider from many a dangerous rut. Some distance away the darkness was again relieved by the brilliant rays from some hotel lamp. Anon a friendly glow from a bar-room averted a collision with a Cape cart, whose cabby had neglected to light up.

The man reined in his horse at the end of the street before the stoop of a long, one-storied hotel. It occupied the upper left-hand corner, and commanded a view of the entire length of Commissioner Street.

A spacious verandah, commodiously fitted with cosy little tables, wicker chairs, and settees, surrounded the two sides of the building facing

the street. It was illumined by hanging lamps. The usual motley crowd of men who occupied the verandah had disappeared in the direction of the dining-hall. Even the bar, which communicated with the verandah by a broad door at one end, was deserted.

The man looked in every direction for a Kafir boy to take charge of the horse. He could see, through the open French windows of the dining-room, the dinner in full swing. Waiters, black and white, were scurrying to and fro. Corks were flying. Trays borne aloft, laden with steaming dishes. The long tables were packed with diners, laughing, talking, and gorging.

No chance of getting a waiter, stable-boy, or servant of any kind being evident, the man turned the horse towards the opposite side of the street. A covered passage, four or five feet wide, gave access to the more private buildings of the hotel.

These were called Percy Buildings. They were curiously constructed. Built in one story of corrugated iron, lined with planks of polished timber, the buildings formed a square. In the centre stood two rows of similar bungalows. The space between these formed an unpaved alley-way, eight feet wide. A narrow gutter

ran through the middle, and served to carry off the rain-water in the wet season.

The only entrance from the street to this labyrinthine alley-way being the passage already described, it was often a matter of perplexity to a new lodger how to find his way out. It was not an unusual thing for a belated visitor to lose himself at night, and wander round the bungalows a score of times, until chance or an obliging tenant showed him the passage to the street.

Another source of confusion was the similarity of the doors and windows. This, through the absence of lamps at night in the alley-way, occasioned ludicrous mistakes and strange encounters. It was a common occurrence for some festive young Johnnie, to use a colloquial term, returning from a drinking-bout, otherwise called smoking concert, to try every door until one was found to open beneath the key in his unsteady fingers. The *contretemps* arising from a mistake can be more easily imagined than described.

Curious and inconvenient these chambers. The sanitary arrangements on the most primitive scale. An utter lack of privacy prevailed, owing to the resounding properties of the wood-panelled walls. The occupant of one room

could hear his neighbour in the other cough, sneeze or snore, and dream! Here one was chilled in winter or baked in summer. Still people were content to pay a fabulous price for such accommodation.

The man rode boldly into the passage. It was customary for the occupants of the chambers, likewise visitors, to tether their horses in the alley-way. Consequently, the man rode straight in, trusting to the clatter of the animal's hoofs to warn foot passengers of his approach.

He turned to the right of the passage, and then to the left, cautiously guiding his horse to the end. From the window of the last bungalow shone a soft rosy glow. Reining up, he gave a tap on the window with his riding-whip.

The door was thrown open. A flood of light streamed across the footway. The horse started. The movement brought him before the door. It revealed the rider to the tall, white-robed woman standing on the threshold.

The man doffed his broad-brimmed digger's hat. The light fell on his smiling face and drooping golden moustache. He was handsome and manly enough to be the pride of any woman. So thought the woman standing in the doorway.

"Ah, Hector dear, at last you have come!"

Her tone was low and caressing. Her eyes shone with greeting. She stepped out and gently stroked the glossy neck of the horse.

"Yes, Ariadne, here I am. Sorry to have kept you waiting. There was not a sign of a Kafir over the way. So I rode in."

He gave the animal a pat. He caught in his the soft hand rubbing the horse. Drawing near, she drooped her head. Her cheek brushed the man's knee.

"Oh," she murmured, "I am so glad you are here. I have been so lonely."

The man laughed softly.

"Get down, dear, and come in. Jacobs will be here presently. He'll off-saddle the horse for you. He has been here twice with the *menu* for dinner."

A short man, with a good-natured face, appeared at the further end of the alley. Observing the horse before the door, he hurried forward, shuffling his big, clumsy velschoen in the sandy gravel.

Hector dismounted, and threw the rein to the servant.

"Take the horse to the stable. I want him put up for the night. Then come for the dinner order. Be quick about it."

The man led the horse away. The pair

entered the bungalow and closed the door. The alley was once more given over to darkness.

Within the room these two stood silent but happy. They gazed into each other's eyes. Her hands were folded on his breast. "One whole week! It has seemed an eternity. My love!" she said, slowly.

"Nay, Ariadne, it has not seemed so long as that. And if it did, is it not worth the waiting, these few hours when we shall be together, eh?"

He spoke in a half-teasing, tender tone. He kissed the fair head resting on his shoulder.

"I have often thought and dreamed," looking around the softly-lighted room, "of this little nest many a time through the week—I say, how charming it appears to-night—and also you, my bonnie bird!"

"I'm glad you are pleased with the room, dear," she said, ignoring her lover's pretty compliment. "I had a windfall this week in the unexpected sale of a story. I used every penny of the cheque in finishing the decorations of these rooms. Kathleen says I am awfully, *awfully* extravagant! Am I, dear?"

"Not a bit. But I am afraid I shall get into a row," he said, looking towards a door leading to the inner room, "if your sister hears me."

"Kathleen is not there. She has gone to St Mary's to assist at some school function —distribution of prizes, I believe. We are to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner for once. Now was it not good of her?"

"Oh yes! good old Kathleen."

"Hector, Hector!" She placed her hand over his mouth. "I will not permit frivolous slang—be warned."

"No? Beg pardon." He pressed the dear fingers to his lips. "May I be allowed to call you a barbarian?"

"Barbarian?" queried Ariadne, in surprise.

"Yes, a very fascinating barbarian," answered Hector, with a quizzical smile. "A charming barbarian, who turns her pretty room into a wigwam worthy of a Sioux princess."

"You big tease," said Ariadne, giving the golden moustache a gentle tug, "I'll forgive you for comparing my room to an ugly wigwam, if you will say that you admire the covering of those unsightly planked walls and ceiling."

"I like it immensely. You have made it

very artistic. The leopards adorning the four corners of the ceiling are stunning enough to shoot. What an original you are! I don't think one woman in a thousand would have the pluck to be such an original, eh?"

"Don't talk nonsense, Hector. Sit in this cosy chair—I bought that lion's skin for your use alone—while I get you a cigarette."

"Of what are you thinking?" said Ariadne. He was puffing away and staring abstractedly at the yellow eyes and black muzzle of a leopard!

"I was trying to 'kalculate,' as the Yankees say," said Hector, with a twinkle in his eye, "how many thousand words it took to buy all those karosses, rugs, and shields. You tell me that it's a guinea for——"

"Hector! you are really as unreasonable as Kathleen. I bought the whole lot, shields and all, from an old Swazie for a few pounds—I shall be vexed in a minute."

"There, there, little one," answered Hector, soothingly, "I am only teasing again. It's the prettiest room in the Rand. Those skins will come in very useful when we buy a waggon and bullocks, and go to Swazieland or Matabeleland on our wedding tour."

Ariadne hid her face on his breast. She did

not see how grave his face had grown. His voice was low and tender as he touched the coils of her shining hair.

One of the charms of this young Englishman was his voice. Every tone of it thrilled Ariadne, till she often wondered which she loved, the man or his voice. The indescribable tenderness of that voice now speaking of their marriage, swept her heart with a thrill almost painful in its joy.

After a time Ariadne talked softly of the projected wedding trip. He listened and gazed through the rings of smoke from his cigarette. The candles burned with mellow light in their sconces against the skins on the wall. They shone on the manuscript-strewn table. A bull-pup, hideous in the perfection of breed, lay beneath the table on a bed of tiger skins. The brute catching his eye, lazily arose to lick Hector's hand, and then returned as lazily to its dozing.

Hector's eyes roamed over the luxurious appointments of the room. It was resplendent with as many costly articles of furniture and draperies as the small space would admit. The air was redolent with the sweetness of a score of Indian bowls laden with violets of Pretoria. Ariadne had evidently neglected none of the

shops in her search for rare and beautiful things to embellish this pretty boudoir. Hector's gaze fell on the little round table opposite. Damask, sparkling silver, and tinted glasses, all looked exquisitely inviting in the glow of the silk-shaded candelabra.

His lips tightened as he contrasted that dainty table with the rough-and-ready service of his *ménage* at the mine. There metal cutlery took the place of silver, iron ware that of china. The unpainted deal board that of the shining damask. The only ornament thereon being the indispensable whisky bottle, and its attendant syphon of soda. There the yellow light of a smoky lamp spluttered and shone in lieu of the æsthetic glow of wax candles.

For the first time a pang of doubt smote Hector's heart. He realised how little he had to offer Ariadne in exchange for those pretty luxuries. It might be long before he could offer her that—little as it was. The week of absence had been one of difficulties and perplexities. And the future—it looked very dark.

"Bah!" he thought, "away with forebodings; I'll put the state of things to her squarely. I love her too much to be capable of deciding. She has grown into the very marrow of my heart. She shall decide. But if it should be—

God! it could not be. One way or another—she shall decide."

"Kiss me, Ariadne," he cried aloud.

She did not know the bitterness underlying that kiss.

CHAPTER II

HOW THE SHAREHOLDERS' MONEY WENT

A KNOCK at the door announced the return of Jacobs, who entered the room bearing a silver dish laden with fruit. He placed it on the table. Then with an air of deference presented the *menu* to Hector.

Jacobs was a waif drifted to the goldfields, how and when no man could tell. He could not have told himself had he been asked. Once there he found that a white man could not possibly work with the Kafir diggers. Too illiterate to obtain employment as a clerk, and too weak to work as farm labourer or driver, the poor wretch soon found himself on the verge of starvation. One day he tried to earn a shilling by holding the horse as Ariadne alighted at the Bank. On coming out to remount, she found the poor fellow in a faint. The exertion had been too much for him. With a woman's ready sympathy, Ariadne sent the unfortunate man to the Nurses' Home. After a week's illness he came to thank her for the kindness which had

saved his life. Touched by the gratitude he expressed, she engaged him as her special servant. She paid him well, and raised him from the slough of despair to the heaven of content.

"There you are," said Hector, handing the servant the *menu*, on which he had marked with a pencil the dishes desired.

"Thank you, sir," said Jacobs. He scurried away on his mission to the kitchens in the main building across the street.

Ariadne resumed her place on a low seat beside her lover. She rolled another cigarette, and slipped her hand in his. Meanwhile he smoked in silence.

Their hearts were full of that sweet sense of confidence and companionship which constitutes the truest and firmest bond between man and woman—the bond of intellectual sympathy. It elevates human impulse and mere passionate desire to the plane of spiritual enjoyment. The soul dominates the senses. Silence becomes more eloquent than words.

It is the invisible chain whereby a woman holds in perpetual thrall her lover or her husband. Without it the most alluring beauty sooner or later palls.

These reflections passed through Hector's

mind as he puffed silently. He knew the woman sitting contentedly at his feet, so assiduous of his comfort, even to the rolling of his cigarette, possessed an intellect that eclipsed the charm of her personality. She was one of those women who would convert a desert into a paradise for the man she loved.

"And now," he thought with something like a curse, "poverty, damnable, ghastly poverty, is the spectre that has arisen to drive her from my side. It is bad enough to suffer the pangs of being stoney broke. But the man who could expect the woman he loved to share poverty with him, is only fit to be——"

"Dearest, dearest, you are crushing my hand. Are you dreaming?"

"Have I been asleep, little one? did I hurt this poor hand? Let me kiss it."

"Ha! Here's the dinner at last!" he cried, opening the door for the servant, with a great show of alacrity, to effectually hide his emotion.

"Jacobs, you don't need to wire to announce your approach; your big velschoen shuffle loud enough to be heard at the 'Jumpers'."

"Yes, Master Hector," answered Jacobs, with a chuckle, as he placed the soup on the table, and proceeded to uncork the wine, "I know they do, but I had to hurry up, as I can't

get a blooming Kafir to help bring the dinner."

"That is unfortunate," observed Hector, as he served the soup.

"It will finish the velschoen, but don't let that trouble you. You shall have a new pair."

"Thank you, Master Hector. I hope you and madame will excuse my shortcomings."

"Certainly, Jacobs," said Hector, as the servant moved the empty soup plates. "But you should have said longcomings, my man. You have been a devilish long time serving the dinner."

"What has happened?" queried Ariadne. There was an unusual expression on the servant's face.

"Oh! everything, madame," answered Jacobs, glad to get a chance to talk of his grievance. "There is an awful row on in the kitchen. Jim, the head cook's two missisis—the young one, and the old one——"

"Jacobs, what are you saying?" exclaimed Ariadne with an air of severity, although she tried to suppress a smile.

"I beg your pardon, madame, and Master Hector, but Jim is a Kafir, you know," Jacobs explained as he served the fish. "Kafirs have more wives—I mean as many wives as they

please. His two missis got jealous. One's a Fingoe, the young missus—and came to have it out with Jim, and themselves, and the whole blooming lot of Kafirs working in the kitchen. The young Kafirs liked the fun, and kept it up between Jim and his missus until Mr Bryant, the manager, brought in the constables and gave the old missus in charge — they couldn't find the young one—because——"

The usually staid and impassive Jacobs burst into fits of laughter.

"Because the old missus—ha ha!—chucked —the young missus—ha ha!—into—a big bin of pickled pork—ha ha! The constables carried the old woman off. Jim looked everywhere for the young one—couldn't find her—but—ha ha!"

Here Jacobs went into paroxysms of laughter.

"When I was crossing the road just now, I nearly dropped tray and all, for what should I see right before me but a bin—ha ha!—on two black legs—ha ha!—running up Commissioner Street like mad—ha ha!"

Jacobs shuffled away to fetch the remainder of the courses. He took good care, however, to turn into the alley on the opposite side of the bungalows to have his laughter out.

"How very ridiculous!" said Ariadne, when

she had recovered from the effect of the servant's inimitable description. "Jacobs is really too comical. I have heard nothing so funny for a long time."

"He would make a capital clown. You had better recommend him to Frank Fillis."

"A good suggestion, dear; I shall bear it in mind. On second thoughts, I might recommend Jacobs to our popular actress. She prides herself on having only 'gentlemen actors' in her company."

"Nonsense; she would not refuse Jacobs, provided he proved to be a genius. You know, the man that built the theatre in which she performs is not ashamed to own that he was once a stevedore."

"Not now; that was when he was poor. When one is rich it makes all the difference in the world."

"You are right; it makes all the difference in the world."

"Why do you repeat my words so sadly? What troubles you?" said Ariadne tenderly, as she arose from her chair and put her arms round his neck.

"Nothing. Sit down, little one. I hear those velschoen of Jacob's flapping along the alley."

"Won't you tell me?"

"Not now, dear—not now."

Ariadne resumed her seat. The rest of the meal passed quickly. Jacobs removed the dishes, and arranged the salver of fruit in the centre of the table. With the instinct of an observing, faithful servant, he saw that his mistress was impatient to have him go. He hurriedly opened the champagne and filled the glasses.

"Place the wine on the table—also the coffee. I will serve it."

The servant obeyed. He fidgeted about the room, anxious for an opportunity to apologise to his mistress. He imagined he had offended her.

"You may go, Jacobs," said Ariadne, apparently ignoring his uneasiness. "You will not be needed again."

"Thank you, madame." Then he left the room, closing the door very softly. Outside he paused a moment.

"It's them beastly velschoen as has made all the trouble," he muttered. "I'll never wear the damned things again."

Taking off the obnoxious shoes, and tucking them under his arm, he sped down the dark alley in his naked feet.

"Poor Jacobs, he thinks I am angry with him."

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"I believe," said Hector, listening, "that he has taken off those velschoen."

"Very likely," answered Ariadne, with a smile. "He would take off his head if he thought it annoyed me to see it on his shoulders—poor grateful soul."

"Ha!" said Hector, with a sigh of satisfaction, after drinking his wine, "that's capital fiz! I say, this is not like famine, is it, little one? Let me fill your glass! Now drink to me, dearest and sweetest of women, drink to me!"

Lifting the glass of pale sparkling wine to her lips, Ariadne pressed a kiss on the rim, and held it to her lover.

"You drink first," she said gaily, "and then I'll know your thoughts."

"God pity me, little one," answered the man, with a sudden gravity. "I fear they would not make you happy."

Ariadne replaced the glass on the table. She looked steadily at him. Her face blanched as she saw his eyes cast down as though to avoid her gaze.

"Hector!" Her voice shook in spite of her efforts to steady it. "What do you mean—what has happened?"

"Everything has happened that should not."

He tried to speak lightly. He still avoided those violet eyes.

"Everything has gone wrong, the mine is in a fearful muddle, and——"

"Hector, look at me. Is it only the mine? Speak."

"My love! My precious little one!" cried Hector, excitedly. "You don't think *that* of me. You surely don't think I could be untrue to you—let my heart stray to another woman for one instant?"

"Oh, I am so glad!" sobbed Ariadne. "I am so glad it's only the mine—I thought——"

"You must not think about it any more, my darling, but drink your champagne like a sensible little woman, while I tell you how things stand."

"Thank God the ice is broken," thought Hector. He refilled the glass Ariadne in her agitation had spilled over the table. "It will be easier to tell her all now."

"As I was saying a few minutes ago—this does not look like famine," began Hector, helping Ariadne to some fruit. "You have no idea how difficult a matter it is to obtain food for our men at the mine. If the drought continues, we shall be obliged to half starve them. Work will be stopped. It will be necessary to aban-

don the batteries, unless water becomes plentiful very soon."

"Then the situation is indeed becoming serious?"

"It is indeed. I very much fear there is a bad look-out for Johannesburg. If the drought continues, there is a possibility of rioting among the natives employed in the various mines. Should they make a raid on the 'Camp' in search of food, a rough time would ensue."

Here Hector paused and frowned thoughtfully. Ariadne gave a little shiver; an icy wind seemed to chill the perfumed air of the cosy room.

"Don't let me alarm you, dearest," Hector exclaimed, affecting an easy, smiling manner he did not feel. "Fortune has beamed too long on the Rand to fear any real danger to its prosperity. An outbreak among the Kafirs could be easily subdued. For, after all, the poor devils are as easily managed as children, when not frenzied by drink. I am a duffer to frighten you in this manner.—Come, don't think of it. Eat your grapes; I'll not speak of it again."

"I am not frightened, Hector. Not one bit as far as a Kafir outbreak is concerned. But I

feel an indefinable foreboding of sorrow. I wish you would tell me the truth, at once. Don't spare me. I have stood face to face with trouble many a time since—since he died. I always make up my mind to expect the worst. Now tell me truthfully how things stand. What is your trouble?"

"Well," began Hector rather awkwardly, as it went against the grain—so to speak—to discuss his business with a woman, and this woman above all,—"Well—the fact of the matter is things connected with the mine are—unfortunately—not exactly as they should be. Money is needed to go on with. The pressure is getting too much for the pockets of the Syndicate. Shares are not selling as expected. Men are becoming chary of parting with funds just now. The confidence of speculators in Reef property has been terribly shaken. The revelations of the scandalous manner in which the shareholders' money has been squandered at the 'White Rose,' is doing all the harm."

"The 'White Rose'! Is that not a neighbour of yours?"

"Yes, it is near our property."

"And what is this scandal?"

"The story is not any too short for its own credit. It has been well ventilated by the

Planet this afternoon. I have a copy with me, and a nice tale it tells, I assure you. Mismanagement and trickery seem to have been running wild. Possessing the richest bit of ground on the Reef, the company has drifted into a virtual state of bankruptcy."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, it is true. The only way out of the difficulty was to secure additional capital at once. Those who furnished the money, very wisely stipulated that the direction of affairs should be placed in responsible hands. One of the most reliable and experienced men in the business was selected as director. The first steps he took to set things straight resulted in the discovery of a most deplorable state of affairs. To use strong language, the previous management turned out to be a damnable swindle."

"How very dreadful!"

"Let me read the account in the *Planet* to you, if it will not bore you?"

"Not at all; by all means let me hear it."

"It explains the whole nasty business better than I could tell it. By Jove! they don't spare them either," said Hector, taking a newspaper from his coat pocket. "I won't trouble you by reading the beginning, as I have already ex-

plained that. I'll go right to the account of the exposure. 'At the time when the company thus received its resuscitation,'" he began, "'only a few weeks ago, the battery was shut down, and the mine was in a parlous plight: the stamps, ten head of Hornsby's, had in fact been condemned as useless. The engine, a sixteen-horse power compound, by the same reputable makers, had been likewise thrown aside. The plates had been cleaned up by the Amalgamator, said to be the son of a distinguished professor of mineralogy in England—and presumably the battery was worth little or nothing beyond the shed that covered it. Mr ———, the new manager, a practical, not an ornamental man, quickly perceived, however, that the final clean-up must have been a very perfunctory sort of business, for he succeeded in getting 180 ozs. off the plates; that was not a bad haul to start with. It then occurred to the new management that it might be worth while to test the tailings in a Berdan pan; thirty tons were accordingly put through, with the astounding result that two hundred pounds of quicksilver amalgam, containing nearly 100 ozs. of gold, was taken from the bulk.'"

"It reads like a fairy tale," said Ariadne.

"It does. But the worst is to follow.—

Listen. 'The next thing which occurred to the mind of the new man was, that the battery ought to be near the mine instead of a mile or two away, and as it would be some time before the complete delivery of a new thirty head Sandy Croft, which had been ordered by the former management, it might be worth while to overhaul that with a view of ascertaining whether it was not in a serviceable condition. The firm of engineers appealed to —the same that were getting out the thirty stamps—ridiculed the suggestion, vowed that the repairs and removal would take a couple of months and cost fifteen hundred pounds, and that the battery would be worth nothing even when the work was done.'

"Mark *that*, Ariadne. The company of engineers repudiated the battery in toto. 'This,' continued Hector, 'was not the kind of situation to please such a man as the new director, for he saw plainly enough that if something was not done quickly, the new capital would be fooled and frittered away like the old, and by the time the thirty stamps were up—with an undeveloped mine — the company would be once again aground. So he rejected the advice of the mechanical engineers, and set to work with his own men, and in his own way,

with the result that the removal has been effected in less than five weeks' time, that a dam has been constructed, and the ten stamps are now pounding away right merrily, worked by one of the smartest and prettiest engines in the Rand—*and all for the expense of less than five hundred pounds.*' Now, what do you think of *that*, for a set of swindling engineers!" exclaimed Hector.

"Oh!" answered Ariadne, with a little laugh. "But they were caught nicely. I wonder how they liked losing the chance of making a cool thousand!"

"They were quite willing to let it slip, no doubt, sure as they were of a bigger profit on the thirty stamps and new machinery. They feathered their nests well between them, director and all. But I must have another glass of champagne. It makes my throat dry. You know I am not much of a reader."

"Indeed, you read very well.—Not any more, thank you, dear," said Ariadne, as Hector was about to refill her glass.

"And now for the last chapter of this extraordinary story," said Hector, as he resumed reading. "'Lying about the mine were a number of machinery cases, which the new director took to be the empty packages in

which probably the original ten stamps had come out. Examination, however, proved the fact that they were full, and that their contents were a fifteen stamp battery and a twenty-five horse-power tandem, both made by Hornsby. These, after being indented and paid for by the shareholders' money, had been rejected as worthless, without the packages being so much as opened; and, as already stated, a thirty-head mill and a fifty-horse power Marshall's compound engine had been ordered from Sandy Crofts. So far as any one knows to the contrary, these, the fifteen stamps and their engines, were as good as ever left makers' hands.'"

"Simply disgraceful!" ejaculated Ariadne.

"Worse, dear," said Hector, pausing for breath, "it was simply criminal. Now hear the summing-up of the editor on the whole vile fraud—he writes to the point. 'Anyway,'" he continued, "'the ten stamps are working to the entire satisfaction of the new directorate, and it is a sin and a shame, crying out for denunciation if not for practical vengeance upon those concerned, that not only the interests of shareholders, but the names and reputations of such houses as Hornsby's, should be at the mercy of managers and directors, who can only escape

the devil of hopeless incompetence by falling into the deep sea of infinitely worse. The sins of omission and commission that have been perpetrated at the 'White Rose' and its immediate vicinity are enough to make the angels weep.'

"How is that?" said Hector, looking over the edge of the page at Ariadne.

"Strong, very," she answered.

"Now for the gist of the matter," he exclaimed, as he resumed. "'It is clear that there is one cure, and one only, for the evils which are threatening to weigh the gold-mining industry down. *Companies must be so consolidated as to admit of economical working*, and of its being possible to employ really competent and qualified men. Exit the amateur engineer and the director who *directs* in order that he may draw the fees and have a better chance of gambling in stock—and the Witwatersrand will breathe again.'

"And that is the way," cried Hector, starting up as he flung the paper aside, "that the hundreds of unsuspecting shareholders' money goes! And we, *we*," he went on excitedly, as he strode the little room with springing step, "we suffer for it—*we*, the earnest, conscientious, hard-working diggers, we who have earned the

right to the name by years of experience, *we* must go under, we incur the opprobrium of distrust and suspicion, because a few mushroom directors and mine managers are foisted on the market by the unscrupulous so-called companies in London!

"It is such work as that recorded in this sheet of the printer's devil, that, sooner or later, will stop half the batteries, and shut down the mines. In the face of such exposures and dirty business, who could blame the shareholders for a withdrawal of their confidence? They are right. I would not put one damned shilling in a mine share myself if I heard such things. *Johannesburg is going to the dogs, as sure as the sun rises to-morrow.* This is the work that will do it. *We* don't want the moneyed speculator and his partner.

"If the honest men are left in peace to work for the ultimate good of all concerned, there is gold enough in the Transvaal for the whole of Britain!"

CHAPTER III

POVERTY TRIES THE DOOR—BUT LOVE LOCKS HIM OUT.

"Don't despair!" exclaimed Ariadne, as Hector sank into a chair. "Things cannot be as bad as you imagine. I am sure everything will turn out for the best."

"For the best—no, no, it's all up with me, the worst has come."

"The worst!" echoed Ariadne.

"Yes, I'm a ruined man, Ariadne—a ruined man. I've lost every penny I possessed in this world."

"Oh, Hector!"

"I don't regret the money. I am young enough and strong enough to make it all back again. But you—you," he faltered out hoarsely, "it will cost me you, my darling. It will be like tearing out my heart to do it—but I shall have to let you go!"

Ariadne made no reply. Surprise held her dumb. The news of Hector's ruin was trivial compared to the blow he dealt by acknow-

ledging his willingness to give her up. The shock aroused all Ariadne's pride. Her heart turned against the poor fellow blurting out his misery awkwardly, incoherently into her ear.

He was too much absorbed in his wretched anxiety to tell her all, and have it over with, to notice her coldness and silence. He had but a humble opinion of himself—this splendid, sturdy fellow, who could hold his own with any man. He trembled before this woman's frown, like an oak whose leaves rustle tumultuously beneath a passing summer storm.

He did not think that such a woman could or would make any sacrifice for him; the thought she loved him for his manliness, his generous, noble nature, never entered his head. There was no subtlety in his composition. He comprehended only the straightforwardness of action. He could risk his life in the depths of a mine—fight a refractory Zulu, or kill a lion; but he could no more analyse a woman's feelings than a baby. He did not comprehend the fierce pain in his heart. He took for regret what was in reality the struggle for mastery between his love and himself.

"Yes, little one, I must give you up. You will marry a better man than I am—and—" here he almost broke down—"one that is not

such a duffer as I have been, to squander his money away—and—lose his chance of marrying the sweetest woman on God's blessed earth. But I love you, Ariadne, as long as there is a breath of life in my body! And it will make me happy when I know that you—you belong rightfully to a man that can give you such pretty luxuries as these, that you are the wife of a good man who will cherish and protect you—my bright beautiful darling!"

Ariadne sat motionless at his feet. She gave no word or sign of what was passing in her mind. He looked sadly at the bowed head, and thought, with a sigh, how much more quietly she was taking things than he had expected. After all it was better so. Had he ever been worthy of her?—No!

"I have led a wild rough life since I came to South Africa," began Hector, looking at the drooping head, not daring to touch it. "Twelve years ago—I want to tell you about it, Ariadne, in order that you may be able to judge for yourself how unworthy I am. May I?"

She answered by a nod of assent.

"Thank you, little one. It is just twelve years; since then I have squandered two fortunes. I deserve to suffer for it now. One fortune I brought with me when I left England

a headstrong, reckless boy of twenty-one. I threw it away in two years of riotous living in the Cape. The other I made in ostrich-farming. In a few years I sent that the way of the first. I drank, I gambled, I plunged into every dissipation known to the wild set with which I associated. Every manner and kind of dissipation but one—woman—that is the only sin I escaped. I have never wronged a woman, not even a poor black one—that I solemnly swear to you."

For the first time since he had begun speaking, Ariadne moved and silently placed her hand in his.

"I don't want to make you think any better of me, dear," he said, pressing the cold little hand between his own. His voice trembled as he continued his story.

"It was through no virtue of mine. I simply couldn't, that is all. As for love! Well, years passed amid the rough scenes, the reckless life of an ostrich-farmer and gold-digger obliterated all trace of refinement. I abandoned the hope or desire for a woman's love. I felt too debased — living a life of debauchery, surrounded by half-savage Kafirs, with boon companions as bad if not worse than myself—to think of love.

"When I came to the camp three years ago, there were no women. But as time went on, things prospered, the booms began, the tent shanties disappeared, houses arose, like mushrooms almost in a night. With the gold that poured in, came women. Wives, sisters, and sweethearts of the newcomers. They made the camp gay with their afternoon teas, picnic junketings, and dances. But I held aloof. I was happier when boozing with the cricketers, or working among my Kafirs at the mine, until —until you came.

"I loved you the moment I saw your sweet smile—the moment I heard your voice. I did not care to know your past. I did not think of who or what you were. I only thought of the present. I was mad with the intoxication of loving you. At first marriage never occurred to me; or if it did, it was only to be thrust aside as a remote contingency. A humdrum method of securing you, when the fascinating edge of intimacy had dulled sufficiently to fit us for the sober routine of married life.

"I wronged you, dear. I humbly confess it. I might have wronged you more. Forgive me for acknowledging it—but I want you to know how really bad I am. I would have wronged you grievously had you been another woman,

for I misjudged you deeply. But, when I found that you were not the woman you seemed. A woman of the world as alluring as a siren. As heartless as you were fascinating, but that you had a heart of gold. A mind as fair as a pearl, and a life as clear as crystal, I resolved to marry you. If you would have me. I grew wild to make the money to buy the cage for my bonny bird, a cage where the glamour of luxury would hide the bars that fettered her.

"I grew wild, mad, and lost my head. I staked my last thousand pounds, and, God help me! lost it all, little one, all. With it I have lost you."

"Yes, Hector," faltered Ariadne, her voice broken by sobs; "but now," creeping into his arms, "you have found me anew."

"No, no," he muttered hoarsely, as he gently put her away from him, "I could never subject you to the privations of a digger's life. You to whom luxury and refinement is as essential as the air you breathe. This is the fitting nest for you," looking round the room. "Not the brown earthen walls and ant-heap floor of a mine-manager's hut!"

Ariadne's sobs had ceased. She realised he was in earnest. His very self-abnegation proved how strong and deep was the love he

bore her. She knew that mere sobs, tears, caresses would not shake his generous determination. The only way to break down his resolution was by the power of eloquence and persuasive reasoning.

"You forget that," she said in a low voice, pointing to the manuscript on the table. "With that I can help you!"

"Ah! God pity me! it's that which adds a pain to my regret. That gift which you possess needs fostering. My hopes of your future are too great to ruin them by binding you to a poor devil like me. There!" he cried, placing his hand over her lips as she was about to interrupt his words passionately, "I know what you would say. You are noble enough to make any sacrifice for me. But I shall not be the one to let you throw away your future, as I have done my fortune: never would I permit it!"

"There was a time when you spoke very differently."

"Yes, Ariadne, but that was, as I have just told you, before I understood you, before I loved you in the true sense of the word. Of what avail is a man's love to a woman, if it does not bring her good?

"That which some men call love, is not love.

It is supreme selfishness! Love is unselfish. Love is sensitive of the honour of its object. Love seeks to elevate, not drag down the woman. But you know all this as well, if not better than I do."

"Yes, I know all that you say is true," said Ariadne, looking at him sadly. "A man's love should bless the object of it with every good it is in his power to bestow. But, Hector, there are some things that money cannot buy. One is hope. Another is the content which begets happiness. Still another is the divine gift of inspiration. You speak of my talent. You say it needs fostering. You declare that you have hopes of a future for that talent. That you would rather die than destroy it. Oh, my love! do you not see that you are taking the most effectual means of crushing those very gifts—by—by depriving me of you?"

"God!" he cried brokenly, "help me to do right. Ariadne, don't say those things! Don't look at me with those reproachful eyes. Have pity, little one, for I am as weak as water in my love for you."

"Listen, Hector. The gifted women are the women who need the support of man's love far more than their less gifted sisters. You look surprised. You do not believe me! Then I

will try to explain. The women who possess brilliant talent, in fact, what is called genius of any kind, are naturally exposed to criticism, to admiration, to censure. Why? Because her exceptional talent isolates such a woman. Other women rarely understand her. The few who do, are not just to her. The poison of jealousy blinds them to all good in her. They tremble for the peace of brother, lover, or husband."

"Still," said Ariadne, after a pause, "there are women who trust. These are so few and far between, they are like the white milestones that mark a long and weary road. On the other hand, men are lavish in their admiration and goodwill. Of what benefit is their appreciation and good-fellowship, if it be the sort a pure woman spurns, or a shrewd one rejects as spurious? Men love to be amused and interested. A clever woman is a source of infinite diversion to them, be she singer, dancer, actress, painter, or writer. Men are honest in their praise, in the literal sense; of that there can be no doubt. Nevertheless, the majority would not care to see Maude the petted sister, Ethel the sweetheart, or the Missis suddenly developing into a genius. They would not care to hear them discourse learnedly on politics and art. Do anything above the average. Would they, dear?"

"I am afraid you are right, little one."

"You acknowledge it! Then you can understand the position of a clever woman thrown, without ballast or guide, like a captainless ship, upon the rough sea of Life, where every man is a pirate, and every woman's evil tongue a rock on which to wreck her. Hector, the only hope of the clever woman is the anchor of a husband's love. Her safest port a husband's fireside."

A mist gathered in Hector's eyes. His voice was husky with emotion as he said, "Dearest, do not weep. Every tear cuts me to the heart. Be merciful; teach me to be strong. You were not made to be the wife of a poor man. A beggarly digger."

"Hector! my life, my love is yours. I might have lived, content in my ambition, without love. Since I have known you I feel that is impossible. Come what may, I cannot live apart from you. My inspiration would be gone. My dreams of success over. My work. Oh! it is too late—too late to surrender love, and you."

All this and more Ariadne passionately pleaded. Hector felt his resolution vanquished by her words.

"Was the love of such a woman to be cast

aside?" he thought. "What if another should win the right to console her, to enjoy the sweetness of her companionship, the mad joy of loving her!"

The very thought set Hector's blood afire with jealousy. He yielded to the intoxicating thought of what the full possession of her love must be. Raising Ariadne's face he gazed into her eyes. The love shining therein thrilled and subdued him.

He kissed her hair, her brow, her lips, the proud curve of her soft warm throat as he whispered—

"It shall be as you wish, little one. You shall be a poor Digger's wife. God pity my weakness. It is too late to be strong now."

CHAPTER IV

ARIADNE'S VISION

THE little silver clock, in its nook above the book-shelves, had long since chimed the hour of midnight. The candles in their sconces were burned out. A heavy stillness hung over the room, oppressive with the strong odour of violets. The profound quiet was broken by the hurried scratching of the pen. Ariadne wrote rapidly, casting page after page into a satin-lined basket on the table beside her. The soft rays of the shaded lamp made a golden circle of light on the sheets. It faintly reflected her face, with its lines of deep thought.

The indefinable charm of expression that softened her face while her lover was beside her had disappeared. A mask had fallen over her beauty. A mask with compressed lip and meditative eye. It revealed the woman of vigorous mind. One on whom Fate had wantonly bestowed the form of a woman with the intellect and resolute will of the man. This combination is not usually attractive in woman.

It rendered Ariadne more fascinating, as she knew how to veil the masculine tenor of her mind under an assumption of feminine meekness. Men admire women of genius, but treasure them more as an *Edition de luxe.* They rarely regard them as convenient pocket editions of wife for the humdrum enjoyment of every-day life.

Wise women conceal wit and imagination beneath a cover of simplicity. They assume a desire for the flatteries which men find pleasure in bestowing, and ordinary women in receiving. It makes life more comfortable. Ariadne thought all this as she laid down her pen and neatly arranged the sheets of manuscript in the basket. Then she arose with a sigh of relief.

She gazed in tender reverie on the vacant chair by the table. A half-consumed cigarette lay beside it. She took up the weed and kissed it.

"Good-night, dear empty chair," she whispered, "you have held him in your arms—but I am not jealous; good-night!"

Taking up the lamp, she passed out, leaving the room to solitude and darkness.

The chamber she entered was curiously arranged,—the tent-like style of the adjoining

room being carried out in this. Skins covered the floor, likewise the walls and ceiling. Doors and windows were hung with draperies of amber-silk. The elegant modern dressing-table, the cheval-glass, the handsome furniture, was in strange contrast to the barbaric display of skins.

Some women individualise their surroundings. Ariadne was one of that class. She left on the most trivial of her belongings the stamp of her originality. If there is any truth in the mysterious doctrine of reincarnation, Ariadne had been a Savage, an Oriental, as she was now a Christian. To the first she owed the instinct of the savage developed in her extraordinary love of wild animals. The contact of the skin of the lion or leopard thrilled her sense of touch with an enjoyment as keen as that of a savage.

From the Oriental she derived her worship of light. Her love of vivid colouring. A forgotten sense of sensuality awoke in her enjoyment of sweet odours. The perfume of the hookah, the pungent vapour of incense burning constantly in its silver censer, made her think and dream better, so she would tell Kathleen, when her sister protested against the stifling fragrance of the tiny rooms.

"I have no doubt, dear, but what I was once on a time a sinful old Turk," she would say when Kathleen found her buried in silken cushions, with the amber mouthpiece of the hookah between her lips, scarcely visible through the smoke.

"Don't be shocked, sister mine, I am *drawing inspiration*," waving a bit of manuscript gaily. "Behold the result."

The Christian reincarnation saved her from sinking to the plane of a voluptuary. An early religious training held in check those strange inclinations—half savage, half sybarite—seeking a subtle mastery over her.

Religion was to her an ideal. There she worshipped the Beautiful. The ivory image of the crucified God hung by her bed. Before it she murmured the poetical prayers of the Rosary —she worshipped the beauty of kind words, good deeds, and heroism.

Ariadne stretched herself out wearily on the couch beside her sister. The rays of the night lamp on the table near by shone soft and clear over the pages of the little volume of sonnets with which it was her custom to beguile sleep.

Presently the drooping lids closed over her eyes. The book fell from her hand, and she slumbered.

The Spirit of dreams stole into the room and stood beside Ariadne's pillow. He touched her eyelids with his shadowy wand. Lo! they slowly opened. She saw not the dimly illuminated room, the lion skin across her feet, nor her own sleeping face reflected in the cheval-glass opposite the bed.

No; a wider, more mystical vision arose beneath the magic wand of the Spirit of dreams.

Her eyes opened on a strange wild scene. She found herself standing alone on a slight elevation above Johannesburg.

Its streets and squares, dotted with spires and villas, and lined with shops, lay at her feet.

In the centre a great mass of people surged around the Exchange Buildings, now transformed to a glittering temple of gold.

She heard the ribald songs.

She heard the boisterous laughter of men and women, as they thronged to and fro in wild frenzy.

They were of every nation, clime, and colour.

Some were strangers.

Others there were whose faces she knew.

The millionaire-broker cheek by jowl with the smooth-faced priest.

The bloated gin-purveyor hand in hand with the smug-faced jockey.

The staid municipal official elbowing the illicit canteen-keeper.

Diggers and athletes.

Actors and barmaids.

Wives and mothers, and young maidens.

Doctors, policemen, tradesmen, clerks, and labourers.

All mad with the thirst of greed.

Drunk with the wine of gold.

The very dust of the street glittered in the hot blaze of the noontide sun, so laden was it with gold.

Gold was everywhere.

The people fought for it, some gleefully, some sullenly.

The women dug it from the road with their slender fingers, and thrust it into their bosoms.

The men tore it madly from the women. Their breasts were crushed and bleeding thereby.

Others snatched up the gleaming filth—swallowed it, choked to death in voracious haste.

Anon, one more powerful than the rest would build a mound of the magic soil.

He danced frantically on its top, till another stronger still dethroned him.

Some warily dug pits, burying themselves out of sight in the yellow depths.

The flying hair of the women, the bloodshot eyes of the men, grew tinged with the golden hue.

Worn out with the struggle and riot, some sank down for a brief rest.

Others still sang, and danced, and fought.

Suddenly a far-away shout of many voices broke the seeming lull.

Ariadne raised her eyes. She looked in the direction from whence the sound had come.

She beheld, swiftly approaching along the western reef, what appeared to be a great mass of yellow cloud.

The cloud, as it rolled nearer, resolved itself into sparkling dust. In it could be faintly discerned the forms of many men, they gesticulating wildly as they ran. They pierced the air with their cries.

Whether of joy or grief, the dreamer could not tell.

On! on! rolled the glittering dust cloud.

It touched the outskirts of the golden city.

The roar of its voices startled the ear of the crowd of men and women in the streets.

They turned their eyes towards the west, from whence the crowd appeared.

Then a mighty madness seemed to fall upon them.

Wildly embracing one another, they clapped their hands in glee.

They shouted one and all—

"The Boom!

"The Boom!!

"The Boom!!!"

Ariadne looked again at the great cloud.

Lo! within its centre she beheld a wonderful vision.

Riding a monster chariot of gold, appeared a gigantic figure, half god, half man.

His naked body gleamed like polished gold.

Great wings of the same precious material towered above his shoulders, and enveloped in their lower ends his limbs and belly.

His face rivalled the sun in its glow.

A mane of hair, like spun gold, flowed from beneath the crown on his head.

In one hand he carried a sceptre, fashioned like unto a lash of a hundred tongues.

And every tongue dripped blood.

In the other hand he held the many reins of golden ribbons, guiding the steeds of his chariot.

The steeds that drew him were—Men!

The dreamer uttered a cry of horror as she

beheld their bleeding, crushed and broken bodies.

One fell in the traces. The great wheels of the chariot crushed his fallen body.

In an instant a hundred of the shouting crowd rushed forward, fighting, killing one another, in their struggle to take the place of the vanquished one.

Meanwhile the Rider laughed long and furiously, cutting and blinding his human steeds with the hundred tongues of his golden lash.

The great chariot was laden with gold.

It teemed over the sides. It fell along the road, to rise again in sparkling dust under the tramp of many feet. It was caught by the eager hands of the wildly-pursuing crowd.

For the sight of the golden treasure of the chariot blinded the maddened throng to the gold beneath their feet.

The farmer forsook his plough. The shepherd his flock.

The mines yielded up their diggers at the sound of the chariot wheels of the Spirit of the Boom.

Soon the dreamer beheld the cloud sweep through the streets of Johannesburg. The great Spirit of the Boom laughed furiously as

he cast his golden load among the multitude. He lashed all the while right and left with his flail. He goaded them on again and again to gather it up till the men and women were glutted with his treasure.

And then began a scene of fearful debauch.

Every sin and crime born in the lap of idle gold stalked forth.

The wine flowed, now red, now amber, in torrents wherein the multitude drank, and laved, and wallowed like swine.

Lust roamed forth, unchecked, and held high carnival.

Wilder and more furious, more hideously unlicensed, grew the whirlwind of debauch.

Finally an awful rage seized upon the multitude.

In their delirium they turned on each other, fighting one another with tooth and nail, till the streams of wine were tinged with blood, and the gold grew red beneath the flow.

And all the while the Spirit of the Boom laughed uproariously as he lashed them into fresh excesses.

His demoniac mirth shook the great chariot with peals of glee.

Turning her eyes from the dreadful fight of Lust and Gold, the dreamer beheld afar a swollen tide of waters.

Slowly the waves rose and fell, rolling one over the other, as they surged towards the unconscious city.

She saw the waters advance inch by inch, foot by foot, nearer and nearer still.

Black in the distance like the mouth of a pit. As the tide crept on, now red, now yellow, again gleaming silvery, phosphorescent, changing to a sea of varied hues as the waters swept the streets, enveloping in its embrace the feet of the multitude.

Its damp contact cooled their heated passions, cleared their brains, sodden with debauchery.

The Spirit of the Boom spread his great wings as the waters swept the city, and soared away.

Soon he and the chariot of gold was lost to view!

When the multitude beheld the flight of their God, a great silence fell upon them.

They gazed on one another in mute despair.

But their apathy was soon turned to horror as they beheld their treasures disappearing beneath the many-coloured flood of waters.

In an agony of terror they felt the rising waters envelop them.

Then they broke forth in wild cries of lamentation.

Higher, still higher surged the waters.

Frantically the men sought for escape, piling the bodies of the dead and helpless women one upon the other, as they had piled the gold.

Then they sprang upon the human mound in their frantic struggle for life.

But the water ruthlessly swept on and up. It swallowed them one after the other.

It stifled their prayers and shrieks.

It stiffened their frenzied bodies.

Soon the loathsome flood was seething with the dead and dying.

The tide insinuated its clammy fangs into the foundations of the Exchange. The dreamer beheld the glittering edifice totter, then slowly sink into the jaws of the rolling and surging waters.

Then a voice broke the silence hanging over the submerged city.

It fell on the ear of the dreamer.

In solemn tones it proclaimed—

"Behold! the river of Famine, Fever, and Death that shall sweep clean the garments of Sin and Greed that clothe yon hapless city.

"The lust of gold hath wrought its ruin."

And then, as a wave of the hideous flood touched the feet of the dreamer, with a great cry for help, Ariadne awoke.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE BROWN HOUSE IN DOORNFONTEIN

It was a simple little dwelling, the home of a bevy of the most popular bachelors in the camp. Despite its unassuming appearance, it attracted the attention and speculation of every young belle in Doornfontein.

It was located in the most modest quarter of that growing suburb, in a lane, not yet dignified by the name of street. Here was the newly-erected Doornfontein Club. A building which would have puzzled the brain of the wisest of architects in search of a name to catalogue its heterogeneous style. Cupola, minaret, and moresque-latticed portico, savoured of the Orient. Gable, belfry, and turreted windows imparted a flavour of Old English. A noble verandah spanning one side of the building gave the building just the necessary African aspect.

This fantastic structure was supposed to have been planned under the supervision of one of the club members, a wealthy Turk. He dressed

faultlessly in the European mode, looked like one of the better class of the Chosen People, and entertained lavishly in his mansion within a stone's throw of the club.

'The Harem,' as this quaint mansion was chaffingly dubbed, bore out the character of its *soubriquet* in the latticed windows, trellised porticoes, and domed minaret surmounted by the crescent. It might have been a wing of some palace transported from the shores of the Bosphorus and dropped haphazard on this unpretentious site.

Within easy walking distance of the Harem, another of the fine villas gracing this suburb might be seen. This was the abode of a genial but shrewd American. He retired on a fortune made in the palmy days of the Camp. A fortune made over the bar of the pioneer hotel of Johannesburg, chiefly through the thrifty business management of his dusky-skinned, brilliant-eyed wife.

This was a handsome building in the modern style. It was built of brick. Every inch of woodwork in the finishings, stairway, doors and windows was, as the owner proudly remarked, all of 'real American walnut,' and imported regardless of expense.

The site had been originally an old Dutch

farm. The primitive homestead was carefully preserved, while the grounds were rich in strawberry beds, graperies, orchards, and charming groves of fir and willow.

The majority of the villas being erected were on the conventional lines of South African architecture. Broad, one-storied structures, surrounded by the indispensable verandah.

Occasionally an exception occurred, thereby affording a pleasing if eccentric contrast. The owner of one charming-looking abode in other respects, had topped the whole by a thatched roof, more suitable to the wilds of Connemara than a would-be fashionable suburb of Johannesburg.

Another, said to be a lady who had accumulated a pretty fortune through running a canteen, finished off her neat dwelling by the erection of a steeple and clock, worthy of the most orthodox chapel. Probably a devout feeling of thankfulness to the Almighty for favours received, induced the ex-bar-lady to announce her retirement from public life by a fitting symbol of the change in her social and moral circumstances.

In fact, cupolas and steeples were decidedly at premium in the Camp. The very shops bristled with them. No building of any pre-

tension to beauty or prominence was considered perfect until a steeple or cupola was set on haphazard, like an Irishman's tile.

At the time of writing this sketch, Doornfontein was the nucleus of fashionable life in the Rand. A world in which the ambitious 'missis' of the successful broker or hotel-keeper ruled by right of wealth, dispensing hospitality with an indiscriminate lavishness suggestive of the ex-barmaid or house-maid.

Clad in the richest silks and laces, and blazing with diamonds, madame or the 'missis' shone resplendent in her box at the Theatre Royal. She was a perfect display of bad form in her dashing cart. A Kafir boy rigged out as a tiger posed on the box, drawn by a tandem of as pretty a pair of horses as money could procure. The fastidious Englishman, fresh to the Rand, in search of a fortune, rendered homage to the glittering, coarse goddess of the hour. He was glad to accept a patronage he would not have dared to receive at home.

But in the Rand all was quite different. What would have been impossible at home, was not only possible here, but oft-times necessary. The husband of the goddess reigned supreme on the Exchange. There he sent

stocks up and down as easily as a child tosses a ball. And if madame, with the freedom of the Golden City's moral code, found the newcomer a pleasing toy to dangle at her chain, there was ample compensation for his outraged sense of good taste and gentle breeding to be found in the way of valuable tips. The result set him up again, or helped to recompense his losses in the old home far away. There never an echo of the fast life of the Rand would be likely to penetrate.

It would be unjust to madame not to admit that nine times out of ten she understood all this. Her experience gained behind the bar had not left her without a keen insight into human nature. Consequently she held a tight rein and despotic whip over her temporary slaves. Sometimes she was lucky enough to curb the captive effectually by marrying him to a niece or dependent sister.

Curious as the blending of these many conflicting elements in Rand society may appear, it increased the charm. Continual reinforcements from Home society lent an ever-varied fascination to society. Every new arrival brought with it an impetus to amusement-giving. The new faces lent an excitement to every pleasure. Nights of feasting, dancing,

card-parties, followed days of hard work on Change, devoted to buying and selling.

Oft-times, when those were days of great anxiety, and fortunes were made and lost in an hour—the nights of revel and dissipation ran wilder riot than ever in the sumptuously appointed villa and bungalow of the broker and his missis.

At the very height of the crisis, when the biggest bear of the market went under, dragging with him scores of young speculators, and men saw their thousands slipping away—the Wanderers' Club was opened with a flourish of festivities. Its handsome hall, decorated with gorgeous display of bunting, was given over to dancing - bouts, amateur theatricals, concerts, and every conceivable amusement with which the fashionable world diverts itself.

In the gay ballroom and jolly bar of the Wanderers, many a smiling face covered a heart sick with dread of the future. Many a brimming glass and foaming beaker brought men forgetfulness of the ruin already upon them. Subsequent events have borne sad witness to this.

Let us now return to the little brown house in Doornfontein. It stood in a narrow lane, half street, half road, embellished here and

there with newly-planted young trees carefully boxed round to escape the encroachments of sundry stray and hungry cattle. Its pretty sitting-room, adorned with elegant trifles from the hand of many a fair one, was given over to a perfect orgie of smoke and excited debate.

Bad times had already fallen upon the heretofore jolly, free-and-easy *ménage* of the cricketers. An anxious if heated council was being held as to the future of the bachelor team.

"I say, Archie," remarked a smooth-faced chorister-looking youth, "there is no use in bringing up such arguments, they can never convince me. I tell you the Rand is going to pieces. We had better make tracks for some more profitable pastures, pretty quick."

Captain Archibald Achilles, to whom these sage remarks were addressed, rose excitedly and began to pace the room. He was a capital specimen of a stalwart young Englishman, lithe and sinewy, blonde as a Norse god. The deep-set blue eyes, that, at this moment, were sparkling with suppressed impatience.

"I tell you again it's for the best. Things must take a turn. Why not have patience a little longer? Why, there's the club only just completed, and shall we throw up the bat at such a time?"

"True, I never thought of that," remarked another, "it would look shabby just now. The boys have all of them stood by us."

"Oh, bosh!" exclaimed the first speaker, "they are too sensible to expect us to make sacrifices for their pleasure. There's Crœsus, who told me only this morning, the breaking-up of the team was a sensible move. We can't live on air; we are not bank managers and mine owners. I for one shall be off to Matabeleland within a fortnight."

"I'll join you, Gray," eagerly cried another of the band.

The captain continued his pacing. He was nervously biting the end of his flaxen moustache.

One of the men, who had not spoken for some time, watched him narrowly. The two were partners in a stock-brokerage, and although openly on the most friendly footing, were nevertheless distrustful one of the other. The young man sitting or reclining in an easy chair smoked leisurely enough; his handsome face wore, if anything, a bored look of indifference. Slightly and elegantly built, his physique scarcely proclaimed him the capital athlete he was. The hands thrust into his smoking jacket were almost as delicate as a woman's; but they held the

strength of steel, and would wield a bat with the power of a giant.

For some reason or other he was not popular with his fellow-cricketers. Whether it was that they resented his superior shrewdness or were jealous of his success with the women, would be hard to tell. Perhaps they would have been at a loss to define the cause if pressed for it. At all events, the young men waited to hear his opinion of the disbanding of the team. They had always been more or less guided by his decision in sporting matters.

But he said nothing as he smoked placidly on; until the captain at last challenged him as he ceased abruptly in his walk, and stood before him, saying—

"Well, Morrie, are we never to get a word from you? What's the say?"

"I'll take time to think over it," he replied, warily. "You're opening this rather suddenly on us, Archie. I'll sleep over it before I decide."

The captain seemed satisfied, and resumed his walk. He had not quite expected this young man of all others to come to an immediate decision, although he affected to think he would.

"As I was saying before, the wisest thing for all of us is to clear out of the Rand and at

the earliest day possible. That's my decision," said Gray, rising and stretching his legs. "Now I'm going for a ride. I'll see you at dinner at the 'National,' boys."

The Captain let him depart without answering his rather decided objection to the plan he had laid before the team. Gray was not the man essential to his object. It was the handsome, keen-eyed Morrie that absorbed his attention. To keep him by his side until the time was ripe for pulling up stakes and being off, was the point in view.

"Well, I think I'll be off too."

"So soon, Morrie? It's an hour before dinner. And we might as well talk over the next match, now we are alone."

"No, I think not. I'd rather take a little longer time to consider it."

"All right. By the way, did Jerrison take up those shares?"

"No, the rascal is getting chary of scrip. Well, I'm off."

As the door closed behind the cricketer, the captain strode to the window, and stared moodily out. A score of anxieties perplexed him. What was to be done? he thought. Why, by all that was damnable, had difficulties arisen over which he had no control?

Gnawing the end of his moustache, he let his mind wander back to the first months he had passed in the Rand. The boom had brought to him success—no failures in those good old days. He recalled the glorious round of pleasures when the team came fresh to the fields. That was a carnival of success which made the present state of affairs black and dismal beyond expression.

To some men these changes and reverses would have mattered little; the spirit of adventure would have buoyed them up and rendered them eager for new fields to explore; but to this man, selfish, vain, egotistical and ambitious, these reverses were crushing.

He had scarcely the strength to look them boldly in the face. His weakness endowed him with a certain cunning which resulted in subterfuge and underhand dealing. These things he would have preferred to avoid. It galled his sense of refinement, disturbed his easy conscientiousness to resort to them; but his selfish ends must be gained at any cost.

While these cogitations were busy in his brain, a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice aroused him from his thoughts, saying,—

"Well, Archie, how goes it?"

"Hallo, Hector! I didn't hear you come in."

"No? I left the horse with Jim and came in the back way. Has Rob been here — I couldn't see him about?"

"He has not come home yet. Have a whisky and soda, old man?"

"Thanks!" said Hector, as he filled a glass from a bottle on the table, and pouring in a plentiful supply of sparkling soda, drank it off at a draught. He sat down leisurely in a chair. From one of the numerous pockets of his jacket he produced a short briarwood pipe. He filled this indispensable companion of the digger with Transvaal tobacco. A fine article, by the way, and one which should be better known outside of South Africa. Strong, fragrant, and pure is the Boer tobacco.

The young man puffed vigorously. He gazed through the blue fumes of smoke at his friend.

Hector was a splendid specimen of manhood. His noble length of limb encased in brown knickerbockers, shapely calves covered with brown woollen hose, loose white silk shirt, and brown jacket-coat with rolling collar and sailor-knot of blue, set off the manly figure. The well-poised head, the long drooping blonde moustache shaded a mouth, beautiful as a woman's. The strong chin redeemed the

mouth. Altogether the face under the broad-brimmed digger's hat was fascinating to both men and women.

A woman is always susceptible to a *soupçon* of the rake in a man. Like all thoroughly well-bred Englishmen he could drink to any extent without showing in a vulgar manner the effect of his potations.

"Well," he began, "what news, Archie?"

"Bad, Hector," replied the other. "I'm awfully down on my luck. I can't seem to keep this beastly team together long enough to suit my purpose. There's Gray now, he is as stubborn as a bullock; you know he is our best pitcher. And as for Morrie—well, he is so decidedly non-committal, won't say anything as yet—and he is such a capital wicket that a game would be dead without him. I can manage Mosentiem and the others, but those two—well, they are regular duffers."

"What's your idea of keeping them? I did not know you intended breaking up."

"Well, Hector, I'm going to leave the Rand. I have a very good offer at home, and I think I had better take it."

"Go on! this is news indeed!" he exclaimed, laying down his pipe in astonishment. "I am

sorry to hear it, but of course if it is for the best—go."

"It is. But as my appointment does not begin for a couple of months I want to put in the time as profitably as possible. I am stoney-broke, but a few good matches would recoup me."

"But Morrie and Gray are both hot to go to Matabeleland. Isn't that better than counting sticks or catching 'flies' on 'Change?"

"Very true, but I must prevail on them to wait."

"That would be a loss to them."

Archie shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"I say that would be a little selfish on your part, eh?" persisted Hector.

"There are no secrets between us, Hector—I don't mind telling you. I don't care a rap for the others. I am going to consult my interests only."

Hector listened with a frown. He did not like the utter selfishness and hardness of his friend. Intimate as they had been, he had never before realised the extent of that selfishness. His thoughts reverted to the judgment Ariadne had passed on this man. He was to have further proof. Archie said presently, as though reading his thoughts,—

"I suppose you have seen her to-day?"

"No, I have just come in from the Reef." A flush touched his bronzed cheek, as it always did when any allusion was made to Ariadne. At the same time something in the tone of his friend's remark made him fully prepared for an unpleasant talk. He tightened his lips on his pipe as the other continued,—

"How much longer are you going to keep up that infatuation, Hector?"

"As long as she loves me," he replied, doggedly. Archie knew the tone was hostile, but he had resolved to speak plainly and strongly on the subject. He had resolved to make a last effort to break it off between Hector and Ariadne. He loved Ariadne. She had repulsed him. But of this Hector knew nothing. Ariadne had kept her enemy's secret.

"Hector!" he began, stopping in his walk and looking down at his friend, "I wish to heavens I could influence you to give up this woman before I go away. Will you listen to reason? For God's sake take my advice before it is too late, before you are ruined."

"What is the use of talk, old man? I have told you again and again I love her. I shall never give her up."

"Love her? Don't call it by such a name,"

cried Archie, carried beyond prudence by his jealousy. "How can a man love a woman who has drained every passion of the soul, and lived in her short life the experience of a score of men like ourselves? A widow, and a woman of the world to her finger tips! If she is a woman of genius, all the more reason for not loving her. Those women are only fit to amuse men—not to be wives or the mothers of children."

"Stop, Archie!" cried Hector, springing from his chair, "I'll not hear you speak of her in such terms. It is unjust. Ariadne is one of the best women God ever made."

"I repeat, Hector, it is not love, it is wantonness that makes her use every charm to fascinate you."

"I don't care a hang what it is. I'll love the 'little one,' as long as she's the sweet true-hearted woman she has always been!"

"As long as she is true," repeated Archie, sneeringly. "Ha ha! well, we won't discuss her further to-day, old man. Let's go to dinner."

"What do you mean?—out with it!" cried Hector hoarsely, his face pale with anger. "You're a duffer to talk like that. You know you lie. I believe, by God, you love her yourself!"

They stood looking fiercely at each other. It was the first time in all the history of their friendship they had quarrelled. Archie's face grew white as death, and a faintness crept over him as he looked into the bloodshot eyes of Hector. A sort of pity crept over him. He had not thought Hector capable of such love. He supposed him to be the last man to yield to the fleeting weakness every man experiences some time or other for a woman and mistakes for love.

A new pang of jealousy shot through his heart, at the knowledge that this woman not only possessed his love but she had taken the first place in the affections of Hector; that he, the gentlest and softest of men to his friend, had suddenly turned on him like a lion at bay, ready to strike and defend.

"Forgive me, Hector," he said, masking the hypocrite by a show of regret, at the same time holding out his hand; "I did not think you were struck so hard."

Hector turned away abruptly for a moment. He came back to Archie, and, taking his hand, said, unsteadily,—

"That's all right."

But the seed had been sown.

CHAPTER VI

THE PRICE OF A SINGLE FLOWER

WHAT more interesting spot for the study of a certain phase of humanity than that of hotel life? The place *par excellence* to indulge such study is the *salle-à-manger.*

Given an intimate knowledge of the inner life of the heterogeneous mass of individuals collected therein for the indulgence of one of the first laws of nature, the study becomes too serious for pleasure. To know the man near you is a swindler, rogue or scoundrel—or that woman opposite a whitened sepulchre, is not always a pleasant appetiser—it is too like the death's head at a feast.

But where one has a *soupçon* of knowledge anent the lives, character, and position of the people, there is a wide field for fancy. Psychical observations become intensely interesting. There the student has his subject, bland and happy, smiling and flippant, earnest or sensual, under the genial influence of a good dinner.

The care, wear, and tear of the day has been

for the nonce forgotten. People appear as they would if the world was one field of pleasure and self-indulgence.

The brilliantly-lighted dining-hall of the Grand National Hotel was crowded to excess. Two young men entered, and gazed round a moment in search of their party. They espied a hand at the far end of the room beckoning to them.

It was Morrie, making frantic signs to call their attention to the table where he and his companions were seated.

Archie led the way through the labyrinth of tables and scurrying waiters. He stopped now and then to exchange greeting with various friends. He was very popular, this clever young captain of the cricketers. Was he not charming as an actor? Could he not sing a negro song irresistibly, play an excellent game of billiards, and flirt, when need be, most discreetly and tenderly?

Occasionally his steps loitered as a pair of bright eyes levelled a flashing glance at him; but Hector's impatient whisper, "Go on," hurried him along, and the two were soon seated at the table.

A passing waiter was effectually bribed to attend to their wants. The charm of a half-

sovereign conjured dinner before them in a trice.

There was no ripple on the flow of gossip and chaff with which they enlivened the dinner, to indicate the under-current of worry and discontent.

Their chaff and attention were centred mostly on an adjoining table. It was unoccupied. Covers were laid for a number of persons. The centre was graced by a magnificent basket of flowers, the fragrance and beauty of which attracted general attention from the adjacent diners. An exquisite *boutonnière* of violets and roses was laid beside each cover. Clusters of pink-shaded candles adorned the corners of the table.

"I see the 'Circus' is decorated and lighted up to-night," said Archie, as he gulped down his soup.

This witticism provoked a shout of laughter. Archie was not given usually to brilliant displays of wit. The covert sneer at the early career of the millionaire host for whom the table was prepared was one of Archie's best attempts at wit.

"I wonder if the dog show will be on," cried Morrie. This allusion was to the trio of splendid bull-pups that usually graced the table

with their master. It elicited fresh laughter that deepened into positive roars when Mosentiem gravely remarked—

"I'll bet five to one there'll be a full house, and a brave display of hook noses!"

Now, this was rather rough on Mosentiem, for was he not a son of the hooked-nosed brigade himself? But, strange to say, his laugh was the longest and loudest.

Hector forgot his troubles, and enjoyed the chaff of his companions, especially when it was turned on Mosentiem. He heartily disliked the *sang-froid* with which Mosentiem ridiculed his own people.

But time teaches many lessons, and Hector was yet to learn how true was the heart beneath that handsome Jewish face.

Hector turned his attention to the beauty of the flowers on the opposite table.

The sweet odour of the violets filled him with a voluptuous memory of Ariadne. They were her favourite flowers.

Amid the noisy talk of his companions he fell into a reverie, deepened by the generous Burgundy, over what yon table would be were he at one end and Ariadne at the other, dispensing hospitality in the happy character of man and wife.

How superbly she would grace that place! He fancied her sweet face aglow with smiles. He could hear her soft voice and mellow laugh.

"Oh, God!" he groaned, "will the damnable gold only come fast enough to accomplish that dream."

"I say, wake up; what are you groaning about?"

It was Archie's voice, as he gave Hector a vigorous nudge.

"I believe I was nodding," laughed Hector. "I almost fell asleep trying to estimate the cost of those flowers. The perfume is too strong; it induces a tendency to doze."

"The Burgundy is too strong; it induces a tendency to booze," exclaimed Morrie, chaffingly.

"Oh, go on," retorted Hector. "Come now, tell us how much that basket's worth."

"Yes!" chimed Archie, "you're a connoisseur, you know."

"Well," and Morrie looked at the basket critically, "I'd take a hundred pounds for it."

"Whew!" whistled Hector.

"Take another glass, Hector; you're dry," said Morrie, scornfully, who did not like being doubted.

"Morrie estimates at the rate that old Engleman paid him for a single rose; a fiver. Well, I have counted twenty roses in the basket."

"Great Scot!" interrupted Morrie, "don't talk like a duffer, Gray. That was an exceptional case. Old Engleman was dying to get a rose for a certain pretty actress; and as there was not another rose to be found in the camp but the one I was wearing, he would have it, and offered me a fiver for it. Of course I would have been a duffer if I refused."

"No fool like an old fool," interpolated Mosentiem, with a grin.

"He got it cheap at that," continued Morrie, ignoring Mosentiem's remark. "He would have had to send a man and cart all the way to Pretoria and back to fetch a flower; and then he would have been able to get only a few."

"And the little girl's vanity would not have been tickled by wearing the only rose in camp that night," exclaimed Hector.

"Right you are! Look at those orchids in that basket," resumed Morrie. "There's only three, and I'll bet my head they have brought a fiver each. There's only one garden in Pretoria produces them, and I'll bet there's not another orchid to be found in the Rand to-night.

Why, the violets alone are worth a couple of tenners."

"Oh, rot!" impatiently exclaimed Gray.

"Rot, nothing," retorted Morrie. "There's somebody not far away who gave me two quid for a handful one day last week."

He gave a sly wink in the direction of Hector, who was gazing into his glass, while a blush worthy of a schoolboy spread over his face.

"Money thrown away," sneered Archie, as he frowned in the direction of the downcast eyes.

"No, by God!" cried Mosentiem, hotly. "There," pulling a banknote from his purse and thrusting it into Morrie's hand, "send her the finest basket of violets to be found in the Rand. Send it to-morrow with my compliments."

"Not if I can help it," said Hector, hoarsely, his face purple with jealous rage. "I'll——"

"I've as good a right to send her flowers as you have," interrupted Mosentiem.

"If you dare."

"Shan't I, though?" laughed the other.

"I must get out of this," said Hector, attempting to rise, "or I'll break the duffer's head."

But Archie held him down. "Don't be a fool!" he said, scornfully. "If you make a row here, it won't do her name any good."

Archie's words soothed and quieted the indignant man.

"It's all right, old boy; let's shake hands, I won't interfere," said Mosentiem, extending his hand across the table.

Hector glared at him, and the quarrel might have been serious, but at that moment Morrie cried—

"Here comes the circus."

CHAPTER VII

THE MILLIONAIRE'S DINNER

All eyes were turned towards the entrance of the dining-hall, where the head waiter stood obsequiously. Then bowing and walking backwards, he waved his hand in the direction of the flower-laden table.

He was followed by a slight, dapper little man, blonde-haired, blonde-moustached, and rosy-cheeked. His bright eyes smiled blandly behind gold-rimmed glasses. He wore his honours jauntily as he sauntered along with a self-conscious air which seemed to say—

"Here I am; look at me.

"I am Crœsus. The great Johannesburg Crœsus, who made his millions out of nothing. You won't see such a sight twice in a lifetime. Look well while you have the chance. Behold a man that can teach you everything. From turning a somersault in the ring that will make the sawdust fly, to turning a somersault on 'Change that will make the gold-dust fly.

"Here I am. Look at me well! I can teach

you to sing, to dance, to juggle, and to make speeches in the Assembly. I can teach you where to dig for gold, and where to find diamonds. I can teach you how to make money, and how to spend it.

"I'm a downright lucky little fellow, I am. Lucky to my friends. Lucky to my enemies. Lucky to the women, from the barmaid to the peeress. I'm the luckiest of lucky little fellows. Look at me well; it will do you good."

All this, and more, the little man's swagger proclaimed.

Meantime the group of young men watched his approach in silence. Prejudiced as they were against him, the man commanded their involuntary respect.

Did he not represent success? There was not one of them but would have lorded it as a thoroughbred, had they been blessed with like success and fortune. They knew it well. They resented his prosperity by contemptuous chaff. Not one of them but knew in his heart he would not refuse the little man's golden friendship, had it been offered.

The little man knew it. Who would blame him for an extra swagger as he passed their table? He knew they were swells, poor, but swells all the same, who would gladly use him,

had the opportunity presented itself. But the little man was true to himself. He helped only his kind.

While he swaggered after the cringing waiter, in his wake followed a lady recently elected to the enviable position of his better half.

She was a dark-haired, handsome woman. Her eyes had the brilliancy of the Creole. The dusky tones of brown in the full, round throat were deepened by the contrast of the necklace of flashing diamonds. Her figure, to which the robe of pale tinted satin, with draperies of flowing lace, lent an air of elegance, was generously proportioned. The rounded arms and well-poised bust gleamed like tinted ivory beneath the delicate lace. They might have served as the model of a sculptor's master-piece.

She was proud, this charming Mrs Crœsus. Her small head, with its graceful coils of jet-black hair, grew more haughtily erect. The straight brows met in a defiant frown. The angry flash of the brilliant eyes threw a scornful glance towards the cricketers. It proclaimed how intensely she resented their stare of cynical inspection.

She knew there was no admiration in those glances. Only contemptuous wonder and

satirical speculation on the turn in the wheel of Fate which had so gilded her fortune.

"Mrs Crœsus has got a gorgeous wedding present, I see," flippantly remarked Mosentiem as he sipped his Moselle.

"About time for both wedding and present, I should think." This from Archie, with a sneering laugh.

"That necklace must have cost a cool twenty thousand pounds," said Mosentiem, meditatively.

"All certified, let us hope," observed Archie.

"Not much, I'll bet!" broke in Gray; "although Crœsus is too clever to ever be caught."

"It's a long lane——" began Archie.

"Rot!" exclaimed Gray.

Hector suddenly roused himself from the reverie into which the magnificence of Mrs Crœsus had plunged him.

"What's this I hear about a wedding?" he queried. "When were they married, does anyone know?"

"Now you ask conundrums," said Mosentiem, laughing. "But the ceremony is rumoured to have taken place in London—a few weeks before Crœsus returned to the Rand."

"And why," interposed Gray, "this sudden hankering after fashionable life?"

"Well, you see," resumed Mosentiem, "Crœsus is fond of 'the missis,' in spite of his numerous other attachments, and proud of her beauty——"

"Beauty," interrupted Hector, staring through his glass at the unconscious Mrs Crœsus, now smiling and chatting with her guests.

"Where is it?" chimed in Gray.

"Yes, I said beauty," answered Mosentiem, "and I say it again."

"If quantity is a form of beauty, I agree with you."

"Oh, go on, Archie. Keep quiet!" cried Hector, impatiently.

"Well, beauty, as I was saying," resumed Mosentiem, lolling back in his chair, tugging his tiny black moustache with one hand and holding his glass up to the light with the other, while he surveyed the contents with a critical eye, "and fidelity."

As he uttered the last words he swallowed the wine and laid down his glass with a great air of impressment.

He paused before he resumed, apparently waiting for comment. But the boys were so struck with his declaration of Mrs Crœsus' fidelity, that they forgot their inclination to chaff in their astonishment.

"Yes, she had been faithful to him, through thick and thin. It was a long time to wait, eight years, for the small courtesy of a wedding-ring, and Crœsus wasn't going to see her slighted and insulted for the lack of one. He had too good a memory to forget how she loved him when he was poor, and too good a heart to turn her off when he was a millionaire.

"Crœsus is the right sort. With all his little upstart airs, he has too good brains in that round cranium of his to be anything else; so he took the 'missis' to London and made her Mrs Crœsus. That effectually stopped the sneering gossip of the ladies of the Government House. They did not dare refuse the courtesy due the wife of Crœsus. She was at once received by the wives of his brother-Assembly members. So, she was received—coldly, it may be, but Crœsus had carried his point."

There was silence for a few moments after this unusually long speech from Mosentiem; he seemed secretly pleased with the effect of his words. He lifted the glass to his lips, and shot a friendly wink at Crœsus, who was regarding him with a smile, and tipped his glass to him as he tossed off his wine.

"I don't think you take the right view of the matter, Mosentiem," said Archie, launching into a tirade against Crœsus.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" blurted Mosentiem, his face purple with indignation. "You are a fine one to preach in that style. The last man in the camp to set up as a saint. Ha ha!"

"You may laugh all you please. I'm no saint, I admit, and like a well set up girl, that is not too strait-laced, as well as the rest. But to marry such a girl—bah!"

"And suppose a girl should lose some of her strait-lacing through love of you—what then?"

"That's her own look-out. If she is weak enough to go wrong, she's not fit to marry."

"Well, thank God, we don't look at the matter in that way here in the Rand!" cried Mosentiem.

"No, we don't in the Rand," said Archie, coolly; "but at home it's very different."

"Yes, very different," echoed Mosentiem. "In the old country we think nothing of seduction and breach of promise; but here, by God! we do. Women are too scarce to treat in that style; we are only too glad to marry them if they'll have us."

"Don't talk like a brute, Archie!" muttered Hector.

Archie's only reply was a sneering laugh, as he arose from the table.

"Let's leave the women alone," he said, contemptuously. "You know we never agree there, Mosentiem, and we never shall."

"Are you coming?" said Archie, as he cut off the end of the cigar.

"Yes, we are all coming," answered Hector. "I've a box at Fillis's. He has a new spectacular circus piece on to-night: 'Cigarette,' he calls it. It's bound to be a good show, like everything Frank does. Come along, boys."

Hector felt that it would be a mortal quarrel between them, if he and Archie were to go away alone, after the manner in which he had aired his views about women. His words had cut two ways with Hector, and the poor fellow felt very sore. He could not refrain from casting a kindly glance at Mrs Crœsus, as he passed her table together with his friends.

She felt the sympathy of his glance. Her eyes fell beneath the look, which she was too proud to return and too sensitive to ignore.

"That's a fine-looking lot of fellows," observed one of the guests. "Who are they?"

Mrs Crœsus' only answer was an indifferent shrug of her handsome shoulders.

"Oh, they are a lot of cricketers," answered

Crœsus. "They seemed a little excited. They are usually cool fellows, all swells in their way."

"So!" answered the guest, who was a newcomer. "I thought they were; now, they look it."

"They are not all members of the team," said Crœsus. "One's the manager of a main reef mine,—the one just going out, that well-set fellow with the long waxed moustache. Bernheim says he is a capital manager, but neglects the mine too much lately for the society of the cleverest woman in camp."

"So!" remarked the other. "I like clever women; introduce me, Crœsus."

"I haven't the honour of her acquaintance," replied Crœsus, as he hurried on to say, "the tall, slender chap with him is the captain of the team."

"So! the captain of the team," said the other, with German-like reiteration; "I like him; he would make the ladies' hearts beat, now, I should think."

"Yes," said Crœsus, with a laugh, "he was rather dotty on the pretty little barmaid at the Bodega, but he does not seem the same now the stocks are going down."

"So! then he's a stockbroker?"

"Well, yes and no," said Crœsus. "When the team came first to the Rand, we set him and another cricketer up in brokering. They prospered for a few months, but were not smart enough to keep on their own legs. You must know it is necessary for shareholders to keep each other a little in the dark about the firms they buy and sell through. That necessitates a change of broker every few weeks. So the cricketers could not always count on their friends, and were not keen enough to know how to work the job. Achilles is only good for athletics or acting, and the other is nearly as bad. Well, the concern of B. & A. will not hold out many days. Poor boys, I'm sorry—but they'll get a fresh chance in Matabeleland, if they take it."

With these words Crœsus dismissed the subject of the cricketers. The dinner, to his mind, was the thing of the moment. After that he adjourned to the inner sanctum of his apartments, there to seek relaxation in the game of the green table, where stakes often ran into the thousands, and the hours into broad daylight.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LAST OF THE BOOM

THE sunshine bathed in warm blazing splendour the wide street. The fine red quartz-dust, lying inches deep in the unpaved roadway, glinted here and sparkled there beneath the golden rays. The many roofs of corrugated zinc glittered in the shafts of light till they shone like burnished opals. Above, the pale turquoise-tinted heavens was flecked by lightly floating pearly clouds. In the clear distance the low kopjes on the far-away edges of the great plateau could be plainly discerned. The morning wind, now tempered to a breeze, lightly swept the dust of the roadway into every crevice and corner of the Golden City.

Sunshine danced and sparkled everywhere, as only it can sparkle and dance in Africa. No fog dared rear its murky head. No chill spread its misty garments, no damp oozed its clammy breath in the face of that merry, brazen sunshine, rollicking in and out of every nook and cranny of the camp.

It shone with the same genial warmth on the polished backs of the natives as it shone on the lady driving her jaunty cart and ponies.

The sunshine slyly insinuated its way down shaft and lead. It trickled a tiny path of light into the far depths, catching an answering ray from the yellow quartz just turned out from its bed by the digger.

Those merry beams touched with tender tints the humble hut of the Kafir, brightened the arid veld, and reflected a myriad sparkles on the rough glasses decking the bar of the meanest canteen.

Its rays danced joyously through the dust-begrimed windows of the Exchange, lighting up a scene of bustle and activity therein.

High 'Change was on, and men of every age, clime, and complexion were shouting in every variation of voice and tone, according to the capacity of each individual's lungs and thorax.

The roar of this human menagerie, in which the Beast rampant with the lust of gold reigned, could be heard from one end of Commissioner Street to the other.

'The Exchange crowd,' as it was dubbed by the street-brokers, filled every inch of the spacious building. There was a regular row on. Through this could be heard now and

then the strident voice of the secretary going through the list of companies, and the scream of the buyer and seller.

Secretary :—" Auroras, any offer ? "

" I'll buy at twenty-four shillings!" came from a remote corner of the room.

" I'll sell at twenty-six ! " cried a voice in the neighbourhood of the bar in the alcove.

" I'll buy at twenty-four and sixpence," shouted the first bidder.

" I'll sell at twenty-five shillings."

" How many ? " cries the buyer.

" How many do you want ? " answers the seller.

" I'll take five hundred," screams the buyer.

" They are yours."

That lot disposed of, the busy secretary promptly offers another.

" Sales at twenty-five shillings, any more buyers ? " No answers forthcoming, he continues in loud tones : " Next—Auroras West—any buyers ? " Still no answer.

" Of course," whispers the seller, who had pushed his way to the side of the buyer, " this sale was only *shlenter*."

" Certainly," replied the buyer, with a wink. " I would not think of buying even at twenty-five shillings."

"All right! Of course!" laughingly answers the seller.

"Any sellers of Cities?" continues the secretary, taking the next lot, in alphabetical order.

"I'll sell at ten pounds," shouts a jolly-looking Jew-boy.

"I'll buy at eight pounds," yells a young broker.

"I'll sell at nine pound ten," screams the Jew-boy.

"I'll sell to arrive at nine pound five." No answer.

"I'll sell here at nine pounds," persists the Jew-boy.

"How many?" shouts the young broker.

"Two shares," shouts back the Jew-boy.

"I'll take them," replies the broker, who straightway begins shouting.

"I'll buy now at nine pound five. At nine pound ten. At nine pound fifteen; are there any sellers at ten pound?" No answer.

"I thought so," he cries, and subsides while the market closes firm, buyers at ten pound ten, no sellers.

There had not been such a day of excitement in the market for many weeks. It was the last boom the ill-fated Exchange was to see again for many a day to come, and the wise ones knew it.

Meanwhile the unthinking rabble in and out of the Exchange, bought and sold with feverish recklessness, in their anxiety to take advantage of the unexpected boom.

Like hungry fish, they bit eagerly at the gilded bait thrown them by the many unscrupulous scrip-owners. These offered their shares through their brokers, regardless of the fact that what they knew to be bubbles blown on borrowed bank capital would in all likelihood burst before another twenty-four hours, and the unfortunate buyers and themselves minus money, and plus worthless scrip.

Such an eager, rollicking, rowdy crowd jostled round a little dark-browed man, dressed in a quiet suit of brown tweed, his wide-brimmed felt hat set well on the back of his head; his twinkling black eyes sparkled with an unusual lustre, as the throng of boys pressed close to him in their desire to buy up the scrip he offered on behalf of one of the biggest bears of the market. If his hand trembled a bit as he jotted down their names in his notebook, the crowd saw it not.

He had always come out right, and they believed in him now as before; for was he not one of the lucky brokers, aye, one of the luckiest? whose record showed one day alone

which had brought his client, the big bear, a clear profit of sixty thousand pounds? Had not his tip turned the hundreds of more than one of the crowd to thousands?

They forgot the legend of the pitcher and the well. With good-humoured chaff they bought. He sold with indifference.

To be a leader in the share market, it was necessary to be a member of the Stock Exchange, although the formula of admission was strict, apparently, no one being admitted until his name, together with the names of his proposer and seconder, had been posted for weeks previous to the taking of the ballot which was to elect him.

The qualifications necessary for this honour were somewhat mystical. What they really were no man could specify. It might be to possess unlimited cheek, the conscience of a juggler, and a voice whose braying would have outbrayed Balaam's ass.

These brawlers were reinforced from the purlieus of Petticoat Lane. They lightened the dull days on 'Change with the fire of Clerkenwell fun and Whitechapel chaff. They made noisy the busy ones.

But it was the men of brain, principal, and interest, who worked the real business. They

kept in the rear of the blatant rowdy crowd.

Very curious and interesting a study was this phase of Johannesburg life; the stockbrokers of the London Exchange would have opened their eyes to see the class of men who were the ringleaders of the Exchange crowd in Commissioner Street. It was amazing, as it was amusing, to behold the rapid progress of some of the newly-arrived Jew boys. What though the newcomer was without a shilling in his pocket, he had young blood in him, a happy-go-lucky spirit ready and willing to fight for success, and he had indomitable good-humour.

Oh, that workers and thinkers would rightly value that inestimable quality of good-humour. A quality with which the Jew is blessed to a marvellous degree. It brings him success in the long-run. These newcomers inside the chains speedily found friends. There was Abrahams, who had changed his name to Richardson—why, I know not; Jacobs, who had adopted the pseudonym of Davis, both respected and successful brokers, ready to give their *koscher* young brethren a start.

One fine day these fledglings might be seen on the wing, flying all over the Exchange, offering with astounding cheek to sell and buy,

not hundreds, but thousands of pounds' worth of stock. Ready and eager to do business on a scale that would have astounded Throgmorton Street. The facility with which these rising speculators would create capital, and wriggle out of a transaction, was marvellous to a degree. It was a matter of little wonder to the older and shrewder brokers when these young birds found themselves snared, and posted for shares they had sold and were unable to deliver, and scrip they had bought and were unable to pay for.

That these daring young birds, finding their wings clipped, made no further attempts to fly, would be a false supposition. They lay low for a time. As soon as their feathers had sprouted anew, they were up and flying as high, if not higher, than ever.

The excitement at 'Change was at its height, the voice of the secretary at its loudest, the clamour of the crowd deafening, when two men entered and elbowed their way to the alcove at one end of the room, dedicated to the bar.

Now, this little bar was remarkable, if only for one thing, and that was the absence of that Johannesburg divinity, the pretty barmaid.

She could not rustle her silken skirts, clink

the glasses between her be-diamond fingers, nor rest her plump elbows on the marble counter in confidential gossip with some admirer.

No, the Exchange was an Holy of Holies, never yet desecrated by the frivolous voice and dainty step of the Johannesburg barmaid.

The men called for a bottle of champagne, and drank it between them.

One was the ever-smiling Crœsus, looking as calm and collected as a country parson while he drank his wine. The excitement seemed to have no effect whatever on him.

Not so his companion, a handsome Jew, whose dark eyes were flashing as he looked over the crowd: he was as great an optimist as the bland Crœsus was a pessimist. He believed in everything, but always with a shrewd eye for the needful, which with him meant the disposing of the many stocks in which he was interested. How many they were, no man could exactly tell; but his principal stocks were known to be Main Reefs, Doornkepes, Auroras, and Knights.

He did not appear often on 'Change; when he did, he had a knack of making mysterious remarks, all calculated to impress people favourably with the market.

"Hi!" exclaimed a broker, catching sight of him, "there's Karl Hennig. I must get a word with him."

The broker pushed his way through the throng, anxious to get the first advice before the other brokers surrounded him.

"I say, Hennig, how's the market?"

"Look here," he answered impressively, as he laid down his glass on the counter. "I have had some good advices from London. You just buy and wait."

An advice which the early bird of a broker hastened to act upon; whether he caught the worm is a matter of mystery.

When the market looked weak it was a favourite strategy of Hennig to beg to sustain it by making offers to buy, which were sometimes accepted to his affected dismay. The man who invariably took advantage of this position was his intimate pal, one Stein, a sleepy-looking shareholder, but who saw more with his eyes closed than many men with both wide open. He was a bit of a sentimentalist, and was probably attracted to the handsome Hennig by his good looks, as well as his character, which displayed now and then romantic tendencies, a quality Stein possessed in no little degree; as he had proved by making

a decidedly romantic marriage, wherein he led to the altar a beautiful young nurse, who had brought him safely through the dangers of a serious crisis of fever. The gallant Stein proved himself as shrewd as he was romantic, in securing for life the service of his skilful nurse.

The great Crœsus was not a regular attendant on 'Change. He seldom operated himself, but issued instructions to his brokers, of whom he had many. The majority mistrusted him, and his brokers got little brokerage from the people. Crœsus did not easily commit himself to any marked opinion, but pretended on the whole to believe in better times.

As an operator he was not courageous ; and with the prejudice existing against everything connected with him, found it difficult to boom his stock.

When he had finished his champagne he beckoned to one of the brokers, a young fellow, looking as if he was fresh from college, or ought to have been still there.

"Can you get me any Consolidateds ?"

"What would you give?" answered the young broker.

"What do you buy at ?" queried Crœsus.

"There are buyers at thirty-nine shillings."

"Have you any others at that price?"

"No."

"Well, see what you can get them at," said Crœsus, turning again to the bar.

As soon as the young broker had gone on his mission through the room, Crœsus faced about again and made a sign to another broker to come to him; this one was old and grizzled.

"Go," said Crœsus, nodding in the direction of the former broker, "and sell that fellow some Consolidateds. Try to get thirty-nine shillings. But if you can't, sell at thirty-eight."

Crœsus was apparently engrossed in an argument with Stein and Hennig when the young broker returned.

"I think I can get you some Consolidateds," he said, "at thirty-nine."

"Take them," answered Crœsus, "but ask me first."

In a few minutes the young broker returned saying—

"Yes, I have five hundred at thirty-nine shillings."

"Sorry," answered Crœsus; "have just bought of another broker and am full now."

Without a shade of disappointment in his face, the young broker turned and pushed again

through the crowd, where he was soon in the midst of a new transaction.

"I say," cried a seedy-looking broker to one of the best dressed men on 'Change, "will you sell me some Buffelsdorn on time, Mr Tyler?"

"Couldn't sell them," replied Tyler. "I'm buying myself. Who wants them?"

"Oh, Smith wants some very badly. You ought to let the poor fellow have some; he has been losing lately."

"Well, you see, I have none left; but I know of a man in the Colony who would sell that way, and just to oblige Smith would let him have three thousand at fifty-six shillings one month, but don't press it."

The seedy broker departed well satisfied, knowing as he did that there was not a kinder-hearted man on 'Change than the dandy Tyler, the dispenser of the most gorgeous balls and hospitality in all the Rand.

Another character of the Exchange was Daly; he dealt chiefly in Rietvliers.

"I'll buy Rietvliers." He was selling at fourteen shillings.

"I'll sell to arrive at fourteen shillings," cried Graham, one of the most persistent sellers in the room.

No answer.

"I'll sell to arrive at thirteen shillings and ninepence," persisted Graham.

"How many?" cried Daly.

"Five hundred."

"I'll take them," cried Daly.

"I'll still sell to arrive at thirteen and ninepence," continued Graham, "I'll sell at thirteen and sixpence—at thirteen and threepence."

"Give it up," said Daly to his broker. "We must wait for some time when Graham is not on 'Change to do anything."

As Daly turned away, his youthful countenance showing signs of disgusted annoyance, and prepared to leave the Exchange, an intention which was easier to conceive than to carry out, for his last words were drowned in a prolonged dismal howl mingled with shouts and laughter interspersed by cries of—

"A fight! a fight! I bet on the bull-terrier."

He joined the crowd near the door, all of whom were eagerly watching the sight which, to all intents and purposes, was evidently of greater importance to them than the record of business promulgated in the momentous accounts of the secretary.

Daly speedily forgot the source of his annoyance, and his face lit up pleasantly as he espied

the scene of excitement; which consisted in the determined if somewhat unequal combat of two dogs, the stronger of which, a powerful bull-terrier of good breed, had fastened his fangs in the neck of his antagonist, a much smaller animal, whose pluck availed him little against the superior powers of the terrier. The poor brute had given up all attempts at dislodging his formidable adversary, and was giving vent to a series of piteous howls, while from his poor little body, torn and mangled by the cruel teeth of the other, hung strips of skin. Bleeding horribly, he still struggled; while the crowd of brokers and shareholders urged on the terrier to finish his half-dead victim.

"Cowardly brute," insisted his unnatural master, a tall, bony Scotchman. "Fight him, Nero! don't give in!"

"For shame!" exclaimed a quiet looker-on. "Dog-fights are under no circumstances better than sheer brutality; but to match an animal like yours against that powerful beast is nothing short of cowardly and disgraceful."

But the sentiment was evidently not in harmony with the majority, who cheered and laughed themselves hoarse; until at length the Scotchman, probably afraid of the pecuniary loss that the death of his dog might incur, began

to belabour the terrier with his heavy boot, and succeeded in rescuing his dog more dead than alive, in order, no doubt, that he might live to fight another day.

The gratified audience heaved a sigh of regret as they turned away, some to refresh their excited nerves at the bar, others to again busy themselves in the share market, while the secretary resumed his labours, his voice quite fresh and ringing as he called—

"Monte Christoes—any buyers?"

CHAPTER IX

A TYPICAL LADY OF THE BAR

"I SAY there, Mrs Koker! Mrs Koker! where the devil are you?"

The speaker emphasised each exclamation by a vigorous whack with his riding-whip on the counter of the bar, in which demonstration he was seconded by his companion, a tall, extremely thin man, who lazily tapped on an empty tumbler near his elbow.

"M-e-ses Ko-ker!" he drawled.

"Y-e-s," answered a voice from the far interior of somewhere behind the bar-room. "I'm coming. Wait a mo-ment."

"Wait nothing! Hurry up, I say."

This impatiently from the first speaker, a handsome saturnine type of the Boer.

A moment or two passed, while the young men sauntered to the door for the fifth or sixth time to look at their horses, standing in the early morning sunshine, pawing the red dust, munching their silver bits and flicking a fly now and then from their sides with their long glossy tails.

The men regarded with evident satisfaction their property held well in hand by two dirty, ragged Kafir boys.

"Don't pull the bridle so hard," drawled the tall German.

"All right, Baas," answered one of the Kafirs.

"Well, what is it to be?" said the lady of the bar, as she appeared behind the counter.

"A whisky split, if you please."

"My stars, but you boys are early customers this morning. I don't believe you have been to bed at all."

"Oh, yes we have, Mrs Koker," replied the saturnine man, laughing at her chaff. "Steady, not too much soda."

"There you are," pushing the glasses towards them.

"Oh, that's good!" drawled the German, draining his glass.

"Have another?" said his companion.

"I don't mind."

"Well, help yourselves," said Mrs Koker, amiably pushing the bottle forward, "while I open the soda."

When the glasses were filled Mrs Koker folded her arms on the counter and looked smilingly at the men. She was waiting for

confidences. It was the usual thing with men after their second whisky.

She felt curious to know what they were up to so early on this bright morning. A rendezvous, she thought, as her eyes caught sight of the horses now being led up and down the roadway by the attendant Kafirs.

Still she made no remark. It was her business to appear discreet. No questions asked was her invariable rule; a wise one indeed, whereby she learnt more than any cross-questioning could have revealed to her.

Now this was no ordinary bar-lady.

She was the mother of a small family, with a good-looking little husband, considerably her junior, more fit to be her son and the brother of her pretty daughter by a former husband, so people said.

She was also a very ladylike, pretty woman for her years. Bar-tending had not always been her occupation; and she made her customers feel her superiority over the frivolous beauty who presided at the Heights Hotel bar, within calling distance of her own domicile.

They had pretty much the same class of men who, when tired of the Hotel bar, would invariably take another glass at Mrs Koker's, if only to chat with her jolly little daughter.

That Mrs Koker knew how to keep undesirable admirers at a distance, was well known. This brought her a certain amount of respect. She doled out her amiability judiciously, always with a keen eye to the mercenary advantages to be gained thereby.

The two men on the other side of her counter might be turned to profitable account sooner or later, thought this practical little woman. Especially the handsome Boer, into whose debt her young husband had foolishly slipped one day at the races, when under the fly-blown enthusiasm of champagne. He borrowed a few hundred pounds of him; the Boer, equally elated by copious draughts of brandy and soda, and success in betting, forgot his usual caution in the matter of parting with the 'ready,' and let him have the money.

Now, this debt had been a thorn in Mrs Koker's bosom. She felt very sore about it. Times had begun to grow bad, and bad had grown worse; consequently Mrs Koker felt it would be a waste of money to pay the debt, provided the handsome Boer could be conciliated by a few harmless blandishments.

And the German? Well, he might be good for a jewelled bangle or diamond ring for her daughter Letty. Then, he bore a respectable

title, modestly worn, to be sure. There was just the possibility—thought Mrs Koker, as she gazed pensively at the glass of sparkling soda and whisky in his hand—that something more lasting than a ring or bangle might be secured for her Letty. Baroness would be a pretty handle to her name.

So she set to work this bright Sunday morning, perhaps for lack of something better to do, perhaps for the mere love of weaving a spell, for she was too fond of her young husband to resort to intrigue herself—of conquest for her pretty daughter.

Some women can hypnotise a man's thoughts right out of his head, as easily as a corkscrew pulls out a cork, and with infinitely less trouble. It is the blue-eyed, blonde, guileless-looking women that can perform these magnetic feats to perfection.

Mrs Koker was blonde, or had been in her youth, and was so still by the use of *l'eau d'or;* and she had innocent blue eyes that stared through their long, light lashes. They were small, deep-set, sleepy-looking eyes, full of hypnotic power, of which the little woman was unconscious. She vaguely knew that therein lay some power or other by which she could do pretty much as she liked with people.

The two men sipped at their whisky quite leisurely. They seemed to have forgotten their hurry. Mrs Koker's eyes began to take effect. The German felt quite sympathetically drawn to the little woman.

"I would like very much, my dear Mrs Koker, to take you out for a canter this lovely morning."

This was drawled out with just a suspicion of an accent. Mrs Koker elevated her eyebrows and shook her head discreetly.

"I say," laughed the other, "it would do you good."

"Not this morning, thank you, gentlemen!" and Mrs Koker beamed. "Besides," she added, "I am sure you are provided with company."

"Right you are," cried he of the saturnine face.

"Then there was no chance for Letty after all," thought the lady of the bar.

"I'll tell you, Mrs Koker," drawled the German, "I'll tell you all about it; we are going to have a little picnic, with two ladies," winking knowingly. "But before we go, another split, please."

"So early," said Mrs Koker demurely, as she served the whisky and soda.

"We are going to Half-Way House; the

ladies meet us at the cricket grounds; and we'll all ride out together."

"Oh," purred Mrs Koker, "but you should be more gallant. Why not call for them?"

"They are two of Laville's girls, you know."

"Oh, I see," murmured Mrs Koker, sympathisingly. "It is unreasonable to be so strict with the chorus ladies."

"So you see," continued the German, "we can't go near the chambers."

"No," said the other. "The little duffer has sworn to punch the head of every fellow he catches calling on the girls."

"Well, you can't blame him," said Mrs Koker, as her mind reverted to a refractory barmaid assistant, who was at that moment sleeping off the effects of a night's debauch. "Laville must have a chorus, you know; he can't give an opera properly without one."

"Very true," answered the German. "But our girls have stuck bravely to their contract, and I don't see why they should suffer for the others who have left him."

"Or he has sold," laughingly added his companion.

"What do you mean?" queried Mrs Koker.

"Is it possible you have never heard that queer story from Kimberley?"

"No!"

"Well, here it is, then. Laville, you know, wanted a bang-up chorus; so he went to London with a view to importing one, and secured a round dozen, I believe. However, he only succeeded in bringing half that number to the Rand. The girls were too good-looking, you know. Two or three made matches on board the *Roslin*, and gave Laville the slip. At Kimberley another slipped off. Laville was as mad as a hatter. So you see, when Dave Cross set his cap at one of the prettiest little women amongst those left, Laville raised the very devil. Couldn't blame him, now, could you?" and the German smiled persuasively.

"I should think not," said Mrs Koker, with a sniff and an indignant toss of her head.

"Dave wanted the girl badly, so he offered to refund her passage money. Laville refused; he was not going to lose one of his best chorus girls for a trifle. However, after a lot of haggling on both sides, Dave planked down two hundred pounds, and got the girl."

Mrs Koker laughed heartily; her eyes sparkled with greed at the thought of Laville's clever transaction.

"Of course," she said, with a prudish pucker of the mouth, "they got married?"

"Of course," echoed the Boer, mimicking her tone, "as much as they ever do here."

At which the three laughed long and loudly.

"What's all this about?" queried a sweet voice.

The two men doffed their caps as their eyes rested admiringly on as pretty a vision as one would wish to see, standing in the doorway behind the bar.

She looked barely older than sixteen. There was refinement and intellect in the lovely face framed in its aureole of golden hair. The slight elegant little figure was robed in a babyish-looking gown of white, fastened at the waist by a broad sash of blue silk. The wide flowing sleeves revealed a glimpse to the elbows of a pair of plump and dimpled arms.

"What's all this about? Tell me; I want to laugh too." This with a delicious pout.

"No, child," answered Mrs Koker. "It is not for little girls to hear."

"Good morning, Miss Letty," said the German.

"Good morning," she answered a little stiffly. She rewarded the handsome Boer's salutation with a coquettish nod of her pretty head.

"You're looking positively charming this morning, Miss Letty," he said, insinuatingly.

"Your trip to Pretoria has done you good."

A sudden rush of crimson dyed the face and neck of the young girl; but she returned the man's mocking glance unflinchingly as she answered steadily—

"It has, thank you."

Mrs Koker looked at the Boer, and hastened to say in as careless a tone as her temper would permit—

"I don't need you, daughter!"

"All right, mamma, dear," and she disappeared in the room behind the bar.

"I say, Mrs Koker, don't drive Miss Letty away."

"No, do call her back," said the Boer, possessing himself of one of Mrs Koker's hands.

"I don't like my Letty to hear naughty gossip," said Mrs Koker, permitting him to hold her hand. "She is so young, and I want to keep her innocent of the world's sinfulness as long as I can."

"Quite right, Mrs Koker," said the Boer.

A mysterious fit of coughing seized upon his companion, who rushed to the door, glass in hand, to get air. The Boer promptly availed himself of the opportunity to whisper a few words to Mrs Koker.

"What a nice white little wrist, you have!" he whispered, insinuatingly. "A diamond bracelet would become it wonderfully, eh?"

"Of course," answered Mrs Koker, with a pleased smile.

"Then you shall have the handsomest in the Camp."

"What is he up to?" thought Mrs Koker, but she gave no sign of what was passing in her mind. She was thoroughly accustomed to humouring the vagaries of her patrons, and knew that many brilliant promises made over the bar were born of the generosity begotten in the sparkling exhilaration of champagne and soda—and as effervescing.

A series of nods from each side of the counter seemed to silently settle the matter of the bracelet.

"You know, Mrs Koker," resumed the Boer in a whisper, "Teddy has not settled that racing debt with me yet?"

"Oh, I know," purred Mrs Koker, gently pressing his hand. "That will be all right; he is awfully worried over it. Do give poor Teddy a little more time!"

"Of course I will. But—" whispering still lower, and leaning half way across the bar in his eagerness—"I'll do better than that. I'll

call it square if you say a good word for me with Miss Letty."

"Certainly I will," answered Mrs Koker, with an innocent look.

"Oh! but you don't understand," he persisted. "I don't mean in the ordinary way."

Mrs Koker's heart gave a great bound.

Was this a proposal for the hand of her daughter Letty?

But the words which followed disabused her mind of any such hope.

"I'm fond of that pretty girl of yours, and I'd give anything I possess to make her——"

"The missus?" insinuated Mrs Koker.

"Oh! Go on! I'm not a marrying man, Mrs Koker, but I'd give anything to—to—well, to make Letty a lady, and the envy of the Camp."

Mrs Koker made no reply. The shock of the brutal proposal was too much even for her feelings, hardened as they were by the experience of years of mining-camp life. She did not raise her eyes from the counter, although the colour had faded beneath the rouge on her cheeks, as the Boer continued, emboldened by her silence,—

"I'll wipe out that five hundred, as clean as

an aasvogel finishes a bullock, if you'll give me Letty!"

"Five hundred," answered Mrs Koker, in a strained whisper, as she abruptly withdrew her hand, and flashed a blazing glance through her half-closed eyes at the leering, handsome face close to hers, which if a look could have burned would have shrivelled up the Boer.

"Five hundred pounds!" she repeated. "No, not five thousand pounds!" bringing the tumbler nearest her, as she clutched it, down with a force that shivered it to pieces on the counter. "Not fifty times five hundred pounds would I take to sell my girl to you or any other man!"

"Ho, ho! Mrs Koker, don't get excited," said the Boer, placidly brushing the broken glass aside with his whip. "She might do worse. I can't marry just yet, for family reasons, but I'll do the right thing by her. I'll do it handsome. Letty won't object, I'm sure; she always has a smile for me—little beauty!"

"If you think, Jan Vanderbosch," gasped Mrs Koker, "that my girl would do wrong, you mistake her. Don't you suppose that because I stand behind a bar, and sometimes let my daughter serve you, that I am not a mother, and a woman to be respected. I like money, and work hard enough to get it—but I don't

want it at such a price as that. No. I'd sooner sell every stick we possess, and pay you your beastly five hundred, than you should dare to put a hand on my girl!"

"Ho, ho!" a soft laugh rippling his face. "We'll see, Mrs Koker, we'll see. Leave that to me; I'll manage it."

Further talk was prevented by the entrance of the German, purple in the face from a paroxysm of coughing.

"There, Fritz," cried the Boer, advancing towards him, "that will relieve you," giving him a few smart pats on the back. "I say," looking at his watch, "it is time to meet the ladies; let's be off."

"Another whisky split, Mrs Koker; I'm nearly choked with this cough."

"Won't you join us?"

"No, thanks all the same though," she said, softening her refusal with a smile. "I never drink when serving my customers; it is a bad plan, and has ruined my assistant, Molly. If it wasn't for that failing, she would be the best barmaid in the Rand. Now don't run away with the girls."

"Don't you be afraid, Mrs Koker. We'll not give Laville another chase to Heidelberg. One such is enough for him."

"Poor little man, what trouble he has with that chorus, to be sure! Has he got her back?"

"Yes, she's back safe enough; but Davidson's dreadfully cut up about it; he vows he'll get her away again—if—he has to marry her."

"Well, chin-chin, Mrs Koker!"

The lady of the bar followed the two young men to the door, and stood on the stoop while they mounted their horses, now in a state of almost unruly restlessness. In a moment they were tearing through the roadway in the direction of the cricket-ground, leaving a whirlwind of red dust behind them.

Mrs Koker watched them out of sight. A curious smile played round her thin lips as she turned and re-entered the bar. Her face bore the look of one who had made up her mind to do an unpleasant thing.

Her ladyship of the bar was in anything but a holy temper this lovely Sabbath morn. "That beast of a Molly," was her first grievance. As she thought of the wretched girl, she gave a vixenish grip to the bottle she was replacing among its fellows on the shelf, as though she would twist its neck in lieu of the unfortunate Molly's.

Her second grievance was that she, the fas-

tidious Mrs Koker, was obliged to serve the few loiterers who were likely to drop in ; her usual proud post being the little parlour behind the bar, where she dispensed champagne and such like expensive drinks to a few, a very few favoured ones.

Grievance number three was that dear hubby of hers; had he not promised faithfully to be back from Potchefstroom by Sunday evening? "The Lord alone knows what capers he's up to," she thought, as she viciously flicked the flies off the counter.

And fourth, and last, and worst grievance of all, was the scene she had just gone through with Jan Vanderbosch. That Letty had been guilty of some secret indiscretion with the handsome Boer, she did not doubt for a moment. His words, "She has always a smile for me," convinced her of the fact.

Now, Mrs Koker was thoroughly imbued with the idea, and stood in awe of the African custom, that any indiscretion on the part of a young maiden considerably lessened, and in flagrant cases utterly destroyed, her marriageable value. Mrs Koker's grand dream was a profitable alliance for her pretty daughter. She knew the young Boer would be a desirable match ; and the bare thought that Letty had

damaged her chances with him, by some of those new-fangled tricks introduced to the Rand by the young ladies imported from the Cape or the old country, called flirtations, made her furious against the poor child.

"Yes—Letty had done something foolish. Letty had been corrupted by the example of those fly-away chorus-girls. Letty must be punished, must be read a lecture she would not soon forget; and that before Teddy returned, for was not Teddy—like the rest of these silly Englishmen—a perfect fool where a pretty face was concerned?

"Letty!" she screamed shrilly; "Letty, I want you!"

CHAPTER X

A CRY IN THE NIGHT—THE VANQUISHER VANQUISHED

"YES, mother."

Children, very young people, and dogs share in common a keen discrimination of tone. They instinctively judge the character, temperament, and mood of those around them by the voice. We who are older, seared and hardened by daily contact with the outer world, little know the subtle changes that betray the different phases of the mind. We may have known it when we were little toddlers, or on the verge of emancipation from the schoolroom. That inner sense, that subtle delicate chord thrilling like an Æolian harp, sweet or harsh beneath the breath of a gentle or discordant breeze, vanishes with the many happy delusions of childhood.

And Letty, poor little soul, was not too old to have lost that childish keenness of instinct. She knew as she heard her mother's voice what it meant, another something. What if a shudder passed through her body? She went

bravely to meet her mother's commands. Instinctively she coupled the tone of voice with the mocking smile of the handsome Boer.

How loudly beat the poor little heart. That would never betray her. But her voice! oh, that voice! it would lose its childish tone; it would betray that it knew what was coming, and that filial duty prompted the formal—

"Yes, mother."

"Don't 'Yes, mother,' me!"

Now Mrs Koker invariably worked herself into a perfect frenzy of passion when she had to do anything that did not exactly please her.

"I want you to tell me the truth—have you been carrying on with Jan Vanderbosch?"

"No, mother," cried the girl in tremulous tones, "I only rode out with him once towards Pretoria——"

"What?" screamed Mrs Koker; "so you have been taking rides with him. There," dealing a series of stinging cuffs on the round soft cheeks, "I'll teach you better!"

The girl shrank back into a ledge between the bar and the corner of the room, her blue eyes staring through their tears as she watched in an agony of terror the angry face of her mother.

"Now listen to what I have to tell you,"

panted Mrs Koker. "Jan Vanderbosch is a bad, wicked man. He means no good by you."

Letty drew her breath quickly and raised her head with a little gesture of pride. Mrs Koker noted the effect of her words, and went on, secretly pleased with the girl's attitude of indignation.

"You are too good to suffer insults at his hands. I have brought you up better than that. He only wants to amuse himself with you. He don't want to marry you. So just you take care of yourself."

Letty turned crimson with shame at the thought of what her mother's outspoken, almost brutal words implied.

"Yes, I mean what I say. I have good cause to know his intentions; and if I catch you or hear of you having anything to say to him after this—I'll——" snatching a light whip from its place on the wall, and shaking it over Letty's head, "I'll give you a lashing, and then send you to Om Peit, where you'll not see a white man for months, and wear nothing but old frocks. There, now look after the bar," said Mrs Koker, as she replaced the whip, feeling better since the trying scene with her daughter was over, "while I go and see if I

can't get Molly on her feet. If anyone comes, call me."

When her mother had gone, Letty dropped her head on the bar, and gave way to a tempest of tears. Although her cheeks were smarting, her eyes burning, and a terrible feeling of home-sickness overcame her at the prospect of being sent away to the lonely, dreary life on the farm of Om Peit, her dead father's brother, where only Kafir herdsmen and native women shared the solitude of the big, coarse, Boer farmer, and the still coarser Tante Suije; all that was nothing to the pain of mortified pride and injured modesty which wrung her innocent heart on hearing her mother's revelation of the wickedness of Jan Vanderbosch.

A feeling of loathing took the place of the admiration she had secretly cherished for the handsome Boer. Her cheeks burned with a keener twinge than ever her mother's hand could have inflicted, as her mind reverted to that stolen ride to Pretoria.

With a sudden gesture of infinite passion, she smote her little right hand.

"He dared to kiss me there," she cried half aloud. "Oh, I wish I could burn out the flesh that his wicked lips have touched!"

Then she dropped her head once more on the counter and sobbed anew.

There is no sorrow so pitiful, no realisation so terrible, as that of an innocent heart when first brought face to face with the depravity of the world. True, Letty had lived the major part of her short life behind her mother's bar, yet she had passed unscathed amid the dissipation and sinful scenes around her. Fast and reckless as the men were who patronised her mother's bar, they had, to a man, treated the beautiful child with tender consideration and half-quixotic respect: and thus she grew up, amid those hostile surroundings, as some fair, fragrant flower flourishes in a garden of noxious weeds.

If vague hints reached her of sin, or an instinctive dread arose within her at times of unseen dangers to her innocence, they left her unharmed, as the poisonous breath of the weeds upon the fair flower. She, like the flower, bore within her the strengthening breath of purity which sweetened the very air around her.

But now, alas! all that was changed, for the hand of her mother, her dear mother, whom, with all her faults, she passionately loved—that hand had rudely torn aside the veil divid-

ing childhood and womanhood; plunged the first spear of doubt and distrust in the quivering heart, when she revealed the baseness, the loathsomeness of the man whom that loving little heart had singled out as the ideal of its innocent dreams.

Thus the pure eyes were opened, and a child went forth a woman, with no armour, save the frail shield of modesty, to fight the long, hard battle.

As Letty's sobs grew fainter she heard a horse dash up to the door. Looking up, she saw a blurred vision of a man dismounting, but her swollen eyes could not for the moment distinguish him until he stood beside her, saying—

"What's the matter, Letty?"

"Oh! Dad Teddy! why didn't you come home last night?" was Letty's answer, as she wound her arms about his neck, and burst into a fresh shower of tears.

Meanwhile Mrs Koker was going through a stormy scene with the refractory Molly.

She lay on a low bed in a tiny room. It opened on a stone-paved courtyard, which formed a sort of open-air lumber-room, with its mound of empty bottles heaped up in one corner, as well as a fowl-yard, with its chicken-

coop in another corner; a shelter the feathered inmates evidently discarded during the day, to judge by the manner in which they availed themselves of the freedom of the court, the house, and even the bar.

This accommodating courtyard likewise served as a kitchen, where the half-breed maid prepared the family meals on a rusty stove propped up in a third corner. A steaming coffee-pot sent forth a fragrant odour as the yellow maid poured its contents into the bowl in her hand.

Mrs Koker had already exhausted breath and muscle in her efforts to rouse the stupefied Molly from her sleep.

"Leave me alone," at last grunted the girl; "I ain't slept enough."

"Oh, you drunken wretch!" groaned Mrs Koker, "shall I never break you of that terrible habit?"

This lament was lost, as Molly sank back on the bed apparently in a deeper stupor than ever.

"Put down the coffee," cried Mrs Koker to the maid, "and pull her feet while I lift her so that we may get her on the floor."

But their combined efforts only landed Molly on the side of the bed, where she sat supported by Mrs Koker's arms.

"Now put the bowl of coffee to her mouth."

The maid obeyed with alacrity, for the coffee was very hot, and she felt a secret delight in the prospect of scalding the unfortunate Molly's palate.

But, to the maid's amazement, Molly, on feeling the bowl touch her lips, took a long draught with evident relish, and then opened her eyes.

"Ah!" she sighed, "now I feel better."

"It's time, you horrid beast!" exclaimed Mrs Koker.

"Don't 'horrid beast' me," she cried, struggling to her feet. "If I am overcome now and then, it's all your fault; you're never satisfied. You want me to sell a lot, and if I sell a lot of drink, I must drink too!" and Molly's voice ended in a sound between a shriek and a howl.

"Oh, listen to that!" cried Mrs Koker, appealing to the yellow maid, who stood by, grinning, and the bare walls around her.

"Yes," blurted Molly, "you row me when I sell eighteen-penny drinks. I must make them open champagne; and if they do, I must drink with them, to make them drink more. And if I get boozed—whose fault is it?—yours, *yours*. The profits go into *your* pocket—so don't you

call me names, if you please—if—*you please*—Mrs Koker."

This was altogether too much for Mrs Koker's patience, already worn out by the exciting events of the morning; and a terrible war of words ensued.

The yellow maid hid behind the chicken-coop, where she gave vent to a paroxysm of silent laughter which shook her fat sides and sent tears to her beady eyes. This babel of screams, words, and imprecations was suddenly interrupted by a voice exclaiming—

"What, in heaven's name, is the matter, Fanny?"

It was Mr Koker.

The sound of his voice stilled the tumult and brought the women to their senses.

Molly hurried away to look after the bar; she was sober now, and rather ashamed of herself, and sought by bustling about and clearing up the bar to make up for her lapse of duty.

"It's all your fault, Teddy," blubbered Mrs Koker, as she sat in the little parlour, looking the picture of woe.

"It's all your fault; I've been in a rage all the morning because you did not come back from Potchefstroom last night. There's Molly, dead drunk since last night. And then I had

such a scene with my poor little girl, all on account of Jan Vanderbosch. I had to beat her—it went to my heart to do it—but it's the only way to cure her of flirting with him——"

"There, there," said Teddy, soothingly, "I'll look after him. Letty has told me all. I'll look after *him*."

"You must never stay away over night again. I—I was so uneasy about you," whimpered Mrs Koker, cautiously omitting to speak of her jealous doubts. "And it was so mortifying to be obliged to serve whisky to those fast boys, Teddy."

"It was, indeed, love," said Teddy.

And so ended the morning's troubles.

. . . . . .

It was long past midnight, when Letty was awakened by a sound at the door of her room. As the room opened directly on the street, she thought nothing of it. Probably some one belonging to the adjoining building had mistaken the door. She settled her little head more cosily on the pillow and dozed off again.

Presently she was again awakened. This time the sound of her name called in muffled tones floated through the door, and aroused her.

It was the voice of Jan Vanderbosch.

For a moment the blood seemed to surge

away from her heart, leaving her faint and trembling. Then her courage returned as a wave of doubt swept over her.

"Perhaps I was dreaming," she murmured.

But the next instant her doubt vanished, as she beheld, distinctly outlined by the full bright rays of the moon, the figure of a man on the thin muslin curtains draping the window.

A childish fear of the dark had induced her before retiring to pull up the window blind to its highest, in order that the light of the moon might keep her company while she slept.

Her innocent device had laid a trap for her. It was that which had attracted Jan Vanderbosch as he rode slowly past on his way home after a drinking-bout.

He could not resist the temptation of peeping into that little chamber. He had no intention of harming or alarming the sleeping inmate when he dismounted from his horse. Something in the wine he had drunk, or that mysterious influence which spurs men on to sudden deeds of evil, roused in him a desire to enter the room.

So he first cautiously tried the door, then whispered softly Letty's name, and was trying the window when she awoke.

Letty's blood ran cold as she suddenly remembered that the window was unlatched.

What should she do?

But she had no time to consider that important question, or devise means of escape. She beheld from her pillow, the sash slowly and noiselessly raised, and a pair of hands rest on the sill of the window. Jan was evidently listening, or it may have been hesitating, before he raised the sash further; but whatever it was, it saved Letty.

Now, Letty was, despite her barely sixteen years and slender little physique, as sinewy and strong as a young springbok. In her veins ran sturdy Boer blood commingled with English blood, that gave her both strength and pluck. As she beheld the hesitation of the intruder, and the hands resting on the window-sill within the room, she saw her opportunity. Quick as thought, with a light bound she gained the window, sprang on the sill, and threw the weight of her body on the sash, thereby effectually pinning the hands to the window, and making a prisoner of the audacious Jan.

Then she uttered a loud piercing cry.

. . . . . .

"Was not that Letty's voice?" cried Teddy, starting up from his sleep.

"Fanny, wake up!" shaking his wife; "I'm sure I heard Letty scream!"

Mrs Koker stared sleepily at her husband.

"It's Letty!" he cried, springing out of bed and hastily donning some clothes. "Something is wrong!"

Again the cry rang out louder and more piercing than before.

"Oh! my girl, my Letty!" screamed Mrs Koker, "she is being murdered!"

To hurriedly unlock the doors, scamper through the narrow alley leading to the street, in which was the door of Letty's room, was, to the excited pair, the work of a few moments.

The sight that met their eyes almost paralysed them with astonishment.

For there, against the window, kicking, struggling, and swearing, was the form of Jan Vanderbosch.

Teddy went to him and discovered that the young Boer, caught by the hands, was securely imprisoned beneath the window. Then he peered through the glass, and beheld the brave Letty holding on to the sash for dear life.

In an instant he took in the whole situation, and gave vent to a roar of laughter that roused the neighbourhood.

"Look, Fanny!" he gasped between the

fits of merriment, "Letty's pinned him tight. Serve him right. Ha ha! Jan, you won't try to climb a lady's window in a hurry again."

"Oh, you wretch!" screamed Mrs Koker, as she hit viciously at the Boer's legs, "you thought you'd get the best of my girl. Oh, you nasty Boer!"

"For God's sake, Teddy," cried Jan, "tell Letty to get off the sash; she is cutting my hands off."

"Get down, Letty dear," called Teddy, "I'll take care of you now."

At his words the poor, brave girl fell in a heap on the floor beside the window; and the young Boer drew away his hands with a curse of relief.

Teddy climbed through the window, lifted the fainting girl to the bed, and then unlocked the door, admitting Mrs Koker.

Meanwhile Jan Vanderbosch lingered outside, although the sound of the screams and loud voices had attracted a small crowd of neighbours, while a head thrust here and there from an open window demanded the cause of the disturbance.

"I've been a duffer and a blackguard, Teddy," said Jan, humbly enough, as he caught his arm.

"Don't, for God's sake, give me away. I'll send you that I.O.U. to-morrow, and the bracelet for the missus."

"All right, Jan," answered Teddy, "I might make an example of you, but I won't do that, although I'll let you pay for your fun!"

True to his word, Jan Vanderbosch returned the note, and Mrs Koker proudly shows to this day the splendid bracelet gracing her wrist. When people ask Jan to drop into Mrs Koker's for a drink he is always in a hurry, or suddenly espies a friend in the distance whom it is absolutely necessary for him to see.

And so ended that night's troubles.

CHAPTER XI

ONE MORE UNFORTUNATE

THE drought had held the land for many weeks; but that Monday morning there was a general spirit of jubilation throughout the Camp. The shower, which had passed over the town during the night, had raised hopes of many such visiting the drought-cursed country. The shopkeepers brightened up wonderfully at the prospect of a rainy season, which would freshen the roads and give new life to the veld.

Terrible stories had reached Johannesburg, told with brutal vividness by the half-starved drivers of the few transport waggons that managed to survive the hardships of the road from Kimberley, the Free State, and Natal.

"Not a drop of rain," they said, "had fallen for over a month. The veld was as dry and hard as a chip. The poor bullocks died by scores for lack of water and nutriment. Nothing fattened, nothing thrived, save the

huge, hideous aasvogels, who came in flocks to feast on the poor beasts as they lay dying, in the helpless agonies of starvation on the veld, or dropped on the dusty roads."

"Them domed assvogels got so fat they couldn't fly," said a brawny, scrubby Boer, as he stolidly puffed at his pipe.

"Yah!" answered another; "how I wished to the Almighty that I could have inspanned the devils to my waggon!"

Which grim humour elicited a grunt from his companions, and leers of delight from the half-naked Kafir boys crouched on their haunches in front of the vorelouper of the span of bullocks that had survived to drag their weary load into camp.

The boys rolled their great eyes in silent mirth, while they playfully whacked the flabby sides and dribbling jaws of their charges with the knotted ends of the rope with which they guided the steps of the sick and tired animals.

A handful of mealies a day sufficed to keep life and soul in their poor little black bodies; right merrily they lived at that, basking in the sunshine or gaily trudging ahead of their charges; the secret of contentment seemed to be born in them.

It was as much a part of their savage nature

as the dark colour of their dusky hides or the kink of their woolly scalps. And so they kicked their shining heels together as they lay on their bellies in the dry red dust of the great market square, silently nodding their little heads in approval of the coarse wit of the Baas.

There were many anxious, troubled faces among the knots of men gathered here and there around the outspanned bullocks in the market square that morning; supplies of food seemed to grow less and less.

"Why don't the Volksraad do something for us?" was the general query. Even the itinerant Mahometan merchants looked hungry and drooping as they sat behind their piles of gay-coloured Kafir blankets and other attractive commodities.

But no buyers came. The Kafirs bid no more; they felt grateful for something with which to fill their stomachs in lieu of the silver which should have filled their grimy hands.

"It is going to be worse than ever," croaked an old Boer as he shook the ashes from his pipe, and gazed into the deep blue of the cloudless sky with his bleared, bloodshot eyes.

"Yah!" responded a gaunt carrier; "that spurt of rain last night was no good. It'll

be another domed month before rain falls."

He jingled the gold coins in his great pocket with a grim smile, as he thought of the enormous profits his bag of mealies had brought him.

Presently a wan, unkempt woman, accompanied by a little half-breed boy, drew near the waggon of the big Boer.

She approached the man timorously.

"I want——" she began.

"What you can't buy," said the Boer with a rude laugh.

"Take yourself off," croaked the blear-eyed old man.

"I've got money to buy," she said, with an effort at dignity.

"How much?" growled the Boer.

The woman disclosed a handful of silver coin.

"Yah, yah!" he roared, "is that all? I don't sell anything for silver; I want gold, old vrouw, gold—be off."

"For pity's sake——"

"Be off," he roared again, giving the unfortunate woman a push.

"Go, drink yourself to death; it's the best thing you can do. You'll get all you want over

there," pointing to a bar in the corner of the square, "you ugly, wrinkled old vrouw. If you were nice and young and fat, I'd give you some for nothing."

The poor creature slunk away, dragging her half-starved child after her.

There was no refuge for such as she, ugly and thin, her face seared with the marks of a horrid disease; clutching the tiny fingers of her boy, she turned her steps towards the bar.

The words of the Boer rang in her ears.

"Drink yourself to death!"

She could do that, she thought, and closed her fingers convulsively over the few silver coins in her hand; they would buy forgetfulness, and make her nice and warm.

"Baby," she whispered softly to the child as she stopped in front of the bar in the corner, "here, take this," putting some silver bits in his little hand. "Go in there, and say to the lady you want a small bottle of gin. Mind you speak nice now!" The child obeyed with an alacrity which told plainly of many such errands.

Presently he toddled back, his pinched little face aglow with smiles as he held a big, stale sandwich in one hand and a bottle in the other.

"Did the lady give you that? Bless her!" exclaimed his mother, as she uncorked the bottle and put it to her lips.

The little fellow nodded, and gleefully crammed the food into his mouth.

The woman drank again and again. Presently she thrust the empty bottle in the child's hand, together with the remainder of the coin.

"Go, that's a lovey," she said huskily, "and buy mummy some more gin."

The child toddled away, and again returned with another sandwich and the replenished bottle.

The unfortunate creature felt the fiery poison of the liquor stealing through her veins and mounting to her brain. A last impulse of decency prompted her to hide herself. Dragging the child with her, she staggered into a recess between two projecting stoops, and sank helplessly on the ground. In a few moments she was unconscious.

Meanwhile the child devoured the sandwich, notwithstanding the heavy dose of mustard with which it was seasoned. But the mustard made his little throat burn; and, taking the bottle from the unresisting hand of his mother, he grasped it between his tiny fingers, and raised it to his mouth.

He was about to drain the few drops of fiery liquor remaining, tip-tilting the bottle on his lips in imitation of the gesture he had often seen his mother perform, when a hand gently drew the bottle away. The cry of disappointment died on the child's lips as he looked up at the tall figure before him.

A woman, with kind, gracious face, looked down upon him with pitying eyes.

"Poor child," she said softly to the servant beside her; "how did they get here? Take the little fellow to your rooms, Jacobs; give him some hot milk, and send someone to look after this unfortunate creature; I fear she is ill."

Jacobs lifted the boy in his arms and carried him away.

For some time Ariadne stood there looking up and down the roadway. No one was in sight, Rissik Street being a sort of narrow lane, not yet built up, save for the two little shanties between whose stoops the drunken creature had crept.

A neat Cape cart, with well-groomed horses, stood motionless in the middle of the road. The Kafir driver waited patiently. Presently Ariadne looked at the watch on the silver chatelaine at her side.

"It is dreadful to leave the poor wretch

lying here," she said, partly to her driver, partly to herself, "but I must be going soon."

The driver respectfully nodded his head, but said nothing.

At that moment Jacobs came round the corner; a policeman accompanied him, followed by some Kafirs carrying a rude litter. The policeman saluted the fair woman with great deference.

"You can drive on now, missis," he said. "Thank you for sending for me."

"Don't mention it," she said. "Tell me, is the poor creature ill or drunk?"

The Kafirs raised the heap of rags, and placed it on the litter. One of them gave a grunt of surprise as the unfortunate's face was revealed.

"What is it?" said the policeman.

"This is old Polly, Canary Dick's vrouw," answered the Kafir. "He works at the Jumpers. This morning old Polly came in to buy mealies."

The policeman drew near, and examined the bundle of rags.

Ariadne turned her head aside, her heart beat quickly, while a lump seemed to rise in her throat.

Presently the policeman said in a low voice—

"You had better go away, missis; no one can do the old creature any good now."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean she was starving, and that dose of Cape-smoke has killed her."

"She is dead?"

"Yes," answered the policeman, motioning to the Kafirs to take away the litter and its burden.

"Was she a European?"

"Yes," said the policeman; "there's many of them brought to that out here through Cape-smoke."

Ariadne opened her purse and gave the man a couple of gold coins.

"Be sure and see that the poor wretch is decently buried. I cannot bear to think of a white woman wrapped only in an old Kafir blanket, and thrust into a ditch to rot!"

"I promise you I'll see that she is properly buried," said the policeman, deeply touched. "Bless your kind heart, missis.'

Doffing his helmet, he stood bareheaded, while Ariadne mounted the cart and drove off.

"Oh, the horror of it, the horror of it!" she thought, as the cart sped over the road in a whirl of dust.

"To what terrible end is this strange city tending? one half starving while the other half feasts.

"No water to drink, nothing but champagne for the rich and Cape-smoke for the poor. How will it end? Shall it be, as Hector said last night, the drought will ruin every one if it continues another few months? The mines will be utterly useless—not a stamp or drill at work for lack of water.

"How dreadful is the outlook, God alone knows.

"If the rain, the sweet, soft, blessed rain, would only come, and wash away all these horrors.

"Oh, England! England! if you but knew how dearly bought is the gold you send your sons to seek in this far-away land! Through what scenes of misery, crime, and debauchery it finds its way into your proud coffers!

"If you but knew! If you but knew!"

Ariadne clasped her gloved hands nervously together, while big tears ran down her cheeks.

"What can I do?" she murmured. "My poor pen is too feeble to work the good it is in my heart to do.

"I'm only a woman, a weak, weak woman.

Were I a man, I would raise a cry that would reach from one end of the Transvaal to the other. I would send that cry of appeal to England. I would fight the good cause night and day, until I had laid the first rail of the road that would lift the poor golden city for ever out of this helpless state. She would be no longer Boer-ridden,—the prey of drought, famine, and fever. Oh, to be a man! a man! to work, write, talk, until I had prevailed on that slow-going Volksraad and old Oom Paul to give Johannesburg a railway to the Cape."

"Drive to the hotel first, for a moment," she said, as the cart turned into Loveday Street.

CHAPTER XII

THE "ARGUS" HOUSE-WARMING

ARIADNE looked over the gilt and satin *menu* she held in her hand.

"You arrived so late," said the chairman, at whose right she was seated, "I began to fear you were not coming at all."

"I am sorry," she said in a low voice, "but something very sad detained me."

"Don't think of it now," he whispered. "I want you to be very bright, and reflect credit on the staff."

Ariadne smiled, while a faint rosy tinge crept over her face. "I feel dreadfully nervous," she whispered back, "amid all these men."

"Nonsense," answered the chairman. "Now, what are you going to have? we have already reached the fifth course."

"Is it possible," she said, scanning the *menu*, "that you really have all that is written here?"

"Yes, all," he answered. "It does honour to the occasion, does it not?"

"Decidedly it does," she replied, as she read the long array of delicacies.

* "Hors d'Œuvres Assorti."
"Mayonnaise of Salmon."
"Venison Pie. Galantine of Fowl."
"Fois gras truffee en Bellivue."
"Ox-tongue en Aspic."
"Fillet of Beef Piqué."
"Roast Chicken, York Ham."
"Turkey au Perigorde."
"Salade de Saison."

Pine-apple Jelly.
Bavarois à la National.
Punch à la Parisienne.
Patiserie Assorti.

Strawberries and Cream.

WINES.

Amontillado. Niersteiner.
St Julien. Beaune.
Giesler (1st qual.) Irroy.
Old Crusted Port.
Liqueurs.

"How was it possible to make out this wonderful *menu*," she asked, "in these dreadful times, with famine staring us in the face?"

* This *menu* represents dishes composed entirely of tinned edibles — the only food supply at that time in Johannesburg.

"It doesn't look like famine," whispered the chairman, with a chuckle. "Those strawberries are from Pretoria, and Zocallo did the rest."

"What a clever man you are," she said, with a glance of admiration at the powerful face bending towards her, "to curb that bear of an Italian and trim his claws, so to speak; I am sure he would never have taken the trouble to serve such a banquet for anyone but you, not even for Om Paul himself."

"Thank you," he whispered, "but a cleverer woman than I am a man has captured me; and she is as brave as she is clever to face this lot of men—and Boers."

"I expect a nip," answered Ariadne coolly, while looking into the bottom of the glass with which she toyed.

"If anyone dares to nip, I'll——"

"I am here as one of you, you know," she went on, *naïvely*. "If there was but one single Englishman present, I should feel safe; he would not suffer me to be insulted."

"Never," the chairman hastened to answer.

"You must tell me who some of these men are, and anything of interest about them."

"Well," answered the chairman, complacently sipping his champagne, "we have a hundred guests, all representative men of the Rand,

with here and there a prominent Cape man. The gentleman next to you is an ex-Premier and member of the Assembly. Allow me to introduce him."

The ex-Premier returned Ariadne's smile with a dignified bow, while she shot from under her golden lashes a keen glance of scrutiny at the pale intellectual face, framed in iron-grey hair and well-trimmed beard. The firm-cut mouth and deep-set, thoughtful eyes impressed her pleasantly, but the slow, quiet tones of his voice proclaimed the man of determination and patience.

"If he makes up his mind to do a thing," she thought, "he will wait a hundred years, if need be, to accomplish it."

"I like him," she whispered to the chairman, after exchanging a few seasonable remarks with the ex-Premier; "his voice rings true. An honest man has always a sympathetic tone. I have never found it to fail—that is, as far as my experience goes. Now, I should say he was a man who stopped at nothing, when once he believed himself in the right, and would cling to it like grim death."

"You may rely on what you call experience, which is really instinct, and with woman it takes the place of experience in man. You have

summed up in a phrase the whole policy and character of our neighbour: being an Africander, he has the confidence of the inner circle of the colony, is in touch with the vital questions of the hour, and knows the pulse of S.A.; and it would have been well had he been reappointed to the premiership instead of his successor, a man worthy in an official sense, but not a vital one. How, in God's name, can a man who has not lived among us—in fact, been born among us—who is a creature of Downing Street, understand the problems of South African politics? It would be just as reasonable to appoint a Thames bargeman to the captaincy of a Union liner. What could he know of the currents, sub-currents and coast dangers of the southern seas? Every exotic Premier is, and will be, a failure. There are still greater dangers ahead, unless a man of thorough Afrikander build does not soon take the helm.—But there, I am drifting into high politics, and, although I know you will write brilliantly and well, I cannot allow you to touch high politics."

"And why not?" interrupted Ariadne; "why should you relegate me to the retailing of society gossip, the frothy chronicles of the small beer of fashion, when I possess the in-

stinct, as you have just said, which led me straight to the mark in summing up our neighbour?"

"Because you are a charming, a deucedly charming woman," answered the chairman, filling Ariadne's glass from the bottle of Giesler beside him; "and we value women here too much to let them trouble their pretty heads with dry problems on political and official subjects. We look to you for restful diversion and sweet forgetfulness from the onerous duties of public life."

"But will you not admit that I, with my wide and profound experience as a woman of the world, a traveller and observer of three continents of the civilised globe, am not more capable, more fitted to take up the pen in political work than your sub-editor, who has never seen a London fog, an American blizzard, who knows nothing beyond the endless blue of an African sky?"

"There, there," interrupted the chairman in a low voice, as he smiled, well pleased with the enthusiasm glowing in her eyes and lending a fascinating beauty to her face, "don't allow your pretty enthusiasm to carry you away. I may admit the truth of all you say, but the time is not ripe for such woman-work in Africa.

Remember, we have not reached the epoch of Primrose Dames, yet."

"Ah! now you misunderstand me," answered Ariadne, a little archly. "I don't aspire to leading African women so high as *that*. But I would be glad to open your eyes to the value of what you call instinctive power in woman. I would make women the counsellors and advisers of men in the arena of state government, as they are in domestic affairs. To whom does a man go more readily and trustfully for advice and counsel, when the world seems to have failed him, than to his wife? Does he not lay all the bearings of the case before her? not that he believes in her wisdom, for wisdom is begotten of experience, but he believes in the "old woman's" instinct, don't you see!"

The chairman nodded approvingly; he highly enjoyed, without yielding to them, the prettily-worded arguments of Ariadne.

"Clever, very clever," he thought. "She is angling for the sub-editorship. By Jove! I'd give it to her if only for the sake of that sweet voice and winning smile. But there would be the devil to pay; they don't appreciate woman in that sense here yet."

Ariadne saw the wavering twinkle in the

dark eyes, and hastened to hit harder on the head of the nail.

"To be brief," she resumed, "the time has come when women must lift some of the burden from men's shoulders and bear it with them. When I think of the Herculean load that thousands, nay, millions of men carry daily, the burden of a household of three, four, or a dozen of souls to support, I wonder that more men don't go mad under the strain. All women cannot be wives and mothers, but they can be co-workers, counsellors, and equals. The time is come when women shall be allowed to be nobly self-supporting, when an over-strained husband and hard-worked brother are no longer expected to bear the pressure alone. We are accepted in America, we are gaining in England and France, and here in Africa we hope to win it. I am sitting here among a lot of hostile men. Oh, don't shake your head!" she said softly, with a smile; "nearly every man is wondering at my 'cheek'; but they don't know that I am mortifying my pride for a principle, trampling under foot my womanly reserve, as they would call it, by being the only lady present at this banquet. I am the wee part of the wedge of woman influence in the Rand. I shall be vilified and stormed at by

the coarse element; but I don't care; I am willing to bear anything to become a precedent in such a good cause."

"By the Almighty," muttered the chairman, "I believe she will wheedle me into giving her the sub-editorship after all!"

"Just one word more," she said, as the strawberries appeared, "I feel that awful times are coming for the whole country, unless Afrikanders awake to the sense of the dangers of alien leadership. I heard a man speak in the Cape; it was in the Council Chamber. He is the coming man for South Africa."

"Who was he?" queried the chairman, with an amused smile.

"Cecil Rhodes," she answered.

The chairman looked steadily at Ariadne for a moment, then he said quietly, "You shall have the sub-editorship."

Ariadne's eyes sparkled mistily. She said nothing further; her point had been gained by a stroke of instinctive policy. Surprised at the sudden decision of the chairman, she refrained from following up and perhaps weakening the advantage she had gained, by further talk on the subject. Like a wise woman, she prudently held her tongue.

CHAPTER XIII

EVERY MAN HAS A RIGHT TO SPEAK HIS MIND

And now the real business of this journalistic banquet began.

The chairman arose and proposed the health of the "President," which was drank amid cheers that deepened to roars of applause as "The Queen" was toasted. No more loyal hip-hip-hurrahs could have resounded at a Lord Mayor's banquet, than those which rolled forth lustily from the throats of her sons and subjects gathered round that festive board in the heart of the Transvaal, and whose Boer leaders joined in with a heartiness that shook the rafters of the fine banqueting-hall, till the very flags and gay-coloured buntings trembled like boughs shaken beneath a summer storm.

Glasses clinked, and wine bubbled afresh, while tears welled up to Ariadne's eyes, touched to the quick by the electric current of the noble enthusiasm which one woman's name, the emblem of purity, goodness, godliness, and the

ruler of the greatest empire of the world, had called forth.

"It is the woman, after all, that they revere," thought Ariadne, as she sat silent amid the hubbub, quite hidden by the men standing about her. "Thank God!" she murmured, in a sudden burst of thankfulness, "that I am a woman, and that British blood flows in my veins. It is that which makes my heart strong and true."

There are moments in our lives when the veneer of conventionality and custom melts beneath the fire of enthusiasm like snow before the noonday blaze. Wine is a generous influence, and when combined with the magic of good-fellowship, it is like unto oil cast on troubled waters: whatever lies beneath the surface blends harmoniously. So the pleasant hospitality warmed alike the heart of Boer and Britisher, and for the nonce they were in sympathetic union.

The Landdrost, the Assistant Landdrost, and the other Boer officials quite entered into the spirit of patriotism of their host; and, as they drank of the mellow Giesler, they seconded with downright goodwill the loyal cheers of their companions.

Was it not right and fitting that these men

should overflow with enthusiasm at the name of their great Queen? And the sturdy Boers felt that they were upholding a just and laudable principle in assisting their friends by shouting themselves hoarse; for is not patriotism a sentiment which commands the respect of every one the world over?

When all had quietened down, the ex-Premier, at the invitation of the chairman, arose and proposed the health of the Johannesburg officials. In a neat and smart speech he tickled the ribs of the special Landdrost metaphorically; at which there arose cries of—

"Good old captain!"

—interrupted by ringing cheers, after which the ex-Premier proceeded to compliment the mining commissioner, and wound up with a cleverly-worded tribute to the ability and courtesy with which they performed their official duties, their strict integrity and uprightness. Having said this, he concluded by saying, "He could say no more of any official in any part of the world."

Again the mellow Giesler flowed, while a copious health was drunk to the reigning powers of the Rand.

Then the Landdrost arose, his kindly, handsome features flushed with pleasure as he

delivered himself of a brief speech in quaint musical English.

"The poor official of Johannesburg," he said, while nervously twirling his wine-glass, "had so much to do to respond to the kind toasts that, if it was not such a pleasure to be present in their midst, these toasts would be very difficult to answer, because he could only repeat the same words over again. He would say, however, that, without their kind assistance, they would never have won their confidence, and if they gave their confidence and assistance in the future as in the past, all would go right."

When the cheers and libations following the Landdrost's speech had subsided, the Mining Commissioner was called upon to respond.

When he arose, he disclosed a pale, thoughtful face, and a slight, delicate physique; but the eyes under the light lashes were deep and keen, proclaiming intellectual strength; and in a voice quiet and self-composed in the extreme, he responded—

"In the discharge of his duties he had to contend with many difficulties; but, through the assistance of the public, he was able to perform his duties in the most satisfactory manner; and he was very glad to see that

they had appreciated his services. He was sure that as long as they had such a public as they had, he might say, *as one of the first public officials in the South Africa Republic, they might always, with public kind assistance and co-operation,* be able to do their duty. For the second time he thanked them for their kind feelings."

The Mining Commissioner resumed his seat after delivering this modest and rather non-committal speech, amid cheers and cries of "hear, hear."

He was followed by the Assistant Landdrost, an unassuming type of the Boer, who nevertheless was listened to with profound attention as he briefly reiterated the thanks of his brother official. The short, dark, bronzed little man sat down amid a tempest of clinking glasses and cheers.

"He is decidedly dull," said Ariadne to the chairman, "but popular nevertheless."

"He is a very good fellow indeed," answered the chairman. "You may put his dulness down to the fact of his speaking English. If he responded in his beloved Dutch, we would have had a long and eloquent one, depend on it."

"How polite they are for Boers!" she

whispered. "Each of them acknowledged my presence with a courteous bow as they drank the toast. I have always been under the impression that Boers were so rude to women."

"It is a mistake," said the chairman, "to suppose that Boers are discourteous to ladies. Women have nothing to complain of as far as the Boers are concerned in the Transvaal. It is the miserable scum of Australian and English ne'er-do-wells that invade the Rand, whose cowardly smut-begrimed consciences hold no reverence for womankind. There is another class of men that we may justly term the freebooters of the press. A woman's good name is to them as the red rag to the bull. They delight in plunging at her with the horns of ridicule and slander. Why, there is even now on the list of applicants for a post in my paper, one man, whose shameless life drove him from Australia, where he had flourished for awhile, the root and stem of a capital paper; but drink, that curse of many a gifted journalist, ruined him; and now he has turned up at the Rand. He has the editorship of a morning paper at present, but it is a poverty-stricken rag, run on the profits made by the proprietor's wife, who keeps a flourishing bar. No one buys the paper; and the staff, of one member

only, is raiding the town for tit-bits of scandal and other unsavoury material. There is good material in this applicant, but I fear I cannot avail myself of it. I might make a man of him after all; but only this morning I learned that he had joined forces with the owner and editor of a weekly whose scurrilous illustrations anent the Government and private individuals will eventually pull him up, for high treason, at all events."

"You quite frighten me," said Ariadne with a little shiver. "Is it possible that the pen can be so debased?"

"Yes, it is, alas! However, you must not allow these bogie-men of the press to frighten you; they will never assail you."

"Pray God they may not. I do nothing to merit it. My pen is a virtual necessity to me at present."

"The first thing they will say is that I am in love with you."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Ariadne.

"And that is the reason I have made you sub-editor."

"Oh! I would rather never write a line than such a thing should be insinuated."

"But they will all the same, and you must be prepared. Jealousy will drive those ink-

slinging scalawags who hate me to any abuse; but don't you mind; just follow the even tenor of your way and give such good work that I shall be proud of my sub-editor."

"I'll do my best," said Ariadne, firmly; but a tear fell into and mingled with the golden wine in her glass, as she put it to her lips in acknowledgment of the toast being drunk.

A heavy-set man of medium height, broad-shouldered and erect, stood up smiling in response to the toast. His neatly-trimmed beard was slightly sprinkled with grey. The fair skin was just touched with that bronzed tinge which always marks the complexion of the Englishman of African breed.

"Lady and gentlemen," he began, "I am sorry that I cannot say ladies."

Ariadne's face flushed crimson at the implied insult, while the Boers shot amused glances at the speaker, and one and all looked sympathisingly towards the graceful figure at the head of the table.

"He does not understand," whispered the chairman to Ariadne.

"Nip number one," she whispered back, drawing in her breath and placing the glass down as she settled herself in her chair, with

compressed lips and burning cheeks, waiting for what was to follow.

But nothing further followed in that strain. The speaker realised that he had committed a *faux-pas*; and taking a gulp of champagne, he launched into a panegyric of the occasion, the chairman, and the new journal.

Gradually Ariadne forgot the unpleasant introduction of the speech as she listened to the eloquent words of the sturdy member from the Cape. Even the Boers forgot their admiration for the violet-eyed woman in their midst, and hearkened spell-bound to his ringing tones.

Ariadne felt that she could forgive him anything, even his coarse snub, as she heard him deliver sentiments which her quick instinctive power told her were just the view she would have presented herself in the interests of the Rand, had she been offered the courtesy of speech.

"Gentlemen," said the Cape Assembly member, "there is room and requirement for able and fearless newspapers in this community. I do not think they need head the first column, 'War or Peace, or Reform on Revolution.' As far as I can see, no one wishes to disturb republican institutions, — *qua* such in this

country; and if I were a resident here, I would not only accept the form of your institution, but I should do what is in my power to uphold the form.

"It is, however, one thing to accept the form and another to acquiesce in administrative acts, more especially in their effect on a peculiar and sensitive industry. Your industry requires not only to have fair-play, but, to become what Nature in her providence has given, requires to be encouraged, fostered, almost pampered.

"*In other States, in other Republics, as soon as a rich mineral field has been discovered, the Government come to the aid of the industry.*

"*Telegraphs are made, railways are constructed, and local taxation is kept at a minimum. That is not the case here.*"

The speaker looked almost defiantly at the Boer officials. The Landdrost's eyes were riveted on his glass, while his companions preserved a stolid placidity. Had a pin been dropped on the banqueting-table it would have echoed like a crash, so absolute was the breathless silence; every one felt it was critical ground on which the speaker had stepped. The chairman moved not, but his twinkling black eyes flashed a look of encouragement at the Cape member, who went on—

"*Your taxation is the heaviest in the world, and you have no railways!*"

Again the speaker paused; but not a pulse stirred, not a sound betrayed that he had touched the most vital part of the cancer that was eating into the very life of the Transvaal. The silence goaded him, and he continued with burning words that fell like blazing coals on the hearts around him—

"In my opinion it is the first duty of the true patriot of the South African Republic to see that in these respects you get redress without delay.

"And why?

"*All know the position this State was in before the discovery of the gold. The treasury was empty. The people were poor and discontented through no fault of theirs. The place the Republic then occupied in the congeries of South African States was not even second-rate.*

"To-day, how different! The difference was caused by the discovery of precious metals, and the influx of a population which knew how to turn to value the great discovery. But, gentlemen, notwithstanding the richness of your fields, I doubt if you can avoid serious difficulties and troubles in which the Government of the State

will share, unless you secure a reduction of taxation, and the entrance of a railway into Johannesburg."

A burst of prolonged and vigorous cheers followed the speaker's words. The crust of astonishment had been broken; and men intensely interested in the vital concerns on which the speaker had so fearlessly spoken, woke up to the fact that the function at which they assisted was not one of mere social gratification.

They realised that the Giesler and *paté-de-fois-gras* bait meant more than a mere tickling of their palates, and they hesitated not to lend themselves to the accomplishment of his hospitable snare, as they commented one to the other on the justice and truth of the speaker's words, that Johannesburg should have a railway. It was the only way out of the difficulties that were accumulating around them.

"In looking over the revenue returns of this country," continued the Cape member boldly, as he noted the effect of his previous words, "published in the *Gazette* just now, I find that practically the whole revenue comes from the different gold-fields. I find also that almost an amount equal in taxation in the output of gold is paid; and I find further that the revenue is not spent on reproductive works or local wants

but is deposited in the Standard Bank. Besides this heavy direct taxation, you are heavily taxed on all supplies, machinery, and necessaries that come from the coast.

"Now, except perhaps to the man who is content to make and sell bits of papers on which the name of a gold company is printed, it is clear that the industry cannot thrive without the two great desiderata of which I have spoken being granted; if not, the time will come, in my opinion, when the digger and the claim-holder will be unable to pay the heavy taxation which now weighs upon them: this would be a calamity in the interests of this community I wish to see avoided.

"All South Africa is concerned in your industry, and in the well-being of this State. We in the Colony don't grudge the Transvaal the Delagoa railway; we only regret its tortoise pace. Let it come with all speed, but don't delay the Cape and Natal, who are ready and anxious to come to your aid at once; and the Executive in Pretoria would be wise, having only regard to the welfare of this State, if they were to say to the Cape and Natal this day—

"'Come with your railways as fast as you can.'"

A profound sensation followed the close of

this daring speech. The Cape member knew what he was about. He sat down, secure in the enjoyment of having said his say, and to good effect.

"It will be many such that will come to teach them ere then, ere they heed," thought Ariadne, looking at the Boer leaders, as they quaffed their Giesler as tranquilly as though the words of the speaker had been chaff, instead of the blunt facts hurled at their heads.

Then arose the chairman, who was received with the cheers and *éclat* befitting the giver of the feast.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, smilingly, holding a glass of foaming Giesler in hand, "when I say ladies I am sure that you will agree with me that the lady present amongst us to-day is a host in herself; and I beg to propose her health, as a member of the staff of the *Star* you have so kindly honoured with your presence on this occasion, and as the pioneer woman-journalist of the South African Republic."

A succession of roaring cheers followed the toast of the chairman.

Ariadne had not the courage to respond by a bow to the genial calls of the men around her. She felt suddenly alone, intimidated by

the effusive demonstration, which was in reality called forth as a sort of demonstrative protest against the rudeness of the blunt but eloquent Cape member.

She realised in that moment that it was not altogether fitting that she should be alone there. She longed for a woman's hand in hers; but where was the woman to be found, she thought, who could have supported her in that hour? Surely not from the bars or the shops. No, no! She was alone, she felt, and she must bear it bravely alone, by shielding herself in the mantle of modesty which every man present would instinctively revere, so she sat silent, while the toast went round.

"A plump and pretty woman," was the verdict of the Boers.

"A deucedly clever one," said the Englishmen to one another, as they swallowed draughts of champagne served by the ready hand of the watchful Zocallo.

After firing back a volley of compliments and thanks at the Cape member who had so loudly sounded his praises and pedigree, the chairman went on to say many things interesting to the company on the history of his paper.

"But a few words I should like to have the opportunity of saying with reference to the *Argus*

Company, for which this, in my judgment, is a great day indeed; for reasons of state of which I shall not say anything to-day, as we did not choose to afford any of our numerous friends the opportunity of saying kind things about the enterprise before it was actually ushered into existence. That we were wise in so doing was afterwards apparent; because every one whose leave had not been asked, predicted for us a short life if not a merry one. These predictions were falsified, because I was able to surround myself with good men and true, who believed that, human infirmities apart, I was not the worst of chiefs for any man, who did his duty, to work with and work under.

"We had a paper in Cape Town and Kimberley; and it seemed to me that we should have a larger place in the world if we had an office of our own in London. And so to London I went, and we set up our own standard in the heart of the City, in a great thoroughfare, where our light cannot possibly be hid; that made me late in coming to Johannesburg, for one thing at a time is my motto. Three years ago I was in the Rand—you know what it was in those days. I went on to the Kaap, and when Barberton collapsed, I was not the only one who said—

"'As Barberton has been, so also will be Johannesburg.'

"Last year, in July, I came up again to spy out the land. I was not tempted to stay. In the early spring of this year I came for the third time; and I saw enough then to tempt an angel out of heaven to come and settle in your midst. Perhaps I am not a very good specimen of an angel."

Laughter and chaffing cries of "hear, hear," provoked a good-humoured smile from the speaker as he continued—

"And Cape Town is not exactly heaven, but I resolved to come. I saw an opening, and I met with such kind encouragement on all sides —and more especially from some of you who are with us to-day—that I could not refrain from taking advantage of it; and now I want to take you into confidence. I have been asked a good many times during the past few weeks—

"'Why don't you establish a morning paper?'

"The reason can soon be told. I have been guilty—according to some who have the advantage of knowing infinitely more about me than I know myself—of every act forbidden in the decalogue; but I have never established,

aided, or abetted in the establishment of any newspaper in my life. I have contributed something towards the death of five or six of the species, and I take much credit to myself for having rendered the State that service."

Shouts of laughter followed this sally, expressed with a world of comical concern by the chairman; in the midst of which a friend called from the other end of the table—

"Then why are you here?"

"That is just what I am coming to," he replied.

"John Bright, who was a shrewd man, said the newspaper of the future was an evening paper. I did not want to establish a newspaper where there were far too many already; and I resolved, with the entire concurrence of those who were acting with me, to acquire for the company we had formed the only evening newspaper existing in the Rand. 'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery,' but I must say that I did not expect to be flattered to the extent of seeing a second evening paper taking the field before we were fairly at work, and still less to witness a morning journal, which has presumably found it impossible to 'reform,' subject itself to the revolutionary powers of coming out in the evening. There are far too

many newspapers in Johannesburg to be good for the people who run them, or the people who read. I put it to you if one good newspaper is not worth half-a-dozen bad ones?"

Loud cries of "hear, hear," accompanied by spirited remarks on the part of the company, enabled the chairman to partake of another glass of Giesler, to refresh his throat, as he continued—

"Are you aware that there are eight publications in Johannesburg now, and that the place is threatened not only with a ninth, but with a tenth as well? The other day we had a noble distinguished visitor to this country, and when he got home he wrote an article in the *New Review*, in which he compared the newspapers of South Africa—this to their disadvantage, of course—with the newspaper of English, American, and Australian towns. I do not call in question the fact of our infirmity; but I have given you what I know to be the true explanation and only answer of which the circumstances will admit—if you want to have good newspaper work and plenty of it, you will have to pay for it.

"I am sure you will be surprised that here in Johannesburg, where the cost of production is extremely high, the fever of competition has

brought things to such a pass, that you can get newspaper space by the square mile, at about the price you would pay for the open veld. It is no state secret to say that these buildings of the *Argus* Company whose opening we celebrate to-day, the lands they have been erected upon, the plant and the stock we are putting down here—for everything is not yet completed—represent an outlay of nearly five thousand pounds. According to South African notions the figure may seem large; but I may tell you that a paper in Brisbane, where the public are not quite so catholic in their affections as we are here, paid not long since twice as much for a site alone. It has been uphill work doing what we have done with bricks and mortar, wood and iron, all around us; but the sales of our paper have more than quadrupled since it was acquired by the *Argus* Company. I think we may be allowed to say that we are not exactly a one-horse show, and these fine buildings will be regarded as the outward and visible sign, not only of our having come, but of our having come, aided by your kind encouragement and support, with the fixed determination to stay."

The close of the banquet was ushered in by a general jubilation of songs, witty toasts, and

copious libations; after which the company, in a body, under the leadership of the chairman, proceeded to view the new premises of his very progressive enterprising journal.

A glance at the commodious and elegantly-fitted rooms of the managing director, secretary, editor, and sub-editor, in close connection with a roomy library and file-room, impressed everyone with the fact that the fortunate staff was housed to much better advantage than the corps of many a first-class London journal.

"And now let us adjourn to the works," said the smiling chairman, as he led the way direct from the editorial rooms across an ingeniously constructed bridge connecting the main building with the works in the rear.

Here the company were amused and interested by inspecting the fine plant and watching the printing of the evening edition of the paper, which contained an account of the details of the lunch banquet.

"Thanks, I shall treasure this indeed," said Ariadne, as the foreman presented her with the first copy.

A facetious guest began an impromptu speech, on which the company assailed him with a volley of chaff.

"There is enough steam here without turn-

ing on yours!" cried a voice. Upon which the company laughingly dispersed, and the installation of the *Star*, the first evening paper of Johannesburg, in the *Argus* Buildings, was happily concluded.

CHAPTER XIV

A SATURDAY NIGHT'S DEBAUCH

It was Saturday evening. The hour of sundown, with its thousand weird shadows, crisp chilly breezes, and pale ghost-like vapours, had come. Along the line of the horizon a narrow gleam of faint rosy-tinged light still hovered. Above, the heavens hung like a dome of invisible sapphire, flecked here and there by scarcely perceptible glistening forerunners of the tide of stars that soon would flood with glorified beauty the moonless night. The air was filled with a deep calm, the calm of suspended labour. No longer the thud of stamp or boom of battery was heard. A week's output had been dug and gleaned from the mine, round which huge mounds of quartz could be seen faintly outlined in the rising starlight. It shone mistily on blackened shaft, the huts of the native diggers, and reflected its pearl-like radiance on the zinc-roofed cottages of the mining officials.

The great reef, in whose bosom hundreds of hands had burrowed through all the day for the treasures of gold therein, was as calm as the sleeping breast of a mother.

As the last halo of the sunset disappeared, the swift-falling darkness revealed many a cheery cottage-glow, interspersed with patches of ruddy light marking the evening fires of the Kafirs, where their sundown repast was in brisk preparation. A very poor repast it was, indeed, at that particular time the great scarcity of provisions affording little more than a pot of mealies or a meagre supply of dried meat.

The majority of the Kafirs squatted contentedly round the fires outside their huts and ate heartily of the steaming mealies, to which they helped themselves by the aid of long wooden spoons, thrust into the iron pot suspended over the blaze. A merry, chattering, laughing crew, full of jest and quibble, perfectly content in the assurance that money was plentiful if mealies were not. The weekly Saturday night's pay had been doled out to them. They were at liberty to hide it away in old trouser pocket, or hang it round their necks in the little sheepskin bag, for the wife and little ones in the far-away kraal. Many carried it to the nearest canteen-keeper, perched like an aasvogel on

the outskirts of the mine. They received in exchange Disease, Madness, Destruction and Death, in the vile poison yclept whisky and brandy, but in reality a spurious and villainous concoction known as 'Cape-smoke.'

The many nameless outrages, the quick and awful murders, the terrible atrocities, prompted by the maddening fumes of Cape-smoke that eat like fiery virus into the very brain and heart of the drunken native, no eye hath seen, save that great Eye looking down through the millions of quiet stars in the calm and solemn night—the unsleeping eye of God.

Their simple meal ended, the Kafirs set to work to put things in order in their various huts. A certain respect for the laws of cleanliness was rigorously enforced by the mine officials. Saturday evening usually witnessed a setting to rights and clearing up of things generally. After this by no means enjoyable half-hour, for the boys were lazy beyond description, and thought any work not done in the mine entirely a waste of time, they prepared to amuse themselves, each after his own fashion.

A few turned in for the night, others donned their best blanket and set out towards the camp, calling at the adjoining mines on the way. A number sought the grimy bar of

some canteen, losing their money as a rule while drinking heavily or dice-throwing.

The most sensibly-disposed remained in the compound peacefully smoking their pipes, joking and chaffing, singing and telling stories, a pastime in which the native takes extreme pleasure. Vivid in imagination, rich in humour, and full of a savage kind of poetical power of description, their tales and legends abound in beauty.

Quite an attentive group were squatting round one spokesman, listening to his narrative in rapt silence, their shining eyes following every motion of his body as he strode up and down, emphasising his words by highly dramatic gestures. The firelight cast his figure into grotesque relief on the canvas walls of the hut near by; but his listeners had eyes and ears for nothing else as they followed breathlessly the recital of the triumphs of a great Zulu chief and his brave warriors. When the story was ended, the actor in this imaginary drama sank down by the side of the blaze, and proceeded to light his pipe amid deep silence, more significant than applause, and highly complimentary to the efforts of the story-teller.

Presently a skinny young Kafir sprang into

the middle of the circle. His appearance was the signal for roars of merriment.

"Show us the singing missis!" screamed one of the group.

At which the young Kafir ceased his grimaces, and, snatching a gay-coloured blanket from the one nearest to him, proceeded to fasten it round his middle, letting the ends trail behind him. Throwing out his chest until his back was almost a curve, he ambled on tiptoe towards the centre of the circle, going through a series of bows and grins in imitation of a lady's manner, comical in the extreme. His audience gravely watching him the while, evidently reserving their mirth for an expected *coup*. Then followed a pantomimic talk, interlarded with gestures and grimaces in clever imitation of a well-known Transvaal prima-donna's style. Suddenly the boy stretched out his arms to their fullest extent, and, standing on his toes, rolling up his eyes, opening his mouth to its very widest, gave vent to a prolonged quivering yell which sent the group into paroxysms of laughter so violent that they rolled over one another in their glee; the boy meanwhile ambling back and forth with a succession of yells and shrill trills that would have made the fortune of a London costermonger.

"Show how Bass kiss missis," shouted a voice.

Whereupon the young Kafir ceased his yells, and, divesting himself of the blanket, proceeded to fasten it round a long knob-kerrie. Having arranged it to his satisfaction, he stuck the stick in the ground; and, retreating to a short distance, began to coyly advance in imitation of a young man stealing up behind his sweetheart, repeating this manœuvre several times to the breathless satisfaction of those awaiting the *dénouement*. This was to seize the blanket-covered stick in his arms, pressing it frantically, and bestowing on the part meant for the head a succession of jerky kisses, each osculation accompanied by a sound like the snap of a whip. This little comedy at the expense of their newly-married manager opened the way, after replenishing their pipes and regaining their breath, to fragments of facetious gossip.

"My old Baas in Barberton," said one, "jumped another Baas' missis. The Baas, dat my Baas jump his missis, come round the compound, blazing mad. My old Bass, he say to me, 'Jim, you up-saddle the two greys, mighty quick. Take the missis away quick to Heidelburg.'

"We rode all night. Dat was a brave missis. My old Bass caught up with us the next day, and we rode all the way to Kimberley. My old Bass bought all the horses we rode. He'd buy fresh ones every place we stopped, and sell ours. My old Bass give me the last we rode, and the missis give me three ten-pound notes."

This recital seemed to tickle the Kafirs immensely, to whom the lawless capture of another man's missis seemed a capital joke.

"I had a missis in Pretoria," began another, with a good-humoured face and round Bushman head, "who would not leave me work alone. She was always looking in the kitchen. I could not even smoke a pipe. She talked, talked, like this," moving his jaws spasmodically, to the amusement of his listeners.

"I tell the Baas, the Baas shake his head and laugh; he was afraid of the missis himself. I think and think. The missis give me a nice pair of trousers and shirt; she say I must always wear them. I think. Next time the missis come in the kitchen I was polishing the knives and forks, and I had nothing on. The missis yell like this," giving vent to a shrill shriek, thereby sending his hearers into fits of laughter, "and run away. That night the Baas look in

the kitchen door, when I was frying steak, put his finger on his nose, and say—

"'Han, you clever dog, what's you done with your trousers? Hurry up supper.' Then he wink and go away, but the missis never come to the kitchen again."

After this story had been commented on and laughed over, the group began to break up, as the night, which had fairly settled down, began to grow chilly. A few remained by the fire chatting and laughing, the remainder dispersed, some to their huts, and a few started off in the direction of a canteen situate on the road just outside the boundaries of the great mining estate.

Among these stragglers was a little party of four, who kept together. They were all Zulus, fine-built fellows; they tramped with the long stride born of perfect freedom of limb and muscle. Keeping close together, they walked in pairs, the two older men taking the lead; they were very intimate, occupying the same hut, sharing everything with each other like brothers. Another companion, a stalwart Matabele, formed the fifth.

A more peaceable, inoffensive little party was not to be found on the reef that night. The two younger men were laughing softly as they

discussed the stories they had just heard. The details seemed very piquant to their bachelor ideas; they did not yet possess wives of their own. In fact this was the reason they had treked to the great mine, where wages were high and sure to good workers. They had already saved between them the price of two bullocks, which was to furnish the purchase-money to buy a wife for each.

It had been arranged that on the following Monday morning the five were to obtain passes, and start at once on their long trek homewards to the kraals.

The two older men, followed by the others, made straight for the canteen. On entering they found the bar quite full. Not a white man was present save the owner of the canteen.

He was a burly, red-visaged fellow, clad in knickerbockers and white flannel shirt, low shoes and brown hose. A broad-brimmed digger's hat was set well on the back of his head. The small watchful eyes, brutal mouth and bull-dog neck, betokened a man of low instincts but resolute courage. He eyed the four Zulus, as they entered, with complacence. They were rarely seen at his bar, and he judged rightly that it was their last if their first visit; it being a custom with the most frugal Kafirs to indulge

in a final jubilation, which meant a drunken spree, before leaving the mine.

"What is it to be?" he said, coming forward as the oldest of the Zulus edged his way to the counter.

"A bottle of three star," replied the Zulu, laying down a sovereign.

The canteen-keeper picked up the gold piece and turned slowly from the bar. Running his eye over the array of bottles on the shelves against the wall, he took down several, but replaced them.

"The beggars have plenty of money, I know," he muttered to himself. "They have not spent any of it here. No—I won't give them 'three star.' I'll give them a bottle of my special brand—that will make their throats burn and send them back for more. I'll get the best part of their little pile before Monday morning."

Selecting a bottle, he carefully dusted it, then he said, suavely—

"Shall I uncork it?"

At a nod from the Zulu he drew the cork, and replacing it, handed the bottle, together with five shillings change, to the Zulu, who thanked him, and departed, followed by his companions.

And thus the deed was done, the evil, *evil* deed, and no pitying God stretched forth a hand.

After loitering a short time about the stoop of the canteen, the Zulus set out for a saunter along the reef.

The night, which to European eyes seemed very dark, was to them full of the radiance of the stars; every object, even the most distant, being clearly defined in the darkness by the mellow light from those wonderful stars, suspended like a myriad silver lamps in the cloudless heavens.

A short trudge brought them to the foot of a low stony kopje. Here they seated themselves amidst the karroo bushes growing thickly around. The old Zulu drew the cork from the bottle, and took a long drink; after which he passed it to his companions, who promptly followed his example. The last to drink balanced the half empty bottle between a couple of boulders. Pipes were re-lit. While they puffed and placidly stared before them, the old Zulu, warmed by the brandy, began to chat for the benefit of the others.

"The camp looks well to-night, with all its lights shining. There, a team of bullocks is coming up the Natal road. It's a fine night to

lead a team. Perhaps that's a bonus driver bringing that big team to camp."

The last observation seemed to interest the Zulus greatly. They started up and gazed in the direction pointed out by the old man. There, far away, but to a practised eye distinctly visible against the starlit horizon, appeared a moving mass of shadow.

"There will be lots of mealies next week," cried one of the young men.

"I heard the Baas telling one of the white boys about the bonus." Stretching his hand out for the bottle, he took another long drink, the others again following his lead. The last drinker cast away the empty bottle.

"The Baas said the Landdrost offered fifty pounds bonus to the carriers to bring mealies, quick, from the Free State and Natal."

This statement of the Zulu was not exactly correct, as the bonus offered was twenty pounds.

"That's not much!" resumed the Zulu, contemptuously; "I could give more if I sold my oxen. But I buy wives; they can grow mealies without any bonus, ha ha!"

The old Zulu's laugh was re-echoed by his companions, until the kopje rang. The bright-eyed lizards scampered deeper into the

crannies of the rocks, frightened by the harsh sound.

"I have enough here," he went on to say, stroking his breast, where hung the little sheep-skin bag containing his hoard of many months' savings, "to buy three strong fat wives."

"Three fat wives!" they repeated admiringly.

"Yes, you must hurry up, youngsters," he said patronisingly to the two young bachelors, as he rose from the stone on which he had been sitting. "Work hard and get many wives; the more wives, the more mealies!"

The young men followed meekly in the steps of the old Zulu and his companions as they treked back to the mine.

"Lohia, how many bullocks can we buy?"

"Twelve," answered Lohia.

"How many wives will that buy?"

"Two."

"Just one a-piece."

After this brief summing-up of their prospects, the young Zulus trudged on in silence.

"That was good brandy," said the old Zulu, as they came in sight of the red glow in the single window of the canteen.

"Yah," grunted his companion.

The old Zulu strode into the canteen, and

laid the price of another bottle on the bar. No need for the villainous canteen-keeper to make a selection this time; a smirk of satisfaction overspread his evil face as he produced the brandy.

"Have a throw, gentlemen," he said, insinuatingly poising the dice-box in his hand; "only a sixpence, cheap, for a good drink if you win."

The Zulu glared at him. The brandy he had already drunk began to heat his brain. The warrior spirit within him was stung by something in the man's manner. Although only a native digger, the men who employed him were infinitely superior to a man of the canteen-keeper's stamp, and the Zulu knew it. His great eyes flashed as he retorted—

"We want no bones; throw them to the white dogs." And, turning on his heel, the old Zulu left the canteen-keeper standing, dice-box in hand, petrified with astonishment.

"Well! I am blowed," he cried; "what cheek! The old nigger is boozed already. That second bottle will settle them. If they are not crazy drunk by to-morrow, and do not come begging for more, I'll never believe in that special brand of mine again."

Just then the little brown clock over the door struck the hour of twelve.

"Here you, Jake," he called to his native assistant, "turn down the light, kick out those drunken niggers, and lock up."

The niggers were one too many for the boy. He fought and pushed, but in vain; the half-dazed poor tipsy wretches would not budge an inch from their places on the floor and benches.

"Wait a minute, I'll settle them," the canteen-keeper roared, as he caught up a sjambok.

The sound of his voice seemed to sober some of the Kafirs, who made for the door as fast as their legs would carry them. The remainder, too drunk to heed any danger, and too helpless to move if they did, were subjected to blows and kicks until they staggered away, or were thrown bodily out of the door by the merciless brute, whose vile wares had brought them to their pitiable condition.

The door made fast, window closed, and all secure for the night, the canteen-keeper proceeded to count up his profits.

"Good business," he muttered, as he spread his gains on the grimy bar.

Pouring out a glass of brandy (not his special brand this time) he drank it off. He then threw a shilling to his little attendant, and pocketing the coin, turned out the light. Wrap-

ping a karros round him, he rolled under the bar and was soon fast asleep.

Outside, the Kafirs were steeped in drunken slumber. One poor wretch lay with his head in a pool of blood oozing from a wound in his scalp, inflicted by the heavy boot of the canteen-keeper. Another lay doubled up under the stoop. A Kafir dog had found his helpless master and crouched by him, gently licking a wound in his face.

Over all, dog and Kafir, canteen and mine, the midnight stars shone peacefully.—Over the hut of the old Zulu, tossing restlessly in his drunken sleep, muttering and gnashing his teeth.—Over the dreaming Lohia and his companions, empty brandy bottle still in hand;—over all, the horror of that Saturday night's debauch.—As they would again shine, bright, serene and calm, over still greater depths of drunken crime to follow.

CHAPTER XV

SUNDAY DOINGS ON THE REEF

SUNDAY morning dawned bright and warm. A great rush of wind swept the horizon clear of every vestige of cloud, whirling in its course the red dust of the road into cone-like vapoury shapes, as far as the eye could see.

As an African night is full of the indescribable glory of darkness, so also is the day one blaze of blinding golden splendour. The long drought had swallowed up every trace of green on the veld. The very stones of the kopjes had lost their greyness, and were red as the sand-covered plain and road. Cattle, horses, men and their very abodes, were grimy with the red soil, until the whole land seemed washed in the colour of the gold for which they toiled and fought.

"Will the rain ever come?" was the burden of the hour, the cry upon every lip, the prayer of every heart.

About nine o'clock, a neat, comfortable Cape cart with well-groomed horses stood before one

of the cottages of the compound. It was the cosy little home of the newly-married mine-manager.

He stood on the white-painted lattice stoop, talking with the director. The weather was the subject of their talk, as they looked across the broad acres of the mine, over the gently swelling plateau to the distant horizon.

"I see no hopes of a let-up in this beastly drought," the director was saying.

"The rain may come at any minute," answered the manager, as he tugged at the glove he was putting on.

"If it does not, then we shall be obliged to shut up the works next week," groaned the director.

"Oh, it is coming," said the manager, cheerfully. "I feel it in the freshness of the air. There is rain somewhere near by. Ah! at last," he exclaimed with satisfaction as he conquered a refractory button on his glove.

The director smiled on seeing the almost dandified care with which the manager was arrayed. A few months back he scorned a glove, and delighted in the comfort of flannel blouses and knickers fastened only with a scarf of red silk, a battered felt hat, and shoes of the broadest, heaviest make.

A few weeks passed somewhere in beautiful Devonshire had transformed this Transvaal rake, born and bred in the Republic, but of good old Devonshire stock.

A pair of lovely eyes had completely vanquished him the first time he gazed into their blue depths; and their owner, a shy English maiden, was brave enough to cross the world to be the bride of a digger.

The manager actually blushed as he saw the look of amusement in the director's eyes; for there is nothing the Afrikander dreads more than to be the subject of the chaff he loves to inflict on another.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting, dear," said a soft voice at that critical moment, as a dainty figure appeared in the low doorway. She extended one neatly-gloved hand in greeting to the director, while the other held a handsome little case containing hymn and prayer book. Simply and tastefully dressed as only an English girl understands how to do, she was as fair and sweet as one of her native daisies.

"Will you not come with us?" she said, giving the director a smile of appeal. "The music at St Mary's is very fine indeed, and Mr Darragh is such a good speaker."

"I'm afraid, Mrs Robertson, I am too utterly lost to be saved now."

"Oh, I don't think of you as one lost," said this pretty missionary, taken aback at finding her innocent scheme detected. "But I thought you might feel lonely, and—and——"

"Let me put you in the cart, love," exclaimed the manager, seeing her embarrassment; while the grey-haired director looked in undisguised admiration at her very becoming blushes.

"There now, little wifey, are you comfortable?" he inquired, as he tucked the dust wraps round her. "The back of the cart is apt to be draughty; you will feel it at the side there. Jim, hurry up. Fasten this flap. All right; now, go ahead," he called, as the Kafir took the reins, and he settled himself at the side of his wife.

"Easy there over those planks. Don't jolt the cart too much."

The sluit safely crossed, the cart was soon spinning along at a good pace towards Johannesburg. As it neared the canteen previously described, the keeper came on the stoop. His red face was cleanly shaven, a well-brushed coat and trousers replaced the flannel shirt and knickerbockers. The bar was decorously closed. Not a trace remained of the disorder of the

previous night. As the cart approached he respectfully raised his hat, and did not replace it until the cart had passed.

"Who is that man?"

"The keeper of the canteen, love," said the manager.

"Such an evil face," said his wife, with a little shudder. "What is a canteen?"

"A bar, my darling."

"A bar! Then that dreadful man sells whisky. That is the reason he looks such a wicked one."

"Not necessarily, my darling," said the manager, placidly. "Some one must sell it; and he is a good sort."

"Oh! I am sure he is not. Does he sell whisky to the Kafirs?"

"Of course, my little wife. What a question!"

"Then it is very, very wrong, Harry."

The manager laughed, and drew her close to him.

"What an earnest little Puritan it is!" he said, kissing the tempting cheek near his.

"But it is wrong, Harry, oh! so dreadfully wrong, to leave all those poor blacks at the mercy of that man. He looks as though he would sell them poison if he could."

"There, my little wife must not make herself unhappy."

"Oh, I won't, Harry, if you will promise me to send that dreadful man away."

"I'll do anything to please you, my darling," exclaimed the manager, with all the fervour of a young husband.

His wife smiled contentedly, and put her soft little hand in his, for, now that the camp was in sight, the billing and cooing behind the unconscious Kafir driver was at an end.

Commissioner Street was quite deserted; but round the neighbourhood of St Mary's were to be seen throngs of church-goers.

He was very proud of the graceful, self-possessed young wife beside him. He felt surprised, almost uncomfortable, at the keen womanly instinct which had set her up in arms against the keeper of the canteen. That her fears were true he knew perfectly well; but the habit of custom he also knew would take more than a woman's word to overcome. Nevertheless he was deeply touched by her sympathy for the blacks; and for the first time he was sensible of the fact that they were much wronged. He resolved to do something towards removing the canteen, keeper and all, of whose doings he knew more than he would have cared to

acknowledge. Then he fell to devising ways and means to accomplish his design; when the rector's voice beginning the sermon aroused him from his reverie by these significant words, "Where is thy brother Abel?"

His wife turned her limpid eyes to his. There was a world of meaning in that innocent look. He laid it to heart more than the teaching of a hundred sermons.

. . . . . .

In the hut in the mine the old Zulu and his companions slept the exhausted sleep of drunkenness. Now and then one would stretch himself and grope blindly round in search of the bottle to quench his consuming thirst, and suddenly roll over again unconscious. The air of the hut was stifling with the sickening fumes of liquor.

A little army of ants industriously besieged the shining calves of the snoring Lohia. A small colony of blue-bottle flies made a nest on the grimy chin and went on tours of inspection in and out the orifice of the old Zulu's wide open mouth. A great black spider noiselessly spun his silken web across an opening in the tent wall, and adroitly caught the half-dazed flies as they sought an escape, surfeited and dizzy with the fumes of the old man's breath.

Now and then a Kafir dog would run his nozzle into a rent in the canvas and give a series of sniffs, then sneak away with an air of disgusted disappointment. Once or twice a gust of wind shook the tent, raising a mist of dust, and disturbing the flies in their nest, the ants at their pastime, and almost demolishing the patient labour of the watchful spider.

Finally a fiercer gust than usual beat so violently on the hut, that the old Zulu was at last awakened. He sat up with a start, spluttering and choking, having swallowed a few of the unlucky flies that had ventured on too daring an exploration down his throat.

He crept outside the hut, and drew himself together in a heap on the veld. Throbbing head and burning throat made him long wildly for a mouthful of brandy ; until tormented with thirst and unable to resist the cravings within him, he called one of the young Zulus and despatched him for another bottle.

It was high noon before the little party left the tent and set out to trek it to a mine on the opposite side of the camp. Their steps were comparatively steady after their rest, and their nerves braced up a bit owing to the brandy, of which they had cautiously taken but a mouthful, consequently they managed to pass along the

road and through the camp without attracting attention. Once well out of the precincts of the camp and fairly on the main reef, a halt was made. Selecting a spot, at some distance from the road, screened by debris of quartz from observation, the Kafirs proceeded to rest and recuperate after the long walk from Langlaagte, a distance of five or six miles. The bottle was handed round, while a sharp look-out was kept for any mounted police that might be in the vicinity, a precaution quite unnecessary. The dust which arose in whirling clouds every few minutes kept those vigilant guardians of the Sunday's peace, who might have been near, too busily occupied in guiding their horses to find time to watch the movements of any prowling niggers.

The mine to which the Kafirs were going lay on the other side of the road, a distance of a quarter of a mile to the left. A good view of it could be obtained from their resting-place. In fact, the old Zulu had selected the spot for the purpose of reconnoitring, as the Baas of that particular compound objected to the visits of strange natives, owing to the frequent rows among the boys. From this vantage-point they could watch for their friends, and signal them to come to the road. The reef declined

gently from the main road, parallel with which lay the foundation of a steam-train line in process of construction, between Boksburg, a new mining village, and Johannesburg. The mine on which the Kafirs kept watch was quite near the road. On a slightly elevated spot stood the three-roomed single-story zinc shanty of the manager and engineer; around were scattered numerous outhouses and stables. A cart and 'spider' out-spanned near by, warned the Kafirs that the Baas was 'at home.' From this point the ground sloped to a hollow some distance off, wherein was planted the shaft, engine-house, and a cluster of canvas huts.

An hour or so passed before there was signs of any one moving about in the compound. The boys were evidently in their huts, or on some part of the mine not in view.

The old Zulu and his companions were beginning to grow impatient, when a sudden stir in the compound attracted their attention.

What appeared to be a great commotion was going on; the boys could be seen rushing out of the huts and running in every direction.

Several made for the manager's shanty, running as if for their lives.

"There goes the Baas," said the old Zulu,

as a man in his shirt sleeves joined the natives and hurried towards the scene of excitement. Three or four men, also in their shirt sleeves, followed quickly on the heels of the Baas, who carried in one hand a heavy sjambok.

"A fight!" cried the young Zulu, as men and natives seemed to mingle in a struggling mass.

The sight was too much for the prudence of the Zulus. Fortifying themselves with another dose of brandy all round, they made for the compound as fast as their legs would carry them. It was indeed a fight, and a pretty serious one, to judge by the bruises and many bleeding heads to be seen. One of the Kafirs was stretched out insensible on the veld, a terrible gash in his head, looking as though his skull had been fractured.

"Boys! who did this?" cried the Baas, speaking in Kafir.

The sound of his voice put a stop to the fighting.

"Dick from the Jumpers did it, Baas!" cried several.

An ugly blood-smeared native took to his heels and turned to run; but he was too drunk to run far, and was soon seized and brought back, struggling and fighting.

"Throw him down!" cried the manager sternly.

In an instant the Kafir was sprawling on the ground; but he began to kick so violently that the manager could not approach him.

"Sit on him!"

The next moment the fellow lay face downwards. Two of the boys sat on his legs, a couple on his shoulders, while the manager administered a vigorous thrashing with his sjambok.

The sound of their comrade's howls provoked the natives who had assisted him in the fight, and they began an indiscriminate onslaught on the nine Kafirs, which was promptly checked by the manager's friends; one of whom, the stalwart captain of the cricketers, struck out so vigorously that the offenders fled completely routed.

Meanwhile the Zulus watched with breathless admiration the prowess of the Baas, as he sent well-directed blows on the prostrate Kafir. Strength and courage was in their eyes the highest type of manliness; and the splendid young Englishman seemed to them a perfect Hercules. They felt the utmost respect for a Baas who could do his own flogging. And this Baas had never failed in that yet.

"Now be off!" said the manager, as he ceased the blows; "the next time I catch you on this compound I'll give you worse than that."

The boys would have liked to give the fellow something on their own account as they released him; but a look from the manager controlled them; and the wretch, thoroughly sobered, limped away, howling lustily.

Order being restored, and the wounded natives attended to, the manager and his friends returned to the shanty, where, over their pipes and whisky, they discussed the fight.

"I say, Archie, there, got in a few good rounds."

"It is disagreeable, to be sure," observed the manager, between the puffs; "but if I called on the mounted police to help me, I should lose all control over the boys. They have a great contempt for the police, and would have more for me if I did not settle things myself; so I am obliged to beat the rascals occasionally."

"And run the chance of a fine?"

"Yes; I would rather pay the 'fiver' than lose control of the boys. It's all owing to those illicit canteens there; they sell the Kafirs bad whisky and worse brandy. Something must be done to stop it, and that very soon."

CHAPTER XVI

A SUNDAY NIGHT'S CRIME

THE old Zulu and his companions listened eagerly to the details of the fight.

Dick, it seemed, was a very demon when under the influence of drink, and made it his business to get drunk regularly, from Saturday night to Sunday night. It was his custom to roam about from mine to mine, seeking a fight. He, in company with three of his comrades, had come to the compound, and attacked the first Kafir they met, whose yells aroused the others. Hence the fight.

The old Zulu's eyes burned with strange lustre as he talked. He drank freely of the hospitable bottle passed round, while his entertainers discussed the plans for the morrow; when it was agreed that they should all meet at the office in Market Square, to secure their passes.

The Zulus prepared to depart. Their friends stumbled out with them in the gathering dark-

ness, as the sundown hour had passed during their talk.

It was seven o'clock; and as the party left the hut the night grew suddenly black as an abyss. Not a single star was to be seen. Guided by the instinct of habit, they reached the road in safety. A walk of half an hour brought them within sight of the lights of the camp. Here they parted, with promises of meeting on the morrow. The Zulus tramped forward, while their companions returned to the main reef.

And now a wonderful and magnificent phenomena frequently seen in Africa, and particularly on the high plateau of the Transvaal, was approaching.

Miles and miles away on the edge of the vast plain, appeared the harbinger of an electric storm. Suddenly the blackness was rent by a myriad slender spears of pale amber light shooting in zigzag lines across the heavens, and as suddenly lost again in the intense darkness. Then a single sword-like flame of opalescent ruby flashed straight up to the very zenith of the heavens, like the blade of a warrior-god, and was gone.

Soon a thin trail of pale rosy vapour, like the first delicate flush of the dawn, quivered afar, a

moment, and sank out of sight. In the instant the whole heaven was covered with a sweep of lurid light, as though the very gates of hell had burst apart, reflecting the infernal glow. This was flecked with inky clouds, like smoke from the bottomless pit. The whole land blazed for one brief interval. Shafts, hut, cottage, spire and street, the faces of the Zulus, the sleeping bullocks out-spanned on the veld, waggon and tent, shone with an appalling beauty, like a picture in a huge golden kaleidoscope, then all disappeared again in darkness.

And thus, ever and anon, the wondrous pictures on the shifting camera of the storm came and vanished; until the air tingled with the overflow of electricity from the surcharged heavens.

The old Zulu seemed to have gone mad with the storm. The brandy burned into his brain like the smelting of red-hot iron. He talked wildly as he staggered along. The colour of the blood he had seen flowing in the fight seemed ever before his eyes. The very darkness was red—red above and red below.

The combined influence of the debauch of the last twelve hours and the electrified atmosphere, together with the lack of food, unbalanced the old man's brain, and drove him completely mad.

His companions were silent, already stupefied with drink and hunger. Lohia was like the old man, completely unbalanced, and ready for any act of crazed excitement.

"Another drink, boys," muttered the old Zulu, when in sight of the canteen where they had begun the debauch of the previous night.

The others followed him blindly, stupidly, as he stumbled into the bar.

The canteen-keeper welcomed them with contemptuous familiarity. The invitation to dice-throwing was this time eagerly accepted. The old Zulu, becoming excited over his winnings, drank incessantly. His companions were not so fortunate, and grew sullen, with the exception of Lohia, who noisily disputed the old man's gains. A quarrel seemed imminent; when the canteen-keeper interfered, and roughly jostled the party away from the bar; whereupon the Zulus raised a clamour of indignation, threatening the burly canteen-keeper, who promptly cleared them out by kicks, cuffs and blows.

"I'll have no disorderly niggers fighting here!" he cried with an oath, as he sent the old Zulu spinning into the road. "Be off now; and don't show any of your black faces here again till you're sober!"

With these parting words, the door was shut

with a bang, and the Zulus were left to pull themselves together as best they could.

The blow of the canteen-keeper's heavy boot half-sobered the old Zulu for a time, but roused in him a terrible frenzy of rage.

"I'll kill him for that," he cried, as he picked himself up. "He make me drink. He make us all drink. He take our money—then kick us out. I kill him sure for this." He gnashed his teeth, and struck out blindly in all directions with the knob-kerrie in his clenched hand.

"Let us go to the compound," said one.

"No!" roared the old man. "I stay here all night. I kill him!"

By dint of coaxing and reasoning, the Zulus prevailed on him to go with them, Lohia supporting the old man, the two swaying and staggering in the darkness.

It was now nine o'clock. Gigantic patches of murky clouds veiled, here and there, the electric storm raging in the heavens. Flash after flash of pale, steely light lit up the scene, revealing the Zulus groping their way towards a broad ditch in an opposite direction to the mine. Blinded by the utter darkness one moment, dazzled by the brilliant flashes of lightning the next, dazed and dizzy from drinking, they wandered to the

edge of the sluit; the next moment the five men lay sprawling at the bottom.

The fall frightened the Zulus back to their senses. Lohia yelled and clutched the old man in his terror. The others, however, realising that they had only fallen into a sluit, called to him reassuringly; and lay quiet, until they finally drifted into a doze.

Meanwhile a man was slowly advancing along the bank of the ditch a short distance off. During the moments of darkness he stood still, availing himself of the flashes of light to take a few steps forward. So intent was he in picking his way, that he knew nothing of the presence of the Kafirs, until he heard the yells of Lohia.

Perceiving that the cries came from the direction of the sluit, he quickened his steps, and by the aid of a half dozen flashes, found his way to its edge.

The next flash disclosed the figure of the man to the wide-open eyes of the old Zulu.

And then an awful thing occurred. The sight of the white face looking down on him enraged the old man anew. Springing up, he clambered with the strength of madness on to the bank, the unsuspecting man offering to assist him.

In a moment the Zulu dealt him a heavy blow with his knob-kerrie. The man, completely surprised, staggered; then rallied and endeavoured to defend himself with a light cane he held in his hand. The next glare of light revealed the Zulu ready for a second attack; whereupon the man struck out with his cane, inflicting a sharp stinging blow on the upraised hand. The Zulu never winced, but stood awaiting the next flash, by the light of which he dealt a second heavy blow on the head of the defenceless man, who fell forward stunned and bleeding.

"I kill you!" he muttered, raining blows on the prostrate figure. "You not kick Zulu again. I kill you."

By this time Lohia, followed by the others, had scrambled out of the sluit.

"Don't kill him!" cried one, snatching the knob-kerrie from the old man and throwing it away. "Let us take his clothes and watch."

This was agreed upon; and the unconscious man was soon stripped of all clothing.

But the old Zulu was not content with robbing his victim. Leaving the others to do that work, he groped, staggering and stumbling, searching for the knob-kerrie. But he could not find it. Cursing and raging, he sought in every direc-

tion, getting down on his hands and knees, tearing up the dusty veld grass in his disappointment.

Just as he was about to give up the search, his knee came in contact with a substance that did not feel like a stone. Picking it up, he saw by a gleam of the lightning that he had found a broad heavy clasp-knife, which had evidently fallen from the trouser-pocket of the man during the struggle.

Uttering no sound, the Zulu opened the knife and examined it closely; then he returned to the spot where his companions were busy over their spoil.

At that moment a groan escaped the man, who had regained consciousness.

"Don't kill me!" he moaned, as the old Zulu sprang upon him. "For God's sake—spare my life."

One of the Zulus struggled with the old man, striving to keep him back.

"I will kill him. He kicked me out!"

"It is not the canteen-keeper," cried the other, still holding him back.

But the old Zulu's frenzied strength was too great; wrenching himself away, he sprang for the second time on him.

A great flash of light revealed the broad

white breast of the prostrate man. With one stroke he drove the knife to the hilt in the heart of his victim.

An awful panic fell upon the others when they beheld the old Zulu's bloody work. For a time they were paralysed with fear, and unable to stay the murderer's hand, as he mutilated the dead man in a horrible manner, while Lohia assisted the fiendish work.

They had not the power to steal away, so benumbed were they with fright.

Then at last the old Zulu dragged the body to the sluit, and cast it in, their senses returned, and picking up their booty, they made for the compound, dragging the murderer away with them in the darkness.

Hours after, when the electric storm had vanished, wrapped in the folds of the black and heavy clouds, and the stars came out, they shone with soft and peaceful light on the dead face, upturned in its cold bed at the bottom of the sluit.

Each gaping, oozing, bloody wound cried out in the silent night to the quiet heavens above for vengeance.

Vengeance, not on the outcast being, besotted, deranged with drink, whose unwitting hand had done the deed; but for vengeance

on those who live upon the debauchery of the black man; the men who sell him the curse of drink; who barter for his hard-toiled savings a few mouthfuls of liquid madness.

For vengeance on the purveyors of rotten whisky, the illicit canteen-keeper and all the many men sleeping that night, with a peaceful conscience for bed-fellows, the men who fatten on the degradation of their black brothers.

For vengeance on such as these, cried out that poor mutilated body, soaking in its own blood, in that lonely sluit!

CHAPTER XVII

A MORNING RIDE TO WILLOW GROVE

ONE morning at six o'clock, Jacobs brought the horses to the door of the chambers in Percy Buildings, according to instructions received the night before. A Kafir boy followed, carrying a tray bearing a cup of steaming fragrant coffee. The door of the sitting-room was open, while Ariadne stood waiting, whip in hand, equipped for her morning ride.

"I am glad, Jacobs, to see you so punctual," she said with a smile, taking the coffee from the Kafir, who stood by grinning while she drank it. "I judge from the way you are showing all those ivories that you want a reward. Does he deserve it, Jacobs?"

"Yes, madame!" answered Jacobs. "He got the coffee very quick."

"Well, there's a sixpence for you, little blackie."

The boy did not understand the words, but he understood the sixpence, which he seized

with a chuckle, then darted out of the door, tray and all, stopping when half way down the alley to drain the cup; after which he carefully scooped out the remains of the sugar with his small black fingers, licking them vigorously as he disappeared round the corner of the passage.

After caressing the horse, who showed his delight in seeing his mistress by a succession of low whinnys; admiring his glossy black coat, shining like satin; petting and patting him until the sensitive animal felt thoroughly confident and happy: a process Ariadne never omitted, believing it a wise plan to make the best possible friends with one's horse before mounting him—she sprang into the saddle.

"Do not get breakfast ready," she said, as Jacobs adjusted her riding skirt; "I shall breakfast at the 'Grove.'"

Some men in flannels, bathing towels hung over their shoulders, on their way to the baths in the buildings, met her at the entrance of the street passage. She bowed coldly to their effusive greetings, in Johannesburg style, as they stood aside to let the horse pass.

The quiet and peace of early morning hung over the street as the horse leisurely picked his way along. The bars, adorning every corner, were still closed; while here and there a mid-

night lamp smoked and spluttered away in the niche over a shop door, or in the recess behind a bar-window. The street was empty; and the horse, whose hoofs made no sound on the soft soil, startled the dogs lying curled up asleep, some of them right in the middle of the roadway.

"Steady, Prince," said Ariadne, as the horse shied when turning the corner, as he came suddenly on a bullock-waggon outspanned in the roadway.

She guided him carefully over the small space available round the crouching bullocks; startling the big Boer driver from his slumbers beside his wife and little ones snugly ensconced in their canvas bed-chamber; rousing the little naked Kafir vourpouper, sleeping between the two great oxen, his black head pillowed on one, his grimy legs rolled under the other, the beasts warming as well as sheltering him.

For a moment the boy gazed with half-open eyes at the vision before him; and then dropped off to sleep again, with a thought only for the beautiful black horse that had awakened him from his dreams. The Boer turned on his side with a grunt, and likewise dropped asleep, as Ariadne, clearing the tangled mass of bullocks, rode on.

The next turn led straight through a short street, lined on either side by shanties huddled together in indescribable fashion, occupied mostly by Hindoo shopkeepers, coolies, workmen, and their families. An occasional shanty, whose door and single-latticed window was painted red, and red curtained, likewise proclaimed the abode of the Chinee. If the scene was unsightly, the various odours mingling in the morning air were worse, rendering the spot a perfect fever-bed and sink of contagion. Moslem and Celestial were invisible, the dirty stoop of hut and shanty empty, save for the few dumb members of the domestic household, the lean hungry-looking fowls roosting here and there, with mangy dogs and drowsy disreputable-looking cats for companions.

To the end of this fetid lane, crossed by a narrow sluit, now dry and dusty, the broad flat stones at the bottom caked with the hardened yellow slime, Ariadne cantered the horse at a brisk pace. Once over the sluit, another five minutes' canter brought her to the brow of the low hill overlooking the camp. Here again was passed a collection of straggling shanties, of which a canteen on one side and a chemist's shop on the other were the most pretentious. Passing quickly through this little hamlet, she

guided the horse across the veld. To the right sloped gently upward the low hill. To the left in the distance lay the valleyed reef, dotted with clusters of shanties, shafts, batteries, and all the signs of mining industry. No tree or shrub broke the monotony of the view. All was red soil, red dust and deep-coloured quartz. The land rolled over the vast plateau in swelling kopjes and low-lying valley, until lost to sight in the blue distance of the horizon.

The morning air blew fresh and crisp in her face, while the genial rays of the sun beat on her back and shoulders with gentle warmth. Prince tossed his handsome black head in evident pleasure when the wind flicked his silken mane; he set his slender hoofs in the springing veld with intense satisfaction. Horse and rider were in a delightful glow when the 'Willows' came in sight. There Ariadne drew rein, and, leaning forward, lightly stroked the glossy neck of the horse, as she gazed on the charming scene before her.

Below, in the lap of the gently declining hill, lay Willow Grove, a mass of rich, deep-toned green, set like an emerald gem in the waste of barren, veld-covered plain. Wind, dust, and drought seemed to have lost their power to work havoc with the verdant beauty of that

embowered spot. It might have been a bit of lovely Devonshire wafted across the seas at the beck of a magician's wand, and dropped in the sandy bosom of the desert plateau.

Many long years ago a hardy Boer settler had planted those lines of poplar and willow by the side of rippling stream and shallow pool. He taught the golden honeysuckle to twine its loving tendrils round clump and gnarled trunk, pouring thereon a sweet store of honeyed fragrance from a thousand tiny cups. He reared the blushing purple-hearted fuchsia, the sweet wild rose, the white-browed daisy, the blue-lipped violet. He built for the good vrouw and little toddlers those ruined adobe walls, thatched roof, drooping eaves and quaint-windowed nooks, now carefully preserved, and bearing pathetic witness to that home in the wilderness.* There the cope trekers found rest at last and peace from the wars and troublous times of the colony.

Absorbed in her contemplations, Ariadne knew nothing of the approach of another rider, until the sound of his voice startled her from the reverie into which she had fallen.

* This interesting relic has, since writing, been destroyed by fire. It was the homestead of the original owner of the property now known as the Langlaagte Mine.

"Good morning," he was saying. "This is quite an unexpected pleasure."

"What is an unexpected pleasure?" answered Ariadne, coldly.

"Why, meeting you, to be sure."

"Oh!" she said, with an air of studied indifference, "I thought you meant the view of the Willows."

"Not at all," he answered, "although the sight of the Grove is a pleasant surprise when seen from this point for the first time. But I must confess that you are the last person I would have thought of meeting on such an early ride."

"And why, pray?"

"Well, intellectual pursuits, late hours devoted to literary toil, poetical visions, and all that, you know. The brain must rest after such drains upon its strength!"

"You are quite right," she answered, calmly, ignoring his attempts at chaffing. "Late hours devoted to literary toil call for repose, and this is my way of taking it."

"And a capital way it is. That horse of yours is a beauty. Where did you get him?"

Ariadne's voice softened as she answered, for she was very proud of the horse.

"He belonged to a poor fellow that was ruined in the first of the smash. I bought him

for a mere song. Dear old Prince," caressing the horse with one hand, while arranging the reins in the other. "And now," riding on, "I must bid you good-morning, Captain Achilles."

"I think I am going in your direction," he said, "if you have no objection to letting me ride beside you."

"None whatever," she answered. "I haven't a monopoly of the road, I'm sure."

"I say, it is too bad to snub a fellow this way. I have been trying to get a chance of seeing you alone for an age. Do you always ride alone?"

"Yes, always," answered Ariadne, with an emphasis on the last word.

"And your sister, does she not ride?"

"No. She is more useful in keeping away intruders and answering my letters."

"By Jove! I should think she was," said the young man. "I have reason to know what a dragon she is. Why do you not see me when I call?"

"Because," began Ariadne, impetuously, a gleam of anger in her eyes. Then suddenly checking herself, she answered quietly, "I did not wish to hear what you have to say!"

"But you must hear it sooner or later."

"Then let it be later," she said, reining the

horse before the threshold of the old Dutch homestead. It now served as a hotel which offered accommodation respectively to man and beast, after the fashion of an English roadside inn.

"Good morning, Mr Spears," said Ariadne, as the gentleman landlord, a fine-looking Englishman of middle age and sportsman-like bearing, appeared in the door.

"Good morning, madam. I am glad to see you have taken advantage of the beautiful weather," he said, as he hastened to assist her in dismounting. "Did you enjoy your ride?"

"Yes, thank you. How fresh everything looks."

"The rains are beginning to do the shrubs and trees good, as well as laying the dust. How are you, captain?"

"Right as a fiddle. Have you anything good for breakfast?"

"I was sure madam would avail herself of the fine morning for a ride, and"—looking dubiously at the other—"I ordered her favourite breakfast, a grilled fowl, kidneys on toast, and salad."

"There is not enough for two?"

"No; however, if you don't mind waiting——"

"I have no objection to sharing the fowl and other good things with Captain Achilles," said Ariadne, on seeing the landlord's dilemma. "No thanks, if you please," she said in an undertone, as the captain began a pretty speech; "I do it to oblige Mr Spears."

Leaving the horse with many instructions to the care of a Kafir stable-boy, Ariadne followed the landlord into the long, low chamber, once the Boer farmer's living-room, now converted into a dining-room, the original character of which had been carefully preserved by the landlord.

The thatched roof visible above the broad rafters toned a rich brown with age, formed the ceiling. The walls likewise bore marks of age in the primitive plastering of ant-heap, rudely applied by the thrifty hands of the long ago dead and buried master. Two small deep windows, the heavy sills notched, dented and worn, no doubt by generations of hardy little Boers, lighted the room. The floors, also of ant-heap, were firm and hard, though worn smooth as polished oak by the hundreds of feet, some of which were mouldering away in the little Dutch graveyard near by, that had passed in and out over the homely threshold. A low, narrow door, opposite the honeysuckled embowered windows, opened on another chamber

of similar character, whose wide fireplace served admirably for the grilling, frying, and toasting necessary to Mr Spears' hospitable cuisine.

Near one of the windows stood a table cosily laid out for the breakfast, on which the landlord had bestowed much thoughtful care.

If walls and ceilings and floor were grimy with age, all else was as neat and shining as busy fingers could make them. The tiny panes of glass in the old windows were as clean and bright as crystal, the linen spotless as snow, while the silver and china breakfast service would have done honour to the most fastidious housewife.

"This is delicious coffee," said Ariadne, when they were seated at breakfast, "and the kidneys are broiled to perfection. I can get nothing fit to eat in camp. You should prize your cook, Mr Spears; there is not another like him in the Rand."

"I thank you," answered the landlord, with a smile; "I am glad he pleases you. These native cooks are very good if properly trained. I must say Hans seems to give general satisfaction."

"Your cook is a Kafir, then?" observed Ariadne, in some surprise.

"Yes, and extremely intelligent. Have you

never seen him? No? then I'll call him. He will be quite delighted. Nothing pleases the poor devil more than a good word now and then."

"Hans!" he called out in a loud voice.

"All right, Baas!" came from the kitchen, the door of which was quickly opened, and an enormous Kafir made his appearance.

"The breakfast is very good, Hans, and madam wishes to tell you how she enjoyed it. She says you are the best cook in the Transvaal!"

"Hi! hi!" roared the great fellow. "I'm much obliged to the missis."

Ariadne looked pleasantly at the black, good-natured face, the shining eyes, and glittering white teeth, now exposed to the utmost in a broad grin. A battered old felt hat, much too small, was stuck on his woolly head. A pair of tattered trousers, barely covering his huge limbs, were held on by a bright blue cotton handkerchief tied round his hips. A sleeveless shirt, of a glaring pattern in red and white check, completed this costume of incongruous odds and ends.

"Come here, Hans," said Ariadne. "There's something for you," dropping some silver in the big, white-lined hand.

"Thank you, thank you, missis!" he cried, as he looked at the coin, and, at a nod from the landlord, shuffled back to the kitchen.

"What a big fellow he is," she said. "What is he?"

"Oh! he's a Swazie. You don't find many in work out of the mines; but I have had him for some time."

"Does he drink?" said the captain.

"That's his only fault," answered the landlord. "He never drinks here, I'll not allow it; but when he gets into the clutches of some of his friends from Langlaagte or the Crown Reef, and they drag him off for a spree at one of the canteens, he comes back like a madman, and it is many days before I can get him straight again."

"By the way," said Captain Achilles, "was it not at some place near here that the natives murdered that poor fellow one Sunday night?"

"Not quite near here," answered the landlord; "the sluit in which the body was found is about a mile back of us, between the Langlaagte and Crown Reef property."

"What are they going to do to the wretches?"

"Hang the lot of them, I believe. They are in gaol now."

"Please don't speak any more about the awful affair," interposed Ariadne, with a shudder.

"Certainly not," said the landlord, changing the conversation. "I have some splendid fruit from Pretoria," he hastened to say, as she rose from the table. "Will you have it now, or shall I send it out to the garden?"

"I believe I should like some later, if you will send it to me. I shall be in my usual seat by the big round table under the willows. I have a lot of reading to do."

This was said with an emphasis intended for Achilles, to whom she had not addressed a word during the meal.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTAIN ACHILLES PLAYS THE RÔLE OF IAGO.

It was one of the most secluded spots, at the end of a broad pathway, ornamented on either side by carefully-trimmed grass, and bordered with rows of scarlet geraniums intermingled with beds of daisies and violets. A spot out of sight of the smooth lawn-tennis ground, the tables and benches scattered round under the shadow of the spreading trees, near the rows of quaint, thick-walled, single-chambered old dwellings for the accommodation of Mr Spears' permanent guests. To this spot Ariadne directed her steps when she left the breakfast table so unceremoniously.

Under the last of a row of willows, whose feathery branches swaying and drooping partially concealed the rudely-constructed rustic bench erected against the gnarled and massive trunk, Ariadne seated herself with a little sigh of content.

Drawing the rickety, moss-stained table

nearer, she opened the pocket edition of Keats, her constant companion, and resting her elbows on the table, began to read.

There was no sound to disturb her in that quiet spot, save the soft whirl of waters dammed up in a deep sluit near by, the low twitter of the young birds overhead receiving their morning lessons in nest-making, the dull echoes, like distant thunder, of the great battery in the Langlaagte mine, whose huge shafts were just visible through the interlacing branches of the orchard of pear trees before her.

She was sitting so quiet, absorbed in the magical verses of Endymion, that she took no heed of the many voiceless, velvet-footed visitors who had come, emboldened by her silence, to pay her a morning call.

The rustling, as she turned the pages of her book, disturbed them not; it fell soft as the whisper of the willow leaves on their delicate senses. There was something in her warm, human presence that drew them to her, one and all, and made them cling to the edge of her riding skirt, creep into its folds, and curl cosily up on the brim of the soft felt hat shading her golden hair. They had no fear of the dainty riding boots, but slyly inspected heel, toe, and arching instep. An indefinable instinct taught

them to feel secure, and assured those beautiful insignificant atoms of creation, that, in this, to them, mountain of humanity, dwelt no will to destroy or injure them.

And while they busily crept in and out of every fold and crease, rubbing their silken bodies in pleasant friction against the fuzzy nap of her gown, Ariadne sat motionless, unconscious of the little world swarming around her, until one bold, big fellow glided from her sleeve, and stretched his sinuous, shining, transparent body against her ungloved hand.

There he lay quite still, evidently enjoying the contact with the cool, soft flesh, while Ariadne noted the deep, rich crimson of his coat, flecked out beneath by black and yellow stripes. A ray of sunshine, struggling through the dense foliage above, alighting on his back, transformed him for the instant into a fiery carbuncle, in which she could trace the blood pulsing through a network of fringed veins. Then the ray vanished, and with it disappeared that beautiful vision of the surging tide of life within the otherwise repulsive grub upon her hand.

Very slowly and carefully she closed her book, putting it down with her disengaged hand, and, folding the other over it, prepared to watch the

vagaries of her queer guest, who had curled himself up with every apparent intention of enjoying a sound nap on his new-found couch.

Soon another, of deep indigo-hued coat, crept over the edge of the book; then another, clad in yellow mail, followed by a score of many-coloured brothers, surrounded the citadel of her motionless white fingers.

"Poor little grub, there is much that is beautiful in your short existence," mused Ariadne. "You are happy in your own lonely way. The dew refreshes you. The sweet root of shrub and tree strengthens you. The sun warms your delicate body. The rain and storm have no terrors for you, who can in a moment burrow for shelter in the soft sandy soil. Where," said Ariadne, lightly pressing one beneath her finger, "did you get that glittering coat? Have you found it sleeping in a bed of golden quartz in the great mine over the way?

"Soon the glorious summer-time will be here, and with it your feast of roses, when you will gorge yourself with the luscious strawberry, and kiss the white bloom from peach and apricot. Yea, happy is your lot, watched over by the same God who guides the fate of kings and empires. But you are happier than kings,

for you know not the pain of mortal striving and straining. The great God has not given you a soul, but He has given you a life, brief, 'tis true, yet full of the richness of mother earth, on whose breast you tranquilly subsist, and as tranquilly die.

"And you," as a truly magnificent specimen, fully four inches long, crept over the rim of the table, and slowly glided near with stately undulations of his gorgeous body, "surely you are the very prince of caterpillars, with your cuirass of vivid green, that wonderful gleaming web of black and silvery white woven into your sinuous back. Those shiny golden antennæ waving above your tiny eyes set like black jewels in your glossy head. How resplendent you will be when that woven coat has blossomed into a shimmering pair of gossamer wings. But now you are content to creep as lowly as the ugliest grub among them all. You preach the old, old sermon of patience and humility, the lesson of humble contentment through the season of grovelling in probation, ere the wings are grown that lead to a higher life for me as well as for you, my pretty caterpillar!"

"I say," exclaimed the voice of Captain Achilles, "you will be eaten up by those beastly grubs if you don't get out of this."

"I'm not afraid of them," answered Ariadne, scarcely raising her eyes to the man standing at the opposite side of the table, "any more than I am afraid of another and more loathsome kind of grub who eats up a woman's reputation."

"I don't understand you," he answered, with a wicked laugh, seating himself on the edge of the table, and flourishing his riding whip with nervous jerks.

"You have been indulging in whisky and soda, Captain Achilles; and I would thank you to take yourself away."

"Captain Achilles," he echoed mockingly, mimicking her tone; "it used to be Archie; now it is Captain Achilles!"

"Yes, and it will be Captain Achilles to the end of the chapter."

"Oh! indeed, h'm——" he ejaculated, as he twirled his whip and brought it down vigorously on the gorgeous caterpillar, cutting the unfortunate grub literally in two, while inflicting a stinging blow on Ariadne's folded hands.

For a moment she sat quite still, holding her breath to keep back the cry of pain that sprang to her lips, and closing her eyes to quench the tears that gushed forth at the shock of the blow. Then she arose, and, folding her hands behind

her to hide the vivid marks thereon, confronted the man seated on the table still nonchalantly twirling his whip, with white face and blazing eyes.

"Cruel brute! Worse than brute, for brutes are cruel only to defend! Why have you killed that harmless worm? Ah! I was right in saying there were grubs among men who would eat a woman's reputation with as little compunction as you have cut the life out of that helpless insect."

"Oh, don't bother about that old caterpillar," he went on, apparently unconscious of the blow he had given her. "If I knew that you were so fond of the grubs I'd get you a bushel of them. But I want to have an understanding on this subject of a woman's reputation, which you fling at my head every time we speak."

"It is a subject on which you have no scruples whatever; in fact, it is a subject you don't believe in at all."

"Oh! damn reputation! What does a woman want with reputation in the Rand? If she has any she had better stay away, and look after it. By Jove, she can't do that here. This is no place for women with reputations. What did you come here for, if you had any?"

"I came here because a merciless destiny

meted out to me the fate to suffer bitterly at the hands of such as you."

"I quite fail to catch your drift. I wish you would explain what you mean."

"You don't understand me?"

"No."

"Then you are one of the most contemptible prevaricators on the face of the earth. You deceive yourself when you imagine that I know nothing of your insinuations, your calumnies, your efforts to separate Hector and myself. I know them all. And while I am at a loss to comprehend your motive—unless it be," she said with a quick disdainful laugh, "that you are in love with me yourself."

"And if I acknowledge that I am?" he burst out, as he sprang from the table. "What then? Answer me straight. No fencing, if you please."

"I would say," answered Ariadne, turning steadily away her pallid face from his gaze, "that I would sooner die than exchange the love Hector has given me for such as you have to offer."

Her answer seemed to stagger him, for he turned abruptly away and strolled along the garden path; while Ariadne picked up her book, and, shaking the folds of her habit, prepared to leave the garden.

Suddenly he turned back; and, coming close to her, said in a voice which he strove to render indifferent, "Thank you for giving me a straight answer; but it's thrown away, I am sorry to say—as—I don't happen to tell the truth."

"I am glad to know that, and quite willing to forgive you, as I would not wish to make my worst enemy unhappy if I could help it."

"No? I quite believe you," he said with a sneer, "when I see you doing all in your power to make one who *is* your worst enemy happy."

"One who is my worst enemy happy! What do you mean?"

"I propose to let you find that out yourself, my charming Ariadne."

"I gave you a straight answer a moment ago. Now give me one. What do you mean?"

"I would rather be excused," he said, taking his old position on the table, and resuming his twirling of the whip, "if you don't mind."

"I do mind. And I insist on an answer."

"Oh! I really could not tell you. It would be a breach of confidence."

"Captain Achilles," said Ariadne, emphatically, "again I insist on an answer!"

"What is the use of nagging a fellow like this?" he cried, with assumed anger. "I tell

you I will not be guilty of a breach of confidence."

"You have been guilty of worse than a breach of confidence in casting the slur of insinuations on Hector, for you can mean but him, as you well know he is the only man I wish to make happy. But your odious hints and sneers are lost on me, let me assure you. I would not believe one word from you against him, not if you swore on a stack of Bibles as high as the highest willow in the grove."

"Ah! indeed," he answered, while leisurely preparing a cigarette, dropping the tobacco slowly on the paper in his hand as he spoke, "you love Hector. There is no doubt about that?"

"None whatever," exclaimed Ariadne, with a strange foreboding straining at her heart.

"And you would marry him; give up all ambition; be content to live the rest of your life buried in Africa?"

"I would do all that—and more."

"Well, I am glad to hear you say so, glad to find you a woman of more pluck than I gave you credit for, and you will need it all, for——"

He paused to re-light the cigarette; it seemed to Ariadne that he prolonged the answer more

from a spirit of tantalisation than through reluctance to tell any unpleasant truth.

"Confound that cigarette, will it never light?"

"Let me hold your cap while you strike the match inside."

"Thank you, how thoughtful you are!" he said, puffing away in the shelter afforded by the cap.

"I say," he cried, suddenly catching the cap and her hand in his, "don't treat me as you do. Spare just a little of that love you lavish on Hector for me. There," kissing the livid mark on her hand, "let us be friends."

"Never!" exclaimed Ariadne, snatching her hand away. "Never—do you understand?—Never. You would have to be born over again to be capable of inspiring such love as I bear for Hector."

"And most worthy he is of it," sneered Achilles, his eyes flashing with jealous rage.

Ariadne made no reply.

"Yes, Hector intends to marry you," he resumed, slowly puffing away between each sentence, "when the mine is floated"—puff—"and there is lots of tin"—puff—"and he can set up a nice little shanty-villa"—puff—"piano"—puff—"horses and cart"—puff—"and all that,

you know"—puff—"he will marry you"—puff—"and"—puff—"*commit bigamy!*"

"Bigamy?" gasped Ariadne.

"Yes, bigamy; that is the sort of man you love; that is the sort of a man I should be if I were born over again, as you just said, in order to inspire you with love. Yes, my charming Ariadne, your darling Hector has a wife in England: not an aristocrat, as you are, to be sure, but his wife all the same. But he will marry you. The law of England need never reach here. You will both be very happy, I am sure—as you deserve. You said a moment ago you would give up everything for him, and more. Well, now you have the chance to prove it. Marry him, and my blessing go with you!"

With the last words ringing in her ears he left her.

For a moment Ariadne stood helplessly staring after his form, as he strode rapidly over the pathway between the beds of budding flowers—stared till path, trees, sky and flowers seemed to revolve in one mighty whirl round his face with its cruel smile. Then all grew black as night. Her heart gave a great throb. She swayed forward and sank insensible at the foot of the great willow.

"Baas, Baas!" cried a Kafir boy, a few

minutes later, as he rushed breathlessly to the landlord, "the missis fall down by the tree in the garden."

Mr Spears found her lying face downwards. As he gently raised the poor stricken head a little line of crimson oozed from the pallid lips. "Bring some brandy and water. Run, you black devil, as fast as your legs can carry you!" he roared to the gaping Kafir.

After much chafing of hands, bathing of temples, and forcing of brandy through the clenched teeth, Ariadne revived a few moments, just long enough to moan—

"My sister—bring her to me," and relapsed into unconsciousness once more.

. . . . .

Hours afterwards Ariadne returned to consciousness, but stared in a dazed fashion at the white walls and low ceiling of the room in which she was lying.

The sun had gone down long ago, and the silvery rays of the moon tipped with pearly light the nodding willows, lawn, and vine-covered hedge visible through the deep-curtained window by her bed. In the soft glow shining across the little chamber, she saw the anxious face of her sister close to her.

"Oh, my sister!" she cried, sobbing faintly, and twining her arms round her, "take me home."

"Yes, dearest," answered Kathleen, while her tears fell fast on the golden head pillowed on her breast; "we shall go back to our dear home, far over the seas, where no echo of the sin and wretchedness of this spot shall ever trouble you again."

CHAPTER XIX

A BIG LITTLE MANAGER

A SHORT little man, with a big, bullet-shaped head, round protruding eyes, heavy brows, and thick, sensual-looking lips, between which was perched a briarwood pipe, was sitting at an upright piano, in the middle of a narrow space enclosed by a wooden railing covered with cotton plush, and devoted to the half-dozen musicians dignified by the name, if not the quality, of an orchestra.

The little man vigorously pounded on the yellow keys, and when not absorbed in attending to the intricacies of the score before him, found time to give the beat with one hand, while rattling away with the bass with the other.

The little man was ugly, coarse, and uncouth to the last degree, but he made up for lack of beauty in plenty of brain and indomitable pluck. With the one he ruled, with the other he fought, until he conquered every obstacle in his way,

and stood up before gods and men a successful man with no thanks to either.

That he possessed the power of getting good out of the most incongruous elements, no one would gainsay who saw him at his post, shouting, swearing, sweating, smoking, and singing all in the same breath, in the herculean labour of rehearsing the opera of 'Faust.' The Marguerite had no voice, but tried to sing. The Seibel had a voice but could not sing. The Faust brayed like a donkey, or bleated like a forsaken goat. The Mephistopheles had a voice as big as his elephantine body; he could emit a bass note equal to the roar of an enraged lion. A chorus of limp young women, with limper voices, whose feeble efforts were completely drowned—unless the sprightly little leader held her own with a succession of shrill notes—by the score of dirty, unkempt, but willing and earnest chorus men. These did their work with a reckless disregard of rhyme, tone, or harmony, that was as marvellous as it was inharmonious.

The little man knew all this, and more; for he was, singular to relate, an accomplished musician without a tithe of training.

Training! what had he to do with training It was a loss of time. His principle was to go straight to work with a bang, to do or die!

He knew that Seibel was jealous as death because she could not stretch her voice up to the score and sing Marguerite, that she did not understand the measure, and sulked so that she lost the beat.

That Martha was driven to tears in her efforts to hear the cue, and implored wildly for some one to beat the time.

That Mephistopheles, disgusted with the hurry and scurry of the music, was up at the back of the stage, winking at the chorus, singing *sotto voce*, when he should have been down at the footlights, helping the tenor and contralto out of their difficulties by his experience of a hundred performances of the opera.

That Faust, in shooting-jacket, knickerbockers and gaiters, with hat cocked on the back of his head, cigar in mouth, lounging on a chair, score in hand, did not know a bar of the music, could not sing the part, and never would, though he tried hard enough.

That Marguerite could not reach a single high note, not if a year's output of the Jumpers' mine was poured into her lap.

That the cornet tooted in the wrong bar to his right. The violin scraped and scratched out of tune on his left. The bassoon gave melancholy yelps at the wrong beat. In fact,

that a chaos of sound and a warfare of time assailed him on every side.

He knew all this, but never swerved for a moment in his determination to produce the opera, that masterpiece of grand melody, in less than a week. In fact, the bills were already displayed around the town proclaiming the event.

But, was he not a perfect Trojan of determination, this ugly little man? Indeed he was. And his worst enemy, looking on him seated there, thumping the piano, beating time, giving the cue, swearing at the chorus, bullying Martha, abusing Seibel, working with voice, limb, and brain, could not escape a touch of sympathy, and wish him the success which such commendable energy certainly deserved.

They were not a few, those who made up the company of the little man's enemies. His brusqueness lost him many a friend. He had no patience with weakness, no pity for those whom Nature had endowed with a delicacy of mental equilibrium which his coarse balance totally lacked.

Fine mental culture meant failure in a new country, where the adventurous, the unscrupulous, and the boldest dare-devilism secured the highest place. Filled with that spirit, he

tackled fortune with a rough and ready hand. Possessed of the faculty of adaptability, he rode rough-shod over difficulties that would have appalled a man of superior mind and heart.

A failure in London, a failure in Melbourne, a failure in New York, he was the Prince of success in Johannesburg. Hence the little man's luck. He had given the golden city her first shanty-theatre, erected three years before. This he had forsaken in a few months for a new, commodious, and pretentiously-decorated theatre built with the money, coined in hatsful at the old one, when Johannesburg was a canvas town. Now it was a full-fledged city that had arisen like a dream of gold out of the delirium of the gold-fever, wherein very naturally it was the man of uncouth, unbridled energy who came to the fore.

If the little man clinched success in the matter of building theatres, he could not be blamed for indulging an ambition to make those walls resound with the masterpieces of Verdi and Gounod, no matter how inadequate their presentation to the indulgent Johannesburg audiences, many of whom had left their critical faculties, together with their reputations, for safe-keeping behind them in London.

For three long hours the thumping toil of

piano and orchestra, braying of the tenor, growling of the bass, and piping of the soprano, abetted by the howling efforts of the chorus, interpolated now and then by skirmishes between the small army of dogs—from the prima donna's thin-skinned tiny greyhound to the mangy cur of the theatre cleaner, all of which were granted unlimited freedom of the stage—continued with unabated fury.

Suddenly the little man arose and declared the rehearsal over; for in South Africa, be it known, there is nothing of the day and night unflagging rehearsal to be found in London. The most insignificant super would revolt at the idea of a rehearsal carried beyond mid-day. He would throw up the whole business, and live like a Kafir, rather than give up that part of the day devoted to tiffin and the indispensable siesta.

The rising of the manager was the signal for a hasty exodus of principal, chorus, and musicians; as all remembered it was salary day, and the 'ghost' was walking in the little ticket-office of the theatre.

Martha was standing aside at the back of the stalls, awaiting the exit of the impatient crowd about to interview the 'ghost,' who had never yet failed to show its face punctual

to the minute, at one o'clock every Monday morning.

As the little man approached her, he exclaimed in angry tones—

"Why did you not know the music better this morning? I can't understand how you, who sang Lenora with only three rehearsals, and made such a success, should stumble over those few bars of Martha in such a style."

"You forget," replied the gentlewoman, "that the music is entirely below my range of voice, and that in my contract Seibel is the part allotted me in 'Faust.'"

"Yes, I know that," answered the little man, mollified by the dignified explanation, "but I can't help myself in giving you an unsuitable part. Try and do the best with it you can."

"I shall endeavour to do so," said Martha, moving away as Seibel approached.

"What was she saying?" whispered Seibel, who was the little man's better-half. "Trying to get you to give her my part, I bet. She shan't have it. I hate her grand airs. I wish you would send her away."

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, dear," he exclaimed, impatiently. "I'll have to take the part from you if you don't sing it better than you did at the rehearsal; but there," warned by

a choking sob from his wife that his terror, a fit of hysterics, was impending, "I'll tell Bernard to come and study it with you this afternoon, and make you perfect for to-morrow."

"Oh, thank you, darling!" giving him a kiss as they emerged from behind the *portière* separating the stalls and the lobby.

"What a lovely day," she said sweetly, saluting Martha, whose only answer was a cold bow.

As she flounced out and jumped into her cart, a bewildering mass of fluttering feathers and ribbons, Martha's glance rested scornfully on the ungloved hands, blazing with diamonds on every finger. Her heart ached with the bitterness of the realisation that she had left friends and home in a wild chase after fortune, only to find her every chance snatched from her by the jealousy and vanity of this overdressed creature.

CHAPTER XX

THE ASSISTANT LANDDROST HOLDS COURT

"BAAS, I swear by the Almighty that every word I say is true. I was fast asleep in the lock-up last night, when a big wind came and blew the door wide open. The wind made me so cold that I walked out of the door, and went right away to my hut and got my blanket, for I was shivering with cold. And when I was coming back to the lock-up this morning, the constable ketched me by the neck and put me in the stocks, because, he said, I broke out of gaol last night. But, before the Almighty, I am telling the truth. The high wind blew the door open, Baas; before the Almighty it did, Baas."

The prisoner, a genuine Hottentot, clad in a ragged pair of trousers, a faded blue cotton shirt, and dilapidated digger's hat, gave his evidence in Kafir-Dutch. A broad grin illumined his jetty countenance, the humour of which was apparently lost on the Assistant Landdrost, seated in his rostrum, slightly above the level of

the room where he officiated as magistrate of the Johannesburg Police Court.

"So, Alexander," said the magistrate, looking at the prisoner steadily, despite the roars of laughter which his *naïve* defence elicited from the crowd in court, "so you have been stealing again. Not satisfied with paying a surreptitious visit to the Landdrost's house a short time ago, you must try your hand at the brickfields. Well, officer, what is the charge?"

"He borrowed a cart from the police-station yesterday morning," said the policeman, "and went to the brickfields, where he proceeded to load the cart with two hundred and fifty bricks. He was just about to drive off with the bricks, when the owner came along and caught him. I arrested him and put him in gaol. He broke out last night; and this morning I succeeded in capturing him, when I put him in the stocks."

"Well, Alexander," said the magistrate, "you are very ingenious, but no doubt your ingenuity will bring you to the gallows. The charge of theft must be passed. But I fear the high wind of last night gave you a bad cold. I'll give you a prescription that will warm as well as cure you—you shall receive ten lashes."

The unfortunate Hottentot was speedily removed, amid howls and protestations, which

occasioned renewed laughter and jeers from the court, to give place to three coolies, named respectively Kissimsing, Jatsulla, and Lutsing, on a charge of cruelty to animals.

As the three men stood up in the dock, they represented as repulsive-looking specimens of humanity as could be found in the length and breadth of the Transvaal. Clad in semi-European dress, rough corduroys, loose shirts, their heads swathed in gaudy bandanna handkerchiefs, their feet shod in Malay sandals, they looked capable of any cruelty, despite their efforts to appear bland and innocent.

"Constable Delemore," said the Assistant Landdrost, without even a glance in the direction of the coolies, "state your charge."

"These men," answered the market constable, "were arrested by me on a charge of extreme cruelty to animals."

"What kind of animals?" queried the magistrate.

"Pigs."

A general laugh followed the constable's laconic explanation, while the Assistant Landdrost, without a change of countenance, bade the constable proceed with his charge.

"They brought eight pigs into market this morning, in a pitiable condition. The poor

animals were bound together by a reim tied tightly round their legs. When they were thrown out of the waggon, I found that their hoofs had rotted off from the tightness of the reims, and their legs were full of sores and maggots."

"Where did the coolies get the animals?" said the magistrate to a Moslem who acted as interpreter for the men.

"They bought them at a farm."

"How many days since?"

After a parley with the coolies the interpreter replied—

"Eight days ago."

"Which is the owner of the animals?"

Again a consultation occurred, and the interpreter answered—

"Kissimsing."

"He is fined five pounds or a month's imprisonment. And you, constable, have the poor animals put out of torture immediately."

The coolie sullenly paid his fine, and then left the room with his companions, in an apparently excited debate with the interpreter, upon whom they fell, once clear of the court, with kicks and blows as a reward for his non-success.

The next prisoner to appear was Jim, a

Kafir, charged with assaulting his brother in darkness, Tim.

"So it is you again, Jim," said the magistrate, glancing at the big Zulu before him, whose genial face broadened into a delighted grin at the Assistant Landdrost's recognition. "Well, what have you to say?"

"Good morning, Baas; I hope you are very well," replied Jim, in excellent Dutch. "I hope you won't be hard on me this time, Baas."

"Go on," said the Assistant Landdrost, while a twinkle crept into his brown eyes. The Zulu's Dutch seemed to please him immensely.

"Yah, Baas, I thrashed that low dog, Tim, because he insulted me."

"Insulted you?"

"Just so, Baas. I was at Fillis' with my chums last night, Baas, doing nothing, but quietly looking at the lions, when this here fellow Tim and another chap come along and called out to me, 'Who's your father?'"

At this speech, given with a comical attempt at dramatic effect, a storm of merriment swept over the court, drowning the voice of the Zulu, who joined in the laughter, and even went to the length of winking at the Kafir police, who forgot their dignity for the time, and were giving vent to boisterous guffaws.

"Yah, Baas," continued Jim, when order was restored, "that low-born Kafir Tim called out, 'Who's your father?' And that's a mighty bad insult to a Zulu; it is, Baas, the biggest insult you could throw in a well-born Zulu's teeth. So I called back, 'Who's yours?' And then that low-born Tim ''saulted' me, and I tried to save my life by sawing at his throat with a piece of iron I had in my hand. He nearly killed me, Baas, and I was trying to save my life, that's the almighty truth, Baas."

"It's an almighty lie, Baas," roared Tim. "That Kafir ain't no Zulu. He's a Cape nigger."

"Silence!" thundered the magistrate. "Now, constable, give me the truth of this affair."

"Jim and his chum there were looking at the animals when Tim and another Kafir came up and called out something in Zulu to Jim, whereupon Jim's chum ran away, while Jim and Tim clinched. In a few minutes Jim's pal returned with two other Kafirs, and they all set upon Tim to beat him. There was such a row. The lions and tigers began to roar, and even the little elephant bellowed."

"So, Jim," said the Assistant Landdrost, sternly, "you created a terrible disturbance.

As I am not acquainted with Kafir folk-lore sufficiently to appreciate your defence, I shall fine you three pounds or fifteen lashes for breaking the peace."

"Thank you, Baas," replied Jim, with a grin. "I'll take the fifteen lashes."

When a few more petty cases had been heard, and justice dealt out for various offences in the form of lashes and fines, not the least of which was attempted gaol-breaking and drunken assault, the Assistant Landdrost, after carefully sorting the papers on the desk before him, glanced several times from the clock to the door at which the prisoners appeared.

He was evidently waiting for some case, so also was the court.

A hush of expectancy fell over the crowd, which was no ordinary one. The rows of expectant faces were not those of the regular *habitués*, grimy, dissipated-looking reporters and idle loungers. There was an air of respectability which rarely appeared in the every-day session of the stuffy little chamber. Among the crowd the quick eye of the Assistant Landdrost singled out the smiling face of a woman here and there, charming, pretty faces, the most prominent therein being the saucy, self-conscious phiz of a popular barmaid, and

the dark-eyed, brilliant beauty of an equally popular actress; while away in a corner between the ledge of two windows, the round little bonnet, dainty cap and strings framing a sweetly pretty countenance, proclaimed that some gentle hospital nurse had braved the stifling publicity of the court.

The sight of these women, every one of whom was young and pretty, made the susceptible heart of the big Boer, in the seat of justice on the little rostrum, throb a trifle quicker; for being a true Boer of the good old-fashioned sort, he had a decided weakness for feminine beauty, whether fair like the lily or tinged with the dusky hue of the damask rose. Consequently he straightened himself up a bit, gently stroking his bushy beard with one hand, while the other was complacently tucked away in the pocket of his commodious broadcloth waistcoat. To appear interested would have been beneath the dignity of his position, therefore he straightway became restlessly conscious, the usual resource of too susceptible men when in the presence of an overpowering femininity.

The presence of so many ladies in the court that morning, where the fair portion of the Johannesburg community rarely appeared, even in the character of witnesses, much less com-

plainant or defendant, precluded some event of more than passing interest. In fact, it was the day of the Great Reef murder trial, when the five Kafirs were to answer the charge. Rumours had been flying broadcast to the effect that one of the Kafirs had turned State's evidence, in consequence of which a crowd assailed the primitive temple of justice long before the doors were open, filling every inch of the broad wooden verandah, the railing in front, and even the window-ledges; where a host of venturesome Boer urchins had perched themselves for a peep from without at the proceedings within, if nothing better could be done.

The doors once opened, a rude but good-humoured throng took possession of every inch of space available; policemen swore, reporters protested, and women pleaded prettily for a place, just as at the Old Bailey or any other court where the awful fascination of a murder trial draws the crowd.

There must be some peculiarly innate love of cruelty or crime in the woman who can find pleasure in watching the silent throes of the unfortunate creature doomed to endure the slow torture of the condemned dock. Women who would scream at the sight of a harmless mouse, or faint at the idea of looking under the bed for

a burglar, or shrink from walking a block alone, after dark, lose all their affectation of delicacy and faint-heartedness at the prospect of gazing securely at the face of the perpetrator of crime, well guarded by the environs of the law like some captive beast; they gloat over every sickening detail, and crane their pretty necks for a good look at the ashy countenance of the condemned, when the black-capped judge commends the tortured soul to God's mercy.

It is usually the timid women, well-nourished, well-bred, the society woman, and her sister, the society actress, whose delicate sensibilities can withstand the shock of such scenes. Brave, tender-hearted women, women who have faced the stormy side of life, the workers and thinkers, have no desire to look on such scenes, unless it be in the cause of mercy; and that, every true woman must feel, is not for the tribunal of justice; the fitting place for her mission of alleviation is the solitude of the condemned cell, not the public dock.

Man is far more merciful in the administration of justice than ever woman could be. The man can be just, without being cruel; but woman, with her more highly-strung temperament, quick sensibility, and complex hysterical nature, becomes a perfectly merciless virago the

moment her slender hand touches the scales of justice. That she plays the mischief with those scales, and vanquishes all balance, is a fact that almost every epoch of history can verify.

Idleness is said to be the mother of crime, and luxury is certainly the lover of vice. The two combined give to the world the class of women who possess that morbid appetite which enables them to coolly partake of their lunch of sandwiches, and imbibe sherry, while waiting for a jury to pronounce the fatal verdict. The creeping sensation of pleasure, the shiver of horror at the sight of the dumb, helpless agony of a fellow-creature's misery, is to them the very acme of harrowing enjoyment. They should be belled out of court, such women, and be no more allowed to preside at the reading of the death sentence than they should be permitted to assist at the hanging of the wretched victim.

To the crowd in the little court the wait of a quarter of an hour seemed very long. Everyone was growing impatient; even the placidity of the Assistant Landdrost began to waver; when a noise of wheels, followed by the shuffling of heavy feet, was heard outside; and the eyes of the expectant rabble were soon gladdened by the sight of the prisoners, as they were ushered

in one by one, each under the care of a brace of policemen.

Five more wretched-looking men could not have been found in all the Transvaal that day than the prisoners as they stood in the dock.

Dick, the old Zulu, held his head up and looked straight before him over the heads of the people through the wide open door, where the crowd pressed thickest, into the sunlit street, with the helpless, miserable pain of lost liberty tugging at his heart.

There was no one in all that court who realised more fully the heinousness of his crime, and knew the certain death awaiting him, than did the old man himself. He knew the utter helplessness of pleading that he had been mad with the frenzy of drink when the awful crime was committed. He knew he had been a coward. No word that he could call himself in his utter abasement was too vile. He had murdered unknowingly, unwittingly, in a delirious paroxysm, a man who had been to him, the black man, a kind and generous friend; who had many times spoken words of wonderful import to him; who had told him of a beautiful faith that would regenerate the poor despised negro; who had offered to lead him to the very throne of the God whom he adored. And this gentle, noble-

hearted friend was the man whom he had foully done to death.

His eye-balls burned with the red film of unshed tears, his whole body racked and throbbed with pain, as he thought over all the doings of that fatal night. But through all his misery he was dumb; no word of defence or protest had fallen from his lips. While his gaolers declared him the most hardened and dangerous of all the prisoners, they feared his silence, they trembled for their lives in his presence. A half dozen of them had bound him to the cot on which he slept in the gaol, and tied with extra ropes his great brawny hands as they led him into court.

Lohia, Jim, Jan, and Charley looked pitiable enough as they were seated, trembling in every limb, with hanging lips and rolling eyes. Their frightened faces elicited jeers and scoffs from the crowd until the Assistant Landdrost raised his hand commanding silence, as the court proceedings were about to begin.

The first witness sworn was an uncle of the murdered man. He gave his testimony briefly, but with much emotion.

The deceased, he said, had left for town on Sunday afternoon, the 8th inst., at about two o'clock, saying he was going to see some

friends, and also to church, and would return about half-past nine. On the Monday morning a man came down to where he was working, and told him that a white man in a state of nudity was lying in one of the cuttings of the Great Reef property. Witness then went up, and to his horror found that it was the body of his nephew.

The witness then identified the clothing of the deceased, which was produced.

A carpenter who worked at the mine was then sworn. He said that the dead man occupied the same room with him. He remembered the deceased leaving for town on Sunday afternoon, as he had asked him for the loan of his watch. Witness asked him if he would come in later, and they would return to the compound together in the evening. He said he could not promise, and he did not go into town. On Monday morning witness saw the corpse lying naked near the boundary of the Langlaagte property. The body was horribly mutilated. He identified the watch, hat, and coat as the property of the deceased.

A physician being sworn, said:—"I am Acting District-Surgeon. On Monday, the 9th inst., I went out to see the body of a white man, who it was stated had been murdered. I

found the body in a state of nudity, lying in a deep cutting. The body was much mutilated. The head was covered with blood, so much so that it had to be washed before it could be examined. On the back of the head there was an open wound, two and a half inches long, laying bare the skull. On the top of the head there was another wound, two and a half inches long by one and a half inches wide. On the left side of the forehead there were two severe bruises. The throat was cut from ear to ear, and there were also two gashes on the side of the neck. The body had been ripped from the neck to the lower part of the abdomen. Several holes had been pierced through the side of the body, one of which had entered the lung. The cause of death was due to the blows on the head, accelerated by the cutting open of the abdomen. Several parts of the body were missing."

An engine-driver at a neighbouring mine testified that on Sunday evening, the 8th inst., he accompanied the deceased to the Wesleyan Church, and afterwards to a boarding-house, where they remained a short time. They walked in the direction of the Salvation Army. Witness left the deceased, as he was going home to the Langlaagte. This was about

half-past nine in the evening. Deceased carried a stick.

Another witness said that he was engaged in laying the train at the Great Reef Mine. He knew the accused, Charley, who worked at the mine. On Sunday evening witness went to look for Charley, but could not find him anywhere. He then went to bed at the eating-house. And about one o'clock Charley returned and went to sleep in the next room. The next day he appeared restless, and did not attend to his work. When witness found out that Charley was to be arrested, he told him so, and he became very frightened and restless.

The compound manager being sworn, said he knew all the accused, who, with the exception of Charley, all shared one hut. On Monday a Kafir came to the property carrying a stick in his hand. As soon as Charley saw the stick he said, "There's the stick!" But, being interrogated, would not give any further information.

The next witness, a young Kafir, was sworn. He gave his name as Andries, and said that he had arrived from Natal a few days before the murder. The day after the murder he met Dick, who offered to sell him a watch for four pounds. Suspecting it was the dead man's property, he sought out a detective, and told

him of the occurrence. They then went back, and witness called Dick, who offered the watch for sale. The detective arrested Dick, and later on the rest of the boys were taken in charge.

The detective's story was heard with breathless attention by the throng of horror-lovers in court. After being sworn, he gave a graphic account of the finding of the murdered man's wearing apparel, the arrest of the boys, and other details of the terrible affair.

"On Monday morning, the 9th inst.," he began, "it was reported to me that a man was lying murdered at Langlaagte. I went there, and found the body of the deceased. There was nothing on the poor fellow but the wristbands of his shirt, and his mutilated body was a fearful sight. Lying there at the bottom of the sluit, it turned my very heart sick to look at it. I went away and set to work at once to trace the whereabouts of the murderers or murderer. I soon found out the occupation of the deceased, and got a description of the clothes he had worn when last seen alive, and the valuables he possessed. On the Thursday following I got a clue from a canteen-keeper, who told me a Kafir in the employ of the Great Reef Company had been seen offering a

watch for sale. I got Andries to go and buy the watch, and bring the Kafir to me. He did so, and I found the watch and chain answered the description given to me. I asked the Kafir, whose name is Dick, how much he wanted for the watch, and he said he would take four pounds, as the watch was his, and he wanted the money to go to his kraal. I then took him into a room in my shanty, and questioned him closely as to where he got the watch. At first he said it was in the brickfields; but after a lot of talking and coaxing, he owned up that he stole it and some clothes from a white man that he and the boys had killed on Sunday. I cautioned him in the usual way, and asked him the names of the boys. The old boy seemed much cut up over what had occurred. He swore that he and the rest were drunk, and did not know it was poor Clark they were murdering, who had always been a good friend to all the boys. Finally I got him to tell the names of the boys; and then I went to the compound. Just as I was going in at the door I saw Lohia, but as soon as he saw me he ran off to his hut. I followed and arrested him. Jan was pointed out to me; and, pointing to Sam, Lohia said, 'There's another.' Sam cleared, and I could not catch him at that time. Jan pointed

out Jem, who was very drunk and seemed to enjoy seeing the others run in. I went into town with the man, and offered a sovereign to whoever would bring me Sam. When I put my prisoners up in gaol, I returned to the mine and searched the hut of the boys. In a bag belonging to Dick I found the coat and vest belonging to the murdered man. In Sam's bag I found the trousers, and under the blankets the murdered man's boots. I found the hat and boots of the deceased concealed under two pieces of ant-heap, close to the spot where the body was lying. The trousers of Dick and Lohia were thickly spotted with blood. After Dick had made his confession to me he gave up the knife with which he had done the deed. Andries interpreted between Dick and myself; but I, too, understand and speak Zulu."

Booy, a native, being sworn, stated that he worked on the Great Reef property, and knew the prisoners well. They, the Kafirs, eat at sundown; but on Sunday evening the prisoners did not eat there. They did not work on Monday. The prisoners were great friends, and were always together.

Hans, the canteen-keeper's black assistant, said the prisoners had come to the bar at nine o'clock that Sunday night; but as they were

already very drunk, the Baas would not sell them any more brandy. The boy gave his evidence in a state of great trepidation, for the beady black eyes of the canteen-keeper were riveted on him from his post at the back of the court, and he dared not give the lie to the evidence of his cruel master, who had sworn that the Kafirs got no drink at his place that night.

And now the sensation so eagerly looked forward to occurred. The youngest of the five prisoners arose, at the bidding of the court, and gave his evidence for the State.

The story was heard with bated breath; for the young Zulu described with pathetic dramatic effect the details of the murder and the drunken bout preceding the fatal night. A shudder ran through the crowd, and a storm of hisses, oaths, and imprecations arose from the crowd when the trial was declared over.

As the prisoners were about to be led away, a rush was made for them by the angry mob; but a posse of sturdy policemen held the crowd back. Outside an awful scene occurred, when the prisoners, thrown one after the other into a heavy cart, were bound to the bottom like so many cattle.

The burly canteen-keeper drew near to

watch the process of binding. When the old Zulu caught sight of the wicked face, gloating with a leer of delight at the spectacle, he swung himself loose from the police, and with one bound was at the throat of the seller of vile whisky.

So sudden was the attack that, for an instant, the police were paralysed with astonishment. The next moment they tore the maddened Zulu from the prostrate body of the canteen-keeper, and felled him with blows to the earth; then they bound and lashed the unconscious prisoner to the waggon, and dashed away amidst the howls of the excited crowd through the town, and on over the hill, in the direction of Pretoria.

Once on the road, they never slackened speed, until a few hours later the waggon and its burden drew rein before the Pretoria gaol, where the prisoners, more dead than alive with fright and exhaustion, were to await their final trial and punishment.

CHAPTER XXI

KING FEVER THE AVENGER

CAPTAIN ARCHIBALD ACHILLES lay dying in one of the little rooms of the Nurses' Home. The gaunt hand of deadly typhoid had smitten him down in spite of his splendid physique and gay, reckless spirits. The hot fingers of the cruel fever bound, as in an iron vice, his throbbing temples, drained his aching body of every vestige of strength, and swamped his vitality in the stream of cold perspiration oozing from every pore.

Yes, Captain Archie—the popular cricketer, the favourite originator of many an amateur theatrical success, the greatest heart-breaker of the camp, from barmaid to nurse, as unscrupulous with women as he was dishonest with men—was dying, and dying as many another of his countrymen, fine, robust Englishmen too, were dying around him, far from the sweet, wholesome air of merrie England.

The mutterings of the dying man, as he

fought for life with the deadly fever, were the only sound in that little chamber, where the young nurse moved noiselessly about, performing her duties of the sick room. The silent watcher by the bedside stirred neither hand nor foot, as he sat with bowed head listening to the laboured breathing and delirious talk of his stricken friend.

For hours Hector had sat by that bed, till he was numbed and dazed with watching, until he almost envied the unconscious state of the dying man. A great change had come over Hector. Grief at the flight of Ariadne, combined with the effects of the dissipation in which he had sought forgetfulness of her cruel and inexplicable conduct, had wrought sad havoc in his handsome face, now drawn and haggard, the eyes dull and bloodshot, the golden moustache drooping and unkempt, while the hands supporting his bowed head were weak and tremulous with the excesses of the past weeks.

Those who have stood guard over the bedside of the dying, can alone know the wearying strain of patient waiting for that last struggle which no word can cheer, nor caress alleviate. It is the saddest duty we can ever perform for those near and dear to us, a duty which brings no consolation, since it brings no hope, which

elicits no thanks or meed of gratitude from friend, foe, or beloved one, when once stricken with the impassive indifference of death.

There had been a strange coolness between the men, for what reason Hector could never clearly define. But when the captain was stricken down as by a flash of lightning with the fever, his last conscious word was an urgent request for Hector. That had been some days ago, and Hector had watched incessantly by his side; but he had never regained consciousness.

"And now," thought Hector, sadly, "the poor boy will go without one word of farewell or message for the *mater* and home so far away."

The nurse entered the little room, adjusted the night-lamp, and then glided to Hector's side. She touched him lightly on the shoulder, saying, "I shall be within call, should he grow worse."

When she had gone, he arose from his place beside the bed, and stood at the foot, gazing at the dying man. His mutterings had ceased, or were so faint that they could not reach Hector's ear.

A long bar of yellow moonlight spread its luminous length across the room and over the

bed, shining on the coverlet, which the sick man clutched in his trembling fingers.

The pale golden light seemed to disturb him in some mysterious manner, for the hands on which it shone began to grasp helplessly at some unseen object, while with laboured breathing he strove to raise himself in the bed.

Seeing the disquieting influence of the moonlight on the dying man, Hector went softly to the window and gently drew the curtain partly over it, shutting out the moonlight. In a few moments he ceased his restless movements, and lay quite still.

Hector remained in his place by the window, half concealed in the folds of the *portière* curtain. A hot air filled with a peculiar odour, half sickly, half pungent, was wafted through the open window. Hector shivered slightly, he knew the odour well; it came from a shadowy procession of carts drawn by Kafirs passing along the roadway a slight distance away. He watched the procession file slowly past, until it was lost to view as it turned with the road round a low kopje. Then he let his gaze rove over the scene before him.

The Nurses' Home stood, like a monument of woman's gentle care and noble self-sacrifice,

on a low hill overlooking Doornfontein and Johannesburg. He could see from the window the whole wonderful town at his feet. The view was one of weird, indescribable beauty, as difficult to imagine, by one who has never seen it, as it is difficult to describe; for, there is in the African moonlight a nameless charm, half melancholy, half mystical, which gilds with an almost spiritual beauty the most commonplace objects.

It is a mellow, golden, dream-like moonlight, as unlike the cold glittering moonshine of the north as silver is to gold; a moonlight which has a hush in it that is holy; a moonlight which seems to charge the very atmosphere with its magnetic silence; in which the harshest voice falls soft as the ring of a distant bell upon the ear, and the very ugliness of man and beast becomes transformed into beauty, albeit grotesque, in that sacred light. There is no land on all God's gracious earth that embodies so perfectly supreme rest, suspense from labour, the oblivion of sleep, as the heavenly calm of a moonlight night in South Africa.

Hector leaned far out upon the window-sill; the slight shiver running up and down his back gave place to a glow which seemed to mount to his head and fill him with a delicious

dreaminess: he forgot Archie, he longed only for sleep; but the scene before him, now transglorified to his fever-smitten eyes, held him in thrall.

The thousand roofs of unpainted zinc gleamed like a mine of opals in the warm moon rays.

Far away the low outline of the distant kopjes seemed bathed in a pale blue vapour like the haze of the ocean.

The shafts, clear to his practised eyes, of mine and battery arose like the phantom masts of ship and barque in ghostly array against the distant blue of the imaginary sea.

Suddenly, far away, he caught the sight of Devonshire hills round the placid waters of a gleaming lake, on whose banks rose a quaint, rambling old mansion.

With a cry he stretched forth his arms; but the scene was gone: and he knew that glimpse of his beautiful English home was a vision woven by the mirage of the midnight moon.

Beneath the window stretched a garden, whose blooming beauty had been planted and tended by the hands of the lady nurses. As his eyes rested upon it, the roses and tulips seemed to change to the familiar faces of far-away friends, as they nodded their uplifted heads in the warm night-breeze.

A great gaunt Kafir dog strolled along the garden path, his black body shining like satin in the mellow light. He walked on his own shadow, cast beneath him by the moon, now full in the meridian of the heavens, where she hung for a few moments apparently stationary. Hector watched, with eyes that began to burn strangely, the shadow of the dog slowly pass from under his body, and lengthen along the path behind him.

Once the lonely animal stopped, and stared up at Hector with great white eyes, then raised its head and gave vent to a prolonged, melancholy bay. Hector shuddered, and then waved the dog away. The gesture seemed to frighten the animal, for he turned and sped towards the roadway, clearing the low fence in a bound, and was off.

Then Hector's gaze rested drowsily on the flowers; but the roses looked no longer up to him; the tulips hung their heads as though bent by the burden of a passing wind. The moonlight seemed to be swallowed up in an approaching darkness; the garden beneath, the town lying beyond, seemed revolving in a vapouring mist; and he was fast succumbing to unconsciousness when every sense was

aroused to alertness by the sound of the dying man's voice calling in hoarse tones—

"Ariadne!"

It was the first time in all those days and nights of watching that Hector had heard that name on his lips.

"Ariadne," he called again, this time in stronger tones, "Ariadne, you must hear me! I'm leaving the Rand for ever. I cannot go without you. Come with me, Ariadne, come —come——"

The last words floated away in a whisper, but Hector's ear, strained by excitement, caught them distinctly as he approached the bed, dazed and staggered by the shock of the revelation made by the raving of the dying man.

"So it was true, after all," muttered Hector. "He did love her. Oh, Archie, Archie, why did you deceive me?"

Then the poor fellow sank on the chair by the bed and began to weep childishly; worn out with watching and weakened by the fever, which had already fastened its fangs in his brain, and poured its poison in his blood. He wept feebly. Had he not loved this man with more than the love of a brother? And that this man of all men should have coveted the woman

he loved; coveted her while he cloaked his real feelings in a semblance of distrust and contempt for her! It was too much for Hector's weakened nerves. He could only find relief in hysterical tears.

Suddenly the stupor into which the unusual state of tears had reduced him was dispelled by the renewed ravings of the captain. At first his words were jumbled and indistinct, but gradually their real meaning was caught by Hector, who started from his seat with a rage he could not control, as the voice from the bed cried passionately—

"I lied about Hector—I lied—lied. Forgive me, it was through love for you—Ariadne—love for you. I lied when I told you—when I said Hector—Hector was married—Hector——"

The last word died in a gurling sound as Hector seized the dying man by the throat.

"Scoundrel," he gasped, frenzied by fever and rage, "you drove her away! Wake up! no shamming. You're no more dying than I am. Get up. Let us fight it out like men. The one who lives shall marry her."

. . . . .

It was an awful sight that met the eyes of the frightened nurses as they rushed into the

room, drawn thither by the sound of the struggle. Hector had dragged Archie out of the bed, and the two were locked in each other's arms in a desperate embrace. All at once Hector's grasp relaxed, and he fell insensible on the floor.

As the doctor and the nurses laid Archie in the bed, he seemed to regain consciousness for a moment.

"I have told Hector at last," he whispered faintly. "He said the one who lived should marry her. Tell him I couldn't help myself. I loved her."

Then he relapsed into unconsciousness.

"He has collapsed," said the doctor, as he felt his pulse. "He will not regain consciousness again, but pass away quietly in that state."

But the doctor was mistaken; for an hour after, when Hector had been removed raving and fighting in the delirious struggles of high fever, Archie opened his eyes and looked at the nurse seated in Hector's place by his bed.

"Tell Hector," he said faintly, so faintly that the young nurse had to put her little ear close to his lips, "tell Hector I could not help it. Tell him to forgive me—when I'm gone."

The nurse nodded her pretty head while she wiped away her tears.

Then he closed his eyes.

. . . . .

The next day the Johannesburg papers chronicled the untimely death of Captain Archibald Achilles, the popular cricketer; and also imparted the sad news of the expected death of Hector, who had been stricken down by fever, through devotion to his dying friend.

CHAPTER XXII

HOMEWARD BOUND

It was a glorious evening at sea; the sun was setting in a blaze of fiery cloud and seething waters on one side, while on the other the pearly disc of the full moon slowly arose out of the purple waves, tipping their heaving crests with her sparkling beams, and flooding the darkness with silvery mist.

Between the rising and setting light, the dark form of the *Garth Castle* loomed up, gallantly ploughing her way in the wake of the sun, leaving behind her a snowy trail of foam, as she sped on her restless course towards that distant land behind whose shores the sun was sinking.

On board the *Garth* affairs were settling into the usual routine of life aboard ship. She had steamed out of the breakwater as the evening shadows were descending on Cape Town five days before. Her passengers were growing accustomed to the sea, and already forming

projects for the entertainment of each other during the voyage.

Two women were alone on the hurricane deck. One was leaning against the guards; her tall figure and auburn hair, tinged by the rays of the sunset, appeared positively resplendent in the rosy glow. The other was reclining in a steamer chair, carefully wrapped in a kaross, from which looked up the wan face and pale lips of Ariadne.

"Kathleen," she was saying in a voice the mere echo of her once gay ringing tones, "how charming you look in that light! The sun gilds your white gown, blue cloak, and dear red head with such a lovely tint that you look as pretty as a picture."

"Thank you," answered her sister, with a little laugh. "I'm glad your good old Kathleen looks pretty once in a while."

"I shall never wear white again," said Ariadne, sadly, as she brushed her hands across her eyes.

"Come, come, you must remember your promise," said Kathleen, drawing a camp-stool near, and sitting beside her. "No more grieving."

"I know it, but I can't do it yet. I must give way now and then. Don't be cross with me."

"No, my darling," said Kathleen, tenderly, "I won't reproach you. I'll help you all I can to forget."

"Will you not try to come down to dinner?" she said, after a pause. "The sight of all those new faces will interest and amuse you. Do come!"

"Don't ask me to-night," said Ariadne, pleadingly. "Just have patience one day longer; then I will go with you. Oh! I cannot bear it yet."

"There, there!" interrupted Kathleen, soothingly, "I'll wait. But you will be amused. We have quite a set of mashers at our table. They even attempt their blandishments on me, your staid old Kathleen. But I see them looking at your empty place, and I know they resent your absence. The captain is such a dear—I have almost lost my heart to him. And there is a handsome German from Durban who looks after me very kindly. He politely offers me a glass of champagne regularly now at dessert."

"Does he?" said Ariadne. "How kind of him! I am sure I shall like him."

"I know you will," resumed Kathleen. "Then there is a splendid-looking, weather-beaten old officer; he is a perfect giant; such a grand head and soft beautiful brown

eyes—oh!" broke off Kathleen, with a prolonged sigh.

"Why, sister," exclaimed Ariadne, with a faint laugh, "you are growing positively eloquent. Go on; this is getting interesting."

"There is another officer; he sits at the end of the table opposite my nice German; but," said Kathleen, impressively, "he is not like the old general, he is the courteous old school type; but this young officer is, well, dreadful; he slangs at the captain and every one else. Last night he roared out to some one at the doctor's table, 'There's no flies at this table.' Now, Ariadne, what do you think he could mean by such an idiotic remark?"

"I'm sure I cannot understand," said Ariadne, laughing outright at her sister's solemn tone; "but I should think he was an original."

"He is decidedly; but as he has just returned from Matabeleland, I have no doubt he has still a touch of the fever; hence his wild careering on deck, and fondness for baking himself in the sun. I don't think he saw much service in Africa, consequently he is undergoing a process of tanning his face and hands in order to appear the proper hue when we get to Plymouth."

"Kathleen, you will become a confirmed

cynic, if I do not get strong soon, and look after you."

"Oh, the M.P. who sits next to me will do that; he is full of kindly excuses for the irrepressible young captain, who is no doubt a very good sort of soldier after all."

"No doubt," said Ariadne, "but I hope he won't subside till I am able to go down. I like to be amused."

"You will find plenty of that, dear, in the antics of a tall, thin young man who has the foot of the table."

"Indeed; what is his peculiarity?"

"Well, he has a fad for giving dinners on his own account at one of the unoccupied tables in the corner. What pleasure he can see in it I don't know, unless it is to get a lot of men round him and see them drink all he can pay for. He does me one service—he takes his disagreeable face away and rids us of the slang of our young captain from Matabeleland. I regain my appetite then."

"Poor Kathleen," said Ariadne, laughing.

"The M.P. tells me it is against the rules to give private dinners on board, but as the bilious young man is a shipping clerk for the Company he takes advantage. The M.P. declares that no such goings on as these are allowed on board the *Tartar*."

"And the German?" said Ariadne.

"Oh, he is not led away by that set; although they chaff him dreadfully, he always remains with us. Now I wonder if he thinks I would miss that glass of champagne at dessert?"

"Perhaps," observed Ariadne.

"Perhaps," re-echoed Kathleen.

"And the women?" said Ariadne. "What are they like?"

"You won't get on with them," answered Kathleen, with a laugh. "Thoroughly commonplace. I don't believe there is one who has a history, consequently they won't interest you; you'll make them all crazy with jealousy. Hurry up, dear, and get strong. I want to see some fun. There is nothing I enjoy more than seeing you rout a pack of jealous old tabbies."

"Kathleen! Kathleen!" began Ariadne, in a tone of remonstrance, but she was interrupted by the voice of the captain.

"Will you not come down to dinner this evening?" he inquired, kindly.

"No, captain. I fear I cannot just yet. You go, dear," she said, addressing Kathleen.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Thank you, captain. If you don't mind, I

would like my chair turned round, that I may be able to watch the moon rising."

"Are you comfortable, dear?" said Kathleen, when the captain had removed the chair.

"Yes, thank you. Go to dinner now. I shall enjoy a quiet musing."

"You are quite sure you won't be lonely?" said Kathleen, as she kissed her.

"No, no. Go now."

. . . . .

When the last sound of their footsteps had died away, and silence reigned on the deck below, Ariadne abandoned herself to the melancholy comfort of unrestrained weeping. She wept at first softly and quietly, but the tears seemed to gain strength with their flow, increasing until a perfect tempest of grief overwhelmed her.

Hector was dead. Three months before, the news of his death had reached her. For a time an attack of fever mercifully seized her and granted blessed oblivion. With the return of health came the return of that unending regret eating at her heart like a cancer of sorrow. Regret that she had not followed the impulse of her love and remained by his side; regret that she had not thrown prudence and virtue to the winds, and been to him all, wife—if not

in name, in heart—for the brief days he had to live. Oh, saddest of sorrows and bitterest of knowledge is the sorrow void of consolation, and the knowledge of good that has been done in vain!

Through her glimmering tears she looked up at the Southern Cross, gleaming with chaste, holy light in the heavens high above her.

"Dear Southern Cross," she said, softly, "you shine on his grave to-night, as you will shine for endless nights when I can no longer see your sacred radiance."

Then her eyes rested on the golden moon, and glanced still lower,—suddenly they beheld the spirit of Hector standing motionless and white before her in the moonlight.

"Oh, my love!" she whispered, clasping her hands on her heart as she slowly arose from the chair. "I knew you would come to me once more. I prayed so long to see you. Let me touch you before I lose you again for ever."

Very slowly she advanced to him, as though fearful of frightening him away. She could see his eyes shining cold as the moon's rays. Nearer she glided, until she could touch him; and then she stretched out her arms and folded them around him.

But the arms that returned her embrace were warm; and the heart she felt beating against hers, throbbed like the beating of an imprisoned bird. The lips on her lips thrilled her with a kiss born not of heaven but of earth. Joy does not always kill; but sometimes it is too much for the fondest heart; and it sent her reeling into the dark abyss of insensibility.

. . . . .

When she opened her eyes, she felt those arms still around her, and the old remembered kisses on her hair. The moon shone brightly on the dear face and the drooping golden mustaches, and on the face of Kathleen.

"Oh! I knew it all the time," cried her sister, tears of joy shining in her eyes. "I knew it from the first day we were on board; but you were too ill to bear the shock of surprise. Poor boy, he has been begging to see you, and watched you from little nooks and corners all over the deck. But to-night I sent him up to you—and—oh!"

Here Kathleen broke down, and fled to the gangway to stifle her sobs.

Ariadne nestled her head on Hector's breast.

"Speak to me," she whispered, "and then I'll know I am not dreaming."

"Ariadne," was all he said.

"Oh! it is my Hector," she cried, exultingly. "All the ghosts in the world could not speak like that."

There are reunions too sacred for words to describe. It is only those who have lost, suffered, and re-found who can imagine the picture the pen is too weak to portray.

When these two had wept out their joy together, Ariadne, woman-like, was filled with curiosity to solve the mystery of Hector's reported death.

"Tell me, dearest," she said, "how did this terrible mistake occur?"

"It would take a long time to tell you all," answered Hector, softly. "You are not well enough to hear the story now."

Then he paused, and Ariadne fancied she felt the hand clasping hers tremble a bit.

"Let it suffice for the present," he continued, "that I have escaped death, and that I am with you again, a stronger and better man than I have ever been before."

It was not until Ariadne was his bride that he told her of his escape from a living death.

How, after a long siege of fever, complicated with congestion of the brain, he suddenly col-

lapsed, and was to all appearance dead. How he was buried the very evening of the day of his supposed death—as many another helpless victim of the fever—and thrust hastily into the grave before twelve hours had elapsed, or sufficient time allowed in which to detect the difference between syncope and actual death.

How two Kafirs, coming in the early morning to prepare fresh graves, mistaking in the faint light of the dawn the low mound above his head for the remains of some freshly-turned soil, had set to work, and, to their amazement, on digging up a few feet of earth, come upon the long, narrow lid of his coffin, from which issued his lusty cry—

"Take me out of this, boys!" *

How the sound of pick and shovel, as they worked away vigorously, had roused him from that deadly sleep. How he awoke with brain and senses cleared of the fumes of the fever; and in an instant realising, thanks to his experience as a miner, that he was somewhere underground — probably buried in a shaft— uttered that cry for help with all the strength of desperation.

How the Kafirs, with true native pluck, instead of abandoning him through fright, took

* This is an absolute fact.

in the situation with grim humour, and set to work right merrily to dig him out. How the doctors stared—some resentfully that he had given the lie to their skill—and the nurses rejoiced, when the Kafirs bore him back to the hospital. How the event probably saved many another poor fellow from a living death, by teaching the medical staff a lesson, whereby they learned to be more cautious in the future.

But of all this he said nothing, that lovely night at sea, to the fair woman beside him; for his courage faltered as he looked in the wan face, and felt the soft touch of the fragile hand.

Suddenly, like the swift stroke of a knife, a pang rent Ariadne's heart as she recalled the words of Captain Achilles that morning in the garden of Willow Grove.

Instinctively she shrank from her lover's side.

"There is something else——" she began, in a tremulous voice.

"I know what you would say," interrupted Hector, as he drew her close to him. "You would tell me of poor Archie's charge against me that day at the 'Willows.' It was false, little one, all false, every word of it; and I never knew what was the cause of your sudden departure from the Rand, without a word of farewell, until I heard it from the poor

fellow's lips, while I was nursing him. The night he died, he confessed it in his delirium—poor, poor Archie. And the shock of hearing the truth knocked me off my head, and laid me down with the fever. I thought, when you ran away, that you had made up your mind that it would not be wise to marry a poor digger after all; so I tried to reconcile myself to my fate."

Ariadne looked up at him with tearful eyes full of reproach.

"But it is all right now," he hastened to say, cheerily. "As soon as I was strong enough, I left the Rand for the Cape, to seek you; and arrived just in time to secure a berth when I found that you and Kathleen had booked for the *Garth*. I've managed to scrape a few hundred pounds together before I left the Transvaal; and if you—if—if you still——"

Here Hector broke down; but Ariadne finished the sentence for him in a whisper, as she put her soft lips to his ear.

"And you are sure you don't regret losing that wedding tour in a bullock-waggon to Matabeleland?" he whispered back, with a spice of his old teasing manner.

"Oh, I'm getting too old for any more rambling!" cried Ariadne, gaily.

"What a very old lady you look, to be sure!" answered Hector, laughing.

"But, you know, a widow always feels old, even if she doesn't look it."

To which arch retort Hector replied with a look of mock gravity—

"Pray don't be alarmed! You won't have cause to feel old very much longer!"

Just then Kathleen joined them, and the midnight bell rang out across the sea.

"Oh, that's the midnight bell!" exclaimed Ariadne.

"Wedding bell, more likely," said Kathleen.

Then they laughed together happily.

"How fast the ship sails to-night!" said Ariadne, as she paused near the gangway, to take a last look at the beauty of the night before going below.

"Not too fast," whispered Hector, as he lifted her down the steep steps; "for we are sailing homeward together, little one, for all time and eternity!"

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INDEX

A

ADAMS, Herbert—
A Virtue of Necessity . . . 7
ALEXANDER, Geo.—
Introduction to "Art of Elocution" 4
America Abroad (J. W. Cundall) . 21
Anna Marsden's Experiment (Ellen Williams) 15
Asmodens (edited by Justin Hannaford) 6
Ashes Tell no Tales (Mrs A. S. Bradshaw) 7
ASCHER, Isidore G.—
A Social Upheaval . . . 8

B

Bachelor Ballads (H. A. Spurr) . . 21
BECKFORD, Geo.—
Vathek 6
Bible Stories Retold 4
BRADSHAW, Mrs Albert S.—
Ashes Tell no Tales . . . 7
Gates of Temptation . . . 14
Bye-ways of Crime (R. J. Power-Berrey) 4

C

CARNIE, T. West—
In Quaint East Anglia . . . 5
Comedy of Temptation (T. Coutts) . 9
COUTTS, Tristram—
Pottle Papers 20
Comedy of Temptation . . 9
Pottle's Progress 21
CUNDALL, J. W.—
London 21
America Abroad 21
Cry in the Night (A. Golsworthy) . 7

D

DANIELS, Heber—
Dona Rufina 13
Darab's Wine-Cup (B. Kennedy) . 16
Dan Leno, Hys Booke (Dan Leno) . 20
Death and the Woman (A. Golsworthy) 18
Devil in a Domino (C. L'Epine) . . 17
Devil on Two Sticks (Le Sage) . . 6
DE BRÉMONT, Comtesse—
A Son of Africa 7
The Gentleman Digger . . 9
DE SOISSON—
The Path of the Soul . . . 5
Dolomite Cavern (W. P. Kelly) . . 11
Dona Rufina (Heber Daniels) . . 13

E

East Anglia, In Quaint (T. W. Carnie) 21
"ENGLISH WRITERS OF TO-DAY" Series—
Rudyard Kipling (G. F. Monkshood) 1
Thomas Hardy (W. L. Courtney) 2
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Bret Harte (T. E. Pemberton) . 2
Richard Le Gallienne (C. R. Gull) 2
Arthur Wing Pinero (H. Fyffe) . 2
W. E. Henley (G. Gamble) . . 2
English Parnassian School (Sir G. Douglas) 2
Realistic Writers (J. Hannaford) 2
ESCOTT, T. H. S.—
A Trip to Paradoxia . . . 3
Elocution, The Art of (Ross Ferguson) 4
Epicurean, The (edited by Justin Hannaford 6

F

Fame, the Fiddler (S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald) 16
Famous Hamlets (C. Scott) . . 4
FERGUSON, Ross—
The Art of Elocution . . . 4
Fetters of Fire (Compton Reade) . 7
Fellow-Passengers (R. Pyke) . . 18
FITZ-GERALD, S. J. Adair—
Fame, the Fiddler . . . 16
That Fascinating Widow . . 17
The Grand Panjandrum . . 19

G

GALT, John—
Ringan Gilhaize 6
Gates of Temptation, The (Mrs A. S. Bradshaw) 14
Gentleman Digger, The (Comtesse de Brémont) 9
Girl of the North, A (H. Milicite) . 7
GOLSWORTHY, Arnold—
A Cry in the Night . . . 7
Death and the Woman . . . 18
GRAYL, Druid—
Nonsense Numbers, etc. . . 19
Pillypingle Pastorals . . . 20
Grand Panjandrum, The (S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald) 19
GREEN, Percy B.—
A History of Nursery Rhymes . 5
Green Passion (A. P. Vert) . . . 10
Guides, etc. 21

H

HALL, Sydney—
Temptation of Edith Watson . 9
Hamlets, Some Famous (C. Scott) . 4
HERMAN, Henry—
The Sword of Fate . . . 9
Hypocrite, The (Anonymous) . . 13

I

In Monte Carlo (H. Sienkiewicz) . 1
In Quaint East Anglia (T. W. Carnie) 25

J

Jocular Jingles (Druid Grayl) . . 19
JOHNSON, Dr—
Rasselas 6

K

KELLY, W. Patrick—
The Dolomite Cavern . . . 11
KENNEDY, Bart—
A Man Adrift 5
Darab's Wine-Cup . . . 16
The Wandering Romanoff . 13

L

Lady of the Leopard, The (C. L'Epine) 12
Lady of Criswold, The (L. Outram) . 14
LE SAGE—
Asmodens; or, The Devil on Two Sticks 6
L'EPINE, Charles—
The Devil in a Domino . . 17
The Lady of the Leopard . . 12
LENO, Dan—
Dan Leno, Hys Booke . . . 20
LONGSTAFF, W. Luther—
Weeds and Flowers . . . 6
The Tragedy of the Lady Palmist 12
Lord Jimmy (G. Martyn) . . . 14
London (J. W. Cundall) . . . 21

M

Man Adrift, A (B. Kennedy) . . 5
Madonna Mia (C. Scott) . . . 11
MARTYN, Geo.—
Lord Jimmy 14
MARTIN, Ernest—
Shadows 18
M'MILLAN, Mrs Alec—
The Weird Well 9
Miss Malevolent (Author of "The Hypocrite") 9
MILICITE, Helen—
A Girl of the North . . . 7
MONKSHOOD, G. F.—
Woman and the Wits . . . 5
Rudyard Kipling 1
My Lady Ruby 12
MOORE, Thomas—
The Epicurean 6
Mora (T. W. Speight) . . . 7
My Lady Ruby (G. F. Monkshood) . 12

N

New Tale of the Terror, A (Author of "The Hypocrite") . . . 8
Nonsense Numbers (D. Grayl) . . 19
Nursery Rhymes, A History of (P. B. Green) 5

O

Obscure Apostle (Orzeszko) . . 7
Outrageous Fortune (Anonymous) . 10
OUTRAM, Leonard—
The Lady of Criswold . . . 14
OWEN, J. L.—
Seven Nights with Satan . . 10

P

Path of the Soul (C. S. de Soisson) . 5
People, Plays, and Places (C. Scott) . 3
Pelican Tails (F. M. Boyd, etc.) . 17
Pillypingle Pastorals (D. Grayl) . 20
Pottle Papers, The (T. Coutts) . . 20
Pottle's Progress, The (T. Coutts) . 21
POWER-BERREY, R. J.—
Bye-Ways of Crime . . . 4
PYKE, Rivington—
The Fellow-Passengers . . 18

R

RAE-BROWN, Campbell—
The Shadow on the Manse . . 12
The Resurrection of His Grace . 15
Rasselas (Edited by Justin Hannaford) 6
READE, Compton—
Fetters of Fire 7
Resurrection of His Grace (C. Rae-Brown) 15
Ringan Gilhaize (Edited by Sir G. Douglas) 6

S

SADLEIR, Mrs Maria M.—
Such is the Law 7
SCOTT, Clement—
The Wheel of Life . . . 2
Madonna Mia 11
People, Plays, and Places . . 3
Sisters by the Sea 3
Famous Hamlets 4
Seven Nights with Satan (J. L. Owen) 10
Shadows (E. Martin) 18
Shams (Anonymous) 8
Shadow on The Manse (C. Rae-Brown) 12
SIENKIEWICZ, Henryk—
In Monte Carlo 12
Sisters by the Sea (C. Scott) . . 3
Son of Africa, A (Comtesse de Brémont) 7
Social Upheaval, A (I. G. Ascher) . 8
SPEIGHT, T. W.—
Mora; One Woman's History . 7
SPURR, Harry A.—
Bachelor Ballads 21
Stage, Year Book of (Greening and Hannaford) 5
Such is the Law (M. M. Sadleir) . 7
Sword of Fate, The (H. Herman) . 9

T

Temptation of Edith Watson (S. Hall) 9
That Fascinating Widow (S. J. A. Fitz-Gerald) 17
THOMPSON, Creswick J.—
Zoroastro 9
Tragedy of the Lady Palmist, The (W. L. Longstaff) 12
Trip to Paradoxia, A (T. H. S. Escott) 3

V

Vathek (Edited by Justin Hannaford) 6
VERT, Anthony P.—
The Green Passion . . . 10
Virtue of Necessity, A (H. Adams) . 7

W

Wandering Romanoff, The (B. Kennedy) 13
Weeds and Flowers (W. L. Longstaff) 6
Weird Well, The (A. M'Millan) . 9
Wheel of Life, The (C. Scott) . . 2
WILLIAMS, Ellen—
Anna Marsden's Experiment . 15
Woman and the Wits (G. F. Monkshood) 5

Y

Year Book of the Stage (Greening and Hannaford) 5

Z

Zoroastro (C. J. S. Thompson) . . 9

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