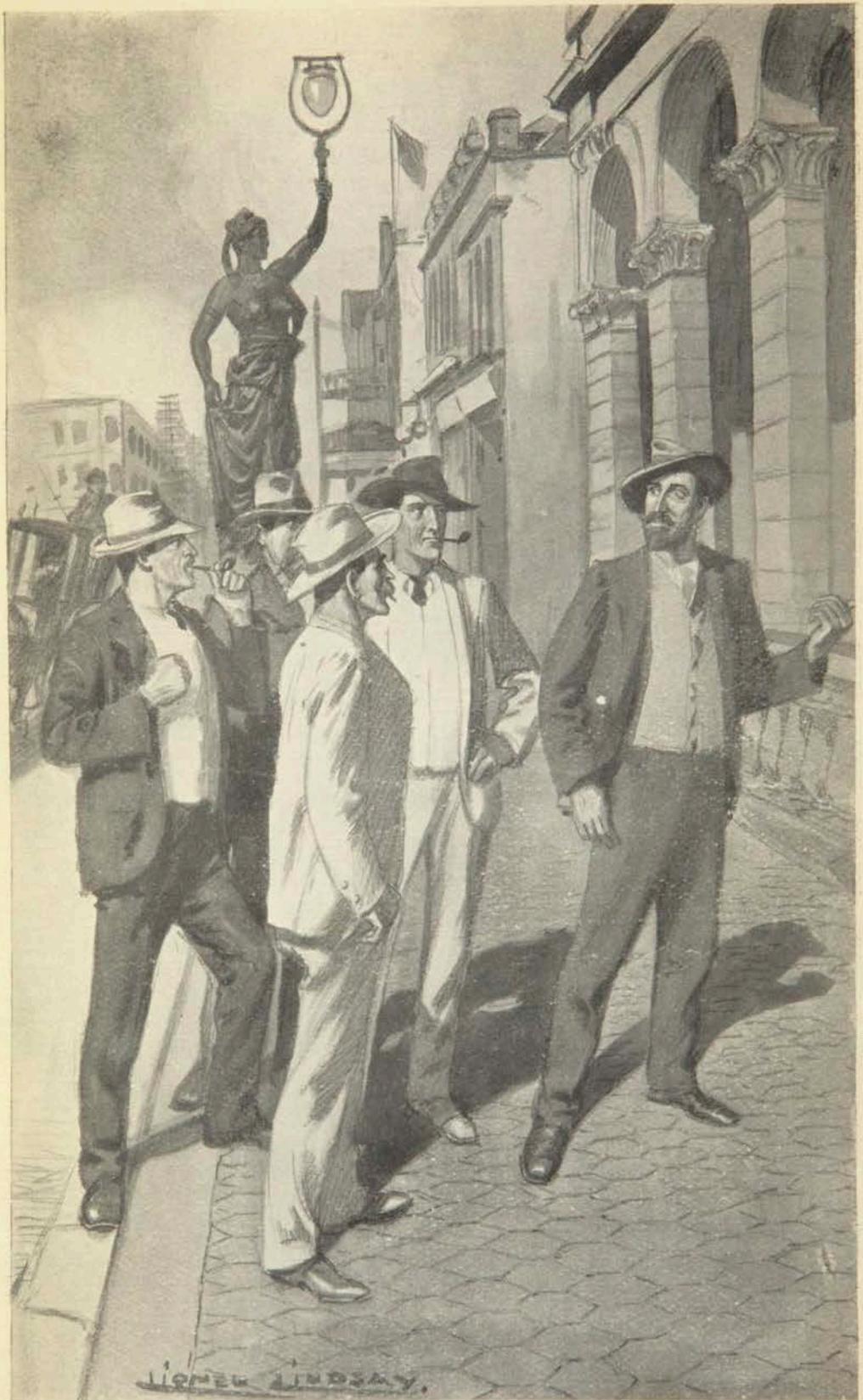


THE
BIG · FIVE
▼
AMBROSE
PRATT



"We met by arrangement on the steps of the Australian Hotel."
(Page 11.)

The Big Five



[Frontispiece

THE BIG FIVE

By

AMBROSE PRATT.

Author of "Vigorous Daunt, Billionaire," "First Person Paramount," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED



WILEY, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON, MELBOURNE AND TORONTO

1911



THE AUSTRALIAN HOTEL

THE BIG FIVE

By

AMBROSE PRATT

Author of "Vigorous Daunt, Billionaire," "First Person Paramount," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED

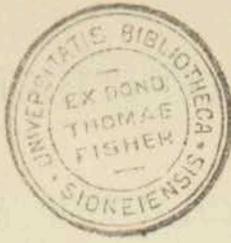


WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED
LONDON, MELBOURNE AND TORONTO

1911

42/6/28

823.91A



CONTENTS

	PAGE
CHAPTER I	
DISSOLUTION AVOIDED	II
CHAPTER II	
LADY TREVOR'S TEMPER	35
CHAPTER III	
LADY TREVOR'S POWER	62
CHAPTER IV	
AN ADVENTUROUS TIME	85
CHAPTER V	
A WILFUL WOMAN	121
CHAPTER VI	
A SERIOUS MISADVENTURE	144
CHAPTER VII	
LADY TREVOR IS BEWITCHED	169

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII	
CAPTURED	194
CHAPTER IX	
" I OWE YOU MY LIFE "	209
CHAPTER X	
A SAVAGE GENTLEMAN	225
CHAPTER XI	
HOPE	243
CHAPTER XII	
A STRANGE TALK	266
CHAPTER XIII	
A NEWSPAPER NOTICE	283



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“ We met by arrangement on the steps of the <i>Australia Hotel</i> ” <i>Frontispiece</i>	
“ ‘ Now,’ said I, ‘ spit out our proposition ’ ” .	19
“ My good man, you are a fool ! ”	45
“ We entered presently a capacious armoury ”	51
“ We were standing by the rail ”	69
“ Startled by his tone, I rose to my elbow and regarded him ”	93
“ The drover had already arrived ”	119
“ Lady Trevor . . . bestrode her saddle like a man ”	129
“ Lady Trevor was immediately behind me, and her husband followed ”	139
“ I forced her locked teeth apart, and poured some spirit down her throat ”	151
“ They burst from their cover yelling like devils ”	159
“ She approached, and took a seat upon the ledge ”	173
“ ‘ Pangeran McLean,’ he said, ‘ nothing can save your friend ’ ”	227
“ I heard a rat-like scramble in the bamboo rafters, then I saw a pair of well-known legs ”	245
“ Bill Forsyth had . . . escaped ”	255
“ Lady Trevor entered, attended by the hag ” .	273

420

CHAPTER I

DISSOLUTION AVOIDED

IT was our last morning in Sydney. We met by arrangement at eleven o'clock on the steps of the *Australia Hotel*, just to have one last drink together before separating, perhaps for ever. None of us pretended to be jovial. We weren't. There was nothing to be jolly about. We had been mates for two years at Kalgoorlie, Coolgardie, and Cue. During all that time we'd scarcely been a day apart, and when our last claim petered out we crossed to Sydney together. But now our joint and several banks were broken, and the "Big Five," as we were known all over the Western diggings, was about to split up, and go five separate ways in search of the fortune that had mocked our efforts to attain in partnership. I, Jim McLean, was the first to reach the rendezvous; six feet of bone and muscular misery, with a lump

in my throat as I saw good old Harry King lurching along, trying hard to look as if he didn't care a damn what happened. Six feet two he stood in his socks, as fine a specimen of manhood as ever an overstocked family of British aristocrats turned adrift to shift for himself in a world of workers, with an Oxford accent and a shilling ; but, in spite of his Oxford drawl, as good a pick and shovel man as you could find in the Commonwealth. Next came Bill Forsyth, like myself a native-born Australian, and like myself, as lean and featureless as two yards of pump-water, with a face to strike matches on. Gilbert Lang was the fourth to turn up—a Caledonian, and a mystic. Of course his father was a Highland " meenister," and equally, of course, Gilbert had started life as an engineer. He had lost his ship for arguing a knotty theological problem with his chief (a Lowland Wesleyan) with a belaying-pin. He owned a face that irresistibly recalled to mind the last granite crag you saw. He overtopped me by a good head, and he had arms like a gorilla. Why he had thought it necessary to use that belaying-pin is still a mystery to me. It must have been in sheer absence of mind—

or perhaps his opponent had a crowbar. Dan Linehan was the last to arrive. Irish-German by extraction, he was born and bred at Coonabarabran. Dan combined in his composition the volatile attributes of the Celtic temperament with the more solid qualities of the Teuton, and this curious mixture had produced an enthusiastic Australian patriot, who was perennially prepared to demonstrate with tongue or fist that Australia was not alone the best, but the only country in the world worth living in. He had brown hair, blue eyes, and a red beard; and I owed him an inch in height, and, despite my forty-two full three inches in chest measurement. He was the handsomest man I have ever seen, and the sunniest. But he was frankly lugubrious that morning.

Not one of us had exchanged a syllable till he appeared. We had just nodded to each other and lounged around, lighting our pipes to show how indifferent we were. But Dan changed all that. He said: "They keep powerful fine whisky in here, boys," and he climbed the steps.

We followed him like sheep, and a moment later we were breasting the bar.

“Up to the pretty, please,” said Dan to the barman. “Ah! it’s help myself, is it? Well, my dear man, your laziness or your good nature, which ever it is, is going to curtail your boss’s profits this fine morning.” And seizing the decanter, he all but filled his glass to the brim with spirit. “Be liberal to yourselves, boys,” he added, passing the jar along, “and drink honest. It’s Dock and Dorris, and no help for it, so don’t spoil the lovely juice of hearts with any of that poisonous soda water stuff or beastly H₂O.”

We followed his advice with an unanimity that set the barman muttering, and made a little begloved and dolled-up dude, who was drinking lonely near us, break into a gentle laugh.

But our troubles! We held out our glasses and clinked them together, and looked into each other’s eyes.

“Jim,” said Dan to me, “you’ll give us a toast, please?”

“Six,” I growled; “a sip apiece for the first five. Harry King! Here’s to you shearing on the Downs. Shear away. Sip!”

We sipped.

“Gilbert Lang! Here’s to you grizzling at the Lithgow smelter. Grizzle away. Sip!”

We sipped.

“Bill Forsyth! Here’s to you droving sheep to Bourke. Drove away. Sip!”

We sipped.

“Dan! Here’s to you stewing in a city office. You’re the unluckiest of the lot. Stew away. Sip!”

We sipped.

“Jim McLean,” said I. “Here’s to you prospecting in the Northern Territory. Prospect away. Sip!”

We sipped.

“Now,” I cried, “for the last, and drain your glasses, boys! Here’s confusion on the Fate that has brought us to the parting of our ways. Confusion!”

“Confusion!” they growled, and every glass was drained at a gulp. We set them on the counter, and, as if on a signal, formed a circle.

I found the four staring at me. They expected the lead from me then. I wanted to get away. I wanted—I——

“Look here!” I said. “I—you—chaps ;

here, shake hands quick, and get it over! Harry, man"—

"First and last!" he muttered in a shaky voice, and gripped my paw so hard that—well.

At that very instant I felt my shoulder plucked from behind. It was the dude. I could have blessed him for the interruption. It gave me a chance to—to—— But of course I had to rend him. I was never so angry in my life.

"What the devil do you want?" I grated, turning on him like a trod-upon adder.

But he was as cool as a cucumber, and not a scrap impressed, though he hardly reached to where my necktie struck for cover under my store-made vest.

"A word with Mr. Jim McLean," he said, polite as pie, and smiling like a Cheshire cat, "and if he is good enough to so far favour me I would beg him to increase my sense of obligation by sparing me that word before he bid his friends farewell."

"The deuce you would," I said quite flabbergasted by his lovely confidence in himself, "and who the blazes are you, anyhow?"

"Philip Trevor, at your service!" he

replied, and made me the prettiest little bow, standing back to do it, clicking his heels together like a dancing-master, and bending from the hips, keeping his knees stiff and his patent-leather-shod toes outstretched. It was downright old-world, and courtly and beautifully done. I got a bit interested, and examined him from heel to scalp. From sole to chin he was just five feet of ordinary dandy, but somehow right there the dude ended and the man began. His chin was good, solid, clean-shaven jawbone, square and grim, and it stuck out bold and jaunty. His mouth was big, with thin, fine-cut, curly sort of lips that he could twist anyhow he pleased. His teeth looked made to order, they were so small and white and daintily cruel. His nose was longer even than Gilbert Lang's, but it wasn't nearly so sanctimonious—perhaps because it had a hump on its back that gave it a bit of a swashbuckling air. He had black, arched brows, a broad and rather prominent forehead, no hair to speak of, and a pair of white-grey eyes that made you think of bird-lime.

I hadn't looked more than ten seconds into those eyes before I turned round to the

boys, and I said, "Say, chaps! you wait here for me, will you?"

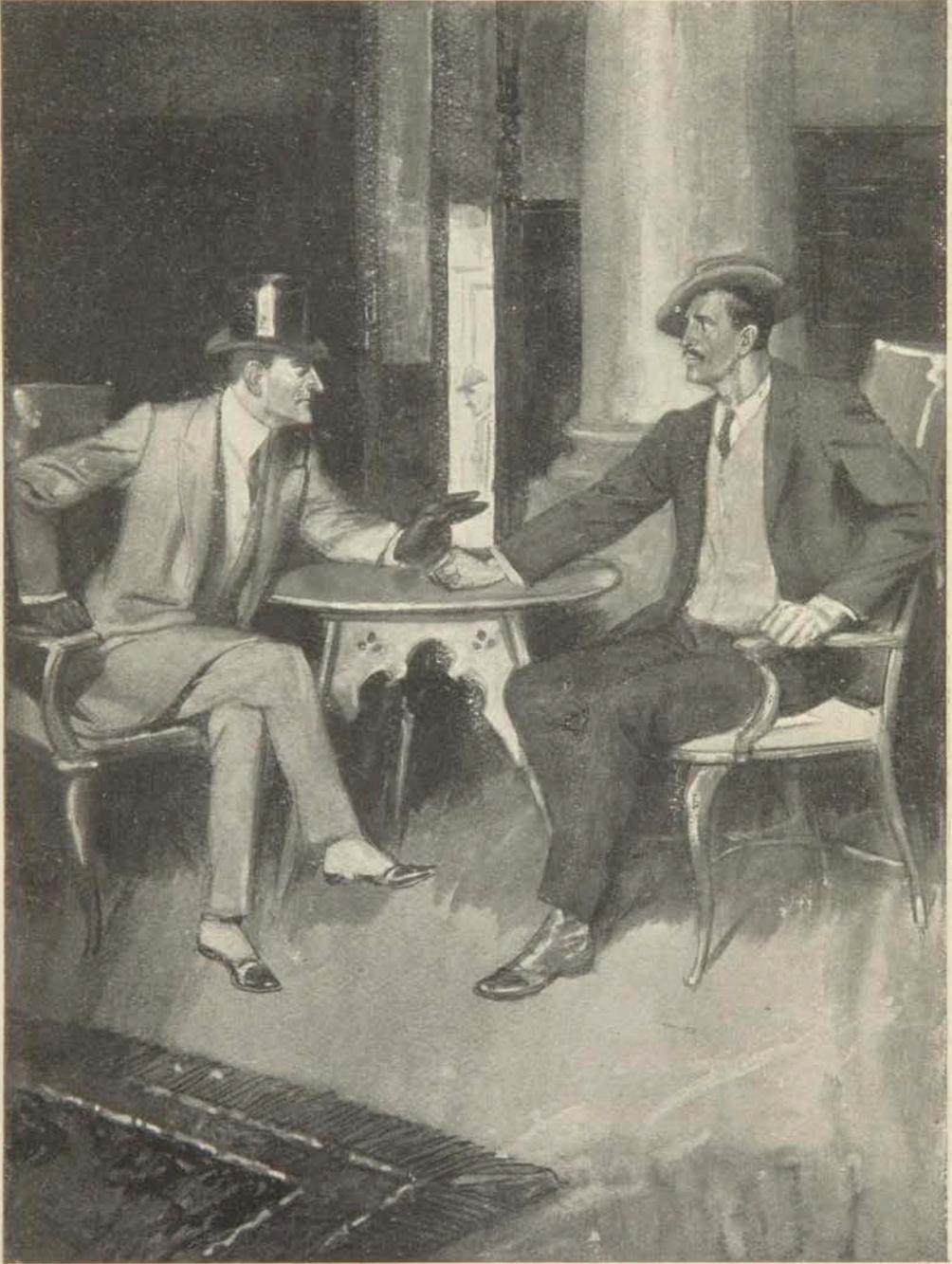
They just nodded, so I stalked out into the vestibule, closely followed by the dude. I walked over to a little table and sat down. I knew by some sort of instinct he wanted me—wanted me bad; perhaps my mates as well; so I reckoned I'd take the centre of the stage from the start.

"Sit down!" I said, waving my hand at a chair opposite.

He seemed amused, but he sat down.

"Now," said I, "spit out our proposition? What d'ye want me for?" Then I shot an arrow into the dark. "Or, rather, me and my mates," I said.

"Not quite so fast—if—you—please," he rejoined determinedly, but ever so politely. "I may have made a mistake, you see. I overheard your name just now, but the point is are you *the* man—the Jim McLean whose name is associated in my recollection with certain happenings, certain exploits?" Here he made me another quaint little bow. It wasn't as pretty as the first, for he was seated, but all the same it was the real thing—A1 at Lloyd's and copper-bottomed.



“ ‘Now,’ said I, ‘spit out our proposition.’ ”



“ Depends, obviously, on what those happenings are,” said I.

“ There is in your conversation a senti-mentousness that engages all my admiration,” he observed. “ You waste no time in getting to the point. With your permission, I shall imitate your method. Are you the Jim McLean who, in '98, discovered a new over-landing route between east and west Australia ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then it was you who opened up the Yank Creek diggings in the Northern Territory two years earlier ? ”

“ Correct.”

“ And discovered the Cope Reef, at Wood-lark Island, in December, '99 ? ”

“ You've got my record boiled down fine. Say, mate, who has been skiting to you about me ? ”

“ A South Australian Government official, Mr. McLean, whose name must, for the present, remain a secret. But now to business. I was fortunate enough to be in the bar when you and your four friends came in to drink a parting glass—a Dock and Dorris, I think you called it.”

"You evidently kept your ears open," I remarked.

He gave a little frown. "I would remind you, in justice to myself, that you spoke as if for the world to hear."

"Having nothing to say to feel ashamed of," I supplemented, with a nod. "Well?"

"Well, Mr. McLean, I made up my mind, almost without an effort, that I want you."

"Me and my four mates," I corrected.

He smiled. "Exactly—you and your four mates, the 'Big Five'; but you especially."

"What for?"

He leaned his elbows on the table, and looked me straight in the eye. "You know where Arnhem Land is?"

"That's easy," I replied. "It covers the north-eastern section of the Northern Territory."

"Quite right."

"And," I went on, "it's all under lease now to the East African Cold Storage Company."

He shook his head. "Not all of it now, Mr. McLean. I have just secured a transfer from the Company of 7,000 square miles, extending from Boucaut Bay to Cape Shield,

with exclusive mining rights over the bulk of the area, and the lease has been ratified by the South Australian Government with an option of purchase *in fee*."

"Oh!" I gasped. "You're by way of being something of a landholder, it appears."

"On the map," he said, drily. "As, no doubt, you are aware, the whole of the country from the Goyder River to the Gulf Coast is absolutely unexplored. All we know of it is that it is thickly inhabited with war-like and unfriendly blacks, whose numbers are variously estimated at from 20,000 to 100,000."

"I can tell you a bit more about it than that," said I.

His eyes sparkled. "You can, eh? But will you?" He made no effort to conceal his excitement.

"Why not?" I shrugged. "It's not much, but it's some. At the end of '95 I was part owner of a Gulf pearling lugger."

"Ah!" he cried.

"Well, mate, one trip was all I made in her, but it was a trip to remember. We were caught in the tail end of a typhoon and

driven from Cape York clean across the Gulf, west-south-west. We brought up in a big unnamed bay, south of Cape Grey. At first we thought it was a case of Davy Jones for us all, but we found shelter at last behind a towering headland and there rode out the gale. But we'd lost both masts and most of our gear, and we'd sprung a leak as well. Willy-nilly we had to beach the lugger for repairs, and go ashore to cut spars, etcetera. Well, being a landsman by trade, I was no use at that work except to get in the other fellows' road, so I took the dinghy, a crow-bar, a wash-dish, and a rifle, and pulled up the creek that emptied just where we beached the lugger, on a little exploring cruise, all by my lone. By and by, to my surprise, the creek widened out into a fairish river, winding between big granite and sand-stone mountains, and deep enough a float a battleship. I got up thirty miles the first day, and the next passed right out of the ranges into an agriculturist's paradise of level, grassy plains, running west and north and south as far as the eye could reach. I didn't go much farther though, for the country was simply alive with natives, and not the ordinary sort

either. Instead of mi-mis they had built houses for themselves, very much after the fashion of the New Guinea savages, high up on piles, with ladders to reach them. And each village had a cultivation patch as well. They are miles ahead of all other Australian blacks, and Lord! mate, adders to touch. I was a public enemy from the word 'go!' As soon as they sighted me you could hardly see ahead for spears and arrows. I had to make a running fight of it. They followed me in big canoes fully a hundred strong. I had to kill a round dozen before they got frightened enough to keep out of point-blank range of my old long Tom. It was a ticklish business, and if they'd had sense enough to rush me I'd have gone under. As it was, I pulled through without any great damage beyond a few spearholes in my thighs and ribs, and an arrow through my neck that just missed the jugular. Cost me nine weeks though, in Palmerston Hospital when I got back."

"Did you not land at all?" he asked in a disappointed tone.

"Not on the way down, you can bet your boots," I answered, grinning; "but going

up I dug a few pot-holes with my crowbar in half a dozen likely looking spots."

"Ah!—and with what luck?"

"Colours every time, mate, and twice I struck wolfram and tin as well. But it's a company proposition, not a poor man's country. That's why I've never thought of going back there."

"One of these days you'll go back with me," he said. "But not yet. My immediate purpose is to make a scientific and prospecting exploration of the country from my western boundary, starting at a point a little north of the 13th parallel and proceeding thence due east to the Gulf coast. When this is done, I shall be in a position to judge the best use to which to put my new estate. My aim is to settle it with whites. I'm not an Australian, but I'm in thorough sympathy with the Australian ideal of a White Australia. But I'm a practical man, Mr. McLean, and I wish to discover for myself if this ideal, as far as Arnhem Land is concerned, is practically attainable."

"Sounds a fair thing," I said. "Well—where do I come in?"

"I would like you, under my general supervision, to take charge of the expedition."

"Oh! And the size of this expedition?"

"Yourself—myself—your four mates, a surgeon, five sailors from my yacht (who, let me hasten to assure you, are all old explorers—they have been with me across Africa), and, possibly, my wife. It is not yet decided if she will accompany us."

"Your wife!" I repeated.

He smiled. "Have no anxiety, Mr. McLean; she is stronger and hardier than most men, and she is a mountaineer of European reputation."

"Hum! But we've the blacks to think of."

He shrugged his shoulders. "She has yet to learn the meaning of fear. She is an expert markswoman, and she can shoot her man without the least compunction—has shot, I may add."

"She must be an Amazon!" I exclaimed.

His eyes glinted. "She is Mrs. Philip Trevor," he said, acridly; then he bowed to me, and a second later smiled. His temper was under miraculous control, that was very evident.

I knew better than to explain I hadn't meant to hurt his feelings. I said: "Any servants?"

"We'll need a few, of course," he replied. "A cook, for instance, and a couple of baggage men. I propose to employ Chinese for that purpose. We can pick them up at Palmerston."

"Well," said I, "that will make a party of sixteen. We'll need from forty-five to fifty horses."

"Sixty are on their way now from Katherine Station to the junction of the Lawrie Creek and the Alligator River, our rendezvous. They started ten days since."

"Then you propose to steam up the Alligator to the meeting-place?"

"Yes, in launches from the yacht."

"An excellent plan; it will save weeks of wasted time and trouble going overland."

"Just so. Now there remains only to arrange terms. I propose to pay your mates four pounds a week apiece and all found; and you, as leader, eight pounds per week. The engagement to last one year from date."

"I want nine," I replied, on instant. "You see," I explained, "four at four, and

one at eight, makes twenty-four pounds, and five won't go evenly into twenty-four, whereas the extra pound will give us a fiver a week apiece."

"Ah!" said he, looking at me keenly, "you are as good a friend as an arithmetician."

"Well, sir, the 'Big Five' isn't exactly a fair, and it certainly isn't only a rough, weather partnership. Any one of the others would do as much for me."

He nodded quietly. "We'll call it £25 a week, then, for the five."

"That's my measure to a T, sir. Shake!" He pulled off his right glove and we shook hands.

"I'll have the agreements immediately prepared," he said.

"For your sailors and your surgeon, I presume, sir?"

He looked me in the eye and in two seconds turned as red as a boiled lobster.

"It's a high compliment you are paying me, Mr. McLean," he exclaimed. "I may be a rascally adventurer for all you know."

"Just so, sir. But so may we be rascals. The compliment was not intended to be all

on one side. It's reciprocal; only you haven't paid us our part yet."

He sprang to his feet and held out both his hands, his whole face aglow. "McLean," he cried, "I've made the bargain of my life this morning, and I'm owing it to you!"

"And I, sir, am owing it to you the 'Big Five's' Dock and Dorris was a blazing lie."

"Gad!" he said, half to himself; "but I feel well nigh a boy again." Then he turned once more to me. "You've nothing to keep you ashore, I believe. Why shouldn't we start this very day?"

"You know best, sir."

"Well, we shall. I'll go straight off and find my wife. Do you and your mates be at the Man-o'-War Steps this afternoon at four sharp. My boat will be awaiting you."

"We'll be there, sir."

"Well—till we meet!" He waved his hand and was off like a lamplighter.

I strolled back into the bar. The four were seated in a corner, smoking hard and staring harder at the floor.

I lounged across to them, my hands in my trouser pockets, turning over all the money I possessed—three-and-sixpence.

“Boys,” I murmured, “I want your last beans.”

They stared at me, hardly understanding. But Harry King grasped the fact that I wanted money, and he very soon led off. He put two shillings on the table. Dan Linehan followed with two half-crowns; Bill Forsyth stumped up one-and-sixpence; Gilbert Lang finally, with a little groan, produced three florins. He was always the thrifty member of the partnership. I collected the money, added to it my own silver, drew up a chair, and sat down. Then I rang the bell.

A waiter came up.

“A quart of Mumm, and five glasses,” I ordered, “and keep the change.” And I thrust our joint-stock capital into his eager palm.

“The puir laddie’s daft,” muttered Gilbert, feelingly.

The others made no remark. Neither did I; but, Lord! I felt their stares. Their eyes bored like bradawls. I was darned glad when the glasses were filled, I tell you.

I held mine up, and for the first time ventured to meet their questioning glances.

“Mr. Philip Trevor!” I said, and drained it.

The others followed suit, after a trifling pause. Then they bradawled me again.

“Harry King,” said I, “you are not going shearing. Dan Linehan, your desk will be worm-dust before you fill it. Gilbert Lang, that Lithgow smelter will look for you in vain. Bill Forsyth, Bourke won’t see you this side of—the grave, I hope.”

There was a moment’s deep silence, then Harry King spoke softly, in his slow, Oxford drawl: “The ‘Big Five’ keeps together, after all, Jim.”

I nodded.

“Philip Trevor is our employer’s name.”

“Aye!”

“When do we start work?”

“This afternoon, four sharp, Man-o’-war Steps.”

“Swags?”

“Of course. We are going by yacht to Palmerston, and then exploring in Arnhem Land for a year. Five quid a week a head and all expenses paid, commencing from to-day.”

“Then I reckon I’ll be off. I’ll have to tramp out to Paddington to collect my belongings.”

“Me too,” said Dan. The pair strolled off together.

Bill Forsyth yawned affectedly, and stood up. “Got to say good-bye to a skirt,” he observed. “S’long, Jim.” He vanished.

Gilbert Lang fixed me with his eye. “Jim,” said he. “How much siller did ye put to the pile we forked out on yon table?”

“Three and six,” I replied.

“Ah!” said he. “That makes eighteen shillings altogether; and with the wine costing only fifteen, it’s three shillings no less your lordship made a present to the waiter. Laddie, how can ye ever expect to be a rich mon with such feckless ways aboot ye? Did ye na think I might want to ha’ some lunch?”

“I forgot it absolutely, Gil.”

“And it’s hard on one o’clock.”

“Gil,” I cried remorsefully, “I’m ashamed of myself. But as soon as we get aboard the yacht I’ll see you get a square meal.”

He shook his head. “That’s na the point,” he said severely. “You should ha’ looked ahead of your nose.”

“I was that overjoyed,” I pleaded, “I had to make a fool of myself. I just couldn’t help it.”

He took his pipe out of his mouth. "Aweel, laddie, we'll say no more about it. Luckily for us both I did na fork out all I had. I've got three shillings left. Come oot and we'll see what we can buy to eat with it."

"You dashed old humbug!" I cried, indignantly, "and you dared to preach to me with that in your pocket after I asked for your last bean! What sort of a mate do you call yourself?"

"A canny one," he answered, grinning. "Come oot and have a bite, and thank your stars the whiles ye eat there's one of the 'Big Five' who isn't entirely destitute o' common sense."

The fact is, I was hungry enough to be really thankful. We had an excellent lunch.

CHAPTER II

LADY TREVOR'S TEMPER

PUNCTUAL to the appointed minute the "Big Five" fore-gathered at Man-o'-War Steps, each man with his belongings encased in form to suit his taste. Harry King carried a weather-beaten Gladstone bag ; Dan Linehan, a huge and heavy shapeless canvas package. Gilbert Lang had brought a neat little iron trunk. Bill Forsyth and I had humped along our good old "matildas" in honest way-back fashion, and with a fine mastiff-like disregard of the ever-increasing crowd of small boys who had followed in our train most of the way from our boarding-house in Unwyn-street. And some of the nippers had been disgustingly offensive too, in revenge, probably, for our magnificent indifference to criticism.

We weren't kept waiting more than half

a minute. A cutter, manned by four smart looking sailors, pulled right to the steps, and a band-box officer, a mere lad, sitting in the stern sheets, hailed us out of hand.

“Ahoy! there, Mr. McLean and party?” he called out.

“Struck it in one!” I replied.

“Then bundle in as fast as you like, sir. The *Psyche*'s all ready for a start. The pilot is aboard, and Sir Philip is fuming to be off.”

“So the yacht is called the *Psyche*, and our new boss has a handle to his name,” muttered Dan in my ear; “hope you've brought your evening duds, Jim, for the credit of the five!”

“Rats!” was my elegant rejoinder. A minute later we were off, and making a bee-line for Athol Bight.

The young officer volunteered his name as Wandsworth, but we were less loquacious. We were too interested in the *Psyche*. She lay in the middle of the bight—a trim craft of full 600 tons, with two raking dummy masts and a big buff-coloured funnel. She was painted grey, like a man-o'-war, and she rode pretty low, with broad flush decks. She carried two launches and three whale-boats,

and no top hamper worth making a song about.

"She appears to me more like a gunboat than a yacht," I observed, when I had looked enough.

Mr. Wandsworth chuckled out: "Just what she was built for, Mr. McLean, less than two years ago, to the order of the Chilian Government. But there was a revolution, and Sir Philip secured her bran new for something near the price of old iron. She's a daisy sea-boat, sir, and can do her fifteen knots through half a gale."

Dan touched the young fellow on the arm. "Is your boss a barrow-knight, or what?" he asked.

"He's a Knight of the Garter," answered Wandsworth, drawing himself up proudly. "That's better than any baronetcy."

"Well," expostulated Dan, "no call to lose your hair, my lad. Barrow-knight or Garter-knight, it's all one to me. I didn't say he wasn't a knight. He might be a bloomin' day for all I know or care."

Wandsworth looked absurdly mortified. He was very young. He was as silent as an oyster all the rest of the journey.

Sir Philip met us at the head of the gangway. He was rigged out in yachting uniform, and more of a dude than ever. Our rough clothes simply shouted at his exquisite nattiness. But he didn't seem to mind. I introduced my mates, and he shook hands all round; then took us below to our cabins. They were tiny little boxes off the saloon—which was really a ward-room—and not big enough to swing a kitten in. I was given one to my lonesome, but the others had to bunk two in a box. We just slung down our things and came out quick and lively, for the *Psyche* was already on the move. On deck again, we were left to ourselves, as Sir Philip had climbed to the bridge. It was wonderful how quickly the little craft slipped out round the Sow-and-Pigs and through the Heads; but it was nothing to the speed she showed immediately we dropped the pilot. She shot ahead all of a sudden like a shaft from the string, and ploughed through the water as fast as many a mail-train I have travelled in. But, Lord! how she shook and quivered. You had to stiffen your jaw to keep your teeth from rattling. There was not much of a sea, but she plunged a good

deal, and within five minutes mine was the only pipe going among the five. One by one my mates furtively put theirs in their pockets, and the conversation languished. After about eight minutes, Gilbert Lang said he thought he'd go and unpack his box. He was a most awfully ugly yellow colour. The others said it was a good idea, and the whole four stampeded below. Tact kept me still. I'm a great believer in tact. I've noticed that nothing enrages a seasick man more than letting him know that you know what is wrong with him. Fact is, a man worth his salt is never seasick. He may have a severe headache, or the whisky or something may have disagreed with him—some even will own up, with particularly brazen insincerity, to a bilious attack ; but seasick ! Lord, no ! And if you want to make an enemy of your best friend, there's no easier way than to fool round him with sympathy when he's really ill. I know, for I used to be seasick myself once ; and I'll never forget how badly I wanted to cut a darned fool of a room-mate's throat just because he would keep on trying to get me to chew some of his wretched biscuits. The biscuits cured me, too, in the long run, but I still remember their owner with active loathing.

I had just about finished my pipe, some twenty minutes later, when Sir Philip descended from the bridge. He asked at once of my mates, but he betrayed no surprise to learn that they were weary and had turned in. He said that the sea air was marvellously soporific to landsmen. Then he surprised me with a question: "King is a gentleman, is he not?"

"He's better; he's a man," I replied. "From the top of his longest curl to the point of his big toes, and what's more, sir, all you could find underneath his skin of anything else you could put on a threepenny piece, and it would make the coin look like a cheese-plate."

"I have no desire to dispute you," he replied, indulgently. "What I meant was that he appears to me a man of gentle birth."

"He has a pedigree as long as a Melbourne Cup winner, sir; but it's not his fault. He had nothing to do with it, and a man can't be rightly held responsible for the vainglory of his ancestors."

"Oh!" said Sir Philip, with a little gulp. "I had no thought of blaming him, I can assure you. But you, McLean, surely you

do not consider noble ancestry a thing to be ashamed of ? ”

“ No, nor to be proud of either. It's a handicap to honest work, and it does a lot of harm in the world, therefore I dislike it. But strong natures, like King's, can ignore it or live it down. It has branded his looks, of course, and stamped his manners ; but, between you and me, sir, he's true grit underneath, and his father might have been a decent hard-working artisan instead of the second son of a pauper peer.”

“ Good Lord ! ” muttered the little knight, half underbreath. He was simply staggered by my point of view, and, although I pretended to notice nothing, I experienced a malicious pleasure in his astonishment.

“ You are indeed a Radical,” he presently exclaimed. “ You would extirpate the aristocracy, I dare say, if you could ? ”

“ Why no, sir,” I replied. “ Why should I wish to do that ? Take them as a whole they are a fine body of men, and do useful work for the nation. But, I confess, I'd like to pass a law to weed out the idlers among them. I've no use for idlers—neither has the world—whatever they may be—kings' sons

or cooks' sons. Work is the fundamental *raison d'être* of human being. There is a full measure of work waiting to be done by every human unit born on this planet's surface, and each unit who evades his share is a sneak and a succubus, because the work has to be done, and his evasion forces his next-door neighbour to work underpaid and overtime. I look upon idlers as public enemies, and had I the power—well, I would abolish them—with the sword, if necessary."

"Bravo! Bravo! Bravo!" cried on a sudden a rich, contralto voice behind me. "There speaks the true, unselfish soul of the democracy, conscious of its aims, and conscious that its aims are grand, and great, and good."

I swung round, startled, and, to be candid, a little abashed by such warm praise of my earnest but unconned effusion. It was to confront a tall, robustly-formed, young woman, clad in a white serge sailor costume that fitted like a glove. I'd like to be able to convey an adequate idea of her, but I never was a woman's man, and frankly, the task's outside my compass. All I can say is that she had regular features, big, reddish-yellow

eyes, a great coiled mass of ruddy-bronze hair, and the whitest skin I have ever seen on a human face. But that only paints a puppet, and this woman was something vastly different. To look at her was to catch yourself thinking that every insect from a beetle to a sand-fly, every animal from a tiger to a snake, and every man, woman, and child that had lived and died before she was born had contributed something to her make-up, and was a real, actual, incorporate part of her. She was Nature, Life, the whole animated universe, refined, concentrated and embodied. She radiated energy and suggested lethargy ; she diffused subtle emanations of hatred and love ; pride, and humility ; cruelty and tenderness ; courage and cowardice ; lealty and treachery ; and I knew at a glance that she did not care one snap of the fingers for her husband.

Of course she was Lady Trevor.

Sir Philip began to present me, but she cut him short. She said : " My dear Philip, your description of Mr. McLean was excellent. In person he is quite as ugly as you warranted (this was a fair sample of the cat part of her, I should say—next came the serpent),

but let me crave your marital permission to admire his mind. (She turned to me.) Mr. McLean, under your tutelage I shall hope to become, some day, as good a democrat as you—perhaps to better your instruction.”

She held out her hand. I took it and got as good a grip as I gave. Sir Philip watched us, smiling as a mask smiles, without expression.

I said: “I had been thinking, madam, you were not aboard. You are coming to the Territory, then?”

“Decidedly; and not only to, but through. Do you object?”

I did not like her tone. It rasped me inside somewhere. “I am paid to effect my employer’s wishes, not to object to them,” I responded, coolly.

“Do—you—object?” she repeated. It was the Napoleon I particle of her that spoke, but in the act of speaking, it suffused her personality and eclipsed all the other particles completely.

But the fact is, much as I admire the great Buonaparte, I have always despised his servants and contemporaries who submitted with such craven promptitude to his despotism.



“My good man, you are a fool!”



When a lad, to read of his iron-shod march over the wills of his subordinates, invariably aroused me to a high pitch of rage and contempt. Oh! to have had a chance to beard the tyrant. How proudly I should have withstood him and defied him. Such was my boyish lament. Now, here was my opportunity. The mighty despot, momentarily redivivus in the person of a woman, stood before me. My blood sang instantly to its long-forgotten adolescent tune of fiery insubordination.

I looked Napoleon—that is to say Lady Trevor—in the eye, and answered in the slow, grim accents I had been saving up unconsciously since childhood, to meet exactly this emergency: “Yes, madam, I object.”

“Why?” rapped out the Dictator.

“Because the Arnhem Land blacks are fierce and unfriendly; and because you are a woman.”

“My good man, you are a fool!” she said, and curling her lip, she shrugged her shoulders, and marched off up the deck.

I dare say she was not far wrong in her contemptuous estimate, but I still think she might have couched her opinion in a less

offensive form. Naturally, I was annoyed. Unconsciously I clenched my fists, and I believe my face must have assumed an uglier colour-scheme than usual, for Sir Philip thought it necessary to stand almost on my toes.

“Softly, softly, McLean!” he said in a low, warning tone. “It was almost unpardonable, I admit; but Lady Trevor will be certain to regret her outburst, and to apologise to you immediately the mood wears off.”

I fell back against the taffrail, and opened my hands. It required an effort; they were stiff. I turned about, and stared into the sea.

“I cannot tell you—how deeply I—I deplore this—most unfortunate occurrence, at the very outset of our work,” said Sir Philip.

My rage found tongue. “My dear sir,” I replied, “you exaggerate the importance of the episode. It is utterly without consequence to me, and why not to you; unless, indeed, you chance to share your wife’s opinion?”

“Don’t be absurd, man,” he said sharply, “I know capacity when I meet it.”

“Well, then,” I shrugged, “let’s talk of something else. “May I ask what stores of arms and ammunition you possess? The subject is urgent, and should, I think, have been discussed before we started, for in Port Darwin only obsolete weapons are procurable.”

His frown vanished, to be replaced with a look of eager, smiling pride. “I can’t reply better than by showing you my magazine,” he exclaimed; and taking my arm, he led me aft to the little quarter-deck. Thence we descended the hatchway to his private quarters. They occupied the same position as the captain’s cabin in a third-class cruiser, right over the screw at the stern of the yacht. There were two large cabins, one no doubt Lady Trevor’s, and an elegantly-furnished combined sitting and dining-room. But they would have been better placed amidships. The motion was next door to intolerable. Every pitch the vessel gave was accompanied with a sickening heaving swish, and the subdued thunder of the revolving propeller-shaft was a perpetual discomfort. But Sir Philip did not seem to mind. We passed through the little saloon, and entering a darkened passage beyond, brought up before

a big iron door. This he unlocked, and having switched on an electric light, we entered presently a capacious armory. It contained more than a hundred Lee-Metford rifles, some fifty Mausers and Lee-Enfield carbines, two small Vickers-Maxim field machine guns, a two-inch quick-firer in parts, a case of regulation army pistols, some two score Smith and Wesson revolvers, and about thirty tons of shells, cartridges, and small arms ammunition.

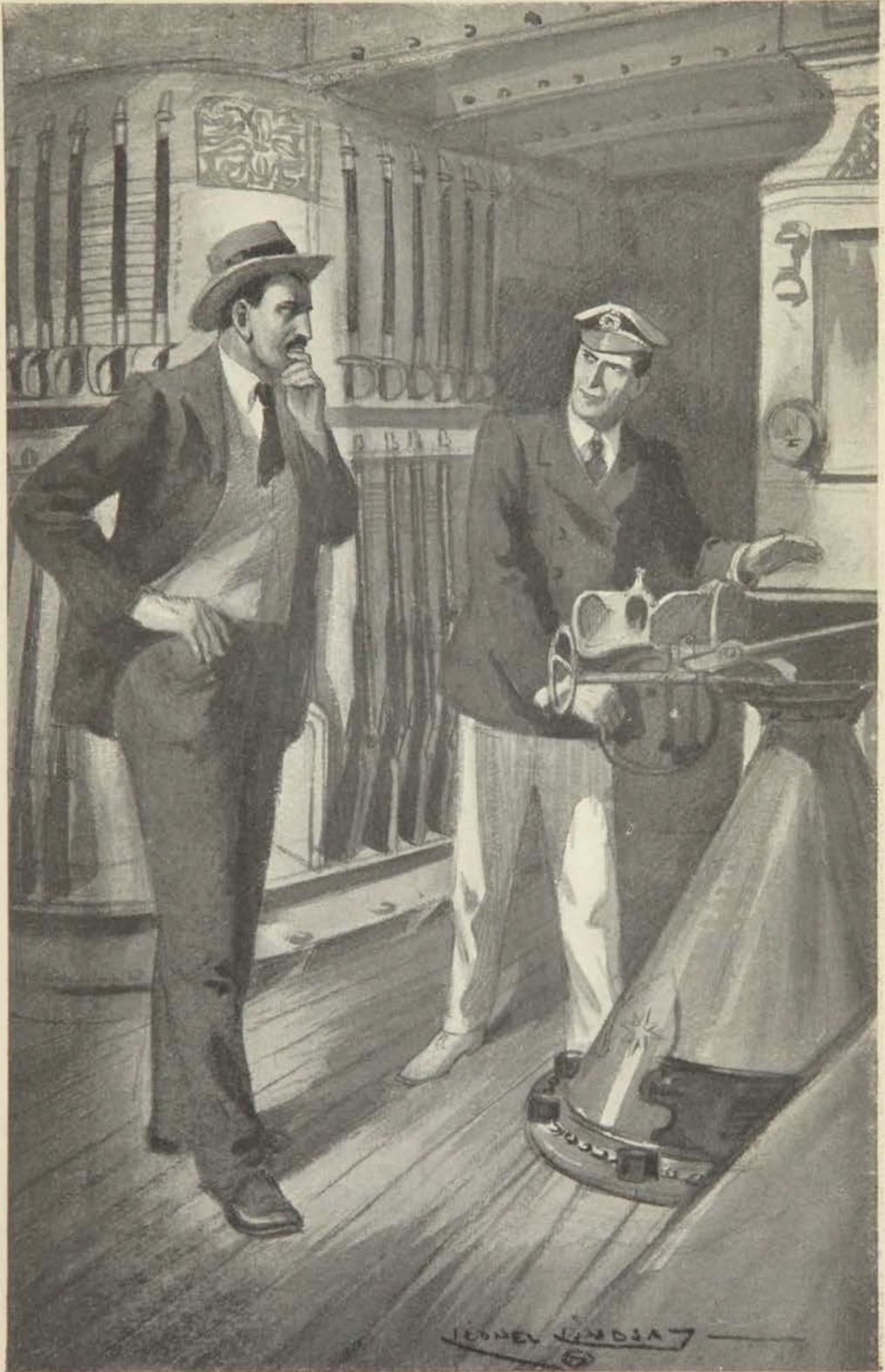
Sir Philip chuckled delightedly at my surprise. "No need to depend on Port Darwin, eh?" he said. "Why, my dear McLean, I've been prepared for this expedition a full month past. All I wanted was the man to put in charge of it, whom I found in the *Australia Hotel* this morning."

"Look here," said I. "There's one thing puzzles me in all this. Why don't you take charge yourself?"

He crossed over and closed the door; then turned and faced me.

"Sooner or later you had to ask me that," he said.

I nodded. "The question has been on the tip of my tongue more than once."



'We entered presently a capacious armory.'

But you must be firm, and always prepared to enforce your authority."

"And by what means, on a woman, supposing at a critical juncture she defies me?"

"I must leave that to your own judgment. Tell me frankly if you feel a doubt of your capacity—or if you find the task distasteful."

"Frankly, I'm not liking the task, Sir Philip," I replied. "What man would? It's simply hateful to consider the possibility of having to treat any woman harshly; but when that woman happens to be your employer's wife—well, it's damnable."

"Ah! then you would prefer to be released from our agreement?"

"I've never turned my back on a job yet, sir. But, since you ask me, I candidly admit I'd prefer to serve you in some other way."

"McLean, there is only one way in which you can serve me. You know it as well as I. Will you do it?"

"I'll see the job through, if you insist."

"I do not insist. I could not. But I earnestly request the service at your hands."

"Very good, sir. I'll do my best."

"Mac," he cried, "you'll not regret this

day. You have taken a great weight from my mind. I can look forward to our expedition now without foreboding. Henceforth, my dear fellow, you must regard me as your friend—indeed, your partner.”

“Your partner!” I echoed.

“Certainly, my partner. It is my intention to give you, beyond your salary, a definite interest in our exploration work. Our prime object is, of course, to discover a payable goldfield so as to facilitate and expedite the settlement of the estate. Here and now I offer you ten per cent. of the value of whatever mining profits may accrue to me in consequence of the expedition, and, failing the discovery of minerals, ten per cent. of any profits arising from the ultimate settlement of whatever good agricultural territory we may locate. Do you accept.”

“Can a duck swim?” I gasped. “But, by Jove, Sir Philip, it’s altogether too much this. It’s princely, that’s what it is.”

“It delights me to have pleased you, Mac. I shall have a deed drawn up at Port Darwin—Now, now, listen to me a moment! It’s not that I fancy you don’t trust me. The deed will be for your protection in case of an

accident happening to me. Now, no protests, please. I will have it so."

"I'm at a loss how to thank you, Sir Philip. I'm dashed if I know what to say. I——"

"Say nothing," he interrupted. "Let's return to the deck. This magazine is stuffy, don't you think?"

He opened the door and signed to me to pass out. I strolled along the passage and entered the saloon, to meet Lady Trevor face to face.

"You have been inspecting the armory, I suppose?" she said.

"Yes, madam."

She came closer to me, and spoke in a low voice that had a curiously pleading and almost pathetic timbre.

"I was abominably rude to you a little while ago, Mr. McLean."

"Yes, madam," I answered, icily.

"I want you to forgive me," she murmured. "Will you?"

"Yes, madam."

Sir Philip passed us and, bowing to his wife, went up on deck. But Lady Trevor still blocked my path. She gazed at me, searchingly, with her big, red-yellow eyes.

She was like a tigress in a caressing and semi-affectionate mood, anxious to be stroked, and prepared to purr.

But I stared over her head.

"You really haven't forgiven me one little bit," she said.

"And you," said I, "are not really sorry for your rudeness one little bit."

"Why should I be? I was angry and I wanted you to know it. And why should you want me to be sorry? We both know you are not a fool, therefore my naming you so, affected nothing."

I was silent.

"You don't answer?" she murmured.

"I have nothing to say, madam."

"You won't be friends then?"

"You embarrass me, Lady Trevor," I said, coldly. "It is impossible for me to believe that you are serious. We have met to-day for the first time. Within five minutes you stigmatised me as a fool, and now, half-an-hour later, you offer me your friendship——"

"To have it declined," she muttered, breathing shortly, and very quickly.

"Pardon me," I answered, bowing low.

“To have your sincerity respectfully discredited.”

“Mr. McLean, I am perfectly sincere. From this time forward, we shall, of necessity, be thrown daily and hourly into each other's company. You are to lead the projected expedition, and then I shall be under your command. Is it unnatural that I should desire our relations to be amicable?”

“Not in the least, madam ; and I can assure you that I heartily reciprocate your amiable wish.”

“Then, Mr. McLean” —she held out her hand.

I took it, pressed her fingers slightly and released them.

“Thanks,” she said, “and we are no better friends than before.”

Our eyes met.

“I asked your forgiveness,” she said, almost in a whisper. “The fault is not mine.”

“Madam,” I replied, “you insulted me, and you have not expressed regret.”

“Oh !” she said, “you would like me to go upon my knees.”

“I would like you to appreciate your fault.

To formally demand pardon for an unrepented offence, the significance of which you do not realise, is not an atonement, it is a contumelious assertion of your indifference and an invitation that I should consent to be despised."

Her eyes glittered. "Do you wish me to believe you one of those lofty-minded, stiff-necked, dignified creatures, who love to style themselves in secret the lords of creation, and whose mission in life is the trampling underfoot of women?"

"Whatever I might wish, madam, you will doubtless, sooner or later, form your own opinion."

"It is formed," she cried. "And now——" She paused.

"And now, madam?"

She drew her brows together, and gave me a look of almost violent defiance. "I am sorry that I even formally apologised," she said.

I was fool enough to try for the last word. "We are of one mind on that head," I said.

"I flatter myself we have nothing else in common," she flashed; and stepped aside, smiling evilly, to let me pass.

I paused a moment, seeking vainly for an

answer, but none occurred to me, so I strode on, and hurriedly returned to the deck. I thought of a dozen excellent retorts during the next ten minutes, any one of which would have withered her, but it was, of course, too late.

CHAPTER III

LADY TREVOR'S POWER

IT was a relief to discover, as I did a little later, that the "Big Five" were to mess with the officers, and that Sir Philip and Lady Trevor invariably dined in their own saloon. Not only had I cherished from infancy a detestation of boiled shirts and swallow-tails, but there were no such articles in my kit. The captain, the doctor, and I dined together that evening. The captain was rather a frilly person, and his conversation was liberally besprinkled with "haw-haws"; but we got along fairly well. As for Dr. Bates, he was a brick—not an ounce of "side" in his composition. Afterwards I met the chief engineer. It goes without saying he was a Scot and a Mac—MacAlister from Glasgow. We played three games of chess, and he only opened his lips to check and mate me. He won them all. It made

him take a kindly view of my shortcomings. He said he was glad to have met me as he bade me good-night.

I spent next day with a book and a pipe as near amidships as I could coax a chair. The sea had roughened considerably, and the *Psyche* bucked through it like an irreclaimable outlaw filly. I was not surprised that Lady Trevor did not show up. Some of the sailors, even, were ill; and, although Sir Philip, whom I did not see, was up and about, he looked, according to a steward, "pretty green about the gills."

Towards dark we caught the southerly buster, whose tail we had been chasing, and we were sorry that we caught it. The captain called it a mere capful of wind, but I have never seen a gale if that capful was not a gale's twin brother. It was a Hades of a night, and though, of course, I was not seasick, the bilious attack that had been promising to pay me a call since we left Port Jackson Heads, kept its appointment. In the morning the "buster" was still going strong, but I contrived to crawl on deck, and although the cold, driving spray, and spindrift gave me a gloomy view of life, it wasn't quite as jaun-

diced an outlook as the cabin had inspired. When late that evening we slipped into the smooth water of the Great Barrier Reef, I almost wept with shame to remember that I had once upon a time cursed the whole family of Madreporaria on barking my shins in Torres Straits against a branch of coral.

My mates, all four of them, appeared on deck soon after daylight. They were the gauntest, hungriest-looking, herring-gutted walking skeletons you could hope to find from York to Leuwin, but cheerful beyond compare. They patronised me beautifully. They said I should have followed their example and put in a good long sleep, as a foundation for our exploring work. They said they felt fit for anything, their rest had done them so much good, but that I looked a bit washed out. I did not reply, I just eyed them. Very soon they were glad to change the topic. Their pachydermatous exteriors had flaws, and my silent scorn went right to each weak spot. It was pitiful to watch them at breakfast. They had three helpings of every course, and they felt they had to invent a fresh excuse for each repeat order. I couldn't bring myself to help them

either. I admire impudence as a rule, but for them to have dared to have patronised *me* was a little too much. Sir Philip and his wife were on deck when we arrived. There were introductions, of course. Lady Trevor deliberately ignored me. She was sugar and spice, however, to my mates. She kept them in a bunch around her all that day, and the next, and the next, and the next, and the next; cleverly overlooking my existence. Not that I cared, and Sir Philip was positively glad. He said it was all for the best that she and I did not exactly mix (he used prettier language, but that was what he meant), because it would be the easier for me in case of trouble arising afterwards to be firm with her. From this I gathered he had been rather fearing that Lady Trevor would have employed her arts during the voyage to make me a bond slave as she did my mates. Sometimes I felt really uneasy about them. Long before we got to Thursday Island they were cooked geese, and all, except Harry King, maudlin idiots. He was a little more reserved. They could not talk about another thing; and their sorrow for me, because I was a pariah and an outcast, wasn't always easy to endure, because

it usually took the aggressive, sympathetic and declamatory form. They assured me *ad nauseum* that she was the wittiest, cleverest, deepest, most learned, most humorous, sauciest, kindest, and out and out, the best woman this world had seen to date. Naturally, Trevor wasn't worthy to black her boots, and they wondered, not only that she had put up with him, but still more that a thunderbolt hadn't sauntered along years ago to reason with him for his infernal self-conceit in not having cut his own throat, or something, to mark his appreciation of his undeserved luck in winning such a wife. You want to go to a bushman in love for true extravagance of imagery. But, take my tip, you don't want to go to four, all "dotty" on the same female divinity, if you have any regard for your temper.

My friendship with Sir Philip tightened up and hardened during those long, balmy, idle days. We did not converse much, but our minds were in close touch, and I got to know him well and pity him a lot, and he, poor fellow, got to lean on me.

He was an unhappy man. He adored his wife. He considered her superior clay. But

he grated on her nerves. I am persuaded it was neither of their faults. To do her justice, she was invariably friendly and sweet to him. But if he went near her, unexpectedly, for just the fraction of a second, she would involuntarily and almost imperceptibly shrink—and his tragedy was *he knew it*. It was an instinctive repulsion of the flesh. Lord! but he was a gentleman—the finest, truest, and whitest gentleman that ever aped the ways of dandy because he couldn't help it. He treated the woman as though she were a reigning empress. Instead of resenting her curious corporeal inability to respond to his affection (as, however unjustly, nine of ten others in his place assuredly would have done) his nobility of character ignored it; and it was his perpetually watchful study, both to please her mind and to avoid giving her physical offence.

And all the while he suffered agonies of jealousy. He was jealous of my mates, of all the officers, of any sailor whom she threw a pleasant word to, of the very air she breathed. But he crushed it down, the gallant soul, and it only existed to torture him in secret, and to make me—once having divined the

turmoil of his spirit—admire and respect him as I never had a living man before.

Gradually he came to realise I knew. It was in some misty psychic way the knowledge must have reached him, for we both kept a countenance of iron ignorance. But eyes speak when lips are dumb, and one night late—she had retired hours earlier to bed—he spoke.

We were standing by the rail; we had been silent for many, many minutes. He said: "They are all sleeping, Mac."

I knew by his tone he meant that she was sleeping.

I said, "Yes, they are all sleeping, sir."

Then, quite suddenly, he turned and laid his hand upon my wrist. "You don't shrink, Mac," he said. "But then you're a tough old bushman. (He gave a queer little laugh.) Do you know—I have a fancy that in some previous incarnation I must have been a serpent or a toad."

"It's an evil fancy, sir," I answered, gravely. "And even were it true, what matters? You're a man in this, every inch of you."

"Do you think so, Mac?"

“Aye, on my soul, I do.”

“Mac,” he said, “she does not value her life at all. It’s my hardest cross to bear. It’s the secret of her recklessness. It began when—when our baby died. Mac, I’m tearing my heart out to tell you this. It’s to make you promise me that if trouble comes, whatever be the consequence, you’ll do your duty to the letter.”

I was more moved than I can possibly describe. All I could do was nod. And he, poor fellow—he was pallid, and two salt tears scalded furrows down his cheeks. I have never thought the less of him for them. But what bosh it is to talk like that. The less of him! It was only at that moment I began to understand and like him properly. Next day we ran in to Thursday Island to refill a fresh-water tank that had sprung a leak during the gale. The pearling fleet was away, and the place in consequence was duller than usual; but we did not stay long—long enough, however, for Lady Trevor to devise a new campaign against me. She must have laid her plans while strolling about ashore, for she put them into operation immediately the voyage was resumed. She started off

by discovering that I lived. I was seated in my favourite corner amidships, reading a book Sir Philip had lent me, when she came along, attended by my mates, carrying chairs.

"I have noticed that Mr. McLean always bestows himself hereabouts," she remarked, "and I am determined to test his judgment."

"You can bet it's a good spot, or he wouldn't be here," said Dan Linehan. "He's a lizard for comfort."

"I believe there is less motion amidships, madam," said Harry King, "and Jim isn't the best of sailors," cut in Bill Forsyth, wickedly.

Gilbert placed Lady Trevor's chair (at her direction) facing mine, at a little distance. I had not moved. It may have been churlish, but I did not perceive any necessity. There was ample vacant room. I kept stolidly to my book.

Lady Trevor, when her satellites were seated, with an artlessness that was in its sheer bravado a high form of art, steered the conversation around me and about me. She wished to know, by way of excuse, all about the "Big Five" partnership—but it was of

Jim McLean she deftly made her victims talk. They were too besottedly her slaves to understand ; but I knew, and she knew I knew. She contrived to drag out funny little stories, in which I hadn't exactly figured as a hero. Instruments to her purpose were the natural human inclinations of my mates to have a joke at my expense. Not one of them guessed that she was there, and doing what she did, to force me to realise the influence she had acquired over them for one thing, and for another to test my powers of self-control. Well she knew how a man hates to be made to look foolish before a woman. It's a thing every woman knows by instinct, that, and none better than Lady Trevor. But I was not minded to quarrel with my friends to please her, and as soon as I had pieced out her intentions I put my temper in a fire-proof safe, and double-locked the door.

Pretty soon I put down my book, and joined in the merry talk, by reminding Dan Linehan of a happening, and which he blushed (on my account) to remember. But receiving a cheery "go ahead" from me, he told it *con amore*, and by rights there never should have been such a crushed worm as myself. The story

was dead true, and it painted me as something extra special in the lunatic line. But somehow or another there I sat, grinning conceitedly, as if I had every reason to be proud of myself ; and I was sufficiently astute not to glance at Lady Trevor, though I badly wanted to see how she took it. I was pleased to note, however, that her laughter did not quite ring true. This encouraged me to wade in, and take the floor in person. I told three stories on end. The first depicted me a fool, the second a rogue, and the third a villain. They weren't true, but that was a detail. They achieved my purpose nicely. The first raised a loud laugh, the second a chorus of startled exclamations, and the third reduced my audience to astounded silence. It was about the way I had kicked an old blind man into a state of insensibility for accidentally bumping against me in a street. " I got six months' hard for it," I concluded, " but it was worth the penalty to hear the old dotard squeal."

Then, for the first time, I looked into Lady Trevor's eyes. She— Bah! She had believed the story. She was quite pale, and she was gripping the arms of her chair hard.

I was so astonished that I forgot to be pleased at my success. I just stared at her.

Harry King's voice broke the spell. "Jim! Jim!" he said, "why have you told us such a monstrous falsehood? It is not amusing, old chap."

"It is not a falsehood," gasped Lady Trevor. "It is true."

"Begging your pardon, madam," burst out Dan Linehan, "if a man said that I'd break his neck for him."

"Shut up, Dan, you fool!" cried Bill Forsyth. "How dare you say such a thing in Lady Trevor's presence?" He turned to her: "Madam, it's just his fun. It's Jim's idea of humour. He doesn't know any better, poor dear. He's for all the world like a Scotchman at a joke. He laughs at things that are impossible. He thinks they're funny because they shout at facts. Ma'am, Jim McLean would no more——"

Gilbert Lang broke in. "Madam," he said, "the puir laddie's been at the dram bottle. That's what's the matter. Phew! (he held his nose) he just reeks o' whusky."

I stood up. "Lady Trevor," said I; "believe me, I deeply regret having shocked you."

I invented the story with a malicious intention that I hoped you would appreciate. My hideously bad taste has recoiled on me to my own confusion. I offer you the most humble apologies and my word of honour that they are sincere."

She stood up too—herself again.

"I should have known better than to have allowed myself to be deceived," she said. "Of course, you invented the story. But although you have made amends you shall, nevertheless, do penance. You shall take me for a walk."

"With pleasure, madam."

She took my arm, and for a few moments we silently paced the deck. But she soon grew tired of that. She led me to the poop, and sat upon the hatchway grating, signing me to stand before her.

"Are you proud of your petty victory?" she asked.

"On the contrary, madam, I am entirely ashamed of it. You assailed with a knitting-needle and I hit back with a bludgeon. It is not a triumph to boast of that I worsted you."

"Mr. McLean," said she; "let us be friends."

"Then you regret having called me a fool?"

"No, and I never shall. How childishly obstinate you are."

"It's my misfortune, madam."

"Mr. McLean, you enjoy a certain distinction at my expense. You are the only person in the world to whom I have twice offered my friendship."

"Madam, were it possible, I would hand the honour down as an heirloom to my children, and rigidly entail the gift."

The tigress look came into her eyes. "Mr. King tells me that you spent two years at the Edinburgh University," she remarked.

"Mr. King never romances, madam."

The tigress look deepened. "How was it you became a bushman?"

"A certain bank closed its doors, madam."

She nodded. She was all tigress now. "I am glad you are an educated man," she said, softly. "Glad, too, that you have pride and sensibility. Do you know why?"

"No."

"It is because I am going to divert myself with you. Life is a pretty dull game, even when one is exploring a new country with the unexpected likely at any time to happen,

and danger present constantly to spur one's appetite for new sensations. I'm rather cruel, I believe. At any rate, I like hurting men. I am sure it will please me to hurt you. And it will be a new sensation, too, for I've never actively disliked any of the men I've hurt before. And, besides, I'm going to hurt you in a new way. I am telling you all about it, so that you may be on your guard, and give me the added amusement of a contest."

"Thank you, madam. And this new way of yours?"

"I am going to convert Mr. King into an enemy of yours. I choose him because I know that you care more for him than for any of your other friends. Why, your voice alters in speaking to him. I've noticed it often. But how angry you look—and it's too soon yet. I have another way also."

"Proceed, madam."

"I am going to make your leadership of the expedition a trial, not by disobeying your orders, but by evading them. You may tell Sir Philip, if you please."

"He has troubles of his own, madam."

"Ah!" she murmured, "a pretty thrust.

You are as skilful with the rapier as the bludgeon." Suddenly she laughed. Her laughter, like her voice, was extraordinarily musical."

"Say, Mr. McLean," she murmured, "is it not quaint—this intercourse of ours? There are those dear, big, hulking fellows, your mates, down there, all gazing up at me and all horribly jealous of your monopoly of me. And yonder is my good little husband, taking no notice of us, of course; but in his heart, weighing, pondering, wondering what occupies us so intimately. And here are we calmly and leisurely discussing how best I can make life burdensome for you."

"You have a dainty sense of humour, Lady Trevor."

"Tell me, Mr. McLean, why is it that Sir Philip, and, indeed, your mates, who ought to know you better, all have the idea that you are an exceptionally strong man—strong-willed, I mean?"

"I cannot tell you."

"But you know that they are wrong?"

"I am not an introspective man, madam."

She began swinging her foot. "You are really a weak and indeterminate charac-

ter," she said smoothly. "Nature has given you that big jaw and a certain mulish obstinacy for purposes of protection and concealment, just as she makes a dancing mantis the colour of the twig on which it feeds, and a hippocampus scarcely distinguishable from seaweed."

"My debt to Nature, then, is greater than I had thought."

"You affect imperturbability rather well, I willingly admit. But come, lay the mask aside for one moment, and be as frank in words with me as I have been with you. Will you?"

"I am at your service, madam."

"Then tell me exactly what you think of me! I know that you dislike me a little and fear me a good deal—but what else? It is your opinion of me as a woman, or, rather, as a human being, that I want. You may speak in adjectives if you please, and be sure that you have not the power either to shock or to annoy me."

"Are adverbs also permissible, madam? I should like to do you justice."

Her face lit up with unaffected delight. "Oh!" she said. "This is perfectly exqui-

site. I shall never be able to hate you properly ; I already owe you so much original entertainment. Yes, adverbs are at your disposal—and substantives as well. Mr. McLean, I am all ears ! ”

I took a good grip at myself, and commenced. “ You are, as I perceive you, madam, a person of uncommon mental capacity. Your nature is, however, so sour and bitter that you employ your gifts to perverse ends. Where you could construct you cynically elect to destroy. You are a moral decadent ; in theory a Cæsar Borgia or a Nero ; in practice, the febrile tyrant of a noble mind, which Providence permits you to torture for its ultimate perfection. You depend for the justification of your existence on the same natural principle that excuses the creation of Inquisitionists, of wolves, and snakes, and—and gnats, madam. In a word, Lady Trevor, you are selfish, and a woman—a fusion of contradictions that has produced your charming, but abnormal, self.”

“ A monster,” she suggested.

“ A monster,” I agreed.

“ Well,” she commented, with a sharply indrawn breath, “ it will comfort me to

remember hereafter, that I cannot, do what I may, beggar your appreciation of my native wickedness."

"You would waste your time to try, madam. I have put you on such a pinnacle——"

"Of infamy," she interrupted.

I made her a bow. It must have been an awkward one, for she laughed.

"What nonsense we have been talking," she said, presently—changing her venue. "We have been telling each other a number of what our lively fancies would persuade us are home truths—in the most exaggerated terms. I have been threatening you, and you have been defying me. And, boiled down, it all means that we are intensely interested in one another. It would be, really, almost shamefully absurd—but for the interest. That is a living factor, is it not?"

"I find you passably interesting, Lady Trevor."

She gave me a most peculiarly searching, yet alluring glance. "Not more than passably, Mr. McLean?"

I am ashamed to confess, her look and tone thrilled me to the core. They were terribly

womanly and charged with an almost irresistible sex appeal.

I don't know to this day how I found grace to smash them down, but I did so with a direct, and positively brutal sneer.

"I turned six-and-thirty last month, madam," I said, grimly. "I am no longer susceptible to the feline wiles of any but an ingénue. The half-conscious audacity of innocence, I admit, still has the power to warm my senses, but the deliberate challenge of maturity finds and leaves them cold."

"The bludgeon again!" she exclaimed, and shrank back, crimsoning. And then in a half-whisper, "Maturity! I am scarcely twenty-five, and, God knows, I have never met a man to move me yet!"

It may have been merely art, but it effectively placed me at her mercy, had she guessed it. I was practically ashamed of myself and ready for abject amends, and when I saw tears rush into her eyes I was utterly aghast. I could have thrown myself at her feet to trample on.

But she did not heed, she did not even see. She stood up and slowly, silently, she passed me and descended to her cabin with a down-

cast and averted face, still scarlet with the blood my mordant gibe had called from heart to skin. From that time onward Lady Trevor avoided me ; but instead of, as formerly, dividing her attention equally among my friends, she chose out Harry King and appointed him her special favourite. Soon the pair were continually together. I merely smiled, for in my folly I scornfully scouted the notion that any woman living could break a friendship such as ours, that had been born and bred of mutual respect, and had been moulded and tempered in the fires of adversity. But my philosophy was a poor, half-baked thing, really, and it was reserved to Lady Trevor to make me realize the fact.

CHAPTER IV

AN ADVENTUROUS TIME

TWO days later, after a swift and smooth run across the Gulf and along the coast of Arnhem Land, we entered Port Darwin. It was a typical May day in those tropic latitudes. The rainy season was over, and the south-eastern monsoon, that blows throughout the winter months, was just commencing. The air was brilliantly clear. Not a cloud marred the unbroken azure sweep of the sky. The iridescent ocean shone and flashed and sparkled like a thing of joyous life, its body a rich purple shot with crimson glows, its surface one broad rippling sheet of molten turquoise. We steamed into the second finest haven in the universe, almost at midday, and it was with a mingling of pain and pride that I beheld it absolutely destitute of ships, although obviously capable of harbouring with ease all the

fleets of the nations. The circumscribing shores exposed their splendid beauty on a scene of desert-solitude. The bold, red, sandstone cliffs, the glistening mangrove stretches, the shining curves of golden beach, and the endless reaching scintillating bays and inlets, luxuriantly lined with flower-spangled wastes of green, all seemed to utter mournful plaints for human use and habitation. But they were only occupied with gulls and cranes, and weird fantastic pelicans. It was hard to realise this wondrous place an undivided part of my native land, and that the people of Australia are content to let it lie neglected; its tremendous potentialities ignored, its inexhaustible resources undeveloped—yet calling, calling—a curse upon such infamous inertia and ineptitude at the instance of the Asiatic hordes so perilously near. Presently, rounding a cape, we came upon the one lonely little settlement in all that coastal wilderness. It is situated on a square patch of tableland on top of a cliff, that fronts the crescent-shaped beach of a tiny bay, whose headland horns equidistantly protrude southwards into the waters of the haven. A zig-zag road climbs up the cliff from sea to town, winding

between rich avenues of nutmegs, poincianas, figs, hibiscus trees, and leaning paper-barks, and massive, towering clumps of bright green feather-stemmed bamboos. It would be difficult to conceive a more romantically exquisite location. Tall, battlemented freestone towers and golden domes, and broad, pale columned marble temples should surmount that splendid, leaf-gowned crag by every right and law and postulate of art. Instead, there rise the ugly slab walls and galvanised iron roofs of a hundred sordid huts and shops and houses, for the most part denized by Chinese and Japanese coolies, and Manila men—scum of Asia and the earth.

Fifty such had gathered on the pier to watch us land. They had not even paid Australia the paltry compliment of donning Western garb. They all wore Chinese clothes and hats and shoes, and they acted just as though the country were their own. A few white men among them looked pitifully out of place, but my heart went out to them, for they were gamely striving to do Australia's duty for her, and fighting, unassisted, against heavy odds to hold this lonely outpost for the apathetic thankless nation.

It was sad to go ashore and mark how, in the few years that had elapsed since my last visit, the settlement had retrograded. The white population had dwindled by some hundreds—the coloured horde had grown. Almost the entire business of the place had fallen into the cunning hands of the coolie scum. I counted thirty-seven Chinese shops of all descriptions, and but three Australian stores of any sort to set against them. Chinese did all the work ; the whites idled about, or affected to attend to the government. To all intents and purposes Palmerston had become a purely Asiatic settlement : a half Chinese, half Japanese outpost, whose inhabitants were coolly and leisurely preparing for the day when Asia—five days' steam away—will be ready to despatch some of her teeming millions across the narrow, intervening sea, to take this land so shamefully neglected by the whites, and hold it and develop it, and show the world that there is not another country on the globe more marvellously rich in natural wealth, or better—once secured—worth fighting for to keep in perpetuity.

Sir Philip and I had a number of things

to purchase for the expedition. We naturally tried the white men's stores first, but it was to the Chinese emporiums we had finally to go to obtain what we required, for they had better stocks. It made me fume to have to do it, but there was no alternative. One white storekeeper put the matter thus: "The Chinese form the bulk of the population, and as they will not deal with us at all we have to depend entirely on the whites, and as they do not support us whole-heartedly, it is quite impossible for us to stock decently."

We had an analogous experience on seeking for cooks and camp servants. We wished to obtain white men, but the only applicants for the position we could find, after beating up the entire settlement, were three drunken miners, whom it would have been utter folly to engage. On the other hand, a score or more of alert and capable-looking Chinese were instantly forthcoming, and I reluctantly selected the four sturdiest rogues of the eager, slant-eyed bunch. They all spoke English well, the head cook in particular. He was the oiliest and politest person it has ever been my fortune to encounter. He gave his

name as Sun Lung Chee Quee. But that was too long, so I promptly re-named him "Chick Weed," and as Chick Weed he came with us, and was known from that time forth.

We left Palmerston next morning at daylight, having spent the night in coaling from a Chinese lighter manned by coolies, and we steered by way of Clarence Strait for Cunningham Channel, into which the South Alligator River flows. The fine weather continuing, we did the journey in splendid time, and we sighted the delta at the mouth of the river a little before noon. It was a fair-sized island, almost circular in shape; very flat and low-lying, and covered with a dense banyan jungle. The ebb-tide was just on the turn as we arrived. The Strait presented the spectacle of a vast medley of mud and sand-banks with one deep channel twisting tortuously between; but the immense rise of tide—twenty-four feet—soon completely transformed its appearance; and after two hours' pause we were able to ignore the channel and steam right up to the head of the estuary. The *Psyche*, however, made no attempt to ascend the river. It was supposed to be navigable for even larger ships, but Sir

Philip would not take the risk, for the only chart extant was forty years old, and since that time no survey had been made, and no European craft, great or small, had ventured into the stream. The course we adopted was to anchor the yacht, after finding the true channel by careful sounding, about five miles from shore. This was accomplished by three o'clock, and the rest of the day was devoted to fitting out the launches and boats for our journey up the river. It was one of the busiest spells I ever spent, for it marked the commencement of my responsibility, and as I was determined that the expedition should not fail for anything forgot, I overhauled the entire baggage, piece by piece, and personally supervised its disposition. The job was not finished till close on midnight, but by that time I was as pleased as I was weary, for I felt assured that no party of explorers had ever faced a task more perfectly equipped, and I knew both exactly what we had and exactly where to lay my hand on anything I wanted.

To my great surprise I found Harry King waiting for me in my cabin. He was seated on a camp stool, puffing away at his pipe,

and he looked as solemn as the concentrated essence of a regiment of owls.

I guessed he had something to tell me, but I was too tired to be polite or even to wish to undress, so I threw myself as I was upon my bunk, boots and all, and yawned in his face.

“Spit out what you have to say, old chap, and sling your hook,” I said, “for I’m the middle and two ends of a played-out wreck.”

“It’s serious, Jim, or I shouldn’t bother you after your hard day,” he rejoined.

“Oh, serious, is it?” Startled by his tone, I rose to my elbow and regarded him. He was calm enough, but he did not meet my eyes. He stared at the side board of my bunk.

“Well,” I said.

“I’ve come to ask you, Jim, before we start—to—to treat Lady Trevor with a little more deference. You’ll presently be our leader, Jim, and, if you’ll pardon me for saying it, old fellow, I know from experience that you can be pretty rusty when you like. Not that I mind—I’m a man, and you’ve generally a good reason for it when you cut up rough. But she’s a woman, Jim—and she

would feel it sorely. Indeed she feels it already. I know you've not meant to be unkind, but the fact is, Jim, you have been ; and your position will soon be such that if you were to continue as you've begun, a woman of her acute sensibility and high spirit would easily find it intolerable. She has told me exactly how things stand—how she has consented to obey your orders in order to join the party, and how Sir Philip has handed—or is to hand over to you—absolute authority immediately we land. I hate to, as it were, hold up the mirror to you, Jim. But I hope you'll forgive me. We're not ordinary mates."

"No, Harry, we are not ordinary mates, and I readily forgive you," I replied. I was no longer weary ; but I was cold inside. I had begun to see that Lady Trevor had not been vapouring when she threatened to convert Harry King into my enemy. The thin end of the wedge was already visible. I felt that I should have to be very circumspect, if I wished to foil her game and keep my friend.

"I've no doubt I am a bit of a bear at times," I added, after a little interval, "and I'm glad

you have spoken out, old fellow. All the same, I can't call to mind having acted boorishly to the lady during the voyage. Perhaps you can refresh my memory."

"Well, one day you told her a wild yarn about kicking a blind man. She resented it, I'm sure. That is a concrete instance. But besides that, Jim, you have ostentatiously held yourself aloof from her ever since we left Sydney, and no woman likes being ignored, you know."

I nodded. "Evidently I've been a bigger fool than usual," I observed. "The yarn was a horrible blunder, I saw that as soon as I had told it. But, on my word, Harry, I kept out of her way thinking only to please her. You know, old chap, I'm no woman's man. I cannot keep a perpetual watch on my tongue like you, and, like as not, I'd be letting out the great Australian adjective half my time, or else making open love to her. She's so infernally attractive, Harry. You must have noticed that yourself."

He coloured under his tan. "She is wonderful," he muttered, "wonderful."

"That's just it," I assented, eagerly. "And between you and me, old boy, I felt it pretty

much because she seemed to take a bit of a dislike to me from the very start. Of course, it's only natural she would—an old stick like me, with fellows like you and Dan, and Bill, and Gilbert hanging round—and you especially, being one of her own birth class. Still, even sticks have eyes—and—and——”

Here I broke off artistically, lowering my voice—“and hearts, Harry,” I added.

He started up and looked at me very keenly, his eyes as bright as beads.

“Jim!” he cried. “Jim!”

“Now you know just the sort of damn fool I am,” I muttered. “So don't you go thinking any more I mean to be unkind to her. I might seem so, but it's just my natural uncouthness and my trying to keep dark how I really feel.”

He caught my hand and wrung it hard. “Poor old Jim, poor old boy!” he said, very softly. For a moment he seemed on the point of making me an even larger confidence, but he crushed down the impulse, and without another word he left the room. I lay down again and stared up at the ceiling. I saw trouble ahead and trying times generally, for it was plain Harry was fathoms deep in

love with an unscrupulous siren who had made up her mind to use him as an instrument to damage me. But she would not succeed as easily as she thought, for I had resolved to outdo her in unscrupulousness, if I could, and I had a notion she fancied me a rather scrupulous person. I chuckled to reflect on her mistake. It gave me a great advantage at the moment, an advantage I would use to the utmost. But, all the same, I was afraid of her.

We started next morning, after an early breakfast on board, at exactly eight o'clock ; the party distributed among the launches, and each launch towing a whaleboat filled with our baggage. Sir Philip and Lady Trevor, Dr. Bates, Harry King, Bill Forsyth, Chick Weed and I were in the leading launch ; and the captain of the *Psyche* came with us to navigate. The yacht's crew manned the rigging and gave us three ringing cheers as we moved away. We replied with a rifle volley. It was a truly exciting moment, and we kept on waving our handkerchiefs to the yacht until she was hull down on the horizon. The estuary was simply huge. We had proceeded fully a dozen miles almost

dead south before the river banks began to close in appreciably at all, and even when we reached the first great bend—more than twenty miles from our starting point—the river was every inch of a mile and a half wide. It was not until we came to the fourth bend, some forty-four miles from the mouth, that we were really able to grasp the fact that it was a river, and not an arm of the sea, we were negotiating. But a little later it narrowed suddenly to a width of about four hundred yards, and from that time forward we reduced speed a half, and sounded without ceasing as we advanced. At two o'clock we anchored for the midday meal, and, while we ate, the tide, which had been racing out for some time before, reached its lowest level. On each side of us were towering brown and yellow mud-banks, topped with dense mangrove jungles and cane brakes, with tall, thickly-wooded hills behind. It was the wildest-looking country imaginable, and as beautiful—saving the muddy banks of the river—as it was strange and interesting. But the air was swelteringly hot, and even to eat was an exertion. Just as we were making ready to start again, we saw our first crocodile. He

was a medium specimen of the marine species, about twelve feet long. He came out of a cane brake on the left bank, immediately opposite our launch, and, after coolly inspecting us for a moment, slithered down the slimy slope with a dull splash into the water, where he vanished instantly. Sir Philip, Lady Trevor, Harry King and the doctor at once rushed for their rifles, agog with eager excitement; but Bill Forsyth and I calmly continued filling our pipes. Crocodiles had no charms for us as objects of sport. We had both wasted too many pounds of lead on their impenetrable hides in bygone days to find any amusement in plugging at them for pastime now.

But the game was new to the others, and they were keen to buy their experience. They bought it steadily all the afternoon. The river was teeming with the brutes. Every few yards we traversed we would see one lying like a log in the slime of the sloping banks. There would follow a volley, and the crocodile hit or unhit would just slither into the water and disappear. It was the most irritating kind of sport. You could never tell whether the quarry had suffered



any hurt or not. It made Lady Trevor quite angry at length, so angry that she turned on me, and asked in her sweetest tones if my superiority could inform her of a means of bagging one of the saurians. I replied: "Yes, madam; fire at the eye."

She fired at crocodiles' eyes for a good hour, and then came over and sat beside me. "Suppose you kill one for me," she said, and handed me her rifle. I fired, obediently, at seven running, and as I missed all seven eyes Lady Trevor gradually recovered her good humour. She was glad to find me an indifferent shot, I think. We had quite a pleasant little sporting conversation, and then a shooting match at ibis on the wing, which she won easily. She positively melted towards me after that, and was so entirely charming to us all that we forgot the heat and the sandflies, and formed by tacit agreement a society to adore her. I had never known an hour flit by so altogether pleasantly. It was with a little shock I realised at last that we had stopped, and that twilight was hard upon us. We had passed through the belt of coastal mountains, and entered the great grassy plains behind. The character of the

river banks had sharply altered. Instead of dense mangrove jungles, we beheld thin lines of paper-barks and kapok trees, interspersed with innumerable clumps of bamboos ; and, as the tide was at the flood, we rode almost level with the plains. The fringing growth of trees was crowded with bird-life. Thousands on thousands of black and white ibis, and scores of thousands of cockatoos and corella parrots crowded the branches ; and the air was thick with swarms of black duck, teal, wild geese, and other waterfowl, winging their way homewards from their feeding grounds at the call of the setting sun. At intervals the sky was quite darkened by the flying hosts, and the whir of their wings charged the atmosphere with reverberantly musical vibrations. Rifles were quickly exchanged for fowling-pieces, and soon a regular fusillade broke out along the line of boats. A moment later a perfect pandemonium reigned. The cockatoos and corellas, disturbed by the gun-fire, fluttered from their perches, and commenced shrilly screaming as they wheeled and circled over and among the trees. Their shimmering white forms suggested the notion of a mighty snowstorm,

but their multitudinous harsh voices destroyed the cool illusion, and very soon the hideous clamour grew positively appalling. It awoke the bats and flying-foxes from their sleep among the branches, and presently there were as many thousands of dark, demoniacally-fashioned shapes flitting through the air as birds. But the bats had this virtue: they were silent, or nearly so; and gruesome as was their appearance, I preferred them to the noisy cockatoos. The party kept on firing till the captain's dinghy (which he had despatched in charge of two sailors to pick up the game) was loaded to the gunwales with geese and teal and duck.

The splendid sport pleased Sir Philip mightily, and Lady Trevor was like a child in her delight. They declared that not even in the most luxuriant regions of Central Africa had they ever known game one half as plentiful, and I could easily believe them; because, splendid a game country as I knew from experience the western half of the Northern Territory, watered by the Victoria, Fitz-Maurice, and Daly Rivers, to be, such an extravagant profusion of bird-life as we beheld that evening cast its resources into the

shade, and formed a new landmark in my experience. We were, however, not permitted to indulge our encomiums on the Alligator long without diversion. The disappearance of the sun was the signal for myriads of millions of mosquitoes to appear. They settled in swarms upon each member of the party, and, setting seriously to work, reduced us all after a few minutes into mere mosquito-slaughtering machines. But, as for each one we killed a fresh score instantly uprose, it was not we who could claim even a momentary advantage in the contest. They were the anophiles: great, fierce black fellows, called in the Territory "up-enders," because they stand on end to bite, and have stings so long and sharp, that the stoutest wool or khaki cannot resist their attack. We ate the supper Chick Weed had prepared for us in a state of angry misery, exchanging never a word, and slapping our faces and our arms and legs without cessation. Before it was over we were all covered with hard, irritable lumps, that demanded, past gain-saying, to be scratched. I arose before the others, and going to the bows secured the bundle of cheese-cloth nets that I had pro-

vided for the journey. My first care was to arrange a sleeping place in the stern-sheets for Lady Trevor. I quietly commandeered almost all the cushions for that purpose, and having fixed them in place, I fastened a cheese-cloth net to the cutter's awning pole. When I turned around it was to find her in a condition bordering on tears. She was standing upright beside the table, stamping her feet and fanning her face with a neckerchief. Sir Philip and Harry King were gallantly doing their best to assist her, but their efforts were ludicrously futile, and the mosquitoes made a mock of them. The poor lady's white skin was stained all over with crimson spots of blood and angry sores. I stepped across, and taking her by the arm and waist, I half led, half lifted her to the couch I had prepared. She lay down as obediently as a worn-out child, whereupon I rapidly tucked the thick meshy folds of the net about her from head to foot. She said nothing, neither did I. I had too much to do. I had to provide for the others. Sir Philip was my first care. He seemed quite dazed by the violence of the plague, and I had to fix his net for him myself. His gratitude was pathetic. Harry King,

too, was not his usual self-reliant self. He was unnerved by the frightful discomfort of the pests, and his hands trembled so that he could not tie the necessary knots. Bill Forsyth looked after himself, of course—cursing in underbreath the while; but the captain of the *Psyche* and the two sailors were the hardest to deal with. They had quite lost their heads, and before I could attend to them they wrapped themselves up in sail-cloth and angrily refused to issue forth again, even when I had got their beds ready for them. It was thus that the care of the party fell on my shoulders, before my legitimate responsibilities commenced. But there was no use making a song about it. A watch had to be kept, and I was the only one apparently able to keep it. Chick Weed, however, came nobly to my assistance. Through long use he was proof against mosquito bites. They did not trouble him at all, and he volunteered to take first watch. I therefore retired to my net, and, being pretty weary, was soon asleep, lulled by the loud droning hum of the hungry baffled swarms that buzzed without. Chick Weed awoke me at the tick of midnight, and we noise-

lessly changed places. I took my seat beside the tiller, a loaded rifle beside me; and having wrapped my legs in a rug, I lighted a pipe and let the mosquitoes do their worst, philosophically reflecting that the sooner I became thoroughly inoculated, like Chick Weed, the better for me in the days to come. I soon found that, if you could only restrain yourself from scratching at the bites, the pain presently subsided and left no after-consequences worth mentioning, merely a tiny scarlet dob that gradually faded. But that was the trouble—to keep from scratching. It was a Hades of a night, or rather morning. About two o'clock Lady Trevor spoke to me in a low whisper."

"Is that you, Mr. McLean?" she asked.

"Yes, madam," said I. "Anything wrong?"

"There are some mosquitoes inside my net. They will not let me sleep."

I got up, and carefully stepping over Bill Forsyth's unconscious body (he was snoring like a grampus) I kneeled down beside Lady Trevor's couch. "It would be madness to try and drive them out," I murmured. "To

do so would only be to let in fresh hordes. But here is a cigarette, madam, and a match. Just put out your fingers—here where my hand is, and I'll give them to you ; also, this little phial of ammonia. Smoke the cigarette, and it will daze the pests ; and put some ammonia on any bites you have, and if it will not altogether ease the sting it will drive all marks away."

She put out her hand and I gave her the articles in question. A second later she struck the match, and we stared at each other through the netting. She lit the cigarette, gazing at me all the while.

"Why are you keeping watch?" she whispered. "The blacks could not reach us here, in the middle of the river?"

"They have dug-outs and canoes, madam. To be frank, I don't anticipate a visit, but it's best to be prepared."

"You will be eaten alive by those awful mosquitoes."

The match went out, and we were only vague shapes to each other once more, just discernible in the light of the swinging lantern.

"I'm pretty tough," I said, "and the

experience will make me tougher still. Have you slept at all? ”

“ Splendidly—thanks to you. Mr. McLean, I’ll never forget your kindness to me to-night.”

“ It was nothing, madam.”

I got up and returned to my post. The glow of her cigarette tip held my attention for the next ten minutes. Then she smothered it in a fold of her rug.

“ You were quite right,” she murmured presently. “ The plagues have ceased troubling. Mr. McLean, how strangely cold it is after the great heat of the day.”

“ Would you like another rug, Lady Trevor? ”

“ No, thanks. I’m gloriously comfy. I’m putting the ammonia on my bites. It stings horribly though, Mr. McLean.”

“ Only for a second, you will find.”

“ Did you bring it for me? ”

“ Yes.” I had not, but it was war between us, and all is fair in war.

“ Why did you? ” she breathed.

I thought of a splendid lie. “ I couldn’t bear to think of your—your soft, white skin being disfigured by these cursed little torments,” I muttered. “ It seemed a sacrilege.”

“ Oh ! ” she said, and was silent so long I fancied her asleep. But she was only thinking, and at length her thoughts found words. “ You are a queer man,” she murmured ; and then was silent for keeps.

Some two hours later the sky began to clear and the heavy grey mists that overhung the water began to rise and break into fantastic cloud shapes at the instance of a newborn breeze. The whole party in our cutter slumbered like persons drugged, suspiring in a curious lethal unison. The dawn broke suddenly, absolutely unheralded save by a gentle illumination of the western reaches of the tree-girt horizon. Without other warning a great broad bar of golden, crimson-flecked light leaped across the centre of the dome, banishing the stars on instant, and putting the dark to panic-stricken flight. A second afterwards the sky was blue, the trees were green, and the river mists were melting like the figment of a dream. A glance upstream showed me three large dug-outs crammed with naked aborigines, about two hundred paces distant. The natives were armed with spears ; they were about thirty strong, and without doubt bent on mischief, for they

were paddling towards us at racing speed—
—yet noiselessly as images. I gave the alarm
to our sleepers by firing over the heads of the
blacks, but the shot did not deter them.
They came on even faster, but now with noisy
yells, and the bucks who were not paddling
fixed womerahs to their spears. Hastily
ejecting the spent shell, I rammed home a
fresh cartridge and aimed to kill. I had just
fired my fourth shot when my companions
joined me, armed, startled, and chattering
like magpies. But the fight was over. The
aborigines had had enough of the white
man's "death-tube." They spun their canoes
round and tore up stream again for their lives,
the leading dug-out the lighter for three tall
warriors gone to their last account—now
corpses, floating idly on the current.

Bill Forsyth, Harry King and Sir Philip
fired after them till they were round the
bend, but without effecting any discernible
damage, a thing I was not sorry for, since,
after all, the blacks, poor wretches, were only
defending their country, and ethically were
quite right in attacking us.

On stepping down into the body of the
cutter again, I found Lady Trevor calmly

engaged at her toilette. She had an open dressing-case before her, and was fixing her hair in front of its mirrored lid.

She greeted me with a nod and a bright smile. "Just as well you kept watch," she said, coolly. "It has perhaps saved all our lives. But, oh! what a hypocrite you are, Mr. McLean; yesterday, you could hit nothing—and this morning you are a marksman among a thousand. Were you missing yesterday to please me?"

"No—you beat me fairly, Lady Trevor. I had big marks to fire at this morning."

"But moving ones," she commented. Then, lowering her voice: "Tell me, please, when—the—the—when the stream carries them away. I dare not look out of the boat. I'm not afraid—not in the least—of hundreds of them living, but the sight of a dead face, black or white, unnerves me."

I stepped to the side of the cutter. One was being swept by the current at that moment past us—and one of its poor, stiff hands actually grazed the planks. But it was only for a second. Next instant it was drawn under the thick, muddy surface, and a little splash and the momentary apparition of

a long, brown muzzle with gleaming serrated jaws told me why. The crocodiles had been provided with a breakfast. Shuddering, I turned around and tried to forget the loathsome spectacle.

"They are near us," gasped Lady Trevor—her eyes round with horror.

"No," said I, "they have gone. The current is very swift." I could not tell her of the crocodiles.

Then the other men joined us, bringing in their smoking rifles. They were inclined enthusiastically to exalt me, but I was in no mood for that sort of thing, and I turned on the first speaker like a wounded wolf. I said I wasn't a bit proud of having deprived of life three unfortunate aborigines, and that I should not have done it but for the hateful duty of having to kill to save. They let me alone after that, and talked of the mosquitoes, which had vanished—all save a few persistent agitators—with the rising of the sun.

We resumed our journey at seven, and proceeded up the river with the turning tide. The water was as thick as pea-soup, but even at the lowest ebb deep enough to float an ocean-going steamer. We accomplished

thirty miles that forenoon, and came to the limit of the tidal influence. Thereafter the water was as clear as crystal, and very sweet and pure to taste. At one o'clock we sighted our rendezvous with the horse-drovers—a tall, bare, solitary limestone hill on the western bank, that rose up out of the surrounding grass plains like a sentinel, with not another piece of rising ground within the radius of reach of the best telescope among the party. On the halt for lunch I had my first brush with Lady Trevor. When the meal was over she went to the stern of the cutter, while we lay stretched out, smoking, under the awning, well nigh prostrate with the fierce heat; and, taking off her shoes and stockings, she began to paddle her feet in the water. The splashing first aroused me. Realising her occupation I sprang up, hot with anger, and peremptorily ordered her to desist.

I dare say I was rude, but the occasion was not one for genuflexions and pretty speeches. Her life was put at stake by playing the fool in that crocodile-infested river. Her temper, however, flashed out even more quickly than my own.

“You are not our leader till we land,”

she retorted, passionately. "Don't you ever dare again to address me in such a tone! I shall do exactly as I please." And in open defiance she continued splashing, enjoying, no doubt, the opportunity both to defy me, and in the act to display her small, white feet. I thought of appealing to Sir Philip, but he answered my glance with a shoulder-shrug; and Harry King showed me, with one resentful look, that he considered me guilty of something very near a crime.

Smothering an oath, I took out my revolver and perched myself on the rail, in order to overlook the stream; and as I thus lost the shelter of the awning, the blistering tropic sun smote me like a furnace. Naturally, my annoyance did not abate, but fortunately for all concerned I was not constrained to wait long. Within five minutes I observed a small log of wood unostentatiously make its appearance on the surface of the water, about twenty yards ahead of the cutter. It floated down smoothly and gently with the current—a mere log of wood, and nothing more; but, strange to say, not altogether with the current. That log had an unseen rudder, and the rudder was steering it straight

for Lady Trevor's gleaming feet. And the log had a small knob some fifteen inches from its nearer end to us, and in the centre of the knob was a lidless, unwinking, cold grey eye.

I cocked my revolver, and waited for the proper second. When it came, I fired. There followed a loud crash of jaws, snapping viciously at air and water not six feet from where Lady Trevor sat ; then a huge, black, scaly tail was flung high into the air and down again, with a resounding clap upon the surface of the stream, and the water all around was churned to foam by the death struggles of the saurian.

Lady Trevor snatched up her feet, and sprang into the body of the boat, pale as a sheet, and scarcely breathing. The others were afoot by then, and all were painfully disturbed. We watched in an electric silence the monster's struggles till they ceased, and finally he sank, still quivering, but dead, into the ooze of the river bed.

Bill Forsyth was the first to speak. " You couldn't have plugged that alligator fair and square in the eye, Jim," he observed critically, " or he wouldn't have struggled. He'd just have handed in his checks without remark.

But it wasn't a bad shot considering the circs., and, anyway, you got him. He's dead meat sure enough."

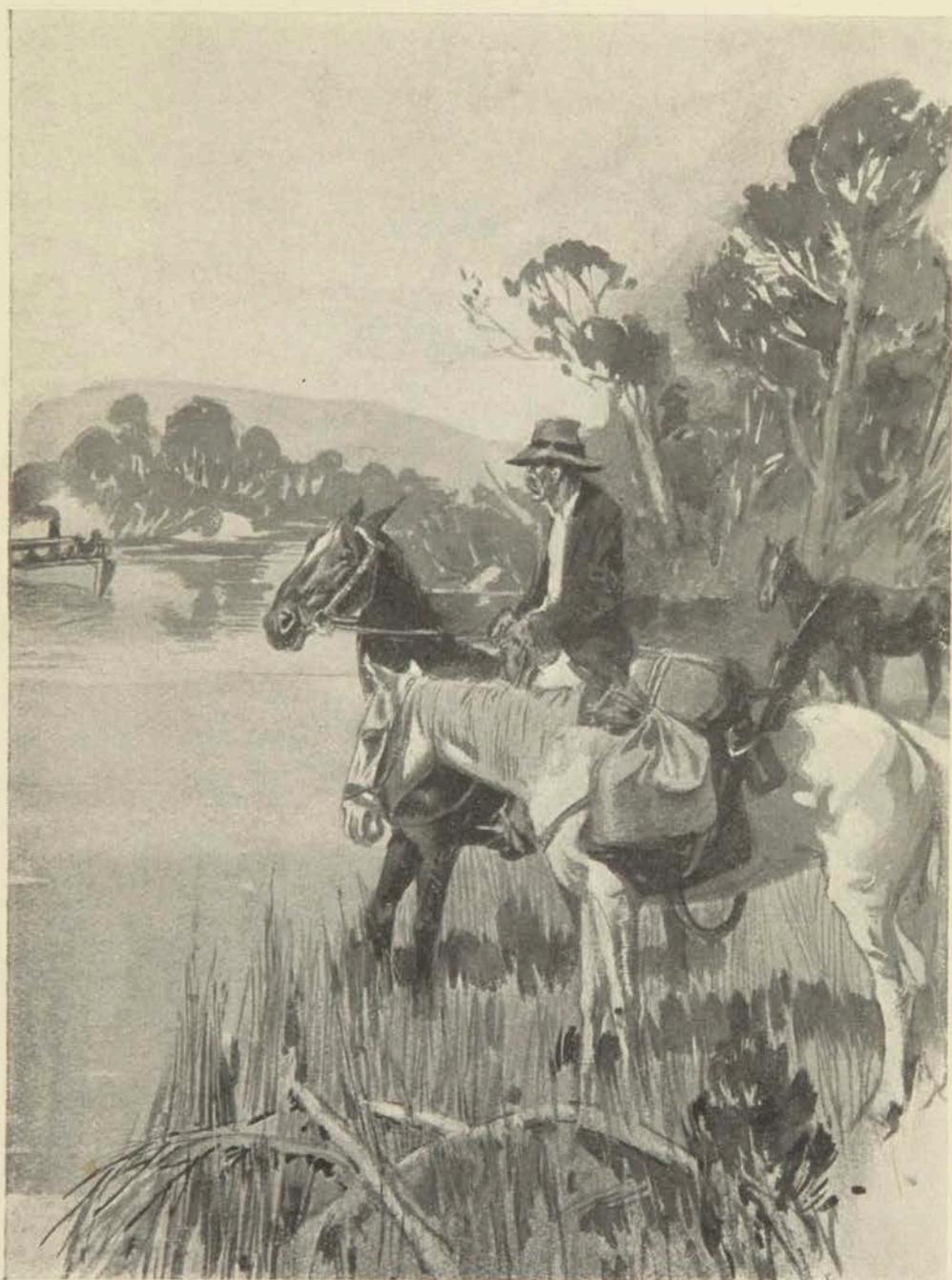
"Fifteen feet if he was an inch," said Sir Philip quietly.

"Up anchor, Masters!" said the captain to the cox. of the cutter. "We'd best be getting on."

Harry King came over, and laid his hand on my arm. "You saved her life, Jim," he muttered in my ear. It was as though he thanked me for a personal service. But Lady Trevor did not thank me; she ignored me, and commenced a scientific discussion with Dr. Bates and Bill Forsyth, concerning the difference between alligators and crocodiles. She said that Bill was wrong in calling the beast I had killed an alligator, because there are no alligators in Australia. There are, however, two species of crocodiles—the marine one, or *Crocodilus porosus*, and the river one, or *Crocodilus Johnstonii*, the former of which is the fiercer and more dangerous. She was frightfully learned, and had manifestly studied up the subject; but although Dr. Bates supported her views, she could not convince Bill. Bill said he didn't "give a

tinker's curse " what naturalists had to say. They were a lot of " tommy-rotting " hair-splitters, and he was prepared to wager his head against a fig of tobacco a *post mortem* of our crocodile would prove the brute a full-fledged alligator. But, anyway, even should it turn out to be a crocodile, what did it matter? " Alligator " sounded just as nicely to the ear, and it rolled off the tongue more easily. Alligator was good enough for him, and he implied it should be good enough for Dr. Bates, or even Lady Trevor.

They kept up the argument for two solid hours, and were still " going strong " when we reached our rendezvous.



"The drover had already arrived."



CHAPTER V

A WILFUL WOMAN

TO my very great satisfaction we found that the drover had already arrived (two days before, in fact), and the excellent fellow, instead of lazily staying on the west bank, had contrived to get all our horses across the river without accident or loss. Furthermore, he had prepared a first rate camp for our reception in a clump of pandanus trees, about two hundred yards from the river, on the banks of a pretty little fresh-water creek. He had brought a small tribe of friendly natives across with him (old buffalo shooters) from the head waters of the Adelaide River. There were twenty of them all told, and they gave us such noble help in landing our belongings from the boats that by five o'clock the job was completed. I liked the look of our horses. They were mostly inclined to run "to the small side,"

and although they were all somewhat over-fat, they were evidently an honestly picked lot, and I could not discover a single weed in the mob. They were quiet too, and showed signs of careful breaking. The drover was delighted at the praise I gave them, for it appears that he had personally acted as Sir Philip's agent for selection, and as he quaintly remarked it was just as well one of his bosses should be pleased—from which I gathered that the breeder of the horses who had sold them to Sir Philip had, thanks to the drover, not made quite as much profit as he had perhaps anticipated in the deal. The drover had very little news to give us. His journey from the Katharine had been almost uneventful. He had seen any number of blacks on the way, and most of the tribes were unfriendly, but they had not molested him, and his passage through their country had never been disputed. He warned me, however, that eastward of the Alligator we should have much fiercer natives to deal with, men who were in all probability absolutely ignorant of the existence of whites; and presently taking Sir Philip and me apart through the pandanus belt he showed us on the other side an horizon

studded with small columns of blue smoke.

"Signal fires!" I said.

"Aye, mate. And they've been 'on the go' ever since I arrived. The tribes are talking to one another and probably collecting. If you take my tip, from the moment you start you'll keep the party together. It's not likely the blacks will attack the crowd, but it's a sure thing they'll pick off stragglers, and as the grass on those black soil plains yonder is a good ten feet high they'll do it without any one but the victims being the wiser."

"We're thinking the same thought," I answered, "and from this moment I'll act it, with your permission, Sir Philip."

Sir Philip nodded. "You are our leader, Mac," he replied. "It is for you to command, for us to obey."

We returned to the camp, and there and then I called the whole party together and made them a little speech.

They took it very well and even cheered me, Dan Linehan setting the tune. But to lead is to be lonely. I was no longer one of the "Big Five," and the five of us knew it. I was the boss, and from the moment I

made that speech asserting my right to give orders and giving them, I was the loneliest person in the party. Why, even Sir Philip felt the change in our relations, and it was never "Mac" again with him, always "Mr. McLean," whereas with my four mates the old free and easy "Jim" changed instantly to a half-ironical "Boss." Only Dr. Bates and the sailors and the servants did not alter. As ever, they called me "Sir."

By six o'clock we had all the sleeping tents erected, and one big eating room and living tent which we made fairly mosquito-proof with netting. To further baulk the mosquitoes I had a chain of small smoke fires built all round the camp. This served the purpose also of an enclosure for the horses, which although hobbled we could not afford to allow stray afield after dark for fear of the blacks.

That evening after dinner I drew up a code of camp laws, and Sir Philip helped me to make fair copies of it—one for every member of the expedition. The laws were simply common-sense rules, but the point was, they had to be rigidly observed, and I saw no better way of impressing this necessity

upon the party than by leaving them no loophole of excuse for dereliction of duty.

But handing them round did not make me any more popular with my mates or anybody else, or their looks belied them. And when I subsequently fixed the watches at shifts of men to stand on guard, and keep the fires going four hours a shift at different points of observation, murmurs of disapprobation reached my ears. I heard the words "ridiculous" and "absurd"—softly but several times repeated.

I did some hard thinking in the qualified quiet of my net that night, and the sum of my reflections was a cold-blooded recognition of the fact that no leader can be universally liked by those he leads, and an equally cold-blooded resolution that if I found I could not rule by liking I would rule by fear.

At daybreak my whistle brought the camp astir, and in ten minutes I had every man working like a nigger. The tents were struck in a twinkling. The hacks were caught, bridled, saddled and unhobbled with the speed of magic by the expert bushmen's hands. Then followed the harnessing and loading of the pack horses. That was more

tedious work, but we got it through within an hour, and by seven o'clock we had all breakfasted and were ready for a start. We wasted no time in farewells to the drover and the captain of the *Psyche*. The drover said, "S'long, mate," to me, touched his hat to Lady Trevor, and rode off with his black attendants to the ford. As for the captain, his instructions to take the yacht to Blue Mud Bay, and there await our advent overland, had been settled days before. He thought it necessary to shake hands all round, but there was nothing else to do, and I watched him enter the cutter without regret. There had been very little love lost between us. He was too starchy a person to suit my taste.

Our start was made immediately afterwards. I put the pack horses and spare mounts in the centre. The van was composed of Sir Philip, Lady Trevor, Harry King (I so placed the latter to please him, poor fellow), Bill Forsyth, two sailors and myself. The rear guard (which I put in charge of Gilbert Lang) contained the balance of the party; saving only Dan Linehan—whom I gave a roving commission to proceed at frequent intervals up and down the ranks as my lieu-

tenant, to preserve the line and prevent straggling—and the remaining sailors, whom I made responsible for the safety of the packs. We were all, of course, armed to the teeth with carbines and revolvers, and we made an imposing cavalcade. That is to say while we could be seen. It was not long that we could, to be candid; for immediately we traversed the pandanus belt the ocean of grass beyond simply swallowed us up. It was the most marvellous stuff imaginable, that grass. It grew in small, close-set, reedy clumps, and rose up straight as an arrow to between ten and twelve feet in height. The stems were almost destitute of blades, and although quite soft and pliable were pretty tough and stringy, but the tops were fluffy and feathery and of a rich succulent green. The horses loved the tops, and snapped eagerly at every cluster within reach. The ground under foot was a fairly stiff and remarkably fine black loam—the richest alluvium that one would well conceive of, and capable of growing anything if cultivated, as indeed the tremendous unkempt growth of grass amply testified.

I set our course by the map with a pocket

compass almost due east to pick up a pass in an unnamed mountain range that ran down from the coast a little west of the 153rd meridian. I had not too much faith in the map, for it was indefinitely marked, and the explorer responsible was no geographer (a mere unlettered bushman), but it seemed better to risk following his direction than essay the high broken tableland which I knew lay further south, and to cross which would have cost us several weeks of toilsome effort.

We in the van had no difficulty in getting through the grass. Our horses were veterans at the business. They broke it down without trouble, and our passage made a well-marked road for those behind us to pass over. Naturally we kept a sharp look-out, for blacks especially, but as we did not force the pace I had leisure to look about me, and to keep an eye along the line. Lady Trevor rode between her husband and Harry King. She wore bloomers, gaiters and divided skirts, and bestrode her saddle like a man. She looked wonderfully handsome so, and despite her costume every inch a woman. Sir Philip was even more the dandy than I had ever

seen him. His immaculately fitting silk riding suit, his glossy boots and leggings, and his bran new chamois skin gloves were a joy for ever to remember. He might have been riding in Park Lane or the Row, save for the carbine strapped across his shoulder ; but even that was no common carbine. It was covered with pure gold and mother-of-pearl mountings, and was in other ways a perfect dude of a weapon ; you could see plainly that it turned up its nose at my workaday rifle every time the latter came within its range. But its owner was no snob. The poor man did not dress for show. He could no more help being a dandy than I could help not being one. He followed the laws of his temperament just as we all do.

We covered eighteen miles that forenoon and then halted for a rest during the two hottest hours on the edge of a vast tea tree swamp that stretched away into the far distance east by north. I was very glad to strike this swamp, for it was marked on the map, and besides that the monster plain grass stopped short of its borders, and thus offered us a chance to steer by our eyes, instead of by the compass. The banks of the swamp,

moreover, were thickly overgrown for a considerable distance from the water with knee-high couch grass, which made splendid fodder for our horses. It was a delight to see the way they attacked it, the dear beasts. I love to see horses enjoy their food. They are grand creatures, and eating is about the only solid pleasure of their lives, more's the pity.

Chick Weed gave us roast wild geese and duck for lunch. He was the most popular member of the party before we had finished. The birds were cooked in a way to make my mouth water now in the recollection. And while we ate Chick Weed's gun was busy scarcely fifty yards away providing as good a dinner for the morrow from the millions of water fowl in the marsh. It was a perfect paradise of game ; and as the birds had quite evidently never been shot at before, they cared no more for the noise of the discharges than for the buzzing of a mosquito. They were so fat and lazy, that even when forcefully disturbed they would only flap away a few yards and settle down again. It was sheer murder to kill them ; but Chick Weed called it " big sport," and when he returned,

wet to the skin but loaded up with the bodies of the slaughtered innocents, he was the happiest and proudest Chinaman in the Southern Hemisphere.

Like every one else Chick Weed had lost no time in falling down and worshipping Lady Trevor. He now came along, and as a matter of course laid his trophies at her feet. He was only a Chinaman, but she told him with real kindness to go at once and dry his clothes before the fire lest he catch cold. I'll never forget Chick Weed's face. For a good second it wasn't a bit ugly, and not a bit yellow. It was the face of a devotee, a saint worshipper, whose ethereal pattern of divinity had unexpectedly given him a glimpse of Heaven. I had never seen a coolie blush before. It was a memorable spectacle.

After our little siesta we pushed on slowly along the fringe of the big swamp, picking our way in order to avoid the heat of the sun among the shady tea-trees and huge paper barks which lined the border. About two miles from our lunch camp we came of a sudden upon a score or more of small circular saucer-shaped mud holes, each about eight feet in diameter, and about three feet deep.

I was so surprised to see them that I drew up for a moment, and of course brought the party to a halt. "What on earth are they?" demanded Lady Trevor. "Buffalo wallows, madam," I replied. "The buffaloes hollow out these holes to roll in, and so plaster themselves with mud in order to evade the painful attentions of a small stinging fly that persistently attacks them."

"Then there must be buffaloes hereabouts?" cried Sir Philip.

"Unquestionably, sir, and the circumstance amazes me, for I had no idea they had spread much east of the Mary River. Yet here is proof positive. You'll have better game than wild fowl to shoot at presently, sir."

"Thank goodness for that," said Lady Trevor, devoutly, and we resumed our march.

We did not, however, proceed more than ten miles further that day, for I had no mind to knock up our soft, grass-fed cattle. We, therefore, went into camp at about five o'clock, forming it in the shape of a big semicircle with the swamp for base, so as to give the horses plenty of room to feed. There being no dry wood available, we chopped down a couple

of paper barks and several pandanus trees for fuel for the fires ; and when that was done, with Lady Trevor's help I contrived to construct out of some spare mosquito nets three big net masks to fit on as many big helmets for the benefit of the sentries, so that they might be able to perform their duties with a minimum of torture. They made a man wearing them look even more hideous a monster than a diver fitted up for a descent to the ocean bottom ; but they were passably effective, and as they left the hands and legs exposed, they were not too cumbersome. Not a man among us but did not bless them in the nights that followed.

That night passed without the slightest untoward incident, as also the next day. We might have been traversing an uninhabited wilderness for all the signs of human life we saw. About ten o'clock the character of the country began to change. The swamp still stretched away on our right hand into the indistinguishable distance, but on our left the flat black soil plains gradually gave place to rolling, thinly timbered eucalyptus uplands, and early in the afternoon a range of tall hills appeared due east, running north

and south, while the swamp appeared to take a sudden sweep to the south as if in sympathy. As the map located the pass we were making for twelve miles north-east, and the country beyond was absolutely unexplored, I called a halt at half-past three, so that the horses should have a good rest where food and water was plentiful before venturing into the unknown wild. I was also somewhat moved to this determination by the sight of a number of familiar objects, some two or three miles ahead of the party, on a patch of level ground between the swamp and a thick pandanus jungle that covered the base of a low hill. They looked at the distance like a group of big stones, and no one but myself suspected they were anything else. But I recognised them for buffalo, and temporarily giving charge of the camp to the hands of Gilbert Lang, I led a band of six shooters, including Sir Philip and his wife, all mounted on fresh horses, to the chase. Carefully marking the position of the big game, and the direction of the wind (it blew by good luck very nearly in our faces), I struck immediately into the eucalyptus forest. The grass here was quite as tall as that on the black soil plains, but

it was much thinner, and did not offer any appreciable bar to progress. Stringy barks and woolly butts were at first the only timber we met with, but as we proceeded with our *détour* pandanus clumps appeared, and they increased in numbers as we advanced, finally smothering all other forms of vegetable life, even the grass. It was a weird little ride. We went in single file, constantly turning and twisting among the tall thin naked stems of the palms, and constantly bent over our saddle bows to escape the long, tough, prickly edged blades of the fronds which, drooping down from the massed profusion of green overhead that almost shut out the light of day, threatened our hands and clothes and faces with their sharp and cruel little claws. Every few yards we saw traces of the recent presence of our quarry, and we crossed innumerable tracks and roads that their impatient feet had hard beaten through the jungle.

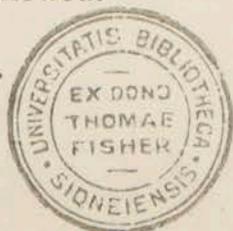
In about half an hour we reached the hill that I had marked, and when the ground began to get seriously steep I halted, and dismounted the party, and gave the horses to the care of a bitterly disappointed sailor.

Prescribing then a rigid silence and the utmost caution to make no sound in walking, I led the way afoot at a slant easterly toward the swamp, around the knees of the hill. Lady Trevor was immediately behind me, and her husband followed. In five minutes we reached the edge of the jungle, and peering through the screen of palm stems beheld a sight to stir a hunter's blood. Within two hundred yards of us stood shoulder on a fine old black bull like a sentinel on guard, watching over the safety of five young cows which were leisurely cropping the herbage near him. But these were only six members on the outskirts of a magnificent herd of fully two hundred beasts that strung along the shores of the swamp for half a mile or more.

In a second all our rifles were cocked and ready for use, but before giving the word to fire I bade my companions in a whisper not to aim at the head of any buffalo, for the skull is impervious to a bullet, but behind the shoulder. Naturally the bull excited the sporting instincts of the band; I, however, to my shame, perhaps, am a utilitarian; I wanted fresh meat and tender young meat,



"Lady Trevor was immediately behind me, and her husband followed."



not tough old bull leather, so I aimed at the smallest and fattest of the cows.

“Fire!” I said; and a sputtering volley sped. One cow dropped to her knees; the other cows bolted like mad down the lane towards the already startled herd: the bull, however, stood his ground. He had been, hit, of course, but not seriously, only hard enough to make him curious and a little angry. He lowered his great horned head and lashed his flanks with his tail, and stared in our direction. I recharged my piece and waited. One might as well have fired at a brick wall as at him in that position. But my companions disregarded my advice, and once more hammered him with bullets. The cow, meanwhile, sank on her side, and with a little bellow expired. The noise disturbed the bull; he swung round and trotted up to her, to be stung by four more bullets. Thoroughly infuriated now, he turned again and began to paw the ground, venting furious little snorts of rage. I thought he was about to charge us, and I was on the point of ordering a swift retreat into the densest part of the pandanus. But at the last moment the old bull changed his mind. A distant bellow

attracted his attention, and observing the whole herd in rapid flight, his courage failed him. He turned and lumbered away at a gallop. Once more the rifles cracked. They merely hastened the old fellow's speed; as for the next volley and the next—the final one—they had no perceptible effect at all.

The sports were simply furious. Dan Linehan's language was unprintable, and Lady Trevor, instead of resenting it, very sweetly thanked him for it. Even Sir Philip lost his temper and was guilty of two successive "damns"! They abused their rifles shamefully, also the ammunition.

I whistled for the horses, and strolled out to cut up the cow. The others watched me from a distance, and such was their disgust that, when the horses came, they rode back to the camp, leaving the sailor and me to do all the work.

"Of course Mr. McLean killed the cow," I heard Lady Trevor say scornfully as they departed; and her tone also implied another score noted up against me for subsequent settlement. But I observed, when dinner time came around that evening, she had a very healthy appetite for the juicy steaks

my utilitarian spirit had provided. And the party unanimously agreed that no beef they had ever tasted could compare for excellence of flavour with the delicate white buffalo meat. Truly, it was quite as good, if not better, than the choicest veal.

CHAPTER VI

A SERIOUS MISADVENTURE

I WILL frankly confess that I was beginning to depreciate the danger we had been apprehending from the blacks. We had travelled for two days through country of unexampled natural fertility, just the country to support thousands of lazy aboriginals with a minimum of effort—therefore just the sort of country which one would have expected to find fairly thickly inhabited. And yet not a native had we seen despite the signal fires we had been shown by the drover on landing from the cutters. However, although the second night passed by without alarm, I did not relax my precautionary rules, and when we started out for the third day's march I sternly suppressed a growing disposition in the cavalcade to ride in loose order. Lady Trevor gave me some trouble

that forenoon. She wanted very badly to have another try at the buffaloes, and on learning that we should be unlikely to find any on the high lands we were making for, she pleaded hard for another day's camp at the swamp. Meeting with a refusal, she became practically obstreperous, although in manner as sweet as honey. She would not keep her place in the line of march, but would join the rear guard or the van as she pleased, and frequently with one man or more for escort she would drop back far behind the main body. Half a dozen times I was compelled to halt and gallop back for her or send a messenger to speed her pace. She was always most apologetic. She had always "just for the moment forgotten the rule." She invariably promised to be good, and just as often as soon as my back was turned offended again. I had to speak plainly to her co-offenders at last, and those who, at her instance, twice offended, I ordered promptly to the van. But that sort of thing was bad for discipline, and it did no good with the lady, for when she found at length she could not entice others to join in her foolish pranks, she played them alone. Poor Sir Philip was on tenter-

hooks. For his sake I restrained my temper as long as possible, but when on calling the midday halt on the banks of a deep ravine there was no Lady Trevor to be seen my patience burst its last bond. She had disappeared as though by magic. To be honest I was less alarmed than enraged, for I had kept a sharp look-out for blacks, and I was quite certain there were none in our vicinity. Hastily placing the party in control of Gilbert Lang, with peremptory orders to remain in camp till my return, I called on Sir Philip and Harry King and started on the back track at a gallop. We had proceeded about three quarters of a mile when the crack of a rifle revealed the culprit's whereabouts; and a few seconds later we came upon her tracks. She had branched off from the main line of march at an angle of the valley we were traversing, and proceeded through a little open lane between a belt of pandanus and a ledge of ironstone into a small swampy hill-enclosed plain beyond. We soon discovered the secret of her rebellious conduct. In the centre of the plain, about a quarter mile from us, stood an old, old buffalo bull; a solitary which the younger bulls had driven from the

herd. Such bulls are always most dangerous to encounter, and even the oldest buffalo hunters will never tackle them if they can avoid it, for not only are their hides usually almost worthless, but their tempers are desperate, and they will charge anything that stands in their road. My feelings may therefore be appreciated to perceive Lady Trevor coolly approaching the old bull on foot, leading her horse by the bridle. She was less than a hundred yards from him when we burst through the pandanus lane, and to all appearances contemptuously oblivious of her deadly peril.

“My God!” I cried, and shouting to my companions to make haste I spurred my horse into the plain. But the ground was miry, and the slush so deep that rapid progress was impossible. It would be all over before we could reach the scene of the impending tragedy. I had scarcely floundered forward a hundred yards before the crisis came. The old bull gave a fierce bellow, put down his great head till his huge horns almost touched the ground and charged at a heavy lumbering gallop full upon the daring woman. At that very instant Harry King’s horse

put his foot into a slime-covered hole at my side and fell, throwing his rider heavily. Sir Philip was calling on me in a frenzied way to do something, spurring madly just behind my other girth, but my horse was doing his best, poor beast, and rushing, little as any of us guessed it, to his doom. I saw Lady Trevor let go her horse's bridle (he had snorted and backed as soon as the bull advanced) and then with the most admirable calmness she raised her rifle and took aim. Her first shot struck but did not stop the charging monster. Quickly but coolly she ejected the spent shell, aimed and fired again. What wonder that she missed, although the bull was scarce a dozen paces distant? I counted the seconds—one, two—no third. She had been standing frozen. Then came the impact. She was lifted bodily and whirled high into the air. The bull, carried on by the impetus of his tremendous rush, passed underneath. She fell behind him. As the brute paused, brought up on his haunches in the slush, and was about to turn and trample on that prostrate form, I spent all my breath in a yell that split the air. The bull—thank Heaven!—heard and saw, and at sight of a

new enemy, thinking no more of Lady Trevor, he charged down on me, shrilly bellowing; and my horse, at his very next plunge, bogged—bogged hopelessly. Sir Philip went down simultaneously in the same hole. I slipped off, and up to my knees in mire waded as quickly as I could to drier ground. A second later my horse was struck, lifted as easily as a feather might have been from the slimy bed of his undoing, and tossed panting and stricken to his death over the bull's shoulder. For an instant the bull almost vanished in the hole, but no bog can hold a buffalo. Slime is their native element. He plunged out quick as light, and then stood for a moment tossing his tremendous head and glaring about him, snorting and bellowing and shaking the mud from his eyes and nostrils. He was skull on to me, but I dared waste no time, for Sir Philip was scarce two yards behind him, struggling, to all seeming vainly, to extricate himself from his rolling, plunging, panic-stricken horse. Raising my rifle, I fired at the bull's neck. He screamed and charged me. I fired a second time at his shoulder, but he came on like a tornado, his horns sweeping the sedge. I waited motionless,

and at the proper instant leaped aside. Buffaloes cannot see ahead of them when on the charge. He passed me at the gallop. But he instantly discovered his mistake, and bringing up short turned to charge again. It was my opportunity. I gave him a bullet behind the shoulder as he turned, and a second in the flank in the region of the kidneys. Both did their work. He came at me with the courage of a lion, but blood was gushing in great clouts from his distended nostrils, and although I was compelled once more to evade his rush, he never made another. At the end of his run he paused, and very slowly turned about—to receive a final bullet in the act that pierced his already riddled lungs. And then facing me, hoarsely bellowing the while and spouting blood at every breath, he sank to his knees and slowly, very slowly, his great bulk tottered, swayed and fell. Sir Philip and I reached Lady Trevor's side together. She was pale as a lily and quite senseless, stretched out on the broad of her back, both arms extended. Taking Sir Philip's flask from his trembling fingers, I forced her locked teeth apart and poured some spirit down her throat. The effect was



‘ I forced her locked teeth apart, and poured some spirit
down her throat.’



immediate. Her eyes opened and she uttered a low strangled groan.

“ Oh! thank God! thank God!” cried Sir Philip, and he turned his back to hid the joyful agony of his relief.

“ Are you hurt, madam?” I demanded.

The wonderful creature looked me in the eye. “ I don't think so,” she replied. “ But I am aching horribly. Did you kill the buffalo?”

“ Yes, madam.”

“ Will you help me up?”

I lifted her to her feet at once. At first her knees gave way and refused to support her, but she was as game as the dead bull had been. Instead of weeping and complaining, she forced a laugh and tried her best to walk unaided, but she was shaken, shaken frightfully. “ Sir Philip,” I said, and taking her of a sudden in my arms I carried her over to the dead bull and sat her down upon his rigid shoulder. It was out of the question for her to repose on the slushy ground. She did not protest, nor did she utter a word when her husband sat beside her and gave her his arm to lean upon—nor did she shrink from him. I left them together, and striding over

to my poor, desperately wounded horse I put a bullet through his brain. Sir Philip's horse had just succeeded in winning out of the bog hole. He was hardly recognisable as a horse, and even the elegant silver-mounted saddle on his back was inches deep in evil-smelling slime. I caught him and led him over to the pair; then hurried hot-foot back to Harry King. Here was the worst damage done. He was seated on a clump of dried mud, holding his horse. He was conscious, but in great pain and quite helpless; his right arm and collar bone were broken, and his left ankle badly sprained. While I was fixing his arm in a rude reed splint, Sir Philip and his wife came up. She was on Sir Philip's horse. Her own had vanished. She went ghastly when she learned poor Harry's wretched plight, but her extraordinary fortitude did not utterly desert her even then. She wished to dismount and assist me, but with what little civility I could muster in the white heat of my wrath against her I directed Sir Philip to lead her to the camp.

Soon afterwards I somehow or other got Harry mounted (it pretty well overtaxed my strength to do it), and slowly, very slowly,

I led the horse through and out of that treacherous morass. How Harry endured the wrenching jolts I do not know. One or two deep moans escaped him, but I looked away and swore like a bullock driver at the horse so as to cover them up. It was better when we reached firm ground, for the motion was easier. We found the whole camp astir and ready mounted to come in search of us. They had been frightened by the return of Lady Trevor's riderless horse. I was thankful for a chance to vent my pent-up rage on somebody. Leaving Harry for a moment, I addressed the party in my tersest English. I had given them orders to stay where they were whatever happened, and at the sight of a riderless horse they had ventured to disobey. That was rank insubordination. This time I would pass it by in silence—but if ever such a thing occurred again I would find the ringleader and flog him till I broke his spirit. Did any man there doubt my word or question my authority, let him step forward and I would make him an example here and now! It was the deposition of the last remnant of the rule of liking; the statement of a blank, brutal, cold determination

and the institution of the rule of fear. But I had dominated crowds before, and though doubtless every man that I addressed was quick stung by my scalding words, not one disputed me, and eye after eye dropped under mine.

When I knew them whipped, I rapped out order after order and they obeyed me like machines. In twenty seconds Harry King was lifted from his horse and taken to Sir Philip's tent because it was the most luxuriously fitted, and Dr. Bates was in attendance on his hurts. Simultaneously the horses were being unsaddled, hobbled and staked out; tents and nets were being erected; wood cut, fires lighted; and water hauled up in buckets from the runnel at the bottom of the ravine.

Perhaps it was as well for the proper impression of my rule upon the party that that day should not end without an even more serious adventure than the encounter with the bull. Perhaps Providence wished to be kind to me, and to teach the others that there was vital need of my strict discipline. However that may be, some two hours after lunch a sailor stationed on sentry-go at the north

end of the camp came in with the news that a large force of blacks had crossed an open patch in the forest within a half-mile of his post. I forthwith got the party under arms, and had the horses firmly staked along the borders of the creek. That done, I appointed every man to a more or less protected vantage post, arranging them in a fan shape among the trees surrounding the tents. Sir Philip wished to take his part in the defence, but I refused him permission, and appointed him to assist Dr. Bates in the duty of guarding his wife, who was by now sick and quite prostrate, despite her will and courage, and also Harry King. We had a long and anxious wait. I had twice made my way to each man's station, and was beginning to think the sailor had made a mistake, when suddenly and silently a spear flashed out of a pandanus thicket on our farthest left and transfixed the top of the tent in which Lady Trevor was lying. The distance it had traversed exceeded eighty yards.

"Are you hurt, Sir Philip?" I shouted.

"No," he replied.

"Lie down then," I commanded.

"On instant," he rejoined.

A full minute passed, then another spear sped from a thicket further south and also transfixing Lady Trevor's tent.

The silence was uncanny. After a pause I broke it. "Keep well covered, men!" I shouted. "But use your eyes and fire if you see as much as a hand."

A chorus of "Aye, Ayes," answered me, then the silence resumed itself. Five minutes dragged slowly by.

Then of a sudden on the extreme right a scream rang out, followed swiftly by a rifle shot, and a second later a sailor staggered groaning down the line of trees, a spear buried in his abdomen.

"Keep your places, men!" I shouted warningly. The sailor was doomed. In ten seconds a perfect cloud of spears had flashed from the pandanus fringe, and most of them had found billets in his body. He fell in a little open patch beside one of the camp fires, a monstrous huddled-up pin-cushion. A moment later the blacks, inspired with confidence by their initial success, began chanting a sort of weird war song, and presently, cheered and inspirited by the noise, they burst from their cover, and yelling



“ They burst from their cover, yelling like devils.”

like devils rushed towards the camp in a thick wedge-shaped mass. I had no need to give an order. The men let drive a withering volley, and closed in at the run to the point of attack, reloading as they came. But the blacks never reached the tents. The second volley, stopped them midway on their course, and back they fled to cover. It was now our turn to charge. We followed them at the double, and once in the pandanus we had them at our mercy, for they could not use their spears in that thick tangle. They melted before us, howling dismally, but I thought of the night to come and resolved to give them a lesson to remember. We, therefore, pressed on over the slope of the jungle-covered ridge, firing with rifle or revolver at every form we saw, until we reached the edge of the plain beyond. There the blacks vanished for a while like snakes into the long grass. I halted the party, drew them up in line, and set every man to watch the plain with all his eyes. The result was exactly what I had anticipated. In a quarter-hour the dispersed natives reassembled on the low ground about eight hundred yards out from the rocky eminence on which we stood. Their number made them

plainly visible despite the grass. They were fully two hundred strong. We fixed our rifle sights in unison, and taking restful aims fired at the wildly gesticulating mass. Six blacks fell, and the rest once more broke and fled, but to reassemble again—the fools—within a mile. Most of our rifles were sighted to two thousand yards, we were on an eminence, and there was not a breath of wind. Four at least of us were expert marksmen, and the blacks were in a mob. Three natives dropped, and I got a fourth before their wits could grasp what must have seemed to them a miracle. It was not butchery, for our lives now and in the future were at stake, and so I did not hinder Bill Forsyth (the finest shot I have ever known) having several tries after we others had desisted. We could not measure his success, but there was reason to suppose he did some damage, for the blacks did not stop again until they had passed utterly beyond our reach.

When we returned to camp and came to reckon up our injuries, we found them serious enough. Besides the unfortunate sailor slain as I have described, a Chinese servant had been mortally wounded—he died within the hour—Dan Linehan had been speared through

the forearm, and two horses had been killed outright.

We spent the remainder of that tragic afternoon burying our own and our enemy's dead—there were fourteen of the latter, poor devils. We put a cross of cypress pine upon the sailor's grave.

There was no rest for most of us that night. I was determined to shift camp to higher ground next morning, so that the sick and wounded of our party might have the benefit of pure mountain air unladen with the miasmatic vapours of the swampy plains to assist their restoration. Axes, saws, and planes were therefore busily at work throughout the hours of dark. We cut down two tall cypress pines and roughly trimmed them into planks and boles, and fashioned these into a pair of sledge carts with all the art the bushman's craft can muster. We made springs for the carriages to soften jolts out of the hides of the horses which the blacks had killed; wheels out of solid sheets of rounded pine; axles for the wheels from spare rifle barrels, their edges ground circular with stones; and runners out of cut slabs bound with iron wire.

They were ready as soon as Chick Weed's breakfast was. Immediately it was eaten, I had Lady Trevor placed in one cart and Harry King and Dan Linehan in the other ; making them as comfortable as might be on beds of springy grass and feather cushions. Teams of our quietest cobs were then harnessed to the sleds, and striking camp we proceeded at a snail's pace towards the pass.

I despatched Bill Forsyth and two sailors on a scouting expedition in advance, and we followed in his tracks. He returned within an hour to report the pass located close at hand and a clear plain-sailing way.

The pass proved to be a huge valley gorge sloping gently upwards between two small naked ironstone ranges and trending sharp south-east. All that day we pushed on, climbing steadily, and not even pausing for lunch, because the country was dry and I wished to find if possible a stream whereby to camp. But the dark found us still vainly seeking water ; and our cattle would have fared ill that evening were it not for the heavy dew that fell and wet the grass and gave them food and drink in one.

At daybreak we resumed our march, and

always slowly mounting we approached the thirteenth parallel through country till that moment no white man's foot had ever trodden. It was poor land judged by southern standards, for the trees were stunted and scraggy and planted far apart. But the grass was so fine and it grew so plentifully that no pastoralist could have looked around without a thrill of envious desire to own it, grazed with sheep and cattle by the thousand score.

Its most prominent characteristic consisted in the giant anthills that everywhere abounded. It is no exaggeration to say that they were in millions; and they ranged in size from a few inches to twenty feet in height. All alike had been erected by the tireless industry of the omnivorous termite—the wood-eating ant. But of the termites there were several varieties, and each had a peculiar form of architecture. The most numerous were those that built the Gothic mounds. These hills were shaped in the form of a tower flanked on every side by flying buttresses, which gave support to the main column. They looked like miniature Gothic cathedrals. The Meridian ants, again, built their hills in the shape of an extended fan. They were as narrow almost as a knife

blade but very tall and broad, and they possessed the astonishing singularity of always pointing due magnetic north and south, whence their popular name throughout the Northern Territory. Another notable point of difference between the Gothic and Meridian hills was that while the former were mostly of a yellowish-red hue, the Meridian hills invariably displayed a steely blue-grey colour tone that conveyed to the eye an indefinable but distinct impression of electricity.

But it was not only by their nests that the termites had made the landscape remarkable. Ranging far afield in search of food they had eaten off the face of the earth all dead timber and every other form of decayed or decaying vegetable matter. In consequence the whole surface of that vast country-side wore the strange appearance of a carefully swept and garnished park. There was not a fallen tree to be seen in any direction, not a log, not a dead bough, branch, twig, or even leaf. The trees, poor and stunted as they were, had none but sap-filled branches, none but green and living leaves. It was the same with the grass. A blade could not show a symptom of withering, save to be instantly devoured. It

was a land of vigorous and strenuous life, where only the fittest survived or could survive. The termites held it in toll from the grinning spectres of disease and death, and they levied their exactions with watchful cruelty and absolute remorselessness. Yet one could readily forgive them for the smooth green beauty they had spread across the landscape—and in our case thankfully, since they had made progress for our sleds a work of little pain and less obstruction. We had only to steer clear of the infrequent rocks our march disclosed. Those were generally confined to the crests of the ridges ; elsewhere stones were only conspicuous from their absence. The soil was hard, but fine and deep and wonderfully even-faced.

It was not until late in the afternoon that we found water. Then, however, we struck a broad, shallow, swift-flowing stream, led to the discovery by a far seen extended belt of tall, woolly butts, cypress pines, and paper bark trees. We had attained by that time to the summit of the tableland, and were fully a thousand feet above sea level. It was with a deep sense of thankfulness I ordered the party into camp that evening, and made pre-

parations for a substantial rest. The fact is, Lady Trevor was delirious, Dan Linehan's spear-gashed arm was showing signs of mortification, and Gilbert Lang, Sir Philip and three of the sailors were all fast locked in the grip of malaria. We had to lift them from their horses when the halt was made.

CHAPTER VII

LADY TREVOR IS BEWITCHED

WE did not shift our camp for nineteen days. Lady Trevor was up and about on the seventh day, and Harry King (trussed like a fowl in bandages, and his arm set in plaster of Paris) was fit to travel on the sixth, but Dan Linehan lay fighting for his life until the ninth, and after turning the corner he needed every hour of the remaining ten to gather sufficient strength to sit a horse. The time passed by with hideous monotony for me, all save one hour of it. I spent it mostly in prospecting the neighbouring country for gold, and trying to make friends with the local blacks. My efforts, however, were in neither case successful. Not a trace of the precious metal could I discover; and the aboriginals, although more peacefully inclined than the Alligator River natives, kept me at arm's length. They were not to be won

over either with tobacco, coloured prints or beads; and although they took my presents greedily enough, they invariably sent articles of food a few hours later to the camp in exchange, such as fish, kangaroos and edible lotus roots. They had their proper pride, and would be beholden to us for nothing. However, they made no attempt to molest us, and in the circumstances that was a mercy to appreciate with blessings, for they were as thick upon the tableland as flies.

For my one interesting hour I was indebted to Lady Trevor. I had climbed a little ironstone knoll on the afternoon of the eighteenth day about a mile from the camp, and finding there a shady mossgrown ledge that commanded an extensive prospect of the country, I cast myself down and gave myself up to a rare musing fit. The strange thing was that it was about her I thought. That very morning I had seen Harry King kiss her hand, and I did not like it. I did not like it upon Sir Philip's account, and also, as I had discovered there and then, I did not like it upon my own. It was an odious discovery. It was simply damnable to find myself, unexpectedly, not indifferent to a woman I had

such excellent reason to dislike. I despised her for her thorough-going selfishness, her heartlessness, her waywardness, her overweening pride, and twenty other radical defects, and yet in spite of my contempt for the greater bulk of her inner furnishing, here was I caught like any schoolboy in some or other of the snares set by her cunning female loveliness. Which was it, I asked myself in mordant scorn? Her big brown eyes? They were only made to see, and hurt, and mock at what they saw. Her fine white skin? Oh! it was fine enough and white enough, no doubt, and soft to touch, but skin. The rounded graces of her form? Good heavens! That gin I saw yesterday was an Aphrodite compared with her. Bah! she——

She came that instant towards me round an angle of the rock. I got afoot and glared at her, an angry utterance on my tongue-tip, but she raised a pleading hand.

“They were all asleep except the sentry, and he did not see me go,” she murmured. “Please not to be angry with me, just for once! I could not stay there all alone—and you know that I have been good lately, very good. I have rigidly observed the rules,

even the little niggling ones, and Dr. Bates only said at lunch time that he did not know how he would have got on without me to help him nurse the sick—especially Mr. Linehan, your friend.” She approached and took a seat upon the ledge, and after a little hesitation I resumed my own.

“How hot it is!” she said. It was an excuse to remove her helmet. She began to fan herself. I could not help but look at her, although I managed to avoid her eyes.

“I owe you my life twice told,” she murmured, after a long silence.

I did not answer.

Then she said my name. She said it ever so softly, but I heard it, and the sound set an artery beating like a hammer in my temple.

“Jim,” she said again. “I have come to tell you something. It is this. I am not going to disobey you or to try and hurt you any more. I could not if I would, and I would not if I could. Do you know why?”

“No,” I muttered. “Will you tell me?”

But she only sighed, and half consciously we fell to staring at the same white stone, a little agate pebble that lay upon the moss between us and before our feet.



"She approached and took a seat upon the ledge."



“It came upon me suddenly,” she whispered, speaking to the air. The understanding of it, I should say—the understanding why it was I longed to stir your anger, and why it was that more intensely still I longed to strive with you—certain all the while that you could master me and would. It came—when you took me in your arms, and carried me across the mire and set me down upon the body of the bull that would have killed me but for you.”

“I think—” I stammered, startled at the hoarseness of my voice, “you should not be so confident with me.”

“I think,” she whispered, sitting movelessly, “that it is best for both of us that you should know. You cannot guess how it has altered me. Sir Philip is happier now than he has been for years—ever since our baby died. I never cared for any man before. It is wonderful. It makes me want to cover all humankind with tenderness, save only you. And oh! if you could know how deeply it has made me pity Harry King! I could offer up my life for the wrong I have done him. I pray each night and morning for light to find some method to atone.”

I called upon the ultimate resources of my strength of mind. "You did not warn me of this way of yours that morning on the yacht," I said, speaking harshly through my teeth. "It is not fair fighting, Lady Trevor—and I will admit I looked for you, with all your faults, to fight me fair."

But she did not move. She sat on like one in a trance, staring at the agate pebble. "The most wonderful part of the whole sweet miracle is this," she whispered. "It does not seem to matter if you care or not—or even if you choose to disbelieve. You are you, what you were and always will be. It is I alone who have so gloriously altered. You may never wish to welcome me upon your plane, yet I have climbed to it, and I am there because of you. You may mock at me for all time if you will, but your mockery can only touch the creature that I was, and she is dead. Oh! I do not wonder that you scorned her, Jim. I scorn her memory myself. She was callous to the core. No woman ever had a kinder husband, and she made his life a constant misery. But you shall see that I will heal his sores. It is a task that I have set myself, and I shall never let it go."

She ceased speaking, and the hour I speak of slipped by in a tangled maze of dreams.

She was the first to wake. She quietly arose, and for a last little while stood gazing at the landscape.

Then she turned to me, and at the calling of her eyes I, too, arose, and we looked at one another long and full.

"I can see that you believe," she said.

"Yes," I answered. "Yes."

"Truly?" she asked, with a queer little indrawn catch of breath.

"Truly," I repeated in my slow, dull way.

"The miracle has blessed us both," she whispered, blinded suddenly with tears.

Then she went before me down the knoll, and I followed her, and silently we walked together back to camp.

Sir Philip met us at the farthest sentry fire. One could see that he had been made anxious by her absence, although he smiled to welcome her return. But she made him rich amends. She took his arm and called him "Phil"—and rallied him for his anxiety, in a tone that was as motherly and tender as her words were humorous. She did well to call it a miracle—the understanding that had come

upon us both—to her long syne ; to me the day. Her husband responded to her challenge with a swift spontaneous glow of loving sympathy that banished in a second years of care from his kind face. And she was manifestly happy in his happiness and in her power to give it him. And I (remembering the years he had served, and the confidence he had reposed in me one night upon the yacht) was almost, and I wished to be entirely, glad.

We struck camp next morning, and reached that night without adventure the northern banks of a considerable river which must have been either the Liverpool or one of its principal tributary streams. The task of crossing it on the following day called for all our energies, for it was not only very deep and swarming with crocodiles, but the banks were high and steep, and hideously slimy. We had to construct a little raft for Lady Trevor and the baggage and the wounded men. It was noon before we got across, and we lost a good old pack-horse in the act—to the crocodiles. But we were lucky to escape so lightly, all said and done.

Next day, the country began to slope

downwards, and soon after passing the 134th meridian, we left behind the fine pure air of the high tablelands, and were once more picking our way through the grassy ocean of a vast low-lying black soil plain. That evening we reached and camped within the borders of Sir Philip Trevor's huge estate, and we held a little jollification to celebrate the achievement. We had brought a case of champagne for that very purpose. No doubt the pack-horses were glad.

Thereafter, our progress easterly was very slow, for the real work of the expedition had at length commenced. It was Dr. Bates' business to examine and analyse the chemical properties of the various soils we encountered from an agricultural point of view, and mine to make a careful prospect on our line of march for minerals. Our route, therefore, now assumed the form of a big zigzag. Keeping the thirteenth parallel as our base of operations, we tacked north and south, distances varying from ten to thirty miles a day; and as we frequently stopped for a day or two at likely-looking spots, a fortnight passed before we sighted the Goyder River. In the interval we crossed sixteen fair-sized

streams, tributaries either of the Blyth or the Goyder, and a dozen separate ranges of hills and mountain spurs. Dr. Bates had better success than I. His fortnight's interim report intimated that Sir Philip possessed a region capable of supporting as dense an agricultural population as the Yang-tse-Kiang valley; and he declared that by the substitution of paspalum, Guinea grass, and Natal red top for the rank indigenous herbage, the whole tract of the country between the Liverpool and the Goyder Rivers could be converted with a minimum of effort into a dairy-farmer's paradise. His enthusiasm, indeed, knew no bounds. He vowed that, granted a hundred acres chosen anywhere haphazard, to be put to mixed farming uses, and given a constant market for dairy produce, he could maintain all the year round two hundred milking cows, and as many swine; and that at the end of a decade he would be a wealthy man. I must admit that I could discover no excuse to disagree with him. The soil was obviously a prodigy of productivity. The whole land was watered with a network of evidently perennially flowing streams; and three splendid tidal rivers, navigable for

ocean-going steamers, trisected the distance, offering absolutely perfect facilities for the collection and transshipment of produce to the ocean and its direct conveyance by the cheapest of all forms of transit—to the markets of the older world. The mineral outlook was less satisfying. Here and there we came across big deep belts and stretches of dark chocolate volcanic soil, deposited by water action in the form of alluvium on the plains and in the valleys, but where it came from was a mystery, for the surrounding hills were entirely composed of sandstones, shales and conglomerates of the upper and lower Cretaceous Periods, all highly fossilised, with here and there more recent limestone ridges interspersed with gravel, marl and clay. But not a trace of volcanic rock could I discover. There was neither basalt nor trap, amygdaloid nor ash; while of metamorphic rocks such as gneiss, granite, diorite or the silicious schists, crystalline limestones or quartzites, there was not the slightest sign.

I was so greatly disappointed that, much to Dr. Bates' displeasure (he simply revelled in his work, and would have lingered for

months experimenting with his beloved muds, could he have had his way), I urged on our party's progress towards the end in my impatience to cross the Goyder, and try the unknown wilds beyond. But I was not to have things all my own way. The farther east we went, the more thickly inhabited with fierce and unfriendly blacks we found the country, and the more troublesome they became. It was impossible to move a step except in company, for they pressed upon us from all sides, and our rifles were night and day in requisition to keep them at a distance, and to preserve not only our stock and baggage, but our lives. It is true that they did not attack us in force. Had they done so, they could have exterminated us by mere weight of numbers. But they never left us two hours in peace, and every day or two, despite the utmost care and vigilance, some narrow escape of van or rear, and the occasional spearing of a horse, would give us fresh proof of their deadly unremitting enmity. One morning, indeed, I myself was punished (and I was usually a perambulating monument of caution) for venturing to ride fifty yards aside from the cavalcade to examine a

curiously shaped magnetic ant hill. The form my punishment took was a perfect cloud of spears and arrows. One spear transfixed and carried off my helmet, another passed between my arm and side, a third just grazed my neck. The arrows did more damage. One pierced my left deltoid, a second struck and glanced off from my breast-bone, and several others combined to send my horse across the great divide. He dropped in his tracks, and I was hardly on my feet again before the rush of a dozen gleaming ebony figures through the grass forced me to shout for aid. It was a touch and go, and I had no time to shoot. I had to use my rifle as a club against their knob-sticks to ward their desperate attentions off, and had my companions been a shade less prompt in their response to my call I must have gone under. As it was I did not come out of the fracas unhurt; for besides the arrow in my arm I received a waddy blow upon my thigh that kept me limping and my temper in a fume for weeks.

Lady Trevor was the first to reach my side. She shot a man, a great six-footer, dead before my eyes with her revolver, but when the

other natives fled, and I was safe, she burst into a storm of weeping.

Sir Philip was deeply concerned at her exhibition of nervous weakness, though no one else conceived it wonderful. It is not a pleasant thing to take a life in any circumstances, even the life of a blood-thirsting black. That was the view we others took, all of us that is to say but Harry King. He did not speak. But some evenings later, when sharing a watch with me by night—he spoke.

“Jim,” said he. “Have you noticed the change in Lady Trevor?”

“I have noticed she avoids me more than ever,” I said slowly. “Is that what you refer to?”

“No,” he answered. “It is not that, Jim. She may avoid you, but she is always watching you: and now—she is almost always with her husband.”

“She avoids you—Harry. Is that so, and is it what you mean?”

He shook his net-masked head.

“No. She is kinder to me than ever—but differently. I once used to think she might—I was a lunatic, I suppose. It seems so

now. But she has altered, and I'm not such a lunatic as not to realise that, realise it thoroughly. And Jim—it's got to do with you."

"With me," I muttered.

He nodded. "It was after that day you saved her from the bull. It dates from then. Surely, blind as you make out to be, you must have observed that she has not once since that day opposed you, even in a trifling way."

"Yes, Harry, I've noticed that. But where's the marvel? She got such a lesson as would have taught any woman with half an ounce of brains to behave herself, and she has more than half an ounce of brains, I fancy. Why, I should reckon she must carry marks of her bruises still. My wonder is every bone in her body was not broken."

I spoke in the coolest and most matter-of-fact way. But Harry once more shook his head.

"Why is she always watching you?" he asked.

"That is a detail I can't quite admit," I replied. "Even on your 'say so,' Harry. She avoids me as if I had a plague. I've not exchanged a dozen words with her since we

left Convalescent Creek, and as for watching me—well, I've pretty well forgotten the colour of her eyes."

"She is always watching you," he repeated gloomily. "She turns away when you look at her. That is why you haven't noticed it. But others have. Dan and Gilbert have both remarked it, and Bill Forsyth—you know how downright he is—he swears you have bewitched her."

I made a poor attempt at a joke. "Perhaps she is interested in my attempt to grow a beard, Harry. I am interested myself. She once told me frankly that I had a brutal jaw."

"Is that why you are letting your beard grow, Jim?"

"That, and my natural laziness. One wastes an awful lot of time and trouble with a razor, Harry."

Ten minutes passed before we spoke again; but it was still on the same subject.

"She treats Sir Philip just as if he were her son," he muttered, "and he is old enough to be her father."

"My dear old boy," said I. "There's one thing plain to me from what you say. You're hugging feelings that do no honour to your

manhood. Crush them down, Harry! Crush them down! She is wife to as white a man as walks, and if as now appears she is beginning to appreciate his whiteness (and you can see she is, for he is blooming into youth, and jolly youth, again), well, Harry, rejoice with me for both their sakes. I am willing."

"You," he muttered, "do not care. If you ever did—you have got over it."

"You poor old owl!" I said, and raising my rifle I snapped quickly at a figure silhouetted on the southern horizon. Two spears crashed into the fire before us. They were war spears, flint-headed, and painted red with ochre. But no more followed, and listening intently we heard a distant rush of flying feet. The camp was not disturbed by my discharge. The whole party had grown too inured by custom to the voice of guns to resign their slumber for one single bang. But I felt grateful to those natives for their interruption; for we did not resume the conversation speedily, and my watch was almost at an end. After that I took care—as I had the power—not to share a watch with Harry King. I liked him even better than of old, and I pitied

him besides ; but I had a secret to preserve, and I feared his simple direct questioning. As well as that I knew only too well—I felt it in my bones—that he had divined the reason of *her* change—and that he had begun to regard me with aversion, and to fail me as a friend—now, when at length she would, I think, have done or given anything to cement the breach that she had helped to make between us. Life is a game of cutting little ironies like that. The keenest cruelty of it lies in this—that one may repent and change, but the acts one sows before repentance comes go on and germinate, and ultimately bear their bitter fruits in spite of one's repentance ; nor can atonement sterilise their seed.

We had to turn back in full view of the river Goyder. The blacks were responsible. Seizing the chance of a sudden alteration of the monsoonal breeze from south to east, they fired the grass in a dozen places along the river's brink, and so rapidly did the flames sweep down upon us, that we were forced to fire the grass in our rear, and retrace our steps behind this second blaze along the hot, black track it left. The second fire, of course, nullified the first lit by the

LADY TREVOR IS BEWITCHED 189

natives, for it left no fuel for the first to feed upon beyond the region of our operations, so we were soon safe enough. But the ill thing was, the aboriginals had compelled us to retreat; and, encouraged by their success, they gathered in such immense numbers between us and the river immediately the fires died down, that rather than risk the precipitation of a conflict by returning, we went into camp in the very centre of the charred and smoking plain. I chose that spot because, although it lacked both food and water for our cattle, it offered us almost absolute immunity from a surprise attack, even in the darkness, since the fires had left the surface of the ground as bare and barren as a sandy desert save for a few smouldering pandanus trees and eucalyptus. The blacks, nevertheless, attempted to surprise us about an hour after the moon had set, in the deepest darkness just before the dawn. It was Bill Forsyth gave us the alarm. His keen bushman's sense of hearing had detected in the far distance a gentle but persistent sweeping sound. Unable to understand its meaning, he put his ear to the ground, in order to discover its exact direction, and while in this

position he perceived that which brought him to his feet, shouting like a lunatic. It was the surface of the plain heaving softly in slow motion like water undulated by a steady breeze. The blacks were creeping towards us in a solid phalanx on their bellies like an army of wriggling serpents. We were under arms in a moment and volleying at their massed ranks. Next instant they were afoot, and rushing to the charge; but while they were within point blank range of our weapons, they were too far off to use their own with effect, and our bullets mowed them down like corn before the sickle. They could not stand the death hail long. Within a few seconds they broke and fled back, howling dismally, to the shelter of the jungle-covered river banks. I'll never forget the sight that the dawn uncovered to our eyes. The plain was dotted with stark black corpses, and each corpse was providing feast meal for legions of great brown hawks, and sable plumaged carrion crows. We did not wait to breakfast there, but striking camp with all our speed made for the river in a big southward curve. It would have been madness to approach it direct, for our glasses showed

LADY TREVOR IS BEWITCHED 191

us fully a thousand armed natives in the jungle, and never a woman among them, a sure sign that they were resolutely bent on war.

But our situation did not lose its seriousness immediately, for the blacks followed us along the banks. The breeze had luckily dropped to a dead calm, so they could not drive us back with fires, but they seemed determined to prevent us from reaching the river, and they kept marching all that day almost parallel with us. If we had not chanced towards evening on a creek, our case would have been desperate indeed, for our horses were well nigh famished, and our water bags were dry. As it was we were badly enough off. The creek dipped into a densely wooded hollow, and was so closely invested with pandanus trees, and withal so shallow, that I dared not camp there. We, therefore, only waited long enough to give the horses a little food and rest, and pressed on through the twilight for another hour and a half. The moon, however, then arose, and brought along a strong monsoonal gale from the south-west. It was what I should have prayed for, had I thought and been devout enough. In two

minutes we had fired the long grass in a stretch fifteen chains wide. Almost instantly a mighty conflagration was on foot, and racing madly for the river, roaring like a hundred hurricanes in blast together. With this inexpugnable force for a vanguard, we trotted blithely in its blistering wake, and as the flames presently spread in all directions round us, save our smoking rear, we were absolutely hidden from the enemy. We were thus enabled without the least effort to outflank the blacks, and to reach in twenty minutes absolutely unopposed a point on the banks of the Goyder which they had occupied an hour previously. But we did not wait for them. It seemed better to risk the crocodiles than another fight, even with the chances in our favour, so we spurred in a body into the stream, lashing the pack-horses and spare saddle hacks before us, and a quarter-hour afterwards we were on the other side without the loss of a hoof, our only damage being a thorough wetting and the drenching of our packs.

We camped four hours later on the summit of a grassy knoll, some ten miles east of the Goyder, that rose abruptly to a height of

LADY TREVOR IS BEWITCHED 193

seventy feet from the borders of a large lotus-covered lake.

We remained there three days to recuperate from our exertions, living almost exclusively on the splendid fish (silver bream and barramundi) with which the lake teemed, and which we caught without the smallest difficulty; and lotus roots, which either boiled or baked made fair substitutes for potatoes. Feathered game abounded in the most extravagant profusion. But we had all grown tired of it, tired to death—and the mere thought of goose, duck, or fowl, cooked however temptingly by Chick Weed's choicest art, was enough to make the thinker desperately bilious. During all that time of rest we never saw a black; and far as the eye could reach, there was no sign of human life except our own on all that marvellously fertile countryside.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTURED

WHEN we resumed our march it was very shortly to enter a country of superlative loveliness and natural fertility. Keeping slightly north of the thirteenth parallel we crossed an open black soil plain, threading our way among a wonderful network of lagoons and billabongs, and then we plunged into a forest-covered region of rolling hills and dales, that I can only liken to the richest jungle lands of Ceylon or Hindostan. No more were we confronted with thinly-planted stunted eucalyptus, stringy bark, woolly butts and paper barks. The trees were almost all of great size and of extraordinary variety and luxuriance of foliage. Banyans, rubber trees, figs, poincianas, cypress pines and cedars grew in the densest conceivable profusion. The hills were strung together with a network of silver threads of

streams flowing in every direction, whose banks were closely invested with avenues of cycadas and peculiar and most beautiful tree ferns, with fronds like ostrich plumes, and the whole jungle shimmered in a haze of gorgeous colour from the flowers of creepers that spread a pall of velvety olive shot with scarlet and yellow star-like blooms, over all the landscape. We were soon furnished with proof positive that the region was volcanic, from the presence of hot mineral springs in some of the valleys and great bubbling pools of scalding mud. Of necessity our progress was slow, for we frequently had to hack paths through the undergrowth and often enough to dismount and lead our horses through the forest for miles on stretch. But we pressed on, spurred to enthusiasm by the discovery of occasional promising outcrops of tourmaline, micaceous schists and quartzite rocks, and the farther we proceeded the more alluring our prospects grew. The third day brought us in sight of a high range of diorite and granite hills, which I determined to thoroughly examine. To reach it we had to cross a valley thickly populated with blacks and watered by a fairly large

stream, flowing, strange to say, south-west. But the natives gave us no trouble at all. They melted like phantoms before our march, leaving their huts and villages deserted. They were a curious people, and I should have been glad to have inspected them more closely, for they seemed of lighter colour than any we had yet encountered, and our telescopes showed that many possessed hair of a distinct copper hue. We, were, however, too anxious to find gold to linger, and as we desired above all things not to provoke their hostility we took care not to touch, let alone impertinently examine, any of their weird little townships, although we passed several close at hand.

It cost us two days of weary effort to climb the spur. We found beyond a sloping stony tableland covered with a tremendous growth of gorse, and broken up with thick belts and patches of pine and banyan jungle and immense bare tumbled mounds of quartzite and argillaceous rocks. We camped by the first creek we met with, and immediately began to prospect for the precious metals. Our first valuable discovery was a considerable deposit of tin and wolfram within half a

mile of the camp. Pushing farther afield we found many traces of copper and selenite, and at length on the fourth day I had the honour of unearthing a small quartz reef, about a foot wide, showing free gold, in the bed of the creek some two miles below our camping ground. An assay by dollying gave us a prospect of two ounces to the ton. We instantly shifted camp to the spot, and for a spell of seven days we all went mining mad. We costeened the line of reef for a space of six hundred feet, and proved it to continue for the whole distance and farther still; while assays in some places actually returned six ounces to the ton.

We thought ourselves millionaires, and it required a great effort to abandon the locality. But time pressed, and if we were to keep our appointment with the *Psyche* it behoved us to push on forthwith towards Blue Mud Bay; however, at the urgent solicitation of the party Sir Philip assented to one last deviation from our route, north-east (the reef made in that direction), and one fine morning we thitherwards advanced.

It was a proceeding fraught with the most fateful consequences to us all. Had we gone

south-easterly, as was our original intention, this history would perhaps never have been written. The occasion for it, at all events, would certainly have been indefinitely postponed.

A rapid march of fifteen miles across the sloping plain brought us with the most startling suddenness to the end of the gorse and to the verge of a big saucer-shaped depression, through which a big river wound a little west of north.

We burst out thoughtlessly from the line of gorse to be halted dumb and spellbound by the sight before us. How shall I paint our amazement to perceive the stretching hollow cultivated like a garden and occupied with scores of people—not one of whom was black of skin and all of whom were clothed! Let me describe the place as it was then, and will live for ever in my recollections. Picture a large triangular flat about four hundred acres in extent, its base the river, its sides dipping in between two low flanking hillspurs to its apex, where the high lands met in dense thickets of yellow-flowered spangled gorse. Picture on the river banks a village composed of between thirty and forty substantial

cots and houses built of bamboos and roofed with thatch ; and at the farther side of the village a tall rocky ridge surmounted by a huge half-covered winze with clumsy poppet heads erected across a great square black shaft. Picture the land behind the line of houses laid out in mathematically precise cultivation squares, planted with rice and maize and a score of different vegetables, and irrigated with runnels of fresh water drawn from a creek that flowed into the river beside a big water wheel situated near the apex of the triangle, where the creek gushed out from the hills upon the valley flat. Picture again the fields being carefully tended and tilled by more than a dozen Chinese coolies in their national costume, wearing gaily coloured smocks, barefooted, and with great hard yellow pith hats on their heads ; and yet again picture about the winze and shaft on the ridge (evidently a mine) another twenty coolies busily engaged in drawing water by hand and windlass in buckets from the shaft. Finally picture the placid surface of the bamboo lined river dotted with numbers of Chinese sampans and canoes, and several large sea-going Malay

praus, all now swinging lazily at anchor or trailing at their moorings along the river banks.

Will any wonder that, even after we had got over the first shock of our surprise, we pinched ourselves and exclaimed aloud like fools to make sure we were not dreaming?

What we should have done, no doubt, was to have retired instantly into the scrub and have made with all speed to Blue Mud Bay and joined the *Psyche*. And then we should have steamed under forced draught to Normantown to telegraph the Commonwealth authorities that while the Australian nation had been sleepily considering the advisability of peopling and developing the Northern Territory with whites, the Chinese had quietly and stealthily stepped in and had actually founded a thriving little colony in the richest part of Arnhem's Land. That was our duty past all question, and mine particularly as a born Australian and the appointed leader of our party. It was not our business to dispute with these invaders for the possession of the country they had seized and were exploiting. It was for the Commonwealth and the British Navy to teach them



that they had transgressed the laws of nations.

But such a thought did not enter the mind of one of us till long enough afterwards, and then it was too late. Yet I dare declare there was excuse for us. The land belonged to Sir Philip. It was portion of the native country of many of us, and we were all interested in it more or less—even Chick Weed, our Chinese cook. And flesh and blood could not stand to see it stolen, and left if but for a day in undisputed possession of the thieves.

Instead of retiring, therefore, we assembled on a common impulse at the edge of the gorse, in full view of the invaders had they cared to look and see, and we held a hasty council of war.

“That is a mine they are working,” said Bill Forsyth.

“And you can bet your boots a gold mine,” cried Gilbert Lang. “And a rich one at that.”

“Shall we permit them to hold it another hour?” asked Lady Trevor in a ringing voice.

Sir Philip and I looked at one another.

Then I glanced around the excited and indignant throng.

"Me fight—me fight bully. Those fellows damn lobbers!" shrilled out Chick Weed. "And Mo Yum he fight bully too."

"I can't use a rifle yet—but I can do up some of those thieves with my revolver," said Harry King.

"Never felt better in my life," boasted Dan Linehan. And I'm simply spoiling for a fight."

The sailors waved their rifles and burst into a cheer.

Too late I commanded silence; the mischief was done. The coolies working in the plantation heard and saw us. For a moment they stared up at us like a pack of frozen images, then of a sudden they rushed off yelling loudly towards the houses.

There was no time to be wasted. I shouted an order, and with the speed of thought our pack-horses were tethered in the gorse. Next moment the whole party was mounted, and we swept down at a smart trot upon the flat. It was a shame to trample down those pretty rows of cabbages and beans and lettuces, planted and tended with such industry and

care, but our only thought at the moment was to profane the toilers whose spades had made the ground so heavy for our horses' feet. As we advanced we saw coolies swarming like flies out of the mouth of the mine shaft. They did not wait for us, but scuttled like big fat rabbits into the houses on the river bank. It took us scarcely five minutes to plough through the plantation, but when we reached the firm sward on the farther side the whole colony had taken cover. I formed up our ranks in close order, and we rode round to the front of the largest house facing the river. It possessed no windows, and the door was closed.

"Chick Weed," said I, "tell those fellows in Chinese that we must see and parley with their head man at once."

Chick Weed nodded, and poured out in a loud voice a flood of unintelligible jargon.

He was still talking when a rifle cracked behind us—and turning swiftly we beheld a perfect swarm of swart-faced Malays, armed to the teeth with krisses and guns, pouring towards us from the rear of the neighbouring houses. The odds were too great, so I promptly gave the order to retreat, and

we spurred round the house by the way we had come. But we were brought up in a second by a solid wall of pikes. We were trapped. "Back!" I shouted, and wheeling swiftly we galloped along the line between the buildings and the river towards the bush. It was only to find at the end of the lane a deep and impassable ditch. The river seemed our only hope, but the sampans lined the banks too closely and thickly to permit our horses to take the water, and there was no time to dismount and seize the boats, for the Malays were charging at the double. There was nothing left for it but to ride through them if we could. We tried, but there was only one possible issue to such a struggle. In less than a minute our horses were down, hacked horribly by the cruel krisses and riddled with bullets. Some of us came to earth right end up—nine all told, including Sir Philip, Lady Trevor, and all the Big Five. We formed a little square round Lady Trevor, whom I forced to lie flat upon the ground, and we fought as men usually fight for a woman they are fond of and their lives. We did not do so badly at the start. The Malays were fully a hundred strong, and as fierce as tigers,

but three point-blank volleys sent them quivering back, leaving a dozen silent dead, and as many more howling wounded lying in their tracks. We seized the lull to rush the nearest house, and firing at the door lock as we approached I hurled myself against the panels. The door crashed in, and next second we had cover. The house contained one large room and a dozen big fat Chinamen. But its occupants were unarmed, and they gave us no trouble. Indeed they would gladly have fled had we allowed it. But I had no such thought. Quickly erecting an open barricade in the wrecked doorway with stools and boxes, I forced the Chinese to stand before it to receive the brunt of the Malay assault. It came within a minute. The Chinese cried out pitifully to the onrushing horde, but the savage Malays paid no heed, to their prayers, and shot and piked them without mercy. This showed us what we might expect in the way of quarter. It was to be a fight to a finish. We retired into the shadows of the interior when we saw it was impossible to support our fragile barricade, and as the Malays poured in we mowed them down with bullets, until presently there was a

heap of dead piled up before the door sufficient to terrify the bloodiest-minded butcher. The Malays did draw off for a moment, the devils, but it was only to make certain of accomplishing our destruction. Next minute the back door of the hut was burst in with a ram, and with a shout the Dyaks charged again by both doors. We had thus two attacking forces to oppose. I have no very clear recollection of what followed. The hut was presently so densely charged with smoke as to exclude the light of day. The scarlet flashes of the guns stabbed without illumining the fog. The noise was simply appalling. I remember wondering vaguely at the heat of my rifle as I took it by the barrel to use it as a club after emptying the magazine, and after hurling my revolver at a surging smoke wave. Once and twice and yet again I lifted it on high and brought it down. Then it smashed in my hands, and unseen figures tried to wrest the broken barrel from me. I was very angry with them, for they kept pricking me with little darts. It was all a hideous nightmare. I made certain that I dreamed. I felt sure I would wake soon, but before waking I wanted terribly to seize and squeeze

some of those elusive oily shapes. I released the barrel, and my clutching fingers grasped things that slipped and wriggled in my hands like eels, but I would not let them go. Soon however the nightmare began to fade into a delicious sense of languor and a deep entrancing sense of peace. The smoke fog lifted, and I saw a pretty green meadow bright with flowers, tenanted with elf-like figures of children who were chasing butterflies. I was very tired, very drowsy. A big blue and yellow butterfly floated over my head. I tried to catch it, and thus I discovered I was lying in the deep mush grass on the banks of a lovely little gurgling creek. I was sorry I could not catch the butterfly, for one of the babies wanted it and cried for it. His grief made me so uncomfortable that I thought of getting up and following the pretty insect, which had just settled on a scarlet poppy at the other side of the stream. But quite suddenly the scene changed, and instead of in the charming meadow I was back again at college lounging in the fives court, and the sports master, who used to be quite a chum of mine (he had been dead a decade), sauntered up and informed me that I should have to

devote more time to training if I wished to win the hurdle race. I was too drowsy to dispute the matter with him. The sun was so exquisitely warm, and that corner of the quadrangle was surely designed for a weary boy to snatch a nap in.

CHAPTER IX

“ I OWE YOU MY LIFE ”

IN one of my dreams I heard Lady Trevor's voice speaking with acrid emphasis.

“ I know nothing of these things you ask me ; I am only a woman, a servant. How should I be taken into the council of the chief ? There is but one who can answer you. He lies yonder, and you are allowing him to bleed to death ? ”

“ That man ”—struck in the resonant notes of a man's deep bass—“ is he your chief ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Then who is the small man who had gold buttons in his coat ? ”

“ An English lord who joined the party for pleasure. His name is Sir Philip Trevor.”

“ And what is the name of yonder man, your chief ? ”

“ He is called James McLean. He is a big

Australian headman, a prince, what you call a Pangeran. If you kill him the Australian soldiers who follow us will fasten you and all your men to stakes and roast you to death with little fires. No revenge would be terrible enough to please them, for they adore their Pangeran McLean."

"They will first have to catch us, O foolish woman."

A short silence followed, then the bass voice spoke some words in a tongue unknown to me. Almost immediately I felt myself lifted up and laid upon a comfortable couch. Then hands quivered painfully about my body, my neck, my shoulders, my arms and sides, torturing me as they proceeded. I knew then that my dreaming time was over. But, despite the pain, I could neither move nor murmur. I was too weak even to open my eyes. I felt hideously hollow veined and helpless. There seemed to be no blood left in my body. All that my nerves and senses could do was to register impressions, most of them charged with a dull, half-nauseating sort of agony. After a while I became definitely conscious of a number of sore wounded places in my frame. They were being patched

up and bound, and they began to ache as the process was completed. At length it was over. A battle of voices broke out, hushed suddenly by the commanding bass. Then my head was slightly raised. My teeth were prised open, and some sweet, sticky, fiery fluid was poured down my throat. It marvellously energised me. Very soon I had strength to open my eyes and look about me. I was still in the hut where our last desperate stand was made against the tigerish Malays. But the fog of smoke had disappeared, and much time must have passed, for not only had the broken doors been repaired, but it was night and the place was illuminated with two big flaring oil flambeaux. My couch was placed against one of the blind walls of the interior. Opposite me, squatted like Turks on a square of matting on the floor, were two strange outlandish figures. One was a Chinaman, a large stout person, with a long pigtail, an immense stomach, and a round smooth oily face beaming with smiles. He was clad in a loose flowing robe of silk, and he was sucking quietly at a long bamboo pipe. The second figure was much smaller. He was a Malay, and evidently of high rank. He was arrayed in a

pink cotton jersey, fitting over his lean frame and gaunt muscles like a glove, a petticoat of green tartan, and wide white duck trousers that fell over his bony knees and ankles and almost covered his small bare feet and broad prehensile toes. He wore at his side a very large kris, the handle of which was thickly encrusted with pearls and rubies. He had small black eyes that twinkled fiercely under triangular, deeply-wrinkled lids; a hawklike nose; a mouth like a steel trap and broad bony jaws. His teeth were as black as ebony, all filed to a point, and glowing with prismatic lights. He wore a thin iron-grey moustache consisting of a couple of dozen long hairs at most and a goatee even more thin and famished looking. Beside him lay a large yellow silk umbrella, heavily fringed with long glistening floss, the handle made of ivory.

Behind this strange pair stood several Malays on guard, all armed to the teeth; and behind them again a row of coolies arranged along the wall, from door to door.

Lady Trevor, her hair unbound, falling in a shining bronze shower over her shoulders, her hands fastened behind her back and her ankles tied with cords, was standing against

one of the pillars of the hut to the left of the judgment mat. Almost at her feet lay two bodies trussed with blood-stained ropes from head to heel. I knew them alive or dead for Harry King and Gilbert Lang, although I could not see their faces. The others of our party had been removed. Where? Suddenly the deep bass tones I had heard before addressed me. It was the voice of the seated Malay.

“ Pangeran McLean,” said he. “ You are awake. You can hear me ? ”

I looked at Lady Trevor. Her eyes were trying to convey to me some meaning. Her lips formed silent words. I tried to understand, and in sheer weakness closed my lids.

“ He has fainted,” said Lady Trevor. “ He needs nourishment—not your cursed spirit. If you wish him to talk you must feed him.” The Malay gave an order, and with magical celerity my nostrils were greeted with the warm fumes of some sort of broth.

They fed it to me with a porcelain spoon. It was good stuff, but it made me drowsy. I did not wish to sleep, but I could not help it. Sleep I did.

Hours later a shriek awakened me.

Chick Weed bound neck and crop with ropes was kneeling before the pair on the mat. Two coolies stood on each side of him holding him down, and doing something which I could not see. There was a brazier filled with burning coals beside them. Chick Weed was shrieking and struggling like a maniac. There was a horrid smell of burning in the room. Lady Trevor's eyes were shut tight. Her face was ghastly. Her head had fallen to one side. I saw then that she was fastened upright to the post.

They were putting Chick Weed to the question—with hot irons. Occasionally I saw the irons glow.

Chick Weed was shouting as well as shrieking, shouting out something over and over in Chinese. Presently the executioners stood apart from him, and he fell groaning and grovelling at the Malay noble's feet. They spoke together for a little while, then Chick Weed of a sudden shrieked again. The Malay had given another order to the coolies. I closed my eyes, but a silence fell and I had to open them again. I had to see. Chick Weed was once more kneeling, but not so near the Malay noble now; with submissively bent

head. He was waiting—for what? It was for his end. A bright blade flashed and fell; and Chick Weed’s head rolled on the floor. His body leaped up gushing founts of blood, then toppled over.

I closed my eyes again and hoped to swoon, just so that I might for however a little while forget. But I did not faint, and my senses seemed to be prodigiously acute. I heard the tramp of feet and very soon a loud splash. They had thrown poor Chick Weed’s body into the river to feed the crocodiles. He had not been clever enough to tell them a story to please them. Could I? I began to reflect. What story would please them or frighten them most? And which were better, to alarm them or to pacify their fears? It was hard to tell. Lady Trevor had invented a rank for me, and an avenging army following in the footsteps of our party. Well, what had that effected? Had it not procured the binding of my wounds and other attentions? Obviously it seemed a good policy to endorse her narrative. But did it perhaps only seem so? They had attended to my wounds and restored me because they were in doubt. They wished to discover the truth. They

wished to know for certain if our party was the vanguard of a larger force. Would it be wise to destroy that doubt of theirs? Would it not be better to prolong its existence in their minds? They might keep us alive in that case until at all events they settled the question for themselves. Chick Weed's fate seemed to demonstrate that they would kill us as soon as they were sure, one way or the other. They were not afraid of being punished, I considered, for their misdeeds. They were only afraid of being surprised. How patient they were. I glanced at them under my lashes. The two chiefs sat like statues. The Chinaman was smoking imperturbably. The Malay was chewing betel nut. Their attendants squatted about them in a semicircle half asleep. They were waiting like philosophers or stoics for sleep to refresh me and give me strength to reply to their questions. Chick Weed's blood was congealing on the ground. A little cloud of steam hung over it. Lady Trevor was breathing heavily, but she was not asleep. She was gazing at me. I wondered was Sir Philip dead or living; I wondered what had become of Dan Linehan, Bill Forsyth, Dr. Bates and

the others. All dead, I supposed. I accustomed myself to the thought of death. I, too, would undoubtedly be killed ere long. And Lady Trevor! What would they do with her? Would the two head men draw lots for her, and would she be forced into the winner's harem? It seemed probable. She was a woman, fair, young, and very lovely, despite the anguished lines in her drawn face. A curious ambition crept into my mind. I determined that I would do my best and employ all my wits to live as long as possible, and to get an opportunity before I died to kill the woman that I loved.

Unconsciously I opened my eyes wide as I registered my last resolve.

Instantly the Malay spoke, and a moment later a coolie glided to my side with a second steaming bowl of soup. I regretted my indiscretion, but I ate the broth greedily, every drop of it.

As my head fell back our Malay captor spoke.

“ Pangeran,” said he. “ You are by Allah's mercy strong enough now to talk with me. Nay, do not sleep again. See! the dawn is on us, and my purpose cannot longer wait.”

A coolie gently raised my head again and propped my shoulders up with cushions.

"What is it?" I murmured feebly.

"You are the head man of the band of marauders that attacked us. Is it not so?"

I did not reply.

The Malay grew a little irritated. "Answer!" he commanded. "It is the Orang Laut, Moolah Hadi Kassim, bids you speak."

I looked him in the eye. "A dog of a Moolah orders an Australian prince to speak," I slowly whispered. "Has the world come to an end?"

"Speak or die!" cried the Malay, enraged at the insult and clapping his hand on the hilt of his kris. But the big Chinaman plucked him by the arm as he was about to rise, and a colloquy ensued between them in Chinese. Presently Kassim sat down again.

"Pangeran," he said to me in smoother tones, "it were best that we conversed with dignity as befits men of our rank and breeding, You are an Australian prince, it would appear—but I too am of kingly blood. My father is a Sulu Rajah. The fortune of war has given you into my hands. I propose to treat you with distinction, and if all goes well arrange

with you for fitting terms of ransom. But that cannot be here and now. If yonder woman's tale be true, we shall very soon be forced to take to our praus and put out to sea. She has informed us that an army follows hard upon your steps, and that a steam warship waits to intercept us at the river's mouth. It is for you to tell us if the tale is true.”

“ True ? ” I cried indignantly. “ Did ever truth issue from woman's mouth ? Moolah Hadi Kassim, think shame on yourself for the folly of your question. How should I have known that you had descended on this part of the country ? Is it not remote from settlement ? How then could I have learned that you had come here, and are working a mine, and stealing from me great stores of gold, which you have been taking from the soil that rightfully belongs to me ? Do you suppose that any of your men are traitors ? And if they were, which of them has had an opportunity to carry me the news ? You know your own dispositions best. Do your praus carry the gold to Palmerston or to Sarawak, perchance to Sulu ? Have you any traitors there ? And then think of the black natives

of this country. Are they not fierce but foolish savages? What do they know of mining? Bah! answer for yourself the question you have asked of me!"

The Malay looked very thoughtful. He eyed me in silence, his head upon his hand. The Chinaman however with an oily smile cut in, speaking fairly good pidgin English.

"How you man know we workee gold mines?" he asked softly.

"I guessed it." I replied.

He nodded. "That velly good guess," he commented, beaming. "And you man, plince, hey? You got lot of plinces in Austlalia, hey? You man, soldier I think him, or sailor, plaps, hey? Two mans dead last day we give to the clocodiles—him both dlessed sailor, Blitish sailors. Where him warship they belong? You savvy?"

"I only wish there was a British warship within a thousand miles of us," I said, heaving a sigh that set all my sores aching afresh.

"You velly good pletender, Missy Plince!" said the Chinaman, still smiling prettily. "But you wait a bit and then we see. If (suddenly his smile vanished and he showed me a set of yellow wolf fangs in a bestial snarling

grin)—if that army your wifey missy talk of come along, we leave your nose and your ears for your fiends, and we take you in the prau, and if we see the warship by the liver when we come to the sea we cut you up in velly small pieces and we give them to your missy wife to eat, and we make her eat them before you quite dead. You find us velly much bad man telly lie to, Missy Plince ! ”

He stood up as he finished, and Hadi Kassim followed his example. The Malay salaamed to me profoundly, raising his hands above his head and bowing three times three. The Chinaman bowed too, his face wreathed in smiles. Then the pair departed, followed by their suite, and left us quite alone. It is true that they shut the doors upon us, but they fixed no guard within the hut at least, and they left the flambeaux burning. I guessed at the reason of this curious behaviour, and spoke to Lady Trevor just as she was about to speak to me.

“ They will be listening to what we have to say,” I muttered. “ Be careful.”

“ How dreadfully ill you look ! ” she said, staring at me meaningly. “ They would have let you die if I had not told them—

your rank. You will forgive, me will you not? ”

“ Aye—but the others. Tell me of them. Is Harry King alive—and Gilbert Lang? They are so still. I cannot see them breathe.”

“ They are both dead, I think. I dare not look at their faces. They are cut so frightfully.”

“ Where is Sir Philip? ”

“ They took him away long ago.” Her voice quivered pitifully. “ He was luckier than we shall be, I think. He was shot through the heart. Jim, do you think they will torture us? ”

“ The Chinaman would like to,” I replied, raising my voice as I spoke. “ But the Moolah Kassim is a noble and a gentleman. He will treat us according to our princely blood and his nobility.”

“ He would be well advised to do so in his own best interest,” she rejoined, with emphasis.

“ Did you see anything of Dan Linehan or Bill Forsyth? ” I asked a little later.

Lady Trevor sighed. “ There were so many bodies, Jim. They cast them all into the river.”

“ None escaped ? ”

“ Yes, a sailor. Masters it was, I think. It was when we charged them on horseback. He broke through the cordon and got clean away. Moolah Kassim has sent a band of men in pursuit and to scour the country along our tracks. He has also sent two small praus down the river to watch for a man-of-war. The scouting party and praus are both expected to return within a couple of days at most. Then, I suppose, we shall know our fate.”

“ Were you hurt—at all—Molly ? ”

It was the first time I had named her so. She caught her breath, and a little colour came into her wan cheeks.

“ Bruised, but not hurt,” she murmured. “ Poor Phil made me lie down beside the wall. I was his latest thought. When he fell (she began to cry) he put his poor dying body before me as a shield. Oh ! Jim, when I remember how I used to treat him I feel like going mad.”

“ You made him very happy of late, Molly. He was a different man. Try and remember only that. God knows you have enough else to make you miserable.”

“ Jim, you are growing paler. Are you feeling very bad? ”

“ Tired, Molly. I feel that I could sleep for weeks.”

“ Ah! then sleep, dear, sleep! ” she whispered. “ And may your sleep renew your strength.”

“ I owe you my life, Molly. I was bleeding to death, I think.”

“ You were covered with little wounds dear. But I do not think that any of them are very deep. You must have fought terribly. They drew you from under a great heap of dead. But sleep, Jim, sleep! ”

CHAPTER X

A SAVAGE GENTLEMAN

ONCE again the sound of voices awakened me. It was broad day—almost high noon, I fancy. Hadi Kassim and two coolies were in the room. The Malay was seated on a mat. The coolies at his direction were rifling the bodies of Harry King and Gilbert Lang. Lady Trevor had vanished while I slept.

Presently the coolies turned over Harry King's half-unclothed body so that his face was towards me. It was hideously disfigured but with a thrill I saw that he still lived. His eyelids were fluttering.

“Harry—Harry King!” I cried.

His eyes opened and he looked dazedly around.

“Pangeran Kassim,” I said hoarsely, “if you wish to earn my eternal gratitude—here

is your opportunity. That man is my friend, and he lives."

The Malay stood up, and stepping forward bent over Harry. Presently he arose again and salaamed to me.

"Pangeran McLean," he said, "nothing can save your friend. He lives, but it is as the flicker of a rushlight before it dies for ever."

I nodded. I could not speak. I felt that what he said was true.

Kassim signed to the coolies, and they took up the corpse of Gilbert Lang and bore it away.

I gazed at Harry, dumb with misery. He was dying before my eyes. The movements which had disturbed him from his former coma had hastened the inevitable end. A little new trickle of blood issued from the corner of his mouth. It did not take long, but at the last moment he was conscious. He saw and knew me and tried to speak.

I thought he said "Molly." I told him she was safe, and he smiled and died.

A little later the Malay spoke to me. "Since this man was your friend, Pangeran," he said in his low deep vibrant bass, "he

shall have burial, as your custom is, within the ground."

I thanked him with a look. Rascally pirate though he was the Malay was evidently a gentleman, and he subscribed to the principle, "noblesse oblige."

When the coolies returned he gave them lengthy directions which caused them manifest surprise. In obedience thereto they rolled poor Harry's clay in matting and bore it with extraordinary marks of respect and reverence from the hut and not by the river door. I felt passionately grateful to the Moolah. "You'll not repent this act of kindness, Hadi Kassim, if I live," I muttered.

He said nothing, but began to roll a plug of betel tobacco and lime from a bamboo case hanging at his waist. When it was prepared he enveloped it in a pepper leaf and very gravely commenced chewing.

"You have taken—the woman away," I said after a long silence.

He bowed his head. "The woman—your wife—Pangeran, is being cared for in my harem. My coadjutor, Chin-Ah-Quoy, although a Mandarin of three feathers, is a

Chinaman. (He spat out in lordly contempt of the entire Chinese race.) He is of peasant blood. He has no noble feelings. He is mean and crafty. He is neither brave, nor courteous, nor loyal. He has no respect for misfortune. He is fit only, like all Chinamen, for dirty occupations. His mission here is but to supervise the working of the mines. When the fight proceeded he concealed himself like a cowardly rat in his hole. But when it was over and my brave Dyaks had won the victory he came forth and presumed to lay down the law to me—to me!" He gritted his black teeth, and his twinkling little eyes flashed forth sparks of light. "But," he proceeded presently in cooler tones, "I took it on my head to teach him that an Orang Laut and a Pangeran may not be dictated to by a craven Chinese serf, although a Mandarin and richer than a Sultan. He wished to take into his house the lady, your wife, and to make of her a slave. But when he persisted (there was ever bad blood between us) I put him aside—and forthwith I gave the white lady in charge of my head wife, who will hold her safe."

"It is well, Pangeran," I answered gravely.

"It is what I expected at your hands. Last evening I told the lady, my wife, to have no fear. I told her that you were a noble and a prince, and that you would treat us both according to our princely blood and your own nobility."

"I heard," he replied, with the simpleness of a child. "We listened without the walls, hoping that you would speak of things we wished to hear. But you are as cunning as you are brave. You spoke of them not at all."

"I guessed that you would listen, Hadi Kassim."

He nodded. "Yes, Pangeran. I have said that you are cunning. But you are not wise."

"Indeed."

"If you were wise you would not have attacked us with your little force. You would have waited."

"Pangeran," said I, "you and your Dyaks were unseen to us. We saw only Chinamen, and my gorge rose at the sight."

"You thought us absent at Maka, perhaps," he remarked, with another nod. "But we were merely taking our siesta in the shade."

"Where is Maka?" I enquired.

He shrugged his shoulders as a Frenchman might have done. "Did you think this our only settlement?" he asked contemptuously. "Learn then at Maka, ten miles up the river, four hundred coolies work a mine as rich as this. Oh! Tuan, if your army does not fear to face us leaderless there will be a fight here presently to hand down to our sons' sons and their sons' sons in song. All night long my praus have been busy fetching and carrying from place to place; all night have the coolies been digging ditches and entrenchments. Before the sun sets to-day I shall have three hundred Dyaks under arms to give battle to your soldiers and to ambush them along the path you traversed."

"You take a lot of needless trouble, Pangeran," I said coolly. "Does a prince lie? I have told you that I have neither army nor warships. Our party merely came out to explore the country, and we chanced upon this settlement by accident. Would that we had not! Soldiers I have in thousands, but they are far from here."

"The lady your wife said——"

"She saw me bleeding to death before her eyes," I interrupted. "She acted as a good

wife should. She lied to save my ebbing life."

Very thoughtfully he stroked his thin beard. "If what you say is true—I could kill you without fear of any consequence," he murmured gravely.

"Assuredly, Pangeran," I rejoined. "My people would never know—or not for years. They would believe I had fallen victim to the native blacks, unless indeed the sailor who escaped——"

"He is dead," said Hadi Kassim quietly. "My people followed him on some of your horses and slew him."

"Then in that case I and the lady, my wife, are entirely at your mercy. Not a soul among all my people dreams that you have settled on this river. Nay, further—they only vaguely know this river actually exists."

"That is what I thought—till yesterday," he said. "We have been here three years now, and have never been disturbed."

How did you come here, Pangeran—and how have you managed to avoid detection all that time?"

"Allah helped us," he answered solemnly:

“ Many years ago a Lanun pirate told my father that gold was to be dug out in shiploads from this river’s banks, and that the white men did not know—indeed that they despised the country and left it wholly to the birds and crocodiles and blacks. We thought that he had a double tongue, but he showed us lumps of stone crusted with the precious metal, and at length I came to see. No one stopped us. I sailed hereaway from Sulu and never saw a ship although a typhoon threw us on a mudbank in the bay. But we soon got off again and sailed up the river, and a coolie we had with us found the mine. On my return, the Rajah, my father, was easily prevailed on to consent to an expedition to seize and work the mine ; but he was poor and our Dyaks will not dig. We needed money and coolies, and that is why we sent an embassy to Canton. That is how we got the coolies and with them Chin-Ah-Quoy, whom the Government sent out with us to see that we did not cheat them out of their share. We sailed across the sea in five great praus, each carrying fifty coolies and as many Dyaks. Twice we saw the smoke of ships, but never once a mast. And it has always been

the same. We have made many journeys to and fro since then—carrying gold to Sulu and bringing back more men. But your ships have not troubled us. We have seen them sometimes, but our praus fly like birds, and we have ever given them a wide berth or slipped out of sight among the islands till they passed.”

“ And have you taken much gold, Pangeran, to Sulu ? ”

“ More than you could place on the floor of this hut to the height of a man’s knees,” he replied. “ But the Chinese, may Allah curse them ! have always had the lion’s share. However, my father has become, because of it, the richest potentate from Perak to Borneo, and I am my father’s heir. Not much longer do I propose to stay here buried in the wilderness. My father is growing old and feeble, and he wishes for my help and countenance behind his chair. The next prau that arrives may bring me this command.”

“ And if it does—Pangeran ? ”

“ I shall willingly obey it, Tuan.”

“ Does that mean you will break up this settlement ? ”

“ I have neither the power nor the will,” he answered grimly. “ I am lord while here, for the protection of the coolies is in my hands. But the country belongs to the Kungsi. My father gave it to them in exchange for a Royal pension, retaining only a tithe of the profits from the mines.”

“ You believe then that the Chinese will endeavour to hold it, even after you go.”

“ I am sure of it, oh ! Tuan. And why not ? The white men have let it lie idle for a century, rich as it is. They do not want it. The Kungsi know this, and are prepared during the next ten years to send out men in thousands. There are more than eight hundred here already. They will do so very quietly, using our praus as of old. It is their intention to occupy if possible the whole northern coast, almost to the limits of your settlement, before the white men know. Then when you do know what can you do ? Why, there are four Chinese to every white man in your settlement at Palmerston as it is now. If you wish to fight you will have to bring your soldiers from the south—as I fancied, oh ! Pangeran, you had already done without my knowing till just now you passed your

princely word that you had not. And do you think even that would avail to turn the Chinese out, once they are established as they will be in the country? Tuan, that would be an idle thought; for not only China but Japan would rise up to prevent you."

"Japan!" I gasped.

"Half the members of the Kungsi are Japanese nobles," he declared. "And the Mikado himself, it is said, is of the order. But this I know, Japan and China are secretly agreed, and to kill your doubts let me tell you that my father's pension, in exchange for which he sold his rights in this country to the Kungsi, is paid to him by Japan."

"But are there any Japanese in the country, Pangeran? I have seen only Dyaks and coolies."

"There are two score Japanese at Maka, all fighting men, old soldiers, and Samurai and many more will come to take the place of my Dyaks when I go. The Japanese are not slaves and serfs like the Chinese. They are fighters like the Dyaks. As I did they will guard the place like watch dogs, while the coolies dig the mines and till the fields. They will be the over-lords."

“ You have given me much food for thought, Hadi Kassim,” I observed after a long pause. “ I would crave now some food for my body if it please you. I can hardly believe after what you have informed me that you will let me go free, however great a ransom I might offer you. But I have no fear that you will kill or starve to death a helpless prisoner taken in fair fight. It is for you to tell me if I am wrong.”

He chewed his betel nut in silence for a while, then spoke, looking me in the eye.

“ You are a brave man, Tuan,” he said quietly. “ Chin-Ah-Quoy sneers at your claim to princely rank, but on my head I think that he is wrong. The good blood always tells. A little back you proved in straight clear meaning words that I had nought to fear in killing you. No base-born scum, whether Dyak, Englishman, or coolie, would have dared so far to trust his enemy. It is true that at the English school I went to in Bombay they did not teach us anything of princes in Australia. They said indeed that in your country all men are equal in the law. But I never could believe that tale. It

sounded falsely in my ears. There are men and men, and some little few are born to rule and the many to obey. Come tell me, Pangeran McLean, were you in my place and I in yours, what would you do with me? ”

I answered on the instant. “I would hold you prisoner, Hadi Kassim, and when I went back to Sulu I would take you with me—and the woman.”

“And then, Pangeran? ”

“And then, Pangeran, I would release you on a promise of reward from the King of England to be paid when the Chinese dogs were driven out of North Australia. For look you, Hadi Kassim, we English are nearer kin to you than these yellow servile cowards. We are sea-men and fighters like yourselves, not hewers of wood and drawers of water and delvers in the slimy earth. Our instincts march in company, and so should we. It is not fit for a noble race like yours to be a servant to the Kungsi—and that is what the pension you receive will ultimately make you—the servant of a race of slaves.”

“By Allah! No,” he cried indignantly. “Never, Pangeran! Never that, by Allah! We take their money—but——”

“But when they cease to need your services, do you think that they will pay you still?” I interrupted hotly. “Hadi Kassim, they are using you for their own ends, the cunning dogs. You are the cover of their treacherous designs upon the English. Have you thought what would happen on a premature discovery of their plans by England. They would throw the whole brunt of the blame on you. They would say to the English, ‘We know nothing of this invasion of Australia. True it is that some of our people took part in it, but they are the paid servants of Hadi Kassim.’ And what do you dream, Pangeran, would happen to you? Would the English sit down under the insult, or would they send their fleets to punish you and pull your father from his throne? You know something of the English character. You have been to school in India. You speak the language perfectly; and you have doubtless read many of their books of history. You may judge, then, what they would do.”

He nodded once or twice, then slowly got afoot. “We shall speak on this matter again,” he said. “Meanwhile, do you eat and rest and

grow fat. It is in my mind to take you to Sulu with me, Pangeran. Chin-Ah-Quoy will be angry when he knows, and he may try in some cunning way to poison you or work you ill. For that reason my own servants shall wait on you. I shall send them to you presently with food."

He salaamed to me profoundly and withdrew. I began to like Hadi Kassim, despite his ferocious acts of cruelty that I had witnessed. He was a savage, of course; but a savage gentleman, and there were elements of nobility in him I found curiously attractive.

About ten minutes after he had departed a half-naked Dyak entered, carrying an earthenware vase of water and a large wooden platter containing a fresh baked fish and some rice cakes. He set these on a wooden box before me, and replying to my thanks with a smiling salaam hurried off again, doubtless to his own dinner.

I felt hungry and began to eat. I found myself so strong that I could use my hands without much effort, although all movements were still painful. I had eaten two rice cakes and almost half the fish when of a

sudden a mysterious whispering voice addressed me.

“Say, Jim, old man,” it said. “Think you could spare me some of that water? I’m as dry as a lime kiln.”

CHAPTER XI

HOPE

THE voice gave me a most painful shock. I could have sworn to the tones of Bill Forsyth anywhere, but of course he was dead. Evidently my imagination had played me a trick. It was a trick that brought beads of perspiration to my forehead and set my bandaged limbs and body trembling. And it took away the last vestige of my appetite. I lay back on my cushions breathing hard, and stared up at the ceiling. For the first time then I noticed that ceiling carefully. It was composed of bamboo poles crossed and interlaced rather cleverly and covered with hessian bags. There was a sort of ladder leading to a man-hole at one corner of the room. Probably it had been used as a storehouse or a sleeping chamber by the coolies before we attacked the settlement. I was thinking this, and trying to compose my jangling nerves, when the voice of a sudden spoke again.

"I ain't a ghost, Jim. It's me in the body, Bill Forsyth, sure enough, and as thirsty as a Sahara camel into the bargain."

"Bill!" I gasped. "Oh! Bill. Where are you, lad?"

"Up in the ceiling," he replied. "I'm looking at you through a hole in the bagging. I've been here ever since the fight."

"How came you there?" I demanded weakly.

"Easy enough, Jim. When I saw it was all U.P. with the gang I took advantage of the smoke to slip up here through the man-hole. No one saw me, and here have I been ever since."

"Are you hurt, Bill?"

"A scratch or two, Jim, but nothing serious. But I'm hellish thirsty. Can you see any one? Is the coast clear?"

"There seems nobody about, Bill."

"I guess it's safe for me to come down then. I've looked out of the roof on all sides. The Malays are eating their chow in the verandah of their barracks, and the coolies are mostly over by the mine chowing too. Don't faint, Jim, when you see me."

I heard a rat-like scramble in the bamboo



"I heard a rat-like scramble in the bamboo rafters,
then I saw a pair of well-known legs."



rafters, then I saw a pair of well known legs, and a second later Bill Forsyth thudded on the beaten mud floor of the hut. He flashed a searching look around, then hurried up to my box, and seizing the water vase drained it in a series of deep gurgling swallows. Setting it down again he slid back to the ladder without a word, and hurried up to his former place of hiding.

“Ha!” he muttered presently, “that’s better. I’m feeling salubrious just now—Jim.”

“Aren’t you hungry, Bill?” I questioned.

“Devil a bit,” he answered. “There’s cases on cases of Lichee and pea-nuts here and preserved ginger, and stinking dried fish hard as boards. And I’m going through them steady. Then there’s rice in plenty to fill up the cracks. Only thing I want is water, and I won’t want any more of that for a goodish bit, I guess.”

“Are you armed, Bill?”

“Bet your life, sonny. Lost my rifle, I’m sorry to say, but I’ve got two revolvers and whips of ammunition. Say, Jim, I’ve had that black-toothed Malay cuss and that big-

bellied Chow covered all the time they were chivvying you and Lady Trevor. If there'd been occasion they'd have gone under afore they knew what struck 'em. Lucky for them they acted decent. The Malay don't seem too bad a sort, I'm willing to admit, but the Chow's a horror. When you was asleep this morning, Jim, they had a word fight out in the open, and the Malay spat in the Chow's face. It was about Lady Trevor, I guess—from what he told you afterwards. The Chow took the insult lying down. But he'll have his revenge if he can. He's as cunning as a bag full of monkeys."

"Bill," said I, "'the Big Five' is in a bad way."

"Aye, Jim. There's only you and me left out of the bunch, and you're looking damned sickly. How long before you reckon to be on your feet?"

"I'm afraid it will be a week at least, old man."

"That's bad," he muttered. "But it only makes me surer what I oughter do."

"Have you any plan, Bill?"

"Yes, Jim. I've been thinking I'd better light out to-night if possible and make tracks

for Blue Mud Bay and pick up the yacht. She's got a machine gun and a fair sized crew. What with being a steamer too she ought to be more than a match for this dose of coloured rubbish, numerous as they are. It's not to be thought of to let 'em keep Lady Trevor a minute longer'n we can help. My only trouble is they may kill her and you out of revenge if they saw the game was up. Still we might make terms with them after knocking 'em about a bit. What do you think of it, Jim? "

" I like the notion, Bill. It sounds feasible, all except your getting away. How do you propose to do that? "

" Oh! that's dead easy. They keep no watch on the river banks, only in the praus. And in the darkness they'd never spot a swimmer. Even if they did they'd only take me for a fish or a water rat."

" But the crocodiles, Bill? Have you thought of them? "

" For hours on end, Jim. Hours on end. They're no friends of mine, I don't mind telling you. But thinking don't cut butter, and needs must when the devil drives. It's about even money I get across in spite of

them. You see, Jim, plenty as they are, they're cowardly brutes, and they give a wide berth to houses except when there are corpses floating round. There are none just now."

"Bill—Bill!" I sighed.

"Not a one," he pursued. "And yesterday should have gorged them. You had the best of it being senseless, Jim. I'll think of that ugly sight for ever. They fought like water dogs for the dead meat of our pals. I had to grip myself hard to keep from running amok one time and sailing in among these cursed pirates. But for Lady Trevor I'd 'a' done it too."

"Thank God, you didn't," I muttered. "There's a chance for her now, with you alive."

"And you too, Jim."

"It does'nt matter about me, Bill."

"Yes, it does, Jim—to her. You're her man, Jim. She saved your life, lad, when I was only thinking of her—and p'r'aps too of myself. She likes you well, Jim. There was Harry King to choose between. He seemed livelier than you, just then. But she chose you. You are her man, Jim!"

“It ought have been Harry,” I groaned.
“I wish it were.”

“I thought it would have been Harry,” Bill whispered back. “I truly thought she cared for him. But when the test came it was you. God! but she is a woman! You’ve a right to be proud, Jim, of yourself and her. I’d give a kingdom if I had your boots this minute.”

“I’m thinking of Sir Philip, Bill,” I whispered pleadingly.”

“That makes me think of the crocs. again,” he retorted with frank brutality. “They rushed him like a pack of dingoes. Well, poor devil, he wasn’t alive to care. He was the first to go under in the fight. I shot his shooter through. Got him through the head-piece. You went Berserk, Jim. You lost your wits. All you seemed to want to do was kill. You fought on long after the others were down, and I was in hiding, although the headman, that Malay cove, offered you quarter twice. You did nothing but laugh and curse and lay about you with a broken rifle, and when you went down at last it was with two on top of you—and when they pulled ’em off one was a goner. You’d strangled him

with your bare hands. I thought it was a death-grip. You've Irish blood in you, for sure, Jim."

"Hush!" I whispered. "I hear steps."

It was the Dyak servant. He entered presently and squatted in the shadow of the doorway, chewing betel nut.

He was evidently intended both to guard and serve me. I found that he understood English fairly well, but he would not talk. He sat there like an image all the afternoon. I slept a little towards evening and awoke considerably refreshed to find a meal of fish-broth and tea set before me. I saved more than half the tea for Bill Forsyth, but the wretched Dyak would not go. I waited hours, and at length overcome with weak drowsiness I slept again. I was aroused in the small hours by a hand heavily pressed across my mouth. Presently Bill's voice whispered softly in my ear. "The guard's asleep, Jim; I'm going. I've left a revolver and some cartridges in the loft behind the big case nearest the manhole against the wall. You can get them if you have a chance. It was better to leave 'em there, as they'll be sure to search you when you grow well. Good-bye, old man—Say

any prayer you know that the crocs. don't get me."

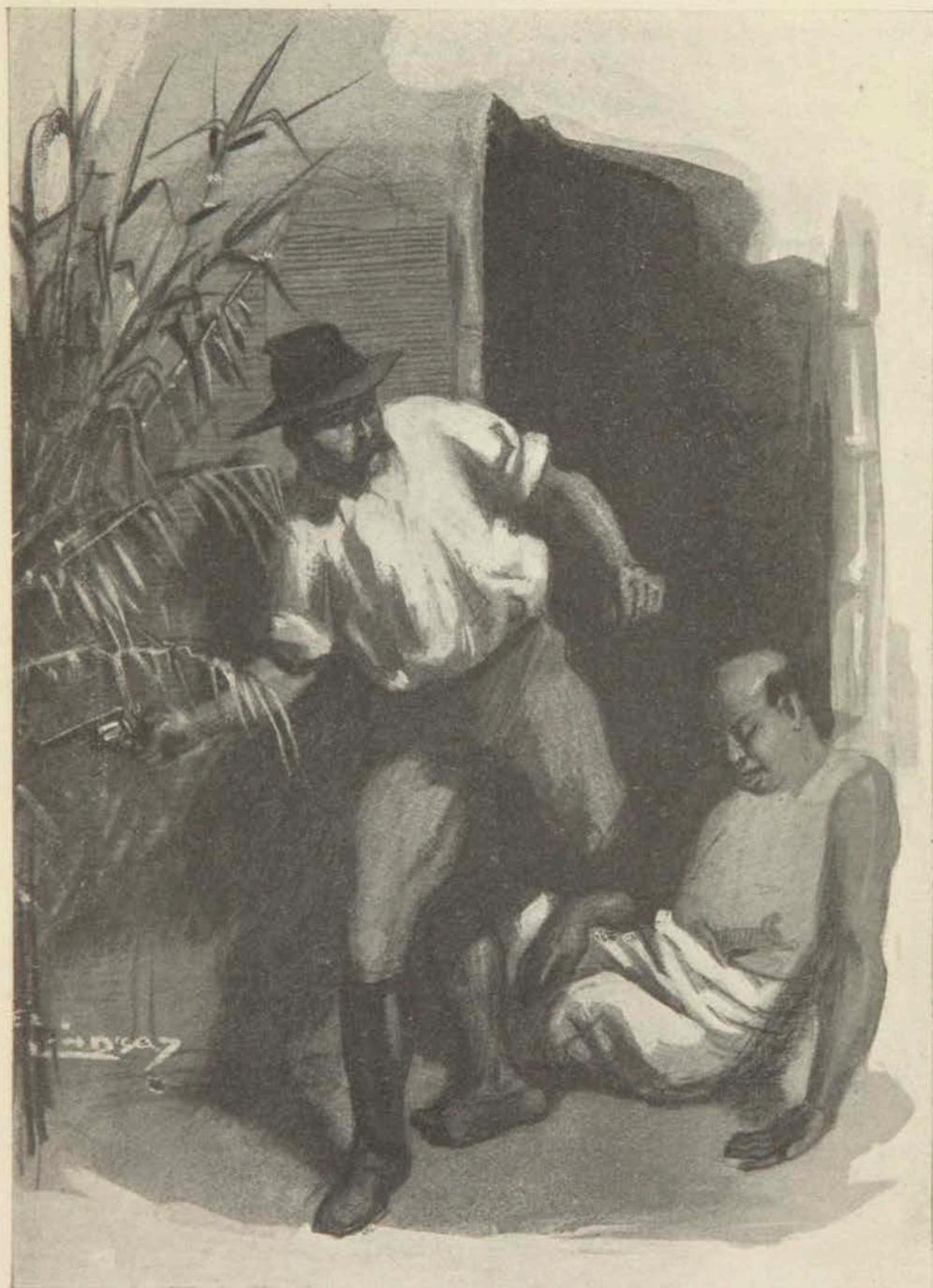
The hand was lifted—and a dark shadow crossed the room. Near the doorway it sank down and disappeared. I heard nothing but the heavy breathing of the Dyak guard whom I could not see. I strained my ears to catch the sound of a splash for long, long anguished minutes afterwards. But no sound reached me save the Dyak's breathing, and at last utterly outworn I fell into a state of coma.

The sun was rising when I came to my senses, and there was the Dyak with my breakfast, a dish of rice and chupatti and a bowl of lime fruit brew. His imperturbable demeanour reassured me. Bill Forsyth had at least escaped the notice of the Malays and coolies. But had he eluded the more vigilant senses of the crocodiles? Time alone could tell. Resolutely I put the black doubt aside and devoted all my energies to getting well.

For five days thereafter nothing happened worth recording. The Malay head man and Chin-Ah-Quoy were both absent all that time at Maka, and I neither saw nor heard from Lady Trevor. In the interval I advanced

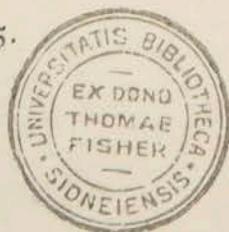
slowly in vigour—although all too slowly for my liking. The curse was that most of my wounds were clean cuts from the razor blades of krisses, and so smooth were their edges that they only knitted tardily. The least exertion made some one or other of them bleed afresh, therefore I was compelled to lie like a veritable log. Still I made good progress and my health was perfect. On the morning of the seventh day of my imprisonment, Hadi Kassim and Chin-Ah-Quoy, attended by their respective suites, entered the hut together. After salaaming they sat down on two separate squares of matting, which attendants spread before them, and Oriental-wise gave themselves up to a spell of silent meditation. Hadi Kassim rolled a plug of betel lime and tobacco and began to chew it. Chin-Ah-Quoy sucked at a bamboo pipe, and inclined his fat neck to the wind a coolie spread about him with a huge ostrich feather fan.

A full ten minutes passed before either of them mouthed a syllable. I was expiring with anxious curiosity the while, for I knew I was about to hear my fate. But I judged it best to let them open fire.



" Bill Forsyth had . . . escaped."

255.



Hadi Kassim was the one to commence.

“Pangeran McLean,” he said, “the prau that was expected arrived last night from Sulu. It has brought my father’s command which I have been long attending to his side ; also a Japanese Pangeran to take my place with two score and ten Japanese soldiers, veterans of the Russian war.”

“Accept my felicitations, Pangeran,” I answered gravely. “Allah desires no longer to waste your talents in the wilderness. You are about to return to the civilization where your birthright is to shine, and shed your light on lesser men.”

“May your shadow grow for ever,” he rejoined, evidently pleased at my compliment. “It is my will to take you with me to my father’s court—also the lady your wife. But Chin-Ah-Quoy demands that his voice shall be heard. He has a speech to put before you.”

I looked at the Chinaman. His fat face was as usual wreathed in oily smiles.

“Me likee be velly good fiend to you, Pangelan,” he murmured. “When you leach Sulu—you be plisoner, poor plisoner. No you can escape. No you can ever be lansomed. That velly much no good. Velly

much no can do. Kungsi no hear of it. You be lansomed Blitish warship come here and to Maka, and Blitish soldier dlive good man Chinee, Japanee, Malay all out. Kungsi no likee that. Kungsi take vellee muchee good care you no escape, you no be lansomed."

"You mean that I shall be a prisoner for ever?"

"No can help." He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "You askee Moolah Kassim?"

I met the Moolah's eyes. Very slowly he nodded once or twice. "The Kungsi is very powerful in Sulu," he replied. "And my father is a member of the Kungsi. You will be a prisoner, Pangeran. What the Chinaman says is a true word. He can speak the truth at times—though when he does it sounds so oddly in my ears that I am loath to take it."

Chin-Ah-Quoy's fat bulk shook with silent mirth. "Moolah Kassim velly funny man," he murmured.

"Speak on," I said.

He ceased laughing and looked at me with cunning twinkling eyes. "You lich man in your own countlee, velly lich, pellaps," he said. "But you no lich in Sulu. You velly

poor man there and the Kungsi no likee you. Kungsi give you little fish, little lice to eat, sometimes velly hot weather, you velly sick, little fluit ; but Kungsi velly glad you die. No much likee keep you alive. Whaffor ? You keep alive—must get mans keep you plisoner ; you die—Kungsi no more touble. Kungsi bury you—all touble over. You savvy ? ”

“ Yes, I savvy—go on ! ”

“ Well, Pangelan, suppose you lich in Sulu. Suppose you make fliends with Kungsi. You still plisoner. No can help that. But you velly much good alive keep. Nicee house, nicee garden sometime, all time, walk in. Nicee girl—much nicee many girl keep you company. Nicee time you live long. Velly happy. What you think ? ”

“ I see. And how may this be done ? ”

“ Velly easy, Pangelan. Me givee you letter Kungsi—me givee Moolah Kassim plenty gold out of mine pay for nicee house, nicee garden, plenty nicee girl, make you velly happy Sulu.”

“ And what must I give you in return, Chin-Ah-Quoy ? ”

“ You tell Moolah Kassim make me plesant of your missy wife—Pangelan. What you say ? ”

“ I say, get out of my sight, you yellow dog ! Do you think a Malay Pangeran would sell his wife to a filthy Chinaman ? What do you think Moolah Kassim would reply to such a question as you put to me ? And shall an Australian Pangeran have less concern for his womankind ? Out of my sight, you scum ! ”

Chin-Ah-Quoy, smiling still, signed to his attendants, and they helped him to his feet.

“ You velly much foolish man,” he murmured, simply beaming at me. “ Bimeby you savvy velly fully what a velly foolish man you are. Kungsi teach you. Kungsi make you solly plenty. Me no get your missee wife, Pangelan. Oh ! no. But Kungsi get her, Kungsi get her velly quick—sell her to some other yellow dog ! That muchee better, you think.”

With this Parthian shaft he lumbered off, leaving me speechless with hate and quivering with rage.

Hadi Kassim sat on chewing thoughtfully, stolid as a piece of wood. Several minutes elapsed, then suddenly he spat upon the ground and said—“ All Chinamen are dogs.”

“ I begin to believe it,” I answered heartily.

“ But tell me, Moolah ; is it true that the Kungsi will—as that scum said—take the lady, my wife from me, when we get to Sulu ? ”

“ It is possible,” he rejoined. “ But I shall know beforehand, and if it should be so, rather than see a brother Pangeran dishonoured I shall take your wife myself. I have four wives now, and do not want another. Furthermore it would make trouble in my harem, for Lih-Kiu, my chief wife, is jealous, and she has a scalding tongue. But have no fears, Pangeran ; you are a great fighter and your tongue is without a cleft. I would do even more to serve you.”

He spoke so gravely, and so evidently without any appreciation of the bitter meaning of his words to me—indeed intending only to show me his regard—that I was simply flabbergasted. The humour of the situation was that he took my manifest emotion for gratitude.

“ Nay—do not thank me ! ” he protested. “ Would you not do as much for me ? There is the masonry of noble fighting blood between us. As for the rest, although needs must you will be a prisoner, I shall see that you are

comfortably lodged—and perhaps we might find you some pleasant occupation not unfitting to your dignity. I have noticed that idle prisoners do not live long. I would not care to have you die. I find much pleasure in your conversation.”

I knew why. He loved flattery. I gave him some more of it. “It is because, oh! Tuan, you have been deprived in this outlandish place of the company of those who, although not your equal in rank or worth, are able to appreciate your greatness. The coolies are not to be considered. As for your Dyaks, though brave men truly, they are merely common soldiers and sailors, and your innate nobility cannot stoop to familiar intercourse with them. It was even so in my case with the party that I led to slaughter at your hands. I was alone while in the midst of them, and until you and I foregathered I seldom spoke save to command.”

He bent his head. “You speak the truth of Allah, brother,” he said gravely. “It is the curse of princely rank to live overmuch alone. Women do not count.” He spat thoughtfully at the edge of his mat. “They please the senses, but they do not move

the mind, and they wear one's patience with their clacking tongues. I have a little son in Sulu. It is in my mind that you should teach him the English tongue, and teach him too the English art of war. If this should please you, I could lodge you in the palace, and we might often thus converse together. Think over the proposal, Pangeran, in quietude. I must leave you now. I go to supervise the execution of a coolie who has been caught with gold in his smock. Rest in peace ! ”

“ One moment, Tuan. When do you start for Sulu ? ”

“ In fourteen days, when the moon is at the full. Peace.”

During that fortnight I had many further talks with Hadi Kassim, and always I flattered him so constantly and deftly that he liked me more and more, and each day gave me a longer measure of his time. But I never once saw Lady Trevor. I heard that she was well. I had to be content with that. The Moolah said that it would not be well to let her visit me until we started on our journey, as a Dyak had seen Chin-Ah-Quoy weaving a spell for the Baligni—whatever that might mean ; and this spell it seems

threatened the lady's life. The Moolah was intensely superstitious, and deep in his soul he was afraid of Chin-Ah-Quoy.

Each day I grew stouter and stronger. On the third, that is the tenth of my imprisonment, I could stand. On the fifteenth I could walk without assistance. On the seventeenth I could have put up a good fight against any three of those small Malays. But I took care not to show any such disposition, and I also pretended to be much weaker than I really was. Two armed guards attended me from the fifteenth day, while each night the doors were locked and Dyak sentinels were posted back and front without. Hadi Kassim was a trustful man for a Malay, but he was not without his prudence. One thing, however, he neglected, and that was to bind my limbs. On the eighteenth night I climbed into the loft and secured the revolver Bill Forsyth had left me. I hid it in the bandage round my waist which covered my most reluctant wound to heal. Next morning I reopened a corner of that wound and carelessly drew Hadi Kassim's attention to the fresh blood-stains on the bandage. He was quite concerned. He said that my

wounds healed slowly because my body needed exercise. That afternoon he took me for my first walk abroad. Two Dyaks helped me to walk. I leaned upon them heavily.

CHAPTER XII

A STRANGE TALK

HADI KASSIM led me towards the mine. It was not far to reach. We did not, however, climb the knoll to the shaft's mouth. We were content to rest in the shade of a grand old banyan tree near the foot of the little spur, and watch the coolies at work. Their methods were primitive in the extreme, but they made up in industry and energy for their lack of scientific skill. They had cut a number of flat terraced ledges in the slope of the knoll, and across these a little water race flowed and gurgled in a series of cascades, running here and there into long sluice boxes and over broad flat tables spread with woolly sheep skin mats. On every terrace numbers of coolies were at work, busy as so many ants. They were crushing the stone which bearers brought them every few moments in iron buckets from the pit's mouth. The pro-

cess was interesting in its way, but pitifully tedious. The stone was first put into big bronze dolly pots, and beaten into smaller pieces with heavy sledges. It was then transferred to smaller pots and broken finer still with brazen pestles. Thirdly, it was placed in long wooden troughs containing water, and there triturated and reduced to the consistence of slime with long heavy slides worked by hand, which ground their dilatory way up and down the troughs. The final stage was the removal of the fine mud to the sluice boxes. The rest of the process was accomplished mechanically by hydraulic action. The water washed away at once the lighter material through box after box, and across the blankets down to the sludge pits on the river bank. The heavier particles sank down, however, of their own weight and brought up to form in heaps, wherever a cunningly planted obstruction occurred. At such places frames of copper wire treated with mercury were inserted to attract and catch the gold. One set of boxes was cleaned up before our eyes. Two foreman coolies performed the operation. First of all they extracted the copper brush nets, and laid

them carefully aside. Next they attacked the heaps of heavy dirt and transferred them, after turning off the flow of water, into a big rocking cradle made of thin copper, and fed with leather water pipes. The lighter part of the dirt so treated fell back into the sluice boxes, to be once more submitted to the action of the runnels. The heavier residuum was collected and washed in shallow tin dishes by hand, the free gold being carefully separated and then extracted with steel tweezers and fine copper brushes washed with quicksilver. When no more free gold remained, the dirt was cast back into the boxes, and the water again turned on. The copper frames and brushes were then taken to a queer shaped oven retort, in which a wood furnace was kept continually aglow. They were laid in the retort for a few minutes. The heat during that time volatilised the mercury, which ascended in the form of vapour, passed through a condenser, and liquefied again in a glass bulb at the further end furnished with a tap. The volatilisation of the mercury of course liberated the gold, which dropped on to an iron plate beside the copper. At a call from Hadi Kassim one of the coolies

brought it down for us to see when all was over. It was still warm and easily malleable by the fingers, although it had been dipped in water. The coolie kneaded the flaky strips into a sort of cake with his hands as he stood before us. It curiously resembled honeycomb. The piece I saw weighed about sixty ounces. I made a mental calculation, and as, according to my agreement with Sir Philip, one tenth part of it of right belonged to me, I realised myself in that paltry half-hour defrauded of at least twenty pounds. The mine beyond all question was a positive Golconda. But I very soon had perfect proof of this. Observing my keen interest in the gold, Hadi Kassim led me to the Dyak barrack house, and through it into a big high palisaded compound, where stood a stout little hut built of solid logs of cypress pine. Four Dyaks armed to the teeth stood on sentry-go, one at each corner of the hut. They salaamed to the Moolah, and at a sign one came forward and opened the door with a key hanging on a chain at his belt.

Hadi Kassim took my arm and led me to the threshold. Within stood between eighty and a hundred neat little square hard wood

boxes nattily superimposed and arranged in tidy rows. The hut contained no other thing. The Moolah spoke to the sentry in Malay and the fellow slipped past us into the hut. He seized one of the upper boxes with both hands and turned. At a glance I saw it was all he could do to lift it. Hadi Kassim carelessly removed the lid, which fitted loosely, and showed me the box filled to the brim with bars and flaky nodules and small spiky lumps of solid gold.

“They are all like that,” he said indifferently.

Again I made a mental calculation, and figured up three-quarters of a ton weight of the precious metal in that hut.

“There is more still at Maka,” said Hadi Kassim, eyeing me with a grim smile. “This mine is not as rich as it was. The reef, too, is dipping deep, and the water makes very fast. Our hand pumps are not much good to cope with it. Still, it is worth working, and worth fighting for to keep. (He struck his breast with his palm.) Me—I found it. Be not angry with me, Pangeran. You did not know this mine was in your country. You did not care so very long to look and see. Me—I

came, and saw, and took it. I have a better right to it than you."

"I don't grudge you the gold," I answered through my teeth. "You deserve it, Pangeran, for your enterprise in seeking it and finding it. But those cursed coolies! The thought that they will spend it, hoard it up, and thrive on it—while I rot a prisoner—well, Pangeran—I confess that thought grips me by the throat, harder even than your strong right hand could."

He nodded sympathetically. "It is a bad thought, Tuan. Thrust it from you, lest it prey upon your mind. Come, if you will—and let us pay a visit to the lady, your wife. The Baligni spell of Chin-Ah-Quoy cannot work on you nor her nor me within the region of my house. There I have a charm set up against them that a Sulu wizard gave me for a service and some gold beside. He found it fastened to a upas tree, where it had been planted by a witch—a poisoner of arrows—when my father's father's father reigned as Sultan. The witch lives still: she cannot speak. My father's father had her tongue cut out for sending a sickness of the eyes to a girl slave whom he liked well, but she hated.

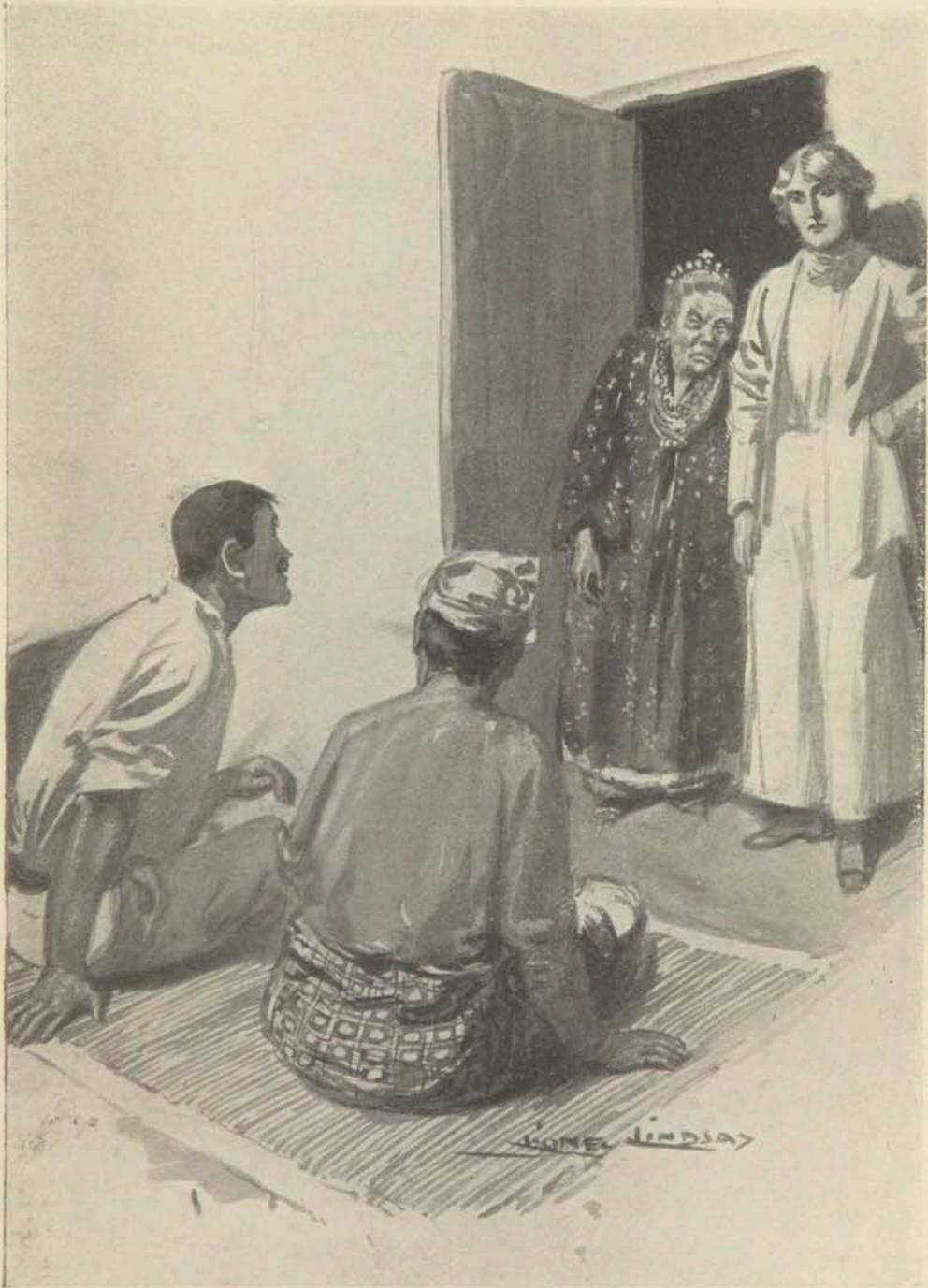
I know, however, that the charm is good, for when I showed it to the witch, she wept like a babe, and grovelled for it at my knees."

He showed me the charm presently, immediately we crossed the threshold of his house. It was an infant's hand, shrivelled up and mummified. Perhaps it had belonged to the unfortunate old witch's child. In that case I could understand how the sight of it would make her weep, poor wretch.

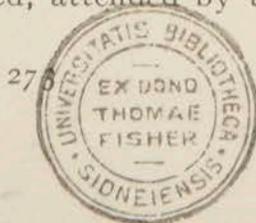
Hadi Kassim was enormously proud of it. He salaamed before the ghastly little emblem more than twenty times, always lifting his hands above his head as he bowed down. It was lowering to see a man of his parts behave so foolishly, but it was the savage part of him, and he could not drive it out.

When his superstitious reverences were over, he seated me upon a cushion, squatted on a mat before me at a little distance, and then clapped his hands. A wrinkled old hag instantly appeared. She took his orders, and vanished with a silent bow.

"She is dumb," observed the Moolah. "So are all my female servants. It makes less clatter in a house. It is sufficient to put up with the clacking of one's wives."



“Lady Trevor entered, attended by the hag.”



I was so excited at the near prospect of seeing Lady Trevor that I felt compelled to conceal it by foolish talk.

“But dumb women are not within all men’s reach to get,” I hazarded.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Not born dumb,” he assented—“but it is quite easy to remove their tongues.”

HadiKassim frequently shocked my civilised susceptibilities like that. In many ways he was as cruel and stony-hearted as a jaguar; yet in others kind to the very point of tenderness. He was a curious mixed product of a man, and perhaps the strangest part of him was his queer regard for women. He held young women in the lordliest contempt. All his wives were elderly. Yet he was as frank a sensualist as any member of his race. Explain the contradiction, those who can! I have no key to it.

Presently Lady Trevor entered, attended by the hag. She had schooled herself for the interview. She was quite calm. She stood before us pale, but still, and bowed submissively. Only her eyes she could not control. They glowed like stars, and told me all I wished to know of her pleasure at the meeting.

“You are well, Molly?” I questioned.

“Yes—my Lord Prince,” she said.

“In two days we set out for Sulu.”

“I have heard, Highness.”

“Have you anything to say to me? If so, speak!”

She curtsied low. “I rejoice to see your Highness so far recovered. Yet I perceive that you are still very weak and sick. I pray your Highness not to overstrain your strength.”

“You say well, Molly. I am still weak and sick. But I shall grow better when the sea wind blows upon my face. In the meantime do not fear for me. I shall not overstrain myself. On the other hand do you regard your health. You are looking pale and thin. You have been giving way to grief.”

“I pray you to forgive me, Highness. Now that I have seen you, I shall strive not to grieve more.”

“It is well. With the Pangeran’s permission you may retire.”

The Moolah nodded. She bowed to us and quietly departed. It was a brief interview, but almost too long for my powers of endurance. The hot strong blood of rage was sing-

ing all the while within my ears, and whispering me that I was armed, and that with one wild dash assisted by surprise I might win out of this accurst entanglement, leaving a train of dead and bleeding bodies in my wake.

But it was a mad thought, and after all it would be an ill deed to requite the Moolah with a bullet for all his little kindnesses to me.

After she had gone we sat on long, each wrapped in thought, and each it would seem thinking of her.

Hadi Kassim made this plain at length. "For a young woman and a fair, your lady wife is not ill-mannered, Pangeran," he said. "If it be Allah's will that I should take her across my threshold for your honour's sake to save her from some Chinese dog, I shall not be quite as burdened as I looked for. She speaks sensibly and not too much. Furthermore, her voice is soft and musical."

I cast down my eyes and nodded. I found my right hand stealing up to the bandage at my waist where my revolver lay. I arrested it in time, and put it down again."

"Has she borne you any sons?" he asked.

“No,” said I, fighting silently to get myself in hand.

“A woman-child, perhaps?”

“No,” said I.

The Moolah plucked quietly at his straggly beard. “I have often noted that men display a strange fondness for wives that are barren,” he observed reflectively. “I could never understand it. Do you dote on your lady wife, Pangeran?”

“She suits me,” I said placidly, and raised my eyes to his face. “I would not put her from me readily, because she loves me, and is loyal and faithful, Tuan, as women go. But you must not think her manners always pleasant, Tuan. Crossed she has the temper of a leopard with young cubs, and even when her rage cools down, she is sullen and talks nagging talk for days together.”

The Moolah spread out his hands, and rolled his eyes. “They are all alike when young,” he said. “As they grow old they get wiser if one beats them frequently and well. You English do not beat your wives. It is a foolish custom.”

“I have often thought so, Tuan,” I replied.

He arose, and at a sign his Dyaks came

and helped me to my feet. Then we bowed to one another solemnly three times three, and afterwards the Dyaks took me back to my prison hut. Gad! how I raged that night, pacing the mud floor in my stockinged feet, and shaking impotent fists at the walls and ceiling.

Next day I was permitted to exercise again. The Moolah had prepared a pleasant little surprise for me. It was an execution. Another coolie had been caught stealing gold. He had twisted it up in his pigtail. They bound him naked to a post, and when the tide was low they set the post upright in the mud of the ditch that flanked the settlement, first smearing the fate-stricken wretch's nude form with a thin dilution of molasses. There he stood before us dying in anticipation second by second, as the tide flowed in, and suffering the tortures of the damned from the attentions of the jungle flies that swarmed about him, attracted by the honeyed mess that covered him. Meanwhile, the Moolah and I strolled up and down upon the sward taking our exercise! while Chin-Ah-Quoy squatted opposite the victim under the shade of a silk umbrella, fanned by a slave, and sucking at his eternal

bamboo pipe. Hadi Kassim thoroughly enjoyed the spectacle, so did Chin-Ah-Quoy, but each in a different way. The Malay made no remarks. He pretended to ignore the whole affair, although his savage nature manifestly revelled in the coolie's sufferings. But Chin-Ah-Quoy put no such bridle on his bearing or his tongue. He talked to the dying man incessantly, and although I could not understand his words, I knew from the tone he used, and the occasional smile he called to Hadi Kassim's face, that the Chinaman was viciously taunting and gloating over his victim. The coolie's conduct won my whole-souled admiration. He made no complaint. He uttered never a groan. He seldom even sighed. He appeared stolidly indifferent to his fate, and quite insensible to the awful torture of the flies. Only from the occasional gleaming of his blood-shot eyes might one realise that he was actually awake, for he mostly kept his eyelids resolutely closed, and only opened them at intervals to mark the rising of the flood. Fortunately the tide rose quickly. In two hours it was up to his chin. It was heartbreaking to mark the poor devil's involuntary efforts to throw

back his head. Yet Chin-Ah-Quoy laughed heartily at them, and Hadi Kassim chuckled. I thought of North Australia peopled with such men as these, and a blood mist swam before my eyes. There were a hundred coolies present, and more Dyaks still. I looked at them and thought of Lady Trevor in their power, and closed my hands behind my back. Then I laughed loud and long. The water was abrim with the thief's mouth. His lips were tight closed, and his face was purple. Lord! how I laughed. The Moolah patted my arm in affectionate sympathy, chuckling like a fiend. Chin-Ah-Quoy was afoot now, shouting taunts at the thief at the top of his shrill voice. The raucous squalling wafted the miserable coolie's soul across the Great Divide into the Beyond. In another moment the muddy stream had eclipsed his nose and eyes, and only his shaven crown was visible. Presently even that too vanished. Chin-Ah-Quoy was so worn out with his exertions that he sank down, a limp heap of fat, upon the grass. He opened his great mouth wide. An attendant threw in some opium pills. He sighed, and crossed his long nailed hands upon his stomach, smiling blissfully. He perfectly

resembled a dozen statues of the Buddha I have seen, bland, innocent yet wise, and almost heavenly beneficent. Due south of where he sat lay Adelaide, south-west Perth, south-east Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane. The same sea circled all those cities and marked them undivided common ground with the little patch of earth whereon Chin-Ah-Quoy made holiday. Five days' steam from where he sat were—how many hundred million Chin-Ah-Quoys? And looking towards Australia some of them, although but few Australians think so.

CHAPTER XIII

A NEWSPAPER NOTICE

NEXT morning a detachment of Japanese soldiers came from Maka in a prau rowed by coolies. I watched them from the doorway of my prison hut, looking over the head of my little Dyak guard. They were capable looking fellows the Japs, and their commander handled them efficiently. He was a young man, but an expert soldier. The detachment went to the Dyak barrack house, followed by coolies carrying their baggage. They had manifestly come to stay. A little later the loading of the praus for the voyage to Sulu commenced. There were so many hands to help that the work did not take many hours. The vessels chosen were the four largest of the little fleet. The Moolah's flag flew on the biggest of the four. It was a black prau of some considerable displace-

ment, very stoutly built and strangely ornamented. Her bows were fashioned like a dragon's head with big open jaws that drank the water, and the pearls of two huge natuna shells for eyes. The sides were pierced for the working of sweeps should the wind fail. The prau had a covered space containing cabins near the stern, built across the shallow hold, and a fighting deck on top. She was an old vessel, and had sailed the seas a famous pirate in her youth, so Hadi Kassim said. I could well believe it, and as I afterwards discovered the planks of her bows were ferruled and splashed with bullet marks and holes. All the gold was put aboard of her. We started next morning, when the tide began to ebb, about nine o'clock I think. The embarkation took scarcely ten minutes to accomplish. Hadi Kassim's wives were among the first to cross the plank. Lady Trevor was with them. She smiled at me, waiting on the bank, as she passed. Chin-Ah-Quoy stood near speaking earnestly to a coolie seaman. I was a good deal surprised to find that we took many coolies with us, almost as many as Dyaks. They came, I discovered, to do the rough work which the

Dyaks held beneath their dignity. In fact they forthwith manned the sweeps. Not counting the women we had ninety-seven souls on board our prau when we pushed away from shore ; and some of the other craft were more crowded still. The Dyaks collected on the fighting decks and fired their guns by way of salute when we were in mid-stream and began to move. But the coolies ashore did not respond, neither did the Japs. All that forenoon we carried the tide with us, and made good progress, the sweeps being only used to keep us in our course. The land we passed through was mountainous and very picturesque, being for the most part densely jungle-covered. The river was about a hundred yards wide, very deep and quite free from bars and snags. Hadi Kassim and I spent our time seated on mats and cushions on the fighting deck. He chewed betel and tobacco. I smoked. Sometimes we conversed, but not often. The Dyaks, however, who were gathered in a crowd at the bows, chattered incessantly. They were delighted at the prospect of seeing their homes again. On two of the praus men were singing and beating tom-toms. Altogether they

made a great noise that vied with the screaming of the multitudinous cockatoos which fluttered about the trees, lining the banks in an interminable snow-cloud. In the afternoon we lost the tide, but the coolies kept us going with the sweeps, and sometimes when the wind and the bendings of the river served we sailed. At nightfall we drew near the eastern bank and anchored in the stream about eighty feet from the land. The Dyaks went ashore in canoes and sampans and lit great fires and feasted far into the night, making themselves drunk with their native spirit. Hadi Kassim went with them and joined in the revel, as wild a savage as the least of his men. Before he departed my wrists were fastened to my sides, my ankles were bound, and I was carried into one of the little cabins. Lady Trevor, similarly treated, was there too. To make assurance doubly sure, the coolies were chained to their seats at the row-locks like a herd of slaves. It appeared that Hadi Kassim ashore and Hadi Kassim afloat were two different men. Ashore he was an oriental potentate not vastly dissimilar from other members of that ilk; but afloat he was an autocrat, a pure savage

and a pirate. The blood of countless generations of ferocious pirates was in his veins. He had only to enter a prau to bring it surging to the surface.

Lady Trevor said nothing when she saw me, but when the door was locked upon us by our captor, she wriggled upright to a seated posture and began to laugh low but mirthlessly. She did not seem able to stop herself.

The shadows were too dark to mark her face, but I thought her laughter was hysterical. I sat up and waited patiently for it to cease.

“What is it?” I asked at length.

“The ending of the strain,” she muttered. “For three weeks I have been the constant servant of a hateful old savage vixen who detests me, and who has been using all her power and cunning to make my life intolerable. Consider one of her pleasant little ways! I am simply covered with horrid little sores from the pinching of her nails. She dipped them in some yellow sticky stuff to make the sores smart and fester. She was not satisfied to draw blood with her abominable talons.”

“Why did you not complain to the Moolah?” I asked indignantly.

“I did,” she replied, “and he beat the old reptile with a lawyer cane. But she paid me back in coin with interest. She and the others. They threw me down and filled my mouth with rice and bastinadoed me like Turks. I knew better afterwards than to tell tales again. Jim, cannot we escape?”

For answer I told her about Bill Forsyth and his heroic essay to procure assistance through the crocodile-infested river and perhaps beyond. For hours we discussed his chances and our own. She sidled near me when the deep dark came. My presence was a sort of comfort, I suppose. At length she asked my leave to cry, and leaning her head upon my shoulder wept. I could not dry her tears. It is terrible to hear a woman cry, and not to be able to do anything. I could only speak. I did not speak for long—but her sobs wrung my heartstrings so that silence at last became impossible.

I said, “Molly, Molly, you are melting all my fortitude away. You are forcing me to tell you that I love you, and I had resolved to keep that knowledge to myself.”

She drew away from me a little then, and her crying gradually ceased.

“I did not guess you were so pitiful,” soon she muttered brokenly.

“Pitiful!” I echoed.

“You said that because you pitied me.”

“Did I, dear? How wise you are.”

She caught her breath. “Jim, you can’t really care,” she whispered.

“I did—before you changed—even while thinking you a selfish, heartless thing,” I answered quietly. “The true woman in you must have spoken to my heart without my knowledge, perhaps without your own.”

“Jim!” she cried, and her eyes glowed star-like in the darkness.

“Not yet, dear,” I muttered. “He is only three weeks dead.”

She was silent for a little while, then she spoke, and this is what she said. “Jim, I never cared for him. I was a wicked wretch to marry him. I thought—it is my one excuse, that I was born destitute of the capacity to care. But you came, and when I knew all that your coming meant you saw me do my duty. It hurt. It seemed to prostitute me in the doing of it. But it

seemed my proper penance and I did it. Now he is dead and I am free, and I know that it was not a proper penance but a crime. If his ghost were in this room and we both could see and know that it was there, I would feel no fear of it, and in its hearing I would say to you what I intend to say. Jim, you are my man and I am your woman. Whatever comes or tries to come between us is an interloper and an evil thing, a criminal against the laws of nature that have fashioned me for you and you for me. Jim, my soul and body cries for you : I feel yours cry for me. Do they not? Oh! Jim." Our lips met, drawn together by a power beyond our will.

Afterwards she told me that she could be happy and would make me happy, though we spent our lives as prisoners together. Then I told her all I knew of Sulu and the Kungsi, and we resolved that I should kill her if the Kungsi tried to part us. The dawn came all too soon ; and we were temporarily separated. I was taken to the fighting deck as soon as Hadi Kassim woke.

He was heavy-headed and surly, and demanded to be amused. I flattered him. Before noon we reached the estuary, and the

river broadened out to half a mile with flat low-lying wooded banks and plains beyond. The monsoon favouring, the sweeps were shipped; and we set sail, skimming down the stream like sharks. In two hours we reached the bay, and on rounding the last point came full upon the *Psyche*. She made no smoke, although she was steaming fast. Thus had the Dyaks received no warning. They were dumfounded for an instant. They sprang afoot, their gaily coloured silk scarves fluttering in the breeze. Then Hadi Kassim shouted an order, and each man rushed to his post. I was seized, and none too gently dragged to the mast and bound there upright with heavy ropes. Hadi Kassim raged like a wounded lion. He took the *Psyche* for a gun boat; and up and down the fighting deck he stalked, alternately shouting his orders and loading me with threats and savage curses. The least of my prospective punishments was to be boiled in oil. I did not take the trouble to reply to him. All my eyes were for the chase. Jupiter! but the Dyaks were seamen. The praus spread out, carrying the breeze; then turning flew back like gulls up the estuary, almost in the wind's eye. I had

never seen real sailing before. Those praus were wizard vessels. They appeared almost to defy and conquer nature's laws. But it was of little use. The *Psyche* with her fifteen knots easily got between them and the shore. Then as we dodged and twisted swinging round as on a pivot, she opened fire on us with the two-inch. She wasted fifteen shots, then struck the prau upon our port. A frightful yell went up. The prau sank almost instantly, dragging the chained coolies on the rowing benches to the bottom, but leaving a crowd of black Dyak heads bobbing on the surface of the stream. But it was the only shell that found a billet. The unskilled gunners on the *Psyche* could not hit the magic craft they aimed at, nor was I disappointed thereat, for had the black prau been struck my fate would have been sealed past praying for. The *Psyche* gave up the vain effort soon, and trusted only to her speed to reach the praus before they could pass into the shallow water they were making for. She was splendidly handled, no mistake about that. In three minutes she was within two hundred yards of us. Then a voice pealed out. "Full speed ahead—"

Steady, men! I'm going to give them the stem!"

She went ahead—like a bolt from a bow, simply whizzing through the sea. The shore lay two miles off now on our starboard, and about three on our port. The Dyaks saw what was meant. They gave up all thoughts of escape, and gathered on the fighting decks gay and splendid in their silks and cloth of gold, shaking their weapons and chanting their war songs. The *Psyche* rushed up to the nearest through a perfect storm of bullets. There was a crash, a mighty babel of shots and screams, and the prau went down cut in twain. "To the next," shouted the same voice I had heard before. It was our turn. The *Psyche* in another moment was upon us. Her bowsprit towered over us. It pierced the crowd of men gathered on the black prau's fighting deck. "Bill Forsyth, Bill Forsyth!" I yelled at the top of my voice. A hell of faces surged about me, smoking guns and pistols, flashing krisses. There was a crash and a long grinding grating noise. The Dyaks, screaming like maniacs, Hadi Kassim at their head, swarmed along the *Psyche's* bowsprit and leaped and clung upon her

taffrail. Below, the coolies and the women screamed and moaned. We were sinking, sinking, and over us the *Psyche* passed, a battle waging on her deck fierce as any ever fought in Eblis. "Bill Forsyth, Bill Forsyth," I shouted again despairingly. Then as if by magic I found myself free. A razor-edged kris had cut my bonds and given me my liberty. Lady Trevor's blazing eyes were piercing into mine. "Jim! Oh! Jim!" she cried, and we swayed irresistibly together. Next second the sea had closed over our heads. Holding her fast I struggled to the surface amidst a mass of broken planks and wreckage. The *Psyche* had swept on in chase of the last prau. Half her fore deck was held by pirates, every man of them amok and fighting like a fiend. I looked at my sweetheart, and found that she had fainted. Her eyes were closed and she was a dead weight in my arms. I seized the nearest plank to aid me to support her, and by dint of persistent effort I contrived to collect several others and to place them beneath her and between her arms and sides. Presently I heard a voice crying pitifully for assistance quite close at hand. It was a Dyak. He appeared unable to

swim. His eyes were rolling hideously. On impulse I stretched out my hand to save him, but the treacherous devil produced a kris which he had kept concealed under water and stabbed at me viciously. I eluded the thrust more by good luck than anything else, and next second we were locked together in a death clutch. Down we went, down, down, down. Both his hands were twined about my throat. I wound my legs about his middle, put my left hand on his shoulder, and with my right thrust back his head. In thirty seconds I had broken his neck, but it required every atom of my strength to burst from his strangling grip, and when I reached surface I was sorely spent and almost gone. A floating coop saved my life. I drew myself upon it, and looked around for Lady Trevor. The current had swept her yards away, but she was afloat and awake—wailing pitifully to know herself alone. “Molly—Molly,” I gasped, and began to paddle towards her. Never shall I forget her face when she saw me and understood I lived. She told me afterwards that she had been on the point, in the blackness of her despair, of thrusting the supporting planks aside and

going thus to seek me in another world. Very soon, by inserting the planks between the interstices of the coop, I managed to fashion a rude sort of raft, which enabled us to rise shoulder high from the water, keeping our feet and bodies within and protected by the coop. It was as well, for very soon we saw the fins of several big coasting sharks about us. They came quite close, but they were fearful of our queer-looking structure, and by constantly splashing we contrived to prevent them making an attack. Ah! but I was thankful when the *Psyche* turned about. I fastened my scarf to the end of a small broken spar and waved it aloft, shouting frantically the while. We were sighted almost at once. The yacht bore down upon us at half speed, making ready to lower a boat as she approached. The fight was all over by then. In five minutes we were safe in the boat, and in another five we stepped aboard the yacht. The captain, his arm fastened in a blood-stained bandage, met us at the head of the gangway. He had hardly a word to say. He just pointed to the deck. It was a sight to stir a soldier's veins perhaps, but it made Lady Trevor break into a storm of

weeping. The *Psyche's* victory over the Dyaks had been very dearly purchased. Fully two-thirds of her ship's company were lying dead and still, and not a man left living but had some sort of wound. I took the poor girl forthwith to her cabin, and wrung a promise from her to lie down and try to sleep. Then I went back to the deck to help in the work of disposing of the dead. The anchor splashed overboard as I appeared. The captain touched my arm—"It's a bad business, Mr. McLean," he said. "But I am not responsible. Your mate, Mr. Forsyth, took the matter out of my hands. I wanted to proceed to Normantown and wire for a warship. But he got among the crew and they mutinied. I had to give way."

"Thank God they mutinied," I answered sharply. "If they had not, Lady Trevor would in all likelihood have been forced into a Chinese harem. Where is Bill Forsyth now?"

"He lies over there. He is dead, I think. The leader of the Dyaks cut him down."

With an oath I started forward, and a moment later was kneeling beside my friend. A kris was thrust hilt deep into his chest.

“ Bill, dear old Bill,” I cried. “ You saved us like a hero to meet your own death in the act ! ”

He heard me. He was not dead, but dying fast. He looked up at me with the ghost of a smile in his glazing eyes. “ Give me your flipper, Jim,” he murmured faintly. “ It’s all up with the ‘ Big Five ’ now—you’re the last.”

I shouted for assistance, but he shook his head and smiled.

“ I’ve got it, Jim,” he whispered—“ got it sure. Don’t move me, old man. Let me die easy. That’s Hadi Kassim there. He’s done for me. But I sent him first. I shot him through the gizzard twice. We lay glaring at each other growling like two chained dogs—till he passed out.”

“ Bill, Bill,” I groaned. “ Isn’t there anything I can do for you. Oh ! if we had a doctor.”

“ I’m past medicine, Jim. I’ve only kept alive this long to tell you somethin’. There’s a skirt in Sydney. I didn’t treat her too well. Her name’s in my wallet. Give her my share of the swag if there’s any—will you, Jim ? ”

I nodded. My throat was paining me too much to speak.

Bill smiled again. "I dodged the 'gators," he whispered. "Did 'em brown. I'm glad for yours and Molly's sake."

"Let me fetch her!" I muttered.

"No—Jim. Don't let go my hand. We was mates before we ever knew her, Jim. I'm goin' fast. Tighter, Jim, tighter."

"Bill—dear old Bill."

"Give—her—my—Ah!"

I thought him gone—but one last time he smiled and spoke. "The 'Big Five's' mostly over there—where I'm goin'. Any message to 'em, Jim?"

He was dead ere I could answer him.

We gave the Dyak pirates to the alligators and the sharks, but we buried all our own dear gallant dead next day ashore. Thereafter we set our faces Sydneywards. Little of that which followed have I any right to speak about. My lips were sealed against disclosure by a treaty broke with blood and patched up again with blood. This much however I may say, for others know of it and have remarked upon it, guessingly perhaps, but with some wisdom in their reckoning.

The mysterious cruise last autumn of His Majesty's ship *Alathea* had really nothing to do with the Solomon Island outrage and the *Alathea* did not actually lose the twenty-six of her crew who perished on that cruise by the bursting of a gun improperly charged. She lost them by no such carelessness—as should be plain to all from the recent promotion to a higher rank in another branch of the service of the officer held by court martial responsible for the mishap.

It is further within my province to declare that there is now not a single coolie, Jap or Dyak on the lately discovered and curiously named "Big Five" River in Arnhem's Land, where the marvellously rich Kassim Gold Mines are being opened up by British and Australian capital and worked exclusively by white Australian labour.

The following Extract from the "Melbourne Age" will speak for itself:—

"McLean—Trevor. On the 7th September at St. Saviour's Church, Carlton, by the Rev. C. Kyrle, James, only son of Dr. George McLean, late of Tam-

worth. N.S. Wales, to Mary Louisa Trevor, neè Markham, second daughter of the late Captain Robert Markham, R.N., and relict of the late Sir Philip Peregrine Trevor, K.G.”

THE END.



Ward, Lock & Co.'s POPULAR FICTION

STANLEY WEYMAN

MY LADY ROTH. 6s.

A Romance of the Thirty Years' War.

THE SATURDAY REVIEW.—“No one who begins will lay it down before the end, it is so extremely well carried on from adventure to adventure.”

ANTHONY HOPE

COMEDIES OF COURTSHIP. 3s. 6d.

THE SPEAKER.—“In this volume Mr. Hope is at his happiest in that particular department of fiction in which he reigns supreme.”

HALF A HERO. 3s. 6d.

THE ATHENÆUM.—“Mr. Hope's best story in point of construction and grasp of subject. His dialogue is virile and brisk.”

MR. WITT'S WIDOW. 3s. 6d.

THE TIMES.—“In truth a brilliant tale.”

A. E. W. MASON

LAWRENCE CLAVERING. 6s.

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

THE MOTHER. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“This is Mr. Phillpotts' best book. Whatever may be the value of some fiction, it will do every man and woman good to read this book. Its perusal should leave the reader in a higher air.”

SIR A. CONAN DOYLE

A STUDY IN SCARLET. 3s. 6d.

With a note on Sherlock Holmes by Dr. Joseph Bell. Illustrations by George Hutchinson.

H. RIDER HAGGARD

AYESHA. 6s.

The Sequel to “She.” Thirty-two full-page illustrations by Maurice Grieffenhagen.

S. R. CROCKETT

JOAN OF THE SWORD HAND. 6s.

THE DAILY MAIL.—“A triumph of cheery, resolute narration. The story goes along like a wave, and the reader with it.”

STRONG MAC. 6s.

THE MORNING POST.—“At the very outset the reader is introduced to the two leading characters of what is truly a drama of real life. So vividly is the story told that it often reads like a narrative of things that have actually happened.”

LITTLE ESSON. 6s.

THE SCARBOROUGH POST.—“One of the most popular of Mr. Crockett's books since ‘Lilac Sunbonnet.’”

MAX PEMBERTON

PRO PATRIA. 6s.

THE LIVERPOOL MERCURY.—“A fine and distinguished piece of imaginative writing; one that should shed a new lustre upon the clever author of ‘Kronstadt.’”

CHRISTINE OF THE HILLS. 6s.

THE DAILY MAIL.—“Assuredly he has never written anything more fresh, more simple, more alluring, or more artistically perfect.”

A GENTLEMAN'S GENTLEMAN. 6s.

THE DAILY CHRONICLE.—“This is very much the best book Mr. Pemberton has so far given us.”

THE GOLD WOLF. 6s.

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.—“From the beginning Mr. Pemberton weaves his romance with such skill that the tangled skein remains for long unravelled . . . marked by exceptional power, and holds the attention firmly.”

THE LODESTAR. 6s.

THE STANDARD.—“It impresses us as an exceedingly poignant and effective story, true to real life. Written with cleverness and charm.”

ROBERT BARR

YOUNG LORD STRANLEIGH. 6s.

THE WORLD.—“Mr. Barr gives us a remarkable sample of his power of blending so deftly the bold imaginative with the matter-of-fact as to produce a story which shall be at once impossible and convincing. That a feat of this kind, cleverly accomplished, is attractive to most novel readers goes without saying, and his latest work is certain to please.”

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM

THE LONG ARM. 6s.

"The Long Arm" is unlike any of Mr. Oppenheim's other popular stories. The hero, Mannister, a powerfully drawn character, is the victim of a cruel plot of a band of conspirators. Undaunted by the great odds against him, he proceeds to revenge himself. The ingenuity of device and boldness of execution of his astounding adventures keep the reader enthralled to the very end.

THE GOVERNORS. 6s.

THE GLOBE.—"The Governors" is by Mr. E. P. Oppenheim—need more be said to assure the reader that it is as full of ruses, politics and sensations as heart could desire."

THE MISSIONER. 6s.

THE HUDDERSFIELD EXAMINER.—"We have nothing but the very highest praise for this book. It is a remarkable success for Mr. Oppenheim in every way. Deeply engrossing as a novel, pure in style, and practically faultless as a literary work."

CONSPIRATORS. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—"The author must be congratulated on having achieved a story which is full of liveliness."

THE SECRET. 6s.

THE STANDARD.—"We have no hesitation in saying that this is the finest and most absorbing story that Mr. Oppenheim has ever written. It glows with feeling; it is curiously fertile in character and incident, and it works its way onward to a most remarkable climax."

A LOST LEADER. 6s.

THE DAILY GRAPHIC.—"Mr. Oppenheim almost persuades us into the belief that he has really been able to break down the wall of secrecy which always surrounds the construction of a Cabinet, and has decided to make an exposure on the lines of a well-known American writer. He also touches upon the evils of gambling in Society circles in a manner which should be applauded by Father Vaughan, and, in addition, treats us to a romance which is full of originality and interest from first to last."

MR. WINGRAVE, MILLIONAIRE. 6s.

THE BRITISH WEEKLY.—"Like good wine Mr. Oppenheim's novels need no bush. They attract by their own charm, and are unrivalled in popularity. No one will read this present story without relishing the rapid succession of thrilling scenes through which his characters move. There is a freshness and unconventionality about the story that lends it unusual attractiveness."

A MAKER OF HISTORY. 6s.

THE STANDARD.—"Those who read 'A Maker of History' will revel in the plot, and will enjoy all those numerous deft touches of actuality that have gone to make the story genuinely interesting and exciting."

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM—*continued.*

THE MASTER MUMMER. 6s.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“It is a beautiful story that is here set within a story. A remarkable novel such as only E. Phillips Oppenheim can write.”

THE BETRAYAL. 6s.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“Mr. Oppenheim's skill has never been displayed to better advantage than here. . . . He has excelled himself, and to assert this is to declare the novel superior to nine out of ten of its contemporaries.”

ANNA, THE ADVENTRESS. 6s.

THE DAILY NEWS.—“Mr. Oppenheim keeps his readers on the alert from cover to cover and the story is a fascinating medley of romance and mystery.”

THE YELLOW CRAYON. 6s.

THE DAILY EXPRESS.—“Mr. Oppenheim has a vivid imagination and much sympathy, fine powers of narrative, and can suggest a life history in a sentence. As a painter of the rough life of mining camps, of any strong and striking scenes where animal passions enter, he is as good as Henry Kingsley, with whom, indeed, in many respects, he has strong points of resemblance.”

A PRINCE OF SINNERS. 6s.

VANITY FAIR.—“A vivid and powerful story. Mr. Oppenheim knows the world and he can tell a tale, and the unusual nature of the setting in which his leading characters live and work out their love story gives this book distinction among the novels of the season.”

THE TRAITORS. 6s.

THE ATHENÆUM.—“Its interest begins on the first page and ends on the last. The plot is ingenious and well managed, the movement of the story is admirably swift and smooth, and the characters are exceedingly vivacious. The reader's excitement is kept on the stretch to the very end.”

A MILLIONAIRE OF YESTERDAY. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“We cannot but welcome with enthusiasm a really well-told story like ‘A Millionaire of Yesterday.’”

THE SURVIVOR. 6s.

THE NOTTINGHAM GUARDIAN.—“We must give a conspicuous place on its merits to this excellent story. It is only necessary to read a page or two in order to become deeply interested.”

THE GREAT AWAKENING. 6s.

THE YORKSHIRE POST.—“A weird and fascinating story, which, for real beauty and originality, ranks far above the ordinary novel.”

AS A MAN LIVES. 6s.

THE SKETCH.—“The interest of the book, always keen and absorbing, is due to some extent to a puzzle so admirably planned as to defy the penetration of the most experienced novel reader.”

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

E. PHILLIPS OPPENHEIM—*continued.*

A DAUGHTER OF THE MARIONIS. 6s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“Mr. Oppenheim's stories always display much melodramatic power and considerable originality and ingenuity of construction. These and other qualities of the successful writer of romance are manifest in 'A Daughter of the Marionis.' Full of passion, action, strongly contrasted scenery, motives, and situations.”

MR. BERNARD BROWN. 6s.

THE ABERDEEN DAILY JOURNAL.—“The story is rich in sensational incident and dramatic situations. It is seldom, indeed, that we meet with a novel of such power and fascination.”

THE MAN AND HIS KINGDOM. 6s.

THE FREEMAN'S JOURNAL.—“The story is worthy of Merriman at his very best. It is a genuine treat for the ravenous and often disappointed novel reader.”

THE WORLD'S GREAT SNARE. 6s.

THE WORLD.—“If engrossing interest, changing episode, deep insight into human character and bright diction are the *sine qua non* of a successful novel, then this book cannot but bound at once into popular favour. It is so full withal of so many dramatic incidents, thoroughly exciting and realistic. There is not one dull page from beginning to end.”

A MONK OF CRUTA. 6s.

THE BOOKMAN.—“Intensely dramatic. The book is an achievement at which the author may well be gratified.”

MYSTERIOUS MR. SABIN. 6s.

THE LITERARY WORLD.—“As a story of interest, with a deep-laid and exciting plot, this of the 'Mysterious Mr. Sabin' can hardly be surpassed.”

NORMAN INNES

MY LADY'S KISS. 6s.

A Seventeenth Century Romance.

THE SHEFFIELD INDEPENDENT.—“The book is imbued with the spirit of the times. The story goes with a surge and a stir that makes the blood of the reader quicken and his spirit keep pace.”

THE LONELY GUARD. 6s.

DUBLIN DAILY EXPRESS.—“The author is to be congratulated on this book; it is one of the best that has come under our notice for a considerable period. It is not only full of stirring incident, but highly instructive as to frontier life in the Austria of Maria Theresa's day.”

FRED M. WHITE

THE CRIMSON BLIND. 6s.

THE SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH.—“ ‘The Crimson Blind’ is one of the most ingeniously conceived ‘detective’ stories we have come across for a long time. Each chapter holds some new and separate excitement. It is the sort of story that one feels compelled to read at a sitting.”

THE CARDINAL MOTH. 6s.

THE BRITISH WEEKLY.—“ A brilliant orchid story full of imaginative power. This is a masterpiece of construction, convincing amid its unlikeliness, one of the best novels of the season.”

THE CORNER HOUSE. 6s.

THE WESTERN MORNING NEWS.—“ The book is crammed with sensation and mystery, situation piled on situation until one is almost bewildered. It is an excellent romance which will be eagerly read.”

THE WEIGHT OF THE CROWN. 6s.

THE DUBLIN DAILY EXPRESS.—“ Mr. F. M. White is one of the princes of fiction. A stirring tale full of the spice of adventure, breathless in interest, skilful in narrative. . . . Who could refrain from reading such a story ? ”

THE SLAVE OF SILENCE. 6s.

THE SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH.—“ Attention is arrested at the outset, and so adroitly is the mystery handled that readers will not skip a single page.”

A FATAL DOSE. 6s.

THE STANDARD.—“ This novel will rank amongst the brightest that Mr. White has given us.”

CRAVEN FORTUNE. 6s.

DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“ A tale of extraordinary complexity, ingeniously conceived, and worked out to a conventionally happy conclusion, through a series of strange and thrilling situations, which command and hold the reader’s attention to the end.”

THE LAW OF THE LAND. 6s.

DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“ Mr. White’s new novel may be strongly recommended. It contains enough surprises to whip the interest at every turn.”

A CRIME ON CANVAS. 6s.

This is a story of mysterious crime and it is interesting to recall that when published serially prizes were offered to the readers who guessed the solution of the many mysteries divulged in the development of the story. It is a deeply engrossing tale.

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

JUSTUS MILES FORMAN

JOURNEY'S END. 6s.

THE COURT JOURNAL.—“Surprisingly fresh, abounding in touches of observation and sentiment, while the characters are drawn with exceptional skill, the ‘red-haired young woman’ being a haunting figure.”

MONSIGNY. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“The novel is admirable, the idea is very cleverly worked out, and is of an interesting character. The book is worthy of much praise.”

THE GARDEN OF LIES. 6s.

THE DAILY NEWS.—“This novel is far in advance of anything that Mr. Forman has hitherto accomplished. ‘The Garden of Lies’ belongs to that class of story which touches the heart from the first. It contains scenes which are alive with real passion, passages that will stir the blood of the coldest, and whole chapters charged with a magic and a charm. It is a real romance, full of vigour and a clean, healthy life.”

TOMMY CARTERET. 6s.

THE DAILY CHRONICLE.—“This is a fine book, thoroughly fine from start to finish. We willingly place our full store of compliments on Mr. Forman’s splendid and successful book.”

BUCHANAN’S WIFE. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“‘Buchanan’s Wife’ may be regarded as another success for an already successful author. It contains all the elements to attract, and is written in such a graceful manner that the reader is held delighted and enthralled to the end.”

A MODERN ULYSSES. 6s.

PEOPLE’S SATURDAY JOURNAL.—“Full of exciting incidents handled in a bright, crisp style.”

THE QUEST. 6s.

A tense, emotional and romantic drama, surpassing in interest even that notably successful novel and play “The Garden of Lies” by the same author.

HAROLD BINDLOSS

THE LIBERATIONIST. 6s.

MORNING LEADER.—“This is the author’s best novel, and is one which no lover of healthy excitement ought to miss.”

HAWTREY’S DEPUTY. 6s.

The action of this novel once again takes place in Canada—a country he has made especially his own—and in this story is a plot of quite unusual power and interest.

LOUIS TRACY

A FATAL LEGACY. 6s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“ In all the annals of fiction a more ingenious or startlingly original plot has not been recorded.”

RAINBOW ISLAND. 6s.

THE LITERARY WORLD.—“ Those who delight in tales of adventure should hail ‘ Rainbow Island ’ with joyous shouts of welcome. Rarely have we met with more satisfying fare of this description than in its pages.”

THE ALBERT GATE AFFAIR. 6s.

THE BIRMINGHAM POST.—“ Will worthily rank with ‘ The Fatal Legacy and ‘ Rainbow Island ’ both books full of wholesome excitement and told with great ability. The present volume is an excellent detective tale, brimful of adventure. Told in Mr. Tracy’s best style.”

THE PILLAR OF LIGHT. 6s.

THE EVENING STANDARD.—“ So admirable, so living, so breathlessly exciting a book. The magnificent realism of the lighthouse and its perils, the intense conviction of the author, that brings the very scene he pictures before the reader’s eyes with hardly a line of detached description, the interest of the terrible dilemma of the cut-off inhabitants of the ‘ Pillar ’ are worthy of praise from the most jaded reader.”

HEART’S DELIGHT. 6s.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“ The name of Louis Tracy on the cover of a volume is a sufficient guarantee that the contents are worthy of perusal. His latest novel, ‘ Heart’s Delight,’ establishes more firmly than ever the reputation which he founded on ‘ The Final War ’; like that notable book it has a strong martial flavour.”

THE WHEEL O’ FORTUNE. 6s.

THE PUBLISHER’S CIRCULAR.—“ Conan Doyle’s successor, Louis Tracy, has all the logical acuteness of the inventor of Sherlock Holmes without his occasional exaggeration.”

FENNELLS’ TOWER. 6s.

NORTH DEVON JOURNAL.—“ An absorbing tale of love and crime from the clever pen of Louis Tracy. The secret of the crime which forms the basis of the plot is most skilfully covered, and the solution is a genuine surprise.”

THE SILENT BARRIER. 6s.

“ The Silent Barrier ” is a breezy romance of love and adventure in Switzerland, comparable to an adventure story by the late Guy Boothby.

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

SIR Wm. MAGNAY, Bart.

THE RED CHANCELLOR. 6s.

LLOYD'S NEWS.—“A story full of action, with its characters strongly drawn. Adventure and hairbreadth escapes abound; the style is refreshingly crisp, and the book altogether is one that can be most heartily recommended.”

FAUCONBERG. 6s.

THE FIELD.—“The book has a grip, and should be a success. The ultimate fate of Fauconberg is always in doubt from the beginning to the unexpected ending.”

THE MASTER SPIRIT. 6s.

THE COURT JOURNAL.—“A capital story. The intensely interesting situation is developed with much ingenuity and power. . . . A really fascinating novel.”

THE MYSTERY OF THE UNICORN. 6s.

THE GLASGOW HERALD.—“This work illustrates the author's dexterity in plot-construction, his skill in setting appropriate dialogue, and the facility with which he is able to develop and embellish an engaging narrative.”

THE PITFALL. 6s.

PEOPLE'S SATURDAY JOURNAL.—“In ‘The Pitfall,’ Sir Wm. Magnay has given to the world his best work, for not only is the story of an engrossing character, but it has the virtue of being completely off the beaten track.”

THE RED STAIN. 6s.

THE DUNDEE COURIER.—“One cannot but admire the adroit manner in which the author continues the mystery; how he eventually straightens things out is quite clever, and well worth reading.”

HEADON HILL

THE HIDDEN VICTIM. 6s.

THE ABERDEEN JOURNAL.—“To those who revel in sensational fiction, marked by literary skill as well as audacity and fertility of invention, this story can be confidently commended.”

RADFORD SHONE. 6s.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“I recall ‘The Hidden Victim’ as one of the best of Mr. Hill's books, and alongside it I shall now put ‘Radford Shone.’”

HER SPLENDID SIN. 6s.

PERTSHIRE COURIER.—“Headon Hill gives us good reading with plenty of thrilling incident. He has never told an intensely absorbing story with more dramatic directness than this one. The story is admirably written, the interest never flagging.”

A TRAITOR'S WOOING. 6s.

A splendid story which will be much liked by readers who care for “A Woman in White” and similar stories.

GUY BOOTHBY

THE RACE OF LIFE. 5s.

THE ENGLISH REVIEW.—“Ahead even of Mr. Cutcliffe Hyne and Sir Conan Doyle, Mr. Boothby may be said to have topped popularity's pole.”

FOR LOVE OF HER. 5s.

THE COURT JOURNAL.—“This book shows vivid imagination and dramatic power. Moreover, sketches of Australian life, from one who knows his subject, are always welcome.”

THE CRIME OF THE UNDER SEAS. 5s.

THE SPEAKER.—“Is quite the equal in art, observation, and dramatic intensity to any of Mr. Guy Boothby's numerous other romances, and is in every respect most typical of his powers.”

A BID FOR FREEDOM. 5s.

THE SHEFFIELD TELEGRAPH.—“As fascinating as any of its fore-runners, and is as finely handled. A fully written romance, which bristles with thrilling passages, exciting adventures, and hairbreadth escapes.”

A TWO-FOLD INHERITANCE. 5s.

PUNCH.—“Just the very book that a hard-working man should read for genuine relaxation. This novel is strongly recommended by the justly appreciating ‘Baron de Bookworms.’”

CONNIE BURY. 5s.

THE BIRMINGHAM GAZETTE.—“One of the best stories we have seen of Mr. Boothby's.”

THE KIDNAPPED PRESIDENT. 5s.

PUBLIC OPINION.—“Brighter, crisper, and more entertaining than any of its predecessors from the same pen.”

MY STRANGEST CASE. 5s.

THE YORKSHIRE POST.—“No work of Mr. Boothby's seems to us to have approached in skill his new story. The reader's attention is from first to last riveted on the narrative.”

FAREWELL, NIKOLA. 5s.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“Guy Boothby's famous creation of Dr. Nikola has become familiar to every reader of fiction.”

MY INDIAN QUEEN. 5s.

THE SUNDAY SPECIAL.—“A vivid story of adventure and daring, bearing all the characteristics of careful workmanship.”

LONG LIVE THE KING. 5s.

THE ABERDEEN FREE PRESS.—“It is marvellous that Mr. Boothby's novels should all be so uniformly good.”

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

GUY BOOTHBY—*continued.*

A PRINCE OF SWINDLERS. 5s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“Of absorbing interest. The exploits are described in an enthralling vein.”

A MAKER OF NATIONS. 5s.

THE SPECTATOR.—“‘A Maker of Nations’ enables us to understand Mr. Boothby’s vogue. It has no lack of movement or incident.”

THE RED RAT’S DAUGHTER. 5s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“Mr. Guy Boothby’s name on the title-page of a novel carries with it the assurance of a good story to follow.”

LOVE MADE MANIFEST. 5s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“A powerful and impressive romance. One of those tales of exciting adventure in the confection of which Mr. Boothby is not excelled by any novelist of the day.”

PHAROS THE EGYPTIAN. 5s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“This powerful novel is weird, wonderful, and soul-thrilling. There never was in this world so strange and wonderful a love story.”

ACROSS THE WORLD FOR A WIFE. 5s.

THE BRITISH WEEKLY.—“This stirring tale ranks next to ‘Dr. Nikola’ in the list of Mr. Boothby’s novels. It is an excellent piece of workmanship, and we can heartily recommend it.”

A SAILOR’S BRIDE. 5s.

THE MANCHESTER COURIER.—“Few authors can depict action as brilliantly and resourcefully as the creator of ‘Dr. Nikola.’”

THE LUST OF HATE. 5s.

THE DAILY GRAPHIC.—“Mr. Boothby gives place to no one in what might be called dramatic interest, so whoever wants dramatic interest let him read ‘The Lust of Hate.’”

THE FASCINATION OF THE KING. 5s.

THE BRISTOL MERCURY.—“Unquestionably the best work we have yet seen from the pen of Mr. Guy Boothby. . . . ‘The Fascination of the King’ is one of the books of the season.”

DR. NIKOLA. 5s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“One hairbreadth escape succeeds another with rapidity that scarce leaves the reader breathing space. . . . A story ingeniously invented and skilfully told.”

THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL. 5s.

THE YORKSHIRE POST.—“A more exciting romance no man could reasonably ask for.”

A BID FOR FORTUNE. 5s.

THE MANCHESTER COURIER.—“It is impossible to give any idea of the *verve* and brightness with which the story is told. The most original novel of the year.”

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

GUY BOOTHBY—*continued.*

IN STRANGE COMPANY. 5s.

THE WORLD.—“A capital novel. It has the quality of life and stir, and will carry the reader with curiosity unabated to the end.”

THE MARRIAGE OF ESTHER. 5s.

THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.—“A story full of action, life, and dramatic interest. There is a vigour and a power of illusion about it that raises it quite above the level of the ordinary novel of adventure.”

BUSHIGRAMS. 5s.

THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.—“Intensely interesting. Forces from us, by its powerful artistic realism, those choky sensations which it should be the aim of the human writer to elicit, whether in comedy or tragedy.”

SHEILAH McLEOD. 5s.

MR. W. L. ALDEN in THE NEW YORK TIMES.—“Mr. Boothby can crowd more adventure into a square foot of canvas than any other novelist.”

DR. NIKOLA'S EXPERIMENT. 5s.

Illustrated by Sidney Cowell.

THE MAN OF THE CRAG. 5s.

ARTHUR W. MARCHMONT

WHEN I WAS CZAR. 6s.

THE FREEMAN'S JOURNAL.—“A very brilliant work, every page in it displays the dramatic talent of the author and his capacity for writing smart dialogue.”

BY SNARE OF LOVE. 6s.

THE OUTLOOK.—“As a writer of political intrigue, Mr. Marchmont has scarcely a rival to-day, and his latest novel worthily upholds his reputation.”

THE QUEEN'S ADVOCATE. 6s.

THE LIVERPOOL COURIER.—“Mr. Marchmont is at his best in this tale. One has sometimes wondered in reading this author's works when his invention will give out. But his resource seems inexhaustible, and his spirits never flag.”

A COURIER OF FORTUNE. 6s.

THE DUNDEE COURIER.—“A most thrilling and romantic tale of France, which has the advantage of being exciting and fascinating without being too improbable.”

BY WIT OF WOMAN. 6s.

THE LEICESTER POST.—“The novel rivets the deep interest of the reader, and holds it spellbound to the end.”

IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. 6s.

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“A well-sustained and thrilling narrative.”

THE LITTLE ANARCHIST. 6s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“A romance brimful of incident and arousing in the reader a healthy interest that carries him along with never a pause—a vigorous story with elements that fascinate.”

AN IMPERIAL MARRIAGE. 6s.

A tale of Continental intrigue in its author's best and most original vein.

JOSEPH HOCKING

ROGER TREWINION. 3s. 6d.

T. P.'s WEEKLY.—“ It is a foregone conclusion that Mr. Hocking will always have a good story to tell. ‘ Roger Trewinion ’ can stand forth with the best, a strong love interest, plenty of adventure, an atmosphere of superstition, and Cornwall as the scene.”

THE COMING OF THE KING. 3s. 6d.

THE GLASGOW HERALD.—“ Mr. Hocking's latest romance exhibits no diminution of ability, and is marked by insight and dramatic power. His imagination is fertile, and his skill in the arrangement of incident far above the average, and there is an air of reality in all his writing which is peculiarly charming.”

EASU. 3s. 6d.

THE OUTLOOK.—“ Remarkable for the dramatic power with which the scenes are drawn and the intense human interest which Mr. Hocking has woven about his characters. ‘ Easu ’ is sure to be one of the novels of the season.”

GREATER LOVE. 3s. 6d.

THE NEWCASTLE CHRONICLE.—“ Though of a totally different character from ‘ Lest We Forget,’ Mr. Hocking's latest story is entitled to take rank along with that fine romance. The story arrests the attention from the first chapters, and soon becomes highly dramatic.”

LEST WE FORGET. 3s. 6d.

PUBLIC OPINION.—“ His story is quite as good as any we have read of the Stanley Weyman's school, and presents an excellent picture of the exciting times of Gardiner and Bonner.”

AND SHALL TRELAWNEY DIE ? 3s. 6d.

THE WEEKLY SUN.—“ An engaging and fascinating romance. The reader puts the story down with a sigh, and wishes there were more of these breezy Cornish uplands, for Mr. Joseph Hocking's easy style of narrative does not soon tire.”

JABEZ EASTERBROOK. 3s. 6d.

THE ROCK.—“ Real strength is shown in the sketches, of which that of Brother Bowman is most prominent. In its way it is delightful.”

THE WEAPONS OF MYSTERY. 3s. 6d.

“ Weapons of Mystery ” is a singularly powerful story of occult influences and of their exertion for evil purposes. A tale which it is not easy to put down when once commenced.

ZILLAH : A ROMANCE. 3s. 6d.

THE SPECTATOR.—“ The drawing of some of the characters indicates the possession by Mr. Hocking of a considerable gift of humour. The contents of his book indicate that he takes a genuine interest in the deeper problems of the day.”

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

JOSEPH HOCKING—*continued.*

THE MONK OF MAR-SABA. 3s. 6d.

THE STAR.—“Great power and thrilling interest. . . . The scenery of the Holy Land has rarely been so vividly described as in this charming book of Mr. Hocking's.”

THE PURPLE ROBE. 3s. 6d.

THE QUEEN.—“Mr. Hocking's most interesting romance. It is exceedingly clever, and excites the reader's interest and brings out the powerful nature of the clever young minister. This most engrossing book challenges comparison with the brilliance of Lothair.”

THE SCARLET WOMAN. 3s. 6d.

THE METHODIST RECORDER.—“This is Mr. Hocking's strongest and best book. We advise every one to read it. The plot is simple, compact and strenuous; the writing powerful. It brings out sharply the real character of the typical Jesuit, his training, motives, limitations, aims.”

ALL MEN ARE LIARS. 3s. 6d.

THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.—“This is a notable book. Thoughtful people will be fascinated by its actuality, its fearlessness, and the insight it gives into the influence of modern thought and literature upon the minds and morals of our most promising manhood.”

ISHMAEL PENGELLY: AN OUTCAST. 3s. 6d.

THE ATHENÆUM.—“The book is to be recommended for the dramatic effectiveness of some of the scenes. The wild, half-mad woman is always picturesque wherever she appears, and the rare self-repression of her son is admirably done.”

THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX. 3s. 6d.

THE MANCHESTER EXAMINER.—“Rustic scenes and characters are drawn with free, broad touches, without Mr. Buchanan's artificiality, and, if we may venture to say it, with more realism than Mr. Hardy's country pictures.”

THE BIRTHRIGHT. 3s. 6d.

THE SPECTATOR.—“This volume proves beyond all doubt that Mr. Hocking has mastered the art of the historical romancist. ‘The Birthright’ is, in its way, quite as well constructed, as well written, and as full of incident as any story that has come from the pen of Mr. Conan Doyle or Mr. Stanley Weyman.”

MISTRESS NANCY MOLESWORTH. 3s. 6d.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“‘Mistress Nancy Molesworth’ is as charming a story of the kind as could be wished, and it excels in literary workmanship as well as in imaginative vigour and daring invention.”

FIELDS OF FAIR RENOWN. 3s. 6d.

THE DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“Mr. Hocking has produced a work which his readers of all classes will appreciate. . . . There are exhibited some of the most beautiful aspects of disposition.”

WARD, LOCK & CO.'S POPULAR FICTION

L. G. MOBERLY

THAT PREPOSTEROUS WILL. 6s.

THE DAILY GRAPHIC.—“We could wish that every novel were as pleasant, unsophisticated and readable as this one.”

HOPE, MY WIFE. 6s.

THE GENTLEWOMAN.—“Miss Moberly interests us so much in heroine, and in her hero, that we follow the two with pleasure through adventures of the most improbable order.”

DIANA. 6s.

THE SCOTSMAN.—“So cleverly handled as to keep its interest always lively and stimulating; and the book cannot fail to be enjoyed.”

DAN—AND ANOTHER. 6s.

THE DAILY NEWS.—“Must be considered one of the best pieces of work that Miss Moberly has yet produced.”

A TANGLED WEB. 6s.

THE DAILY MAIL.—“A ‘tangled web,’ indeed, is this story, and the author’s ingenuity and intrepidity in developing and working out the mystery calls for recognition at the outset.”

ANGELA’S MARRIAGE. 6s.

IRISH INDEPENDENT.—“That Miss Moberly has a delightful and graceful style is not only evident from a perusal of some of her former works, but from the fascinatingly told story now under review.”

THE SIN OF ALISON DERING. 6s.

Miss L. G. Moberly is making a big reputation for herself as a writer of strong emotional stories, and this story will add considerably to her popularity.

GUY THORNE

FIRST IT WAS ORDAINED. 6s.

THE PALL MALL GAZETTE says:—“‘First it was Ordained’ is a long way ahead of ‘When it was Dark.’ Mr. Guy Thorne has the gift of the great orator or preacher in holding your attention.”

THE ANGEL. 6s.

DUNDEE ADVERTISER.—“Another of those daringly original, graphic, and popularly influential stories that Guy Thorne loves to write. Both as a story and as an argument for the reality of the spiritual in men and affairs, it is strong and persuasive.”

THE SOCIALIST. 6s.

The subject of his new novel is indicated by its title, and the story is one likely to attract enormous attention, and be everywhere discussed.

ARCHIBALD EYRE

THE TRIFLER. 6s.

THE DAILY EXPRESS.—“A most cleverly contrived farcical comedy, full of really fresh incidents, and a dialogue that is genuinely amusing; there is not a character who is not always welcome and full of entertainment.”

THE CUSTODIAN. 6s.

THE MORNING POST.—“An exceptionally clever and entertaining novel; the reader is compelled to finish the book when he has once taken it up. . . . It is impossible to resist its attractions.”

THE GIRL IN WAITING. 6s.

THE DAILY MAIL.—“This is quite a delightful book. The note is struck ingeniously and hilariously on the doorstep. It is a most enjoyable comedy, which must be read to be appreciated. We can cordially recommend it.”

THE LEADING LADY. 6s.

DAILY EXPRESS.—“A good stirring, moving novel, one which retains the attention and compels a sustained interest. It is a good book.”

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS

THE HOUSE IN THE WATER. 6s.

THE PRESS says:—“As a writer about animals, Mr. Roberts occupies an enviable place. He is the most literary, as well as the most imaginative and vivid, of all the nature writers.”

“Poet Laureate of the Animal World, Professor Roberts displays the keenest powers of observation closely interwoven with a fine imaginative discretion.”

KINGS IN EXILE. 6s.

Another beautifully illustrated volume of nature and animal stories, in the writing of which the author is without a compeer.

MARIE CONNOR LEIGHTON

SEALED LIPS. 6s.

THE DAILY EXPRESS.—“An excellent story, well constructed, and the interest is kept going till the last page.”

PUT YOURSELF IN HER PLACE. 6s.

THE SHEFFIELD DAILY TELEGRAPH.—“Marie Connor Leighton is well known as the authoress of ‘Convict 99,’ and in her latest work she present a novel equal to anything her pen has written. Many dramatic incidents are introduced, and the work may be safely recommended as containing all the elements of a successful novel.”

MONEY. 6s.

“For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” This is the keynote of this stirring novel by the author of “Convict 99.”

THIS BOOK IS DUE FOR RETURN ON
THE LATEST DATE SHOWN BELOW

Except that members of academic staff
may retain it for the following period:

U Book for 2 weeks after due date.

Stack Book (not periodical) for
two months after due date.

072765 27 FEB 1967

071777 15 AUG 1974

DATE DUE

12 JAN 1988



DATE DUE

19 JAN 1988

198403 - 23 JUL 88

DATE DUE

- 6 AUG 1989

DATE DUE
15 SEP 1989

INTER-LIB

15 SEP 1999

UNLESS RECALLED

a0000000102015987b



UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

Fisher Research

A 823.91

0000000102015987

Pratt A.

Big five

