THE GOLD KLOOF

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at https://www.gutenberg.org/license. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

Title: The Gold Kloof

Author: H. A. Bryden

Release Date: July 06, 2013 [eBook #43114]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GOLD KLOOF ***

Produced by Al Haines.

[image]

Cover art

[image]

The rhinoceros, snorting loudly, was upon them.

The Gold Kloof

BY
H. A. BRYDEN

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS
London, Edinburgh, Dublin, and New York
1907

CONTENTS.

I. *School Days*

II. *Bamborough Farm*

III. *Up-country Life*

IV. *The Gold Spoor*

V. *The Trek Begins*

VI. *The Shadowers and the Shadowed*

VII. *Adventures in the Veldt*

VIII. *The Elephant Country*

IX. *In the Thirst-land*

X. *Tom's Story.–The Baboon Boy*

XI. *The Berg Damaras*

XII. *The Lion Camp*

XIII. *Guy is Missing*

XIV. *Poeskop to the Rescue*

XV. *The Kloof*

XVI. *Gathering Gold*

XVII. *The Shadowers' Attack*

XVIII. *The Last of Karl Engelbrecht*

XIX. *Homeward Bound*

THE GOLD KLOOF.

Chapter I.
SCHOOL DAYS.

It was a fine, hot July day on the banks of the Severn river at Tewkesbury, that quaint, old-world, and somewhat decayed town, which offers to the inspection of the visitor and the archæologist some of the most ancient and interesting buildings to be seen in any part of broad England. There was some stir on the banks of the river, for two public schools, one of them situate in the west of England, the other hailing from a Midland shire, were about to contest with one another in their annual boat race. From the Western school a considerable contingent of lads had come over; these were discussing, with the enthusiasm of schoolboys, the prospects of the races. On the banks, gathered near the winning-post, were also to be seen a number of other spectators, some from the town itself, others from the neighbouring country-side.

The fateful moment at length had come; the two boats were to be seen in the distance, their oarsmen battling with one another with all the desperate energy that youth and strength and an invincible determination could put into their task. As they drew nearer it was to be seen that the Midland school was leading by nearly half a length. A quarter of a mile remained to be rowed. Loud cries from

the Western school resounded along the banks. Hope struggled against hope in every youthful breast; yet it seemed that if the oarsmen of the Western school were to make that final effort for which they were famous, it was now almost too late. But, no! the Western stroke is seen to be calling upon his crew; their flashing blades dip quicker, and yet quicker; they are well together, all apparently animated by the vigour and the reserve of force displayed by their leader. Foot by foot they diminish the lead of their adversaries, who are striving desperately, yet ineffectually, to retain their advantage. A hundred yards from the winning-post the Western lads are level; and as the post is passed they have defeated their adversaries, after one of the finest races ever rowed between the two schools, by a quarter of a length.

Amid the exultant and tremendous cheering that now greets the triumph of the Western school, both crews paddle to the boat-house and disembark. The boats are got out and housed, and all but the Western captain and stroke, Guy Hardcastle, are inside the boathouse, bathing and changing their clothes. Guy Hardcastle, a strong, well-set-up lad of seventeen, lingers on the platform in conversation with his house-master, Mr. Brimley-Fair, who has come down to congratulate him on his victory. He is a good-looking lad, fresh complexioned, with fair brown hair, a firm mouth, and a pair of steady, blue-gray eyes, which look the world frankly in the face, with an aspect of candour, friendliness, and self-reliance that most people find very attractive.

While master and boy are talking together for a brief minute or two, a sudden cry comes from the river, followed by others. They look that way, and see instantly the reason of the outcry. Some country people, rowing across from the other side, are evidently not accustomed to boating. Two of them attempt to change places in mid-stream: they are womenfolk; they become alarmed and shift in their places, the heavily laden boat is upset, and half a dozen people are struggling in the water.

Guy Hardcastle is nothing if not prompt. His resolution is instantly taken. He is in his light rowing kit, well prepared for swimming. Kicking off his shoes, he dives neatly into the water, and swims rapidly upstream towards the group of struggling people sixty yards away. Of these, three are clinging to the boat; one man is swimming for the shore with a child; the sixth, a girl of fourteen, has just sunk ten yards beyond the boat down-stream. Her danger is manifestly great and imminent. Boats are putting off from the bank, but they may be too late. Guy Hardcastle, surveying the disaster with cool eye as he swims that way, has concentrated all his energies on this drowning and terror-stricken girl. He is within fifteen yards of where she sank; and now, a few seconds later, just as the girl, now partly insensible, comes to the surface again, he grasps her firmly, turns her over on her back–a task of some difficulty–and, himself also swimming

on his back, tows her towards the bank. It is not an easy task. The girl is no light weight, encumbered as she is with soddened clothing; the stream is strong, and Guy himself is by no means so fresh as he might have been, after that hard and exhausting race of a few minutes since. Still, with invincible determination, the plucky lad struggles with his burden towards the boat-house. Help comes unexpectedly. His house-master, Mr. Brimley-Fair, has foreseen his difficulties, and, jumping into a dingy, has rowed out to his assistance. Presently he is alongside.

”Here you are, Hardcastle,” he cries; ”catch hold of her side!”

Guy clutches with one hand at the boat’s gunwale, and feels that he and his burden are now pretty safe.

”Now, hang on while I row you in,” says Mr. Brimley-Fair, ”and we’ll soon have you all right.”

Guy does as he is told, and in fifty strokes the boathouse is reached, and girl and rescuer are safe. A storm of cheering, greater even than that which greeted the winning of the boat race, now testifies to the gallantry of the boy’s second feat and the relief of all that the girl is safe. Meanwhile, the remainder of the overturned crew have been rescued by boats rowed from the bank.

Arrived at the boat-house, willing hands hung on to the dingy while Mr. Brimley-Fair stepped out of her. Then, bringing her side gently to the platform, they grasped Guy Hardcastle and his burden and lifted them into safety. The girl was pale and insensible, but she breathed; a doctor was quickly in attendance; and after the usual restorative methods had been applied for a quarter of an hour, the patient came round, was carried to a neighbouring hotel, put to bed, and by the evening was well enough to be taken home.

After the doctor had taken charge of the half-drowned girl, Mr. Brimley-Fair turned his attention to Guy Hardcastle, still dripping from his immersion.

”Now, my boy,” he said, kindly patting him on the shoulder, ”you have done splendidly. That was a plucky thing to do. You remembered all your life-saving lessons–which some of the boys seem to think a bore–and deserve, and I hope will get, the Humane Society’s Medal. But, medal or no medal, you did your duty and a brave thing, and we are all proud of you. Now go and get your clothes off and a rub down. You look tired and chilled, as well you may, after rowing that fine race and saving a girl’s life. I’ve sent for some brandy, and you’ll soon be all right again.”

”All right, sir,” said the boy, cheerful though shivering. ”I shall be quite fit as soon as I get into my clothes.”

The brandy soon arrived, and the lad was given a small quantity in some water. Thoroughly dried and rubbed down, he was, not long after, clothed and comfortable again, and quite equal to doing his duty by his adversaries of the recent boat race, who with his own schoolmates were loud in admiration of his

latest feat.

The rival crews had some food together, under the chairmanship of Mr. Brimley-Fair; and later on, the Midland crew having been seen off at the station, the Western lads took train for their own school.

About ten days after these events, Guy Hardcastle received news that altered the whole course of his life. The son of a mining engineer, whose duties took him much away from England into distant parts of the world, the lad had had the misfortune to lose his mother at a very early age. He lived during his vacations with an aunt, a sister of his father's, a Miss Hardcastle, who lived at a quiet country house in the county of Durham. Beyond two families of cousins living in the same county, the lad had few other relatives in England. He had, however, an Uncle Charles, his mother's only brother, living in South Africa, who came home occasionally to England, and to whom he was greatly attached. In fact, next to his father, the lad looked upon his Uncle Charles as his greatest friend. Guy was now a month or two past seventeen. He had been four years at his present school, where he was an immense favourite. Captain of the rowing club, he had not time or opportunity to devote himself, as he would have liked, to cricket, and was not therefore in the eleven. But he was in the twenty-two. He was also a distinguished member of the football team, and a good athlete. At the last sports he had won the mile in the record time for his school of four minutes forty-nine seconds, and had, in addition, carried off the half-mile, the quarter-mile, and the grand steeplechase. Winning as well the long jump and throwing the cricket ball, he was easily *victor ludorum* in the school sports.

Although not a brilliantly clever boy, he was possessed of quite average brains. He was, in addition, a steady and consistent worker, with the result that he was now in the highest form in the school, on the modern side, and a prefect. A thoroughly good stamp of an English schoolboy, excellent at work, keen at games, good tempered, reliable, and steady, Guy Hardcastle was undoubtedly all round the most popular boy in the school. He owed not a little of his popularity to his character, which was strong, simple, and always to be relied upon. His schoolfellows knew that he hated meanness and lying; that he was the foe of the bully and the sneak; that the side he took was the side always of truth and honour and duty. In his own house his force of character and his steady example had insensibly created within the last year or so a vast improvement in the whole tone and spirit of the community of fifty boys; and his house-master, Mr. Brimley-Fair, well knew how valuable an ally he had in the boy, in those directions where the precepts and admonitions of the master are not always able to penetrate.

Guy Hardcastle expected at this period to have another year of school life. After that time it was his father's intention to send him to the School of Mines in Jermyn Street, London, to prepare him for the profession of a mining engineer,

which he himself followed. The fateful news that Guy received came to him one morning in a letter which, by the handwriting, postmark, and stamp, he knew was from his Uncle Charles, in British Bechuanaland. The first few lines read by him as he sat at breakfast turned his ruddy cheek pale. He read no further, but thrust the letter into his pocket, hurriedly finished his meal, and went to his study. There he took out the letter again, and, sadly and with a clouded brow, perused the contents, which were as follows:–

"**BAMBOROUGH FARM, NEAR MAFEKING,** **BRITISH BECHUANALAND,** *May 4, 1896.*

"MY DEAR GUY,–I am grieved indeed to have bad news to send you–the worst, in fact, that I could possibly have to write. Your dear father died two months since at Abaquessa, some two hundred miles up country from Cape Coast Castle, where, as you know, he was at work opening up a mine. This is a sad blow for us all, more especially for you, who lose your nearest and dearest relative, and one of the best and kindest of fathers. I need not tell you how much I mourn his loss. He was a very old and dear friend of mine, and the fact that he married my sister, Helen, rendered our friendship yet a closer one.

"Your father's agent at Cape Coast Castle has forwarded me all his papers and belongings, including two letters written to me by your father shortly before his death. From these two letters, and from Mr. Delvine's accounts, I gather that your father had had repeated attacks of the dangerous malarial fever which is so fatal on the West Coast. From the last of these he never recovered. In his last two letters to me, which I enclose for your perusal, he seems to have had a foreboding that he would not recover; and in the very last (the few lines in pencil, written the day before his death) he asks me to take charge of you and look after you till you are able to manage your own affairs. You know, my dear Guy, how glad and willing I shall be to do whatever I can for you, and what a pleasure to us it will be to see you out here, if it shall hereafter be settled that you come.

"From what your father has told me, he has left behind him some £2,000. This will, of course, come to you, under the terms of the will, at the age of twenty-one. Meantime, you are to have the interest for your maintenance. I need hardly point out to you that your father's death makes a great difference in your future prospects. He earned a fairly good income during his life, and had at one time saved considerably more money than he now leaves. Some unfortunate investments, and the very heavy expenses of that patent lawsuit in which he was engaged–trying vainly, as it turned out, to protect a very unique invention of his own in connection with the concentration and chlorination of pyrites–reduced his savings very considerably; and instead of some £5,000, which might have been looked for three or four years ago, you now only succeed, as I say, to about £2,000.

"In his last two letters your father, as you will see, told me that he had decided not to enter you into his own profession of a mining engineer. He had come to the conclusion that the life is too precarious a one; that although a man, if he is lucky, can occasionally make a big income, yet the

prizes are few and the risks very great. The life is a hard one, as he points out. A mining engineer has to take his chance in all parts of the world; too often his work is cast in a pestilential climate, and, if he escapes death, his health and constitution are, as often as not, completely ruined by the time he reaches middle age. Your father believed–and rightly, as it turned out–that the West Coast mining on which he was engaged, handsomely though he was paid, would be the death of him sooner or later, and was very sorry he had accepted the appointment. However, he was under a contract, and could not well throw up his engagement; and the fever has, alas, proved, as it has for so many other good men, the death of him.

”He reiterated, as you will see, in both these letters, the wish that, in case of his death, you should come out here to me and learn farming. He says, very rightly, that the life is a healthy one; that a man can do fairly well if he is steady and sticks to business; and that he is convinced that you, with your open-air inclinations and active habits, would do very well in it. You will have enough to start you fairly when you are ready to take up land of your own. Your father knew, of course, that if you came out here, as I hope you may do, you would live with us at small expense–as a matter of fact I shall see that it costs you nothing–and that you would have a fair chance of learning stock-farming, and would be well looked after.

”Now, my dear boy, I want you to think over these things; to discuss them with your house-master, Mr. Brimley-Fair, whom I had the pleasure of meeting two years ago when I was home, and with your Aunt Effie, and make up your mind what you think you would like to do in the world. Your father has left me your guardian, but I don’t want to press my own ideas too much. I want you to think over your father’s wishes, and give me your own view of what you hope to do with your life. If you wish to stay on another year at school, I will see that the thing shall be managed. If, on the contrary, you desire to come out here to us, and take up the business of stock-farming, I think it will be better to leave after this term. I have written Mr. Brimley-Fair, pointing out your altered circumstances, and arranging that, if necessary, the usual quarter’s notice shall be dispensed with. You will be going to your Aunt Effie’s at the end of the term for your holidays. You and she must talk things over, and if you settle to come out here she will help you to fit yourself out and see you off.

”You will understand that I don’t want to make a point of your throwing in your lot with me and taking to my business of farming out here. I want you to think well over the pros and cons. I don’t know whether you have ever thought of any other line of life. I would remind you, however, that doctoring and the law require a long and expensive apprenticeship of five years at least before you can earn money for yourself; that you cannot afford an army career; and that you are now too old for the navy. From what I know of you, I don’t fancy you would take very readily to the career of a bank clerk, or a clerk in a merchant’s office.

”If you do settle to join us here, I can only say that we shall all have the very heartiest welcome for you, and that I shall do my best to fit you for the life of a South African farmer.

”Now, my dear Guy, I must finish. With our deepest sympathy in your heavy loss, and our kindest love,–Believe me, your affectionate Uncle, C. F. BLAKENEY.”

From this letter, which, it may well be imagined, Guy Hardcastle read with the saddest feelings, he turned to the enclosures–his father's last letters to his Uncle Charles. He himself had received, three weeks since, a most kind and affectionate letter from his father, written only a week before the first of these two forwarded by his uncle. In this letter his father, although mentioning that he had been down with fever, had said nothing to his boy of the fears which he had expressed to Mr. Blakeney. Guy could see well enough now, as he read the two last letters, that his father had wished to spare him any anxiety. The perusal of these two letters received by his uncle, and the tidings of his father's death; the remembrances of the happy days that he had had with him; his unvarying good temper and cheerfulness and thought for him–all these things brought the tears welling to the boy's eyes. Sad was it, indeed, to think that he should never again set eyes upon that strong and active form; never look into those keen blue eyes; never be able to depend upon that firm mind and excellent judgment, which hitherto had always been at his disposal.

After dinner on the following day, Guy, instead of going out with his schoolfellows to their usual games, stayed behind in the house and waited for a summons from Mr. Brimley-Fair, who had already spoken a few kind words to him, sympathizing in his heavy loss, and telling him he would be prepared to talk over matters with him after a day's interval. He was presently sent for. His house-master laid his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder and put him into a chair.

"This is a very sad business, Hardcastle," he said. "I know what a loss yours is. Nothing, no other friend, can replace a good father, do what we can. I think you know that I feel with you most sincerely in your trouble. I knew your father, and liked and respected him much; and I had as little idea as yourself that he was so soon to be taken from you."

The tears came to Guy's eyes at these words; his feelings were too much for him; he could just then say nothing. His master noticed the lad's trouble, and went on.

"But we are now face to face with quite a different set of circumstances from those of forty-eight hours ago. You have to go out into the world, not, thanks to your Uncle Charles, quite alone, but with the knowledge that for the future you have to rely mainly upon your own exertions in the battle which we all have to fight. I have had a long letter from your uncle; it contains very much the same information that he has sent you. I have purposely left you a day for reflection before talking things over. I have always looked upon you as a sensible fellow. What are your ideas as to the future?"

Guy had had time to recover himself, as his master intended he should. He was now able to answer in a fairly collected voice.

"Well, sir, I have thought over things the greater part of the last day and

night, and the conclusion I have come to is, that I should prefer above all things to go out to Bechuanaland and join my uncle. My reasons are best expressed, I think, by the last part of my uncle's letter to me."

He showed the letter to Mr. Brimley-Fair, who read it carefully.

"Well," said the house-master, "there is a great deal in what your uncle says, and you are certainly restricted in your choice of a profession or business. Still, your ideas may alter. Don't be in a hurry."

"No, sir," the boy went on firmly, "my mind is quite made up, and I don't think anything will alter it. My uncle's life, which I know a good deal about, will, I am certain, suit me better than any other occupation. I should like it above all things. Of course I shall hear what my Aunt Effie–Miss Hardcastle, I mean–has to say, but I am convinced I shall not change my opinion."

Miss Hardcastle came down from the north during the following week, and Guy's future was again seriously and thoroughly discussed. In the end, all three parties–Miss Hardcastle, Mr. Brimley-Fair, and Guy Hardcastle–agreed that he, Guy, could not do better than go out to his uncle and take up the life of a farmer in South Africa.

Guy left that term, to the general regret of his schoolfellows, his house-master, and, a much more important personage, the headmaster of the school. In the following September, having chosen his modest kit and belongings, as advised by his Uncle Charles, Guy sailed for South Africa in the fine Cape liner, the *Tantallon Castle*. He had an excellent passage, and landed at Cape Town in the second week in October.

Chapter II.
BAMBOROUGH FARM.

At Cape Town Guy was met by his uncle, who had come down country to welcome him. The greeting was an affectionate one on both sides, for uncle and nephew were much attached to one another.

"My word, Guy," said Mr. Blakeney, as he shook his nephew by the hand, and looked him up and down, "you have grown since I saw you at home two years ago. What height are you now?"

"Five foot ten, uncle," returned Guy, smiling; "and my weight is eleven stone four. I don't want to grow any taller."

”Well, you’re about tall enough,” said Mr. Blakeney; ”but I expect you’ll put on another inch before you’ve done, and you’re bound to be a twelve stone five man when you’re full grown. I’m heartily glad to see you, and so will your aunt and cousins be when you reach Bamborough. As for Tom, he’s dying to have a look at his cousin, of whom he has heard so much. By the way, my boy, I have to congratulate you on saving that girl from drowning at Tewkesbury in July last. Mr. Brimley-Fair told me about it in a letter shortly after, and sent me an account of it in a local paper. We’re all very proud of you; and you are, I can see, like your father, a good plucked one. Mr. Brimley-Fair says you are pretty sure to get the Humane Society’s medal later on, and indeed you deserve it after so gallant a feat.”

”Please, uncle, don’t say another word about it,” said Guy, reddening at Mr. Blakeney’s words. ”I only did what any other fellow would have done. I was nearest to the girl, and you must remember I was already stripped–or nearly stripped–for rowing.”

”Yes, I remember that, my boy,” rejoined his uncle, with a kindly pat on the shoulder. ”But I remember, too, that you had just had a very hard and exhausting struggle in the boat race you won, and were scarcely in fit condition to rescue people from drowning. Well, now, we’ll get your luggage off the ship, drive up to the International Hotel, have some lunch, and then look about the town. I have some business in Cape Town which will keep me two or three days. During that time we’ll have a look round, and you shall see what there is to be seen.”

Mr. Blakeney was as good as his word. He showed Guy the sights of the old Dutch town, one of the most picturesque cities in the world. They drove round by the wonderful Victoria Drive, thence home by Wynberg and Rondebosch. At Wynberg they had a look at Great Constantia, the Government wine farm, a fine old Cape mansion, once the abode of the Cloete family. At Rondebosch they paid a visit to Groot Schuur, and Guy was shown the various trophies and curiosities of Mr. Rhodes’s well-known mansion. Another day they went over the Kloof to Kamp’s Bay; and on yet another they climbed the four thousand feet of Table Mountain, and from that magnificent altitude gazed over one of the grandest scapes by sea and land to be witnessed in any part of the world.

On the fifth day after Guy’s arrival they took the up-country train, and after spending two days and nights on the rail, and passing Beaufort West, the Orange River, Kimberley, and Vryburg, reached Mafeking. During the journey Guy Hardcastle was never weary of gazing at the strange and varied scenery that unfolded itself before his eyes. He noted the wild mountain country through which they climbed before reaching the plateau of the Great Karroo. He watched the barren and seemingly illimitable vastness of the flat, red Karroo plains; saw wild springbucks and tame ostriches; and feasted his eyes on the huge chain

of mountain, the magnificent Zwartberg, which for scores of leagues reared its mighty ramparts to the south of the plain country, until lost in the dim distance a hundred miles away to the eastward. He noted, too, the extraordinary clearness of the atmosphere. Hills and mountains that were, as his uncle assured him, forty or fifty miles away, appeared in this sparkling and translucent atmosphere little more than a dozen or fifteen miles distant.

"Yes, Guy," added his uncle, "you'll find this clearness of the atmosphere rather troublesome at first, when you begin rifle-shooting. The game on the plains are much farther off than newcomers can believe; and the consequence is that, until they get used to our conditions of light and atmosphere, sportsmen fresh to the country invariably underestimate their distances, and fire far short of the buck, or whatever it may be they are aiming at. By the way, have you ever fired a rifle?"

"Yes," replied the boy quietly, "I have had some practice with the Martini-Henry at butts, and did pretty well for a beginner; and, as you know, I've used a shot-gun ever since I was twelve years old. I began with small birds and rabbits; two years ago I shot partridge with father–he was home that autumn; and last year I was grouse-shooting with our cousins, the Forsters, in Northumberland.

"By the way, uncle," he went on, "I've brought out a sporting Martini-Henry rifle, as you told me. That and the ammunition are packed up in the long case with my saddlery and the rest of my outfit. Here's my shot-gun," he continued, taking down a gun-case from the rack above, undoing it, and extracting from it a handsome double-barrel. "It's a beauty, isn't it? Father gave it me two years ago on my birthday. It's a 'Cogswell and Harrison,' and a first-rate shooter."

Mr. Blakeney was a keen sportsman, and naturally took an interest in every kind of firearm. He took the gun, which Guy had meanwhile put together, examined it carefully, handled it, balanced it, and standing up in the first-class carriage, which they had to themselves, put it up to his shoulder two or three times.

"Yes, it's a very pretty gun, well built and finished, Guy," he remarked. "You'll have plenty of opportunity of using it at Bamborough. We have lots of feathered game: partridges, pheasants (both of them a kind of francolin), koorhaan–that is, bustards–of various kinds, and numbers of wild guinea-fowl. Then there are plover, "dikkop," and so forth; sand-grouse, wild fowl, when the rains fall and the pans and vleis are full, and various other odds and ends."

"My word, uncle," said Guy eagerly, "this is splendid news. I'm especially fond of bird-shooting, and I had no idea you had all this variety."

Meantime, Mr. Blakeney had in his turn been looking for a gun-case, which he extracted, after no little trouble, from under the seat. He took out his keys, opened the case, and quickly put together a light small-bore sporting rifle.

”Here’s a little surprise I had in store for you, Guy,” he said. ”We have a deal of time to put in on this journey, and I may as well make the best of it. This is one of the newest small-bore magazine rifles, a sporting Mannlicher, which an old friend of mine, who has tested it, tells me is the best weapon he knows for all kinds of buck up to a hartebeest or koodoo, or even an eland. I sent down to George Rawbone of Cape Town to get it out from England for me. Tom and I each have a Lee-Metford .303 sporting rifle. This, I believe, is even better. It’s from Holland and Holland in Bond Street, and it ought to be a good one. There you are, my boy,” he added, putting it into his nephew’s hands. ”I hope you’ll like it, and will shoot many a head of game with it. I’ve got plenty of ammunition for you.”

Guy’s face had lit up with pleasure as his uncle handed him the weapon.

”It’s awfully good of you, uncle,” he said; ”I can’t thank you enough. It’s a lovely rifle,” he continued, as he handled the weapon and tried the mechanism. ”If I can’t shoot with that, I deserve to be shot myself. I’ve heard one of our fellows talk of the Mannlicher. His father shoots red deer with it in Scotland, and he says it’s a splendid rifle. I’m afraid my Martini-Henry, with its black powder, will have its nose rather put out of joint by this beauty.”

”No, I don’t think so,” replied his uncle. ”You will find the Martini still a very useful rifle, although, compared with the new smokeless powder weapons, it produces a lot of smoke, makes a big noise, and has a nasty kick. Some day, when you go into the hunting veldt, you will find it a very good second rifle in reserve; and it’s always well to have a spare arm in case anything goes wrong with your first choice and favourite. The Martini bullet delivers a heavy, smashing blow; and I’m not sure whether for lion, leopard, and elephant, and giraffe and the heavier game, I should not still prefer it.”

They presently crossed the Orange River, and passed into Griqualand West. Kimberley was reached and left behind; in no great while they passed Fourteen Streams, and entered the rolling grass-veldt country of British Bechuanaland. Vryburg, the little capital of this colony, was presently left behind; and, a hundred miles farther north, they alighted, after their long journey, at Mafeking. Here they stayed the night at Dixon’s Hotel.

Mafeking still showed some faint remnants of the excitement which had overtaken it when, some ten months earlier, Dr. Jameson and his raiders had marched from that neighbourhood on their madcap and ill-starred attempt upon the Transvaal. That evening, after dinner, Guy heard occasional references to that period, which interested him not a little. He saw, too, for the first time, some Transvaal Boers, who were in the town selling stock and buying various things that they required. Guy watched these men with a curious and a critical eye. So these were the people with whom England for a hundred years had had so much

trouble and so many difficulties. As he watched the big burly fellows–slack and loose-limbed and clumsy they seemed to him, with their rough corduroy clothes, loose trousers, short jackets, slouch hats, great beards, and generally unkempt appearance–it was hard to realize that these were the men who had defeated British troops at Majuba Hill, Laing's Nek, and other places.

He listened to their thick guttural language with astonished interest.

"What a strange lingo," he said to his uncle quietly, after the latter had been discussing cattle and crops with some of the Transvaalers.

"Yes," replied Mr. Blakeney, "it's a queer patois till you get accustomed to it. But you'll have to pick it up, uncouth as it sounds. One can hardly get on in this country without it. All the natives who work for Europeans speak it; and what with transport-riders and Dutch farmers all over the place–most of whom can hardly speak a word of English–one finds it absolutely necessary to acquire Boer Dutch."

"All right, uncle," said Guy, with his usual keenness, "I'll begin as soon as you like."

"Very well," rejoined Mr. Blakeney; "Tom and I will be your tutors. You will not be long before you pick up a fair colloquial knowledge of the language. After all, many of the words are practically identical with much of our Lowland Scotch. *Kist*, the word for chest, for example, is identical with the Scottish word. *Lang* stands for long in both countries. *Kloof*, a ravine, is the same as the Lowland *cleugh*. *Pat* means path or road, and so on. Their word *spoor*, which means tracks or footprints, is identical with an old-fashioned provincial word still in use in England. Otter hunters, for example, often call it the spur of an otter, when they see the prints of these animals in the smooth mud or sand of a riverside."

Mr. Blakeney had had his Cape cart and four horses sent in to meet them, and next morning at dawn they started on the forty-mile drive south-westward which was to land them at Bamborough Farm. Taking with them their gunnery and some ammunition, as well as Mr. Blakeney's and Guy's portmanteaus, they left behind the rest of Guy's kit and impedimenta, which were to be sent on, with some goods and farm implements, by ox-wagon. Having driven for some two and a half hours, they outspanned for breakfast. Peetsi, Mr. Blakeney's Bechuana groom, quickly collected some thorn wood and made a fire; they cooked a kettle of coffee, fried some tinned sausages in a tiny saucepan, got out bread, butter, and a tin of marmalade, and made an excellent meal. Never, thought Guy, had he enjoyed a breakfast so much. Meanwhile the horses, on being unharnessed, had indulged in the invariable roll which all Cape nags make a point of on being off-saddled or outspanned, and were knee-haltered. This operation was closely observed by Guy, at his uncle's suggestion. It is an extremely useful one, which any newcomer to the South African veldt ought to make himself master of. Knee-

haltered, the horse can graze comfortably, yet cannot wander far away. Guy watched Peetsi's operations, and then, after one or two vain attempts, secured two of the horses himself.

"Well done, Guy!" said his uncle approvingly. "Nothing like picking up these things as soon as possible. You'll do, I can see. Once a man learns how to knee-halter a nag, he never forgets it. It's like running or skating, or riding or dancing–once mastered, never forgotten."

The horses were given a feed of forage, which consists of the ears and stalks of oats cut up and eaten together–"oat-hay" some people call it–and then grazed for half an hour in the long grass veldt. The sun was becoming hot, and the travellers now doffed their coats and went, as most people do up-country, in their shirt sleeves.

Presently they inspanned again and drove off. Now they were approaching a belt of charming forest country, low, spreading, umbrella-shaped giraffe-acacia timber, planted by nature not too thickly together. Everywhere among these trees grew the tall, pale, yellow veldt grass, and pleasant vistas and open glades here and there greeted the eye. Amid these trees fluttered occasionally queer, bizarre-looking hornbills, and brilliant rollers, miscalled "blue-jays" by the colonists, blazing in lovely plumage of many hues–blues, lilacs, purples, and greens. For an hour they drove through this pleasant country, and then emerged upon the dry, rolling grass plains once more. Half an hour later they approached a small shallow valley, through which ran the dry bed of a periodical stream. Along the banks of this dry stream grew a fringe of thorn bush, the common doom boom, or thorny acacia. Suddenly Mr. Blakeney pulled up his team.

"Sh!" he said in a low tone, handing the reins to Guy, and reaching out the Mannlicher, which now stood against the seat behind him. "Follow the line of bush yonder," he continued, pointing with his right hand. "Do you see anything?"

"Yes," replied Guy; "I see a big bird. What is it?"

"That's a paauw, my boy," answered his uncle; "our biggest bustard. You must have a try for him."

Taking some cartridges from a bandolier that hung at the side of the cart, Mr. Blakeney filled the magazine clip and pushed it into its place. Then he worked a cartridge into the breech.

"Now, Guy," he went on, "jump down there, creep up behind that bush, and try for a shot. You know the mechanism. If you miss with the first, have a blaze with your second cartridge. You won't get nearer than a hundred yards. Take your time, and don't hurry your shot."

Guy slipped down quietly, and, stooping low, crept towards the bush his uncle had pointed out. The paauw still fed quietly along the spruit: it was some two hundred and fifty yards from the cart, and the cunning creature, judging the

distance to a nicety, esteemed itself quite secure. But, meanwhile, the eager lad with the Mannlicher was creeping up, the wind was right, and it seemed that he might attain his vantage-ground without the alert bird becoming aware of him. Now he is within forty yards of the bush, now thirty, now ten. He is there. Cautiously peering through the leafy screen, and dropping on to his right knee, he takes steady aim and fires.

The report of the Mannlicher was a light one, and its smoke very trifling. The big bird staggered to the shot, half lifted its wings, ran fifteen paces, and then dropped to the veldt dead. A shout of triumph rang out from Mr. Blakeney's lips.

"Bravo! bravo! my boy," he cried in stentorian tones. "You've done the trick beautifully."

Long before the words were out of his uncle's mouth, Guy, scarcely able to contain his exultation at this his first success, threw his hat into the air, leaped out of the bush, and ran like a deer up to the dead bustard. He picked it up–it seemed enormously heavy–and held it up in triumph. Then turning he walked swiftly back towards the cart. His uncle met him at the bush, clapped him on the back, and said heartily,–

"Well hit, Guy! A first-rate shot. I can see you don't want much coaching in the art of rifle-shooting. It isn't every day we get a paauw."

He took the great bird from the lad, and, holding it out, tested its weight. "He's a beauty," he went on; "fat, and in high condition. Can't weigh less than thirty pounds. Handsome bird, isn't he? Look at his crest. That's the biggest and finest bustard in the world–*kori* the Bechuanas call him.

"Now let us pace the distance," he continued.

They paced it from the bush to the spot where the bird had been hit. Just one hundred and five yards it was, at a rough computation.

"A good shot, Guy," repeated his uncle. "And you kept your head and didn't hurry it. Well, we shall dine excellently. Your aunt and cousins will be as pleased as Punch to see that paauw; it's by far the best eating of any game-bird in Africa."

They reached the cart again. Peetsi, with beaming face, exclaimed in smooth Bechuana at the kori, and fastened the great bird up at the back of the cart, under the shade of the hood. Then they resumed their journey. Half an hour farther on, Mr. Blakeney got down from the cart, shot-gun in hand this time. He had noticed a koorhaan, one of the lesser bustards, go down at a certain spot in the veldt on the left-hand side of the road. In approaching the place where the bird lay concealed, he executed a circling movement. Smaller and smaller became the circle, and then, suddenly, without a cry of warning, a biggish bird flushed from the long grass and flew off. In an instant the sportsman's gun was at his shoulder. Then came the crisp report of a Schultz cartridge, and the bird instantly fell to the shot. Mr. Blakeney walked forward to pick it up. As he did so

a second bird, the hen, rose almost from under his feet. Giving her twenty-five yards law, again the gunner pulled the trigger, and the second game-bird hit the earth. It was a pretty scene–the wide yellow plain; the gunner standing knee deep in grass; the stricken bird, outlined clear against the hot sky. Giving the reins to Peetsi once more, Guy sprang out of the cart and ran to meet his uncle.

"Well, that was a pretty bit of shooting, uncle!" he cried joyfully. "I'm glad I saw it. I shall know what to do when I see a koorhaan go down and squat as that one did."

"That's a blue-necked koorhaan," answered his uncle; "one of our most beautiful bustards. Look at its lovely colouring and plumage–the bright rufous back, marked with black; the bluish tinge on the neck; and the tints, rufous, ash-colour, white and black, of the head and neck. And how splendidly the black wing feathers and the white underparts contrast with the rest of the plumage."

Guy took the two birds, which were each about the size of a blackcock, and walked with his uncle back to the cart. They drove on now, with a couple more outspans to rest the horses, until at length, turning a corner of some bush, Mr. Blakeney suddenly pointed with his whip and said, "There's Bamborough!"

Guy looked, and saw at the top of a gentle slope, which rose above a well-bushed river valley, a long, low, square-built house, having a raised veranda, or stoep as it is called in South Africa, running all round it. In a mile they had crossed the dry river-bed, ascended the slope, and driven up to the place. It was just upon two o'clock. Mrs. Blakeney, a pleasant, comely-looking matron, came out of the house, and greeted her nephew so soon as he descended. She had not seen him since he was a small child.

"Of course, I should not have known you, Guy," she said. "What a giant you have grown! I shall be very proud of my good-looking nephew."

Then the cousins had to be introduced–Tom, the eldest boy, a fine-looking lad of eighteen, like his father, lean, dark, and wiry; two pretty, fresh-looking girls of fifteen and thirteen, Ella and Marjory; and Arthur, the youngest of the group, a sharp-looking boy of eleven. The greetings over, Mrs. Blakeney took them at once into dinner, which she had kept back, trusting to her husband's invariable speed and punctuality, even on a forty-mile drive.

In the afternoon they sauntered round the place, and Guy was shown everything there was to be seen. Bamborough was a typical South African homestead of the better sort. It consisted of a large single-story building, thatched by natives with grass, the exterior rough-cast and white-washed. There were ten good-sized rooms, which served for all the needs of the family and left a couple of spare beds for those not infrequent occasions when visitors or wayfarers turned up. A governess, who resided with the family, looked after the education of the girls and Arthur. Tom, who had just finished his schooling at Grahamstown, in

Cape Colony, was now home for good. His father, who farmed twelve thousand morgen of land, or rather more than twenty-four thousand acres, needed assistance, and was glad to have his son about with him. Tom knew a good deal of the mysteries of stock-farming already, and was, his father declared, almost as good a judge of an ox as he was himself. A first-rate rider, a good shot, and a keen sportsman, Tom was just the kind of cousin Guy had hoped for. The two, who had many points in common, quickly understood one another, and struck up a strong friendship.

Guy was shown everything–the trellised vine, leading from the front door to the gate; the fruit orchard at the side of the house, in which grew peaches, apricots, nectarines, quinces, apples, and pears; the orange trees down by the "lands," where the arable crops, oats and mealies, were grown; the stables and compounds; the cattle and goat kraals; and the ostrich camp, a vast enclosure, where stalked a number of these great birds. He was shown the deep-bore well and windmill pump, which supplied the station with water; the big dam, which looked like a lake, with its fringe of willow and blue gums; and many other things pertaining to the headquarters of a large South African cattle ranch. Altogether, what with the morning drive, the meeting with his new cousins, and the long afternoon of sightseeing, Guy was not sorry for bed at ten o'clock. His head had not been two minutes on the snow-white pillow, scented like the rest of the spotless bed linen with some fragrant veldt herb, before he was sound asleep.

Chapter III,
UP-COUNTRY LIFE.

For some weeks Mr. Blakeney allowed Guy to have what may be called a good time. He was anxious that the lad should not be thrust too soon into hard collar-work. There is a good deal of steady routine labour, even upon an up-country farm in South Africa, if the farmer is up-to-date and business-like, and means to take his occupation seriously. There are books to be kept; long and hard days to be spent in the saddle; heavy fencing operations, which need care, thought, and application; journeys to various market centres with troops of fat stock; and a host of other details, not all of which are exactly what may be regarded as pure pleasure or light work. Too many young Englishmen, it is to be feared, look upon stock-farming and cattle-ranching as pleasant out-of-door occupations, entailing

merely an ornamental kind of existence. They picture to themselves, before going out to South Africa, a shirt-sleeve and broad-brimmed hat kind of life, in which the stock-farmer has merely to have a good time, while his flocks and herds increase about him. This sort of settler quickly becomes disillusioned, and, having wasted a thousand or two of good money–probably his father's–returns sadly to urban life again, vowing that no one can make money by stock-farming in South Africa.

But there are plenty of hard-working and successful pastoral farmers in many parts of South Africa who can testify to the excellent result of application and attention to details, united with care, foresight, energy, and experience.

For a long month Mr. Blakeney or his son Tom, sometimes both of them, rode far and wide with Guy Hardcastle over the twenty-four thousand odd acres comprised in Bamborough Farm. They explored boundaries, pointed out to Guy the various beacons marking off their limits, inspected cattle, and assisted at the sinking of a well in a distant part of the estate. This well, and the erection of a windmill pump, were needed for the supply of water to the cattle in what had been so waterless a portion of the ranch that it had been hitherto practically unavailable, excellent as was the grass veldt. A good-sized basin was formed in a piece of limestone formation, where once had existed an ancient native well, now long since dry; and here, when the operations were completed, the cattle were able to slake their thirst in a cool, crystal-clear pool, which at once sent up the value of the six thousand acres on this part of the run by two hundred per cent.

They had various bird-shooting excursions, riding out with a couple of pointers, and, so soon as the dogs stood to game, dismounting from their ponies and walking into their shots. In this way they made some pretty bags of Coqui and red-wing francolin, koorhaan, and guinea-fowl. One or two adventures befell Guy at this period. One day they had sallied out to hunt a troop of hartebeest, which ran on a distant part of the farm. After finding the troop in some prettily-timbered country, well covered with giraffe-acacia, the three had become separated, Guy galloping mile after mile in pursuit of a good bull which he had wounded. The hartebeest, turning out of the troop and quitting the wooded glades in which the herd had been discovered, took away over the open plains. Guy was well mounted, and for a long seven miles pushed after the big red-brown antelope, which swept away in front of him with a free, machine-like action that, despite its wound–a bullet through the middle of the body–showed no symptom of tiring. At length the hartebeest climbed the ridge of a wave in the grass plain, and disappeared. Guy's pony, good and willing as he was, was now tiring visibly. The lad doubted whether he could gallop much farther–the pace had been too great–and the game looked like getting clean away. It was too annoying.

They reached the top of the ridge, and looked over. Nothing living was to be seen; the plain was untenanted. Apparently the antelope had vanished into thin air. But Guy's keen eye noted, half a mile or so to the right, a widish patch of vaal bush. Towards this he now rode. He approached within thirty yards, and dismounted. Just as he did so, the wounded antelope rose slowly to its feet from within the shelter of the bush, and essayed to canter off. Too late! The gallant beast had made its last effort and taken its final gallop. Guy's rifle went up, and as the antelope slowly moved away, another bullet from the Mannlicher pierced its heart. It tumbled suddenly to the veldt, and after a brief kick or two lay dead.

Guy now set to work to skin his prize and take off the head. It was a fine bull, carrying excellent horns, and his pride and satisfaction at having thus secured his first big game trophy were very great. By the time he had completed his operations, and slung the skin and a quantity of venison behind the saddle, the hot afternoon was wearing away. Carrying the hartebeest's head in front of him, resting on the pommel of the saddle, Guy now rode back for the woodland. It was a long eight miles, and his nag was by no means fresh after his tremendous exertions. They reached the acacia groves at last. By this time there remained an hour to sunset. Through these endless groves and glades, all much resembling one another, the young Englishman now attempted to thread his way, with the result that, by the time the sun sank, he found himself completely lost. Just at this moment there came from far to the eastward the faint report of a gun, then another. Guy rode that way, but in half an hour the light had clean vanished, and it became a matter of difficulty to manoeuvre a path through the gloom of evening amid this trackless forest. Night fell; there was no moon; and although the stars glittered brilliantly above, it became apparent to Guy that he was benighted. He heard no more shots.

After wandering on, leading his now dog-tired pony, the lad came to the conclusion that he had better camp for the night. He had, luckily, in the hunting pouch at his belt, a box of matches and a compass, two things which his uncle had warned him always to carry on expeditions of this sort. He knew that there was no water within many miles of where he stood, and that it was useless to think of attempting to find any. He had, unluckily, finished the last remnant of lime juice and water that remained in his water-bottle; bitterly did he now regret the fact. He was terribly thirsty after hunting all day under a burning sun. He felt that at this moment he would gladly have given half a crown, nay, half a sovereign, for a quart of clear water. It was useless to think about it, however, and, philosophically enough, Guy set to work to prepare for the night. First he cut a quantity of grass and placed it before his pony, which by this time he had off-saddled and tied to a bush. On the lee side of this bush he himself meant to sleep, and for this purpose cut more grass and made a rough bed. Then clearing

a space–for he had no wish to start a veldt fire–he cut and gathered sticks and odd timber. He had camped by a dead acacia tree, destroyed by white ants, and soon had before him a cheerful blaze. Now cutting some collops of venison, he cooked them in the hot embers, and, with a biscuit that remained over from his lunch, made out a respectable meal. It was hard work eating without water, and with a thirst such as he now possessed; but he managed to swallow some food, and felt a trifle better. The air grew chill, and he now unfastened his coat from his saddle and put it on; then, piling up more wood on the fire, and making a pillow of the inner part of his saddle, he fell asleep. He knew that here, in this waterless and semi-desert part of the veldt, few wild beasts–leopards, cheetahs, or hyænas–would be wandering about; and besides, he was too tired to trouble much if any there were.

At dawn he awoke, cold and stiff; the fire was out; his pony was munching the remains of the grass that lay near him. Guy rose, somewhat refreshed, but with a terribly dry mouth and tongue. Saddling up, he now prepared to seek his way home. By the position of the sun and the aid of his compass, he could now steer some sort of way through this perplexing forest, and he steadily pushed on. Two hours later, having cleared the timber country and emerged once more upon the open plains, he came upon the spoor of horses, which convinced him that he was going in the right direction. After another hour of cantering and walking, he struck a wagon track, and knew that he could now find his way to the homestead. Very shortly he heard the reports of two guns, then a third. He guessed that these were fired by his uncle or cousin, now no doubt in search of him. Cantering that way, he soon caught sight of three mounted men, and in five minutes was shaking hands with his relatives. They had with them a native servant, and were riding out to look for him.

"My word, Guy," said his uncle heartily, "I am glad to have come across you so soon. This is a dickens of a country to get lost in–the veldt is so waterless, except during the rains; and I was getting seriously anxious about you. We wandered about firing shots yesterday afternoon, and then made for home to bring out more water, and hunt you up to-day, in case you had completely lost yourself. Didn't you hear our shots yesterday?"

"Yes," answered Guy, "I heard two just before sundown last evening; but they were far away to the east, and I couldn't make anything of them, though I wandered that way after dark. Then I camped, made a fire, and slept, and here I am."

"Excellent, my boy," said his uncle; "but you must be terribly dry. Here, April," turning to the native; "unfasten that water-bottle and give Baas Guy a drink. Drink up, lad; it's cold tea, and will do you good."

Guy drank and drank, and presently returned the bottle.

”Never tasted anything so good in my life,” he said, wiping his lips. ”It’s nectar. I begin to understand what thirst really is. In England we can have no idea of it, in a country where you can’t go a mile without coming on water of some kind or other.”

”You’re quite right,” added Mr. Blakeney. ”They don’t half appreciate the blessings of life at home. You want to rough it out here a bit to understand what English comfort and English luxury really mean. Why, we had a man staying with us a year back, looking at stock, who got lost in the veldt out here for three days, two of which he passed without a drop of water. Ultimately we tracked him to a native kraal on the Molopo, thirty miles away. In this kind of country–in fact all through Bechuanaland, on the Kalahari side–you’ve got to watch it, or you may easily get lost, and perhaps die of thirst and starvation. Now, let’s be off home for breakfast. We have an hour and a half’s ride still before us.”

Meanwhile, Tom Blakeney had been examining his cousin’s hunting trophy. ”By Jove, Guy,” he exclaimed, ”you’ve got a first-rate head! That’s a real good old bull hartebeest; you seldom see finer horns.”

”Yes, Tom,” rejoined his cousin, ”I thought it was a good head; and if I had had to go without water another twenty-four hours, I should have brought it back with me. It’s my first hunting trophy, and I shall always be proud of it.”

”You’ll do, Guy!” exclaimed his uncle, as they rode homewards. ”I like to see a fellow keen; and I’m sure you will shoot many a head of big game before you’ve finished. Some day we’ll go into the real hunting veldt, where you can prove your mettle against more formidable beasts.”

A week or two later, Tom and Guy were shooting redwing partridges and koorhaan in a pretty piece of country some miles from the homestead. They had quitted the banks of a periodical stream, where they had bagged half a dozen brace of redwings and a steinbuck, and were now in search of black and white koorhaan and Coqui partridges on a wide piece of grassy plain which ran up to a distant line of kopjes. Juno, the pointer, stood; and Tom, slipping quietly from his saddle, walked cautiously forward, his gun at the ready. Still the staunch dog stood, pointing stiffly at something in front of her. Tom advanced yet farther, and then, without a cry and very noiselessly, there rose from the long grass a single bird, with long greenish legs and a big head. It was an easy shot, and Tom fired and brought it down.

”A dikkop,” he cried, as he ran forward and picked up the bird. Guy came up and inspected the game, which was of a species he had not yet seen in Bechuanaland.

”Why, it’s the same as our Norfolk plover, or thick-knee,” he said. ”Father shot one years ago in Suffolk, and had it stuffed. I can tell it by its big staring eyes.”

”Yes, it’s nearly the same bird,” rejoined his cousin. ”I believe there’s some little difference in the species, here we call it by the Dutch name dikkop, or thick-head. They’re rattling good eating, and we’ll stick it in the bag.”

Smoothing the bird’s feathers, and placing it in the wallet slung behind his saddle, they went on.

In another half hour, during which time they got no shot, Juno, the pointer, became curiously restless. She seemed to neglect the sport in front of her, and turned perpetually to sniff the breeze which blew from their left flank. Suddenly, after quartering the ground in that direction, she stopped and barked furiously.

”What’s the old girl up to?” ejaculated Tom. ”I’ll go and see.”

As he turned his horse that way, the pointer, hitherto standing with hackles up, manifestly in a state of intense anger, suddenly turned and fled, her tail between her legs. Guy Hardcastle, curious to know what had so alarmed the dog, walked his nag that way. The two cousins rode on together for thirty yards, and then, with a curious hissing sound, there rose, ten paces in front of them, the head and neck of an enormous serpent. The reptile reared itself so suddenly, and its aspect was so menacing, that Guy’s pony shied violently and swerved off, nearly unseating its rider as it did so.

”Look out, Guy!” cried his cousin. ”It’s a python. Canter away a bit and slip in louper cartridges [buck shot], and then we’ll have a go at the brute. He’s been following us.” They cantered away forty or fifty yards, changing their cartridges as they did so, and then returned to the charge.

Meanwhile the python, which had undoubtedly been stalking them, had thought better of it, and, seeing more formidable quarry than it had bargained for, was slipping away. The lads galloped to the spot where they had last seen it; and Tom, pointing to a movement in the long grass in front of them, exclaimed excitedly, ”There it goes; come on!”

Guy, who was not used to snakes, didn’t half like the idea of stalking such a monster; but as his cousin galloped on, he touched his pony with the spur and rode after him. Nearer and nearer they drew towards the rustling grass. Suddenly the movement ceased, and the huge, evil-looking head rose before them. The serpent was undeniably angry, and a big python in a rage is a formidable opponent.

”Shoot,” whispered Tom in a steady voice.

Guy needed not incitement. Already his gun was up; they fired together, and as the double report rattled out, the great serpent, stricken in the head and neck, fell writhing into the pale grass. One of the two shots had luckily broken its backbone a foot or so below the head; but the huge serpent was by no means disabled, and now, half impotent though it was, it struggled furiously to reach its adversaries. Beating and flapping the earth in its agony and rage, it writhed itself

towards the two horsemen, who now separated and gave it another shot apiece. Then, recharging their guns, they returned, and finished the wounded monster with a couple more charges.

Having ascertained that the snake was really dead, they dismounted and approached it; then, stretching out the reptile to its full length, Tom took a tape measure from his pocket and ran over its dimensions.

"Eighteen feet," he remarked, rising from his task. "The biggest python killed in these parts!"

"Have you many of these brutes about the place?" asked Guy, turning over the monster with his foot, and comparing the greenish white of its underparts with the brilliant markings of its upper colouring.

"No, not many," answered Tom. "They're shy, secretive beggars, and one very seldom, indeed, comes across them. I've not heard of one for two or three years."

"Thank goodness for that," rejoined Guy. "I must say, if I thought there were many of these creatures in the neighbourhood, I should come bird-shooting precious seldom, especially on foot. Surely they are dangerous? They're not poisonous, I suppose?"

"No, they're not poisonous, luckily," returned Tom. "But they can constrict. Whether they can kill a man I don't know. I shouldn't like to try the experiment. Father says they can't. Still, they can try; and if they were big enough–like this one, for example–they might give you a very unpleasant time of it. They certainly do kill small buck occasionally. Three years ago a python–rock snakes, the colonists call them–which father had shot was found to contain the bones of a duyker in its stomach; and our native boys killed another, with their knobkerries, which had killed and eaten a steinbuck just before, and was completely gorged and stupid after its meal."

They finished their shoot across the flat, adding three brace of koorhaan and Coqui partridges to their bag, and then came back to the dead python. Fastening this to the end of a piece of cord which Tom carried with him, they trailed the serpent behind them and struck for home. Arrived at Bamborough towards four o'clock, they stretched out the great serpent in the front garden, and invited all and sundry to come and view their conquest. It was agreed that so large a python had never before been seen in that part of the country.

"Yes," said Mr. Blakeney, as he watched Tom and Guy divesting the creature of its beautiful skin, "it's a big snake. Three years ago I got quite a fright with one of these reptiles. I was shooting alone and on foot about two miles from here. Juno was with me, and she seemed very uneasy, just as she was with you to-day. Suddenly, as I turned round–I don't know what made me do it–I saw, sticking out above the grass not ten yards behind me, a python. Just for one second I was in

a real fright, I promise you–the thing was so sudden. However, the brute looked very nasty, and I put up my gun and fired at once, smashing its head to pieces. It struggled a bit, and another shot finished it. Now, that snake had followed me right across the flat from the river bed–where, I imagine, it had its holt or hiding-place in some bush or among the rocks–for a distance of more than a mile. It was rather uncanny, wasn't it?"

"Very uncanny, indeed," answered Guy. "I don't like the brutes at all. Do you think they would go for one?"

"No; on the whole, I don't think they would," said Mr. Blakeney. "And if they did, although they might frighten you and even hurt you, I don't think they could kill a man. They could kill a child, as they do undoubtedly kill a young calf sometimes; and for that reason I'm not over fond of them–in fact, I destroy them whenever I come across them, if I can. They're slippery brutes, however, and once let them get near rocks or bush and you'll never see them again."

"The natives about here, father, don't like them?" queried Tom, as he finished his part of the task, and together he and Guy rolled the stripped body of the serpent from its skin, which they had now completely flayed away from the flesh.

"No, the Bechuanas don't like them," rejoined Mr. Blakeney. "At the same time they don't care about molesting them. In Zululand the natives will never touch them. They have an idea that the souls of their ancestors return to the bodies of these serpents, and will even allow them to live close to their huts. For my part, I don't like the proximity of such neighbours."

Having carefully scraped every fragment of fat or flesh from the skin, the two lads rubbed in arsenical soap, and pegged it out on the shady side of the wall of an outhouse, where in a day or two the cure was complete.

In a few more weeks Guy Hardcastle had acquired a very fair knowledge of the far-spreading pastures of Bamborough Farm. He began to pick up, too, some knowledge of stock and stock-farming, for he was a quick lad, who always had his wits about him, and was anxious to gain any sort of information that might be useful to him. He had seen mealies and oats reaped, and assisted in other operations. He had had a very good time, for, mingled with the preliminaries of a pastoral farmer's life, to which his uncle had introduced him, he had had a fair amount of shooting, several pleasant excursions with his cousins to neighbouring farms, and a trip to Mafeking to bring home stores. At the end of January he accompanied his uncle to Johannesburg with a herd of fat cattle, which were disposed of for excellent prices on their arrival there.

On this expedition, although they were assisted by native servants, they had to experience some of the roughs and tumbles of veldt life. They lived for the most part in the saddle, sleeping at night in a light mule wagon which ac-

companied them. The weather was broken and unsettled; the rains, which began in December, still fell heavily at intervals, and they were often drenched to the skin. Even their wagon tent by no means sufficed to protect them from the tropical downpours that periodically fell from the lowering heavens. Nevertheless, to the secret satisfaction of Mr. Blakeney, Guy bore all the discomforts that overtook them with the most cheerful spirit, and arrived at Johannesburg in excellent heart and fettle. He had proved himself a very useful auxiliary, and his uncle was more than well pleased with his behaviour. The return from the gold city was made with much less discomfort, and, unencumbered with a big herd of cattle, they reached home within a fortnight.

One evening, a short time after their return, Mr. Blakeney called Guy into his own room, the "den," as he called it, in which he did most of the office work connected with the farm, and kept his papers, books, and accounts, as well as his guns, rifles, and ammunition. Guy was just then engaged in a game of chess with his aunt, who was a skilful player, and was teaching him something of the rudiments of the art.

"Well, aunt," he said, as he rose with a cheery laugh, "I'm defeated again, I see. You have mate in another move, haven't you?"

"I'm afraid it is so, Guy," replied Mrs. Blakeney. "Never mind; you are getting along very well. This has been quite a good fight, and in another six months you will be crowing over me, I expect."

Guy walked quickly to his uncle's room, where an oil lamp shed a bright glow over everything. Mr. Blakeney was a man of methodical habits. His books and papers were always in their right places; his guns gleamed brightly on their racks; everything was in apple-pie order.

"Sit down, Guy," said his uncle, pointing to the chair near him; "I want to have a bit of a talk with you. First of all, I want to know something about your views of cattle-farming and South African farming life generally. Is it the kind of life you think will suit you, and can you make up your mind to settle down to it? You have now had a three months' apprenticeship, and have probably formed your own opinions."

"Well, Uncle Charles," replied Guy, "my answer is a very short one. I like the life immensely, and mean to stick to it. I can think of nothing that will suit me half so well as to settle down steadily to the same kind of existence that you lead here. I should like it above all things, and I have thought the whole matter very carefully over."

"Remember, Guy, my boy," said his uncle kindly, "that hitherto, except for the journey to Johannesburg, which wasn't a very pleasant one, although from a financial point of view it answered excellently, you have seen rather the bright side of things out here. This place, although I say it who perhaps shouldn't, is

rather a cut above the average. We have put capital into the thing, my cousin and I–I mean, of course, George Forster, who farms the adjoining land, and is my partner. We do the thing well, and our homesteads are exceptionally good. We have, as you see, some of the refinements as well as the comforts of civilization about us. And hitherto we have had good seasons and great luck. But you have to remember that there come times of drought; various diseases attack stock, locusts destroy the veldt, and the farmer's losses are often very heavy indeed. They say rinderpest is on its way south, and will in time reach us even here. It has got as far as Nyasaland, and will probably work its way right through the continent to the very shores of Cape Colony. You must look at all these things before you decide."

"Well, uncle," repeated Guy, "I can only say that I have honestly tried to look at the thing all round. I know–and many thanks to you all for it–that you have shown me the best and brightest side of everything, and that I can't always expect to live in the lap of luxury, as I do here. Please take my word for it. I want to go in for this kind of life. I mean to stick to it seriously and learn the business, and try and make something out of it; and I do hope you will do what you once said you might be inclined to do–that is, teach me the business, and let me in time get hold of some land near you. I have quite made up my mind, and that's my decision."

"Well, Guy," said his uncle, with a pleased look on his kindly, expressive face, "I'm very glad to hear this. I like you, my boy. I believe you will stick to your business, and not look at it merely as a hobby or a plaything; and I can only say, for my part, that I will do all in my power to help you on. For your father's sake, as well as your own, I shall do this; and I hope in a few years, when you've got experience, you will do very well for yourself. Meanwhile, I've lately had my eye on two farms, hitherto unoccupied, which touch our north-west boundary. They are called Hartebeestfontein and Bushman's Kraal. I can get them cheap. They are the usual six thousand acre farms, and I can buy them from Government for £600 the pair. I shall write to my agent at Vryburg to-morrow to secure these farms, which I shall henceforth take to and stock. I shall hold these at your disposal, either one or both of them; and in two or three years' time, if you like to try and make a start on your own hook, why, we'll put up a decent house for you, open up the water supply–I know on Hartebeestfontein there is a spring, and I believe there are some likely *aars* [veins] in the limestone, where more water is pretty certain to be found–and stock the place, so that you can make a fair beginning. But we must go slow for a time, and meanwhile you've got to learn your business. Still, I am bound to say that I believe and hope you'll do very well. You are steady, or I am very much mistaken; you have brains; and I know, I can see, that, like your dear father, you will always go straight, which in

this life is a good deal more than half the battle."

Chapter IV.
THE GOLD SPOOR.

"There is another matter I want to speak to you about, Guy," continued Mr. Blakeney, "which has been perplexing me a good deal. It is this: When your father wrote me the first of the two last letters he sent me before his death, he sent also a short statement, sealed in a packet and marked 'Important.' This statement concerns a very rich discovery of gold in a far-away part of the interior of South-west Africa, somewhere on the border of the Portuguese territory of Benguela. I have worried over this problem for many weeks past, and the conclusion I have come to is that I ought to tell you about the whole business. The shortest and best plan is, I think, to show you your father's letter. Here it is; I'll read it to you:–

"'**ABAQUESSA, GOLD COAST,** *March* 19, 1896.

"'MY DEAR CHARLIE,–You will see from the letter I have already written you that I am in a very precarious state of health, and that I doubt greatly if I shall get over these repeated attacks of fever. In case anything happens to me, I must unburden my mind on one other matter, which seems to me, though it may not to you, very important. A year ago, as you know, I was making some mineral explorations for copper in the mountains behind Mossamedes, Portuguese West Africa. There was little copper to be found worth speaking of, and this business came to an end. One day towards the finish of this work, a Bushman in my service, named Poeskop, came to me and said he thought he could show me something better than copper; that he had once found gold, and that he would show me the place where he had found it. Poeskop was a Bushman from the country north-east of Ovampoland, in German territory. He had worked for Germans and others, and had afterwards drifted into the service of one of the Trek Boers who came to the Mossamedes country fifteen or sixteen years before. He had been brutally treated by this Boer, and, running away from him, came to me. I treated him kindly, and he became exceedingly attached to me, and would do anything for me. He speaks Boer Dutch and one or two native languages of his own country, besides a smattering of German. Well, I asked Poeskop what he meant, and where was the gold he spoke of. He took from the bottom of a dirty old pouch he always wore a piece of skin sewn up with sinew. Cutting this open, he took out four small nuggets of gold, manifestly water-worn. He said that where they came from there were plenty more–plenty. He

had come across the place years before as a lad, and he had discovered what gold was, and its value, when he was working for some German prospectors in Damaraland. He knew now also the worth of gold money in English, and German, and Portuguese. I asked him how long it would take us to reach the place. He said more than a month. I was then under contract for this work at the Gold Coast, and it was impossible to throw it up, or to spare the time–about three months in all, reckoning the return journey to Mossamedes. I told the man I would return, if possible, the following year (1897), or, if not that year, in 1898, in the month of June, which is their healthy season, and go with him to the place. Meanwhile, would he promise not to say a word to any other person? Poeskop replied that he cared for no other white man but me; that he would wait till I came, and would meet me in Mossamedes in June the next year (1897), and the year after, and the year after that; and that each year he would wait for me a month. "But," I said, "supposing I can't come, and wish to send some one else in my place? I may be ill, or dead, or anything may have happened to me." "Well, my baas," replied Poeskop, his little drooping eyes twinkling in the oddest kind of way, "if you can't come, and send any one in your place, let him show me that funny *steenje* which you wear on your watch-chain, and I shall know he is your man, and will do what he asks me." The *steenje*, I must tell you, was nothing else than a piece of New Zealand jade, carved rather curiously in the shape of a fish. Well, there's the end of my yarn. I am dead tired, and feeling very ill. The ague is coming on again, as you can see by my handwriting."

"Here," interjected Mr. Blakeney, "as you can see, Guy, your poor father's writing has become very shaky. But he has underscored the remaining lines of his letter, and they run thus:–

"'My dear Charlie, *I consider this discovery is very important. Poeskop, who was in my service five months, is a most shrewd and reliable little chap. I know he is not lying. I know he has found a place very rich in gold. Of this I am absolutely confident. If I'm right, there is a fortune for all of us. If I get through this bout of fever I shall ask you to give up your ranching for six months, and come and join me at Mossamedes in June. If I go under–and something tells me I shall–I beg you to go on my behalf. Take with you a good and reliable mining engineer; and if Guy is with you, take him. If you cannot go this year, go next.* I can't finish ... what I meant to say. This fever is too much for me. *You and Guy are to go shares if the gold is right.*–From yours ever,

"'J. S. HARDCASTLE.'

"Well now, Guy," added his uncle, "there's the yarn. Look over the letter yourself."

Guy read the letter again, with a serious face, from beginning to end.

"Poor pater!" he said, as he concluded, the tears standing in his eyes; "he was ill indeed when he wrote and underscored these last lines. Oh, that he could

have been with us now!”

”Would that he could have been, Guy!” said his uncle feelingly; ”would that he could! Having read that letter, you will understand something of my anxiety. If your father’s surmises are correct, there is a fortune for us all. And yet any ordinary business man would say the whole thing is a mere wild-goose chase, a will-of-the-wisp. I am bothered awfully; I hardly know what to say, what to do.”

Guy Hardcastle sprang to his feet.

”Uncle Charles!” he exclaimed, ”I’m certain this is no wild-goose chase! My father had a great knowledge of men and things, especially where natives and mining were concerned. He wasn’t a mad enthusiast; in fact, I always looked upon him as a very long-headed and cautious man. I’m only a boy; but that was my impression. Let us go. I’m certain that our search will be a success!”

”Well, Guy,” rejoined Mr. Blakeney, smiling at the lad’s enthusiasm, ”I half believe you are right. Your father was no hunter of wild geese; he was, as you thought him, a man of good judgment and much knowledge. Yet there are many difficulties to be surmounted. I don’t like leaving this place just now. Still, there’s George Forster to look after matters in my absence–as he did two years ago, when I was in England.

”I might do this,” he went on, speaking as if to himself. ”Some years ago I trekked across the Kalahari, by way of Lake Ngami, to Damaraland, and traded and brought back a thousand head of cattle. I have sometimes thought of repeating the trip; but it’s a tough business, and a long and anxious one. If I go with you, we might kill two birds with one stone: go round by sea, and so save much time; and after we have had a hunt for the treasure, pick up a lot of cattle and bring them overland. Meanwhile I’ll have a talk with your aunt, and hear what she thinks about it all.”

Mrs. Blakeney was a great believer in her brother; and her vote went for the expedition, little as she liked the prospect of parting from her husband for five or six months. Finally Mr. Blakeney’s mind was made up: he determined to go, at all events, as far as Mossamedes. If Poeskop were found, well and good: they would go on with the search. If he were not found, they would go south, buy cattle in Damaraland and Ovampoland, and take them across to Bechuanaland by the Trek Boer route, *viâ* Lake Ngami. No sooner was the expedition settled upon than Guy begged his uncle to let Tom accompany them. This Mr. Blakeney refused; Tom, he said, must remain at home to look after his mother and sisters. But, as the lads pointed out, Mr. Blakeney’s partner and cousin, George Forster, was coming across to live at Bamborough and take up the management of affairs during his absence. For weeks the lads moved heaven and earth to accomplish their purpose. They at length won over Mrs. Blakeney; and after she had joined for a few days in the siege, Mr. Blakeney gave way. It was settled that Tom was to go, and the

two cousins were overjoyed. After much consideration, Mr. Blakeney decided not to take a mining engineer, as suggested by his brother-in-law. He himself had spent two years on the Lydenburg goldfields, in the Eastern Transvaal, in his younger days, and had a fair knowledge of gold and gold formations; he had learned assaying also. On the whole, they all deemed it wiser not to impart the secret to any one out of their own family.

Towards the middle of May the party went down by rail to Cape Town, and thence by sea to Mossamedes. Ostensibly they were on a cattle-trading expedition; even George Forster was not let into the secret of the gold search. It would be too ridiculous if the quest turned out an unsuccessful one, and the gold vanished into thin air. Moreover, Mr. Blakeney deemed it unwise to make any mention of gold at all; the merest whisper of it might get about, and set others upon the alert. They kept the secret, therefore, severely to themselves. In pursuance of his expressed intention of bringing home some cattle, Mr. Blakeney took with him as wagon-drivers and herds four of his most reliable natives. These were–Jan Kokerboom, a Koranna; Seleti and Mangwalaan, two Bechuanas of the Barolong clan; and September, a Zulu. They were all good herdsmen and horse-masters, fair shots, and, barring various idiosyncrasies and prejudices peculiar to their tribes, steady and reliable men. Jan Kokerboom was a capital cook, a generally handy man, a good rider and shot, and a first-class hunter. After a fairly prosperous voyage of a week, during the early part of which the natives suffered a good deal from sea-sickness, the ship dropped anchor in Little Fish Bay, off Mossamedes, and the party landed. Their hunting ponies, four in all, which they had brought with them from Bamborough, were safely got ashore.

Mossamedes is, compared with other Portuguese towns on the African coast, rather a pleasant little place. It is built of white stone, and has a picturesque esplanade, lined with palm trees, running along the frontage to the bay. The country surrounding is not very inviting, that to the east and south being, like the littoral of Damaraland and Namaqualand, almost completely desert.

Having passed their baggage at the Custom House with somewhat greater ease than they expected–thanks mainly to a judicious use by Mr. Blakeney of palm oil–they went up the town, and found fairly comfortable quarters at the principal hotel. Here they remained for a week without being able to find any trace of the native known as Poeskop. At the hotel, the proprietor remembered Mr. Hardcastle, who had stayed with him. He remembered also his Bushman servant Poeskop, but neither he nor any of his people had seen him lately in the town. While they were thus waiting, Mr. Blakeney was by no means idle. He spoke with various Trek Boers who were in the place; bought an excellent tent-wagon for £80; four fairly good horses, wiry, but in low condition–a useful addition to their stud; and a span of serviceable oxen. These would in any case

be necessary to them, even if Poeskop failed to put in an appearance. The native servants were then dispatched to the commonage outside the town, where a camp was formed, and the horses and cattle were turned out for grazing. The wagon was thoroughly cleaned out, repaired, and painted, and various cooking utensils necessary for the trek were purchased.

On the evening of the seventh day of their stay in Mossamedes the little party of English were sitting, half an hour before dinner, near the landing-place. Mr. Blakeney spent much time there; for he had an idea that if the Bushman, Poeskop, came to Mossamedes at all, he would make his way to the shore, and be on the lookout for his old master.

"Pater," said Tom, kicking his heels against the low wall on which he sat, "I begin to think the man Poeskop is a solar myth, and I am revolving in my mind a theory by which he can be explained away."

The lad had a roguish smile on his face, at which his father in turn could not help laughing.

"Well, fire away!" replied Mr. Blakeney. "What's your theory?"

"Well, I'll shortly explain," went on Tom. "I consider you and Guy have brought me out here under false pretences. The whole thing is a Barney. I've been thinking it all out for days past. Poeskop is clearly a non-existent person; and here is my theory of his non-existence!"

At this instant, from behind a great pile of stores which lay stacked on the landing-place, there appeared, just in front of them, the short figure of a native. He was a queer, dwarfish-looking little man, with high cheek-bones, a narrow chin, and yellowish skin. His eyes slanted upwards like a Chinaman's; curious, dark, bloodshot eyes they were, with a singular droop of the lids and innumerable wrinkles at the corners. This odd figure was dressed in an old store suit of faded moleskin, a ragged shirt, and a very battered, broad-brimmed hat. A pair of velschoens covered the man's feet. Before Tom, who stared open-mouthed at the apparition, could proceed with his theory, the little man's sharp eyes had run rapidly over the group before him. He looked, as it were expectantly, into the countenance of each. His eyes lingered longest on the face of Guy, and then fell instantly to the middle of the boy's waist. Stretching out his right forefinger, he pointed, with a gesture of strange energy and earnestness, at the watch-chain which Guy wore: it was his father's, and the green jade ornament depended from it.

Mr. Blakeney had watched the man keenly.

"Poeskop?" he said quietly.

"Ja; Poeskop," returned the native instantly, looking furtively about him. "Vaar is de baas–Baas Hartcassel?"

Mr. Blakeney could not refrain from his little triumph over Tom, who sat

utterly confounded.

"Tom, my boy!" he said, with a hearty laugh, "your solar myth is instantly exploded. Here is the essential man, Poeskop himself!"

And indeed it was Poeskop. Speaking in Dutch, Mr. Blakeney explained to the strange little figure before them what had happened. The Bushman followed the story closely, nodding his head, and throwing in a "Ja, ja!" now and again, as it were rounding off the various points. When Mr. Blakeney ceased, he spoke.

"Ja," he said, "I am Poeskop. I came here to meet my Baas Hartcassel, and I am sad because of the news I hear. Never mind; if I cannot be his 'boy' longer, I will be his son's 'boy.' And I will tell you all I know, and take you to the place where–" [here he glanced suspiciously round him, with eyes that searched keenly beneath their droop] "–where my baas wanted me to take him. I see that the young baas is truly the son of my old baas: he has the same blue eyes, and the same look, and the same coloured hair, and though he is young he walks just as walked his father. I saw him yesterday, and watched him; and again to-day I watched him; and now I have seen the *steenje*–the little stone of the fish–and I am sure. Well, I am glad indeed. I will be the young baas's 'boy,' and wait upon him and hunt for him, as I did for his father. Is it not so?" he asked, looking inquiringly first at Mr. Blakeney, then at Guy.

"Yes," said Guy quickly, his colour heightened with the interest and excitement of the discovery; "it is so. You shall be my 'boy,' and I will be your baas, and try to be a good baas to you, as my father was. What wages did he give you?"

"He gave me one pound a month and my *skorf* [food], baas," replied Poeskop, "and sometimes some old clothes when I wanted them."

"Well, I'll do the same," returned Guy cheerfully; "and I am sure we shall be good friends."

Poeskop smiled a huge smile at this speech, showing a set of splendid teeth, which for the moment strongly illuminated his quaint and decidedly ugly visage.

"That is very good, my young baas," he said, his face still beaming with pleasure; "and I shall show you what I promised to show to your father"–he glanced round again, as if fearing to be overheard–"the Gold Kloof. It is there!" He stretched a forefinger into the air, pointing north-eastward. "And you will find plenty gold, enough for you all; and you will make Poeskop rich too, and buy him cattle, and set him up as a farmer."

It was now arranged that the Bushman should at once join the outfit. They walked with him to the wagon outside the town, and introduced him to the other servants. Had he a gun? asked Mr. Blakeney. Yes; he had a gun, concealed not far away. He would get it that night, and put it in the wagon. It was a Martini carbine, given to him by Baas Hardcastle, and in good condition; but he wanted ammunition. This Mr. Blakeney promised to procure for him; and they left the

little man at his supper as happy as a king.

Next morning Poeskop turned up at the hotel in good time, as Mr. Blakeney had told him to do. It was after breakfast; and they were talking in front of the place, the three Englishmen asking the little Bushman all sorts of questions as to their route, the kind of country they would pass through, the prospects of game (which Poeskop told them were first-rate), and so forth.

"Poeskop," presently queried Mr. Blakeney, "how long will it take us, trekking steadily and with good oxen (which I have got), to reach the kloof?"

"About six weeks, baas," replied the Bushman. "It is far, and the way is hard."

"I had thought of getting another wagon," continued Mr. Blakeney. "It will be rather a squeeze for myself and the two young masters here to get into one at night. What say you, Poeskop? Can we manage with two easily?"

"Baas," replied the Bushman, "I would not take two wagons, if you can help it. It is a hard trek, and we have to cross a piece of *doorst-land* [thirst-land], which takes more than a week to get through: two days' and two nights' trek, then water, but not much; then two days and a night without water; then a water-pit; and then three days' and three nights' thirst. It will be hard to get across this with one wagon; much harder with two. If I were the baas, I would take the one wagon only and some spare oxen. We may lose some beasts on the trek from lions, or thirst, or hard work; and it will be safer."

"I'm glad you told me of this, Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney. "You are quite right; we will take one wagon only. I can buy a small tent in the town; that will do for the young baases to sleep in, and I can have my *kartel* [bed-frame] to myself in the wagon. In the daytime the tent can be lashed along the buck-rail."

They discussed many other points connected with the trek, concerning all of which the little Bushman gave them copious information. Suddenly, as he glanced down the sandy street, his countenance changed; he trembled; fear unmistakably seized him.

"Baas," he said, in a hoarse voice, "there comes Karl Engelbrecht; I am afraid!"

"Who is Karl Engelbrecht?" asked Guy; "and why are you afraid?"

"He is the Trek Boer in whose service I used to be," returned the Bushman. "He beat me often with his sjambok, and treated me cruelly; and so I ran away. But I fear him still. He is a bad man–*schelm*!"

"You need have no fear, Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney; "I will look after you. Put on a bold face, and stick to me; I'll see that your friend Engelbrecht plays no tricks upon you. Remember that you are in my service, and that we are in Portuguese and not Boer country."

They watched the two tall figures, on which Poeskop's eyes were fastened,

coming up the street. The Bushman whispered that Karl Engelbrecht was the bigger of the two–the man on the right. The Boers–for they were manifestly both Dutchmen–were now close to the hotel. Karl Engelbrecht, of whom Poeskop stood in so much terror, was a typical Boer of Boers–a big, heavy, slouching fellow, six feet in height, powerfully made, very strong, but slack and loose-limbed. He wore the usual Boer clothing–short jacket and loose trousers of moleskin, a flannel shirt, velschoens (field-shoes) of untanned hide, and a big slouch-hat, ornamented with a single short black-and-white ostrich plume. His long hay-coloured hair ran over his ears and partly covered his neck, and he wore a huge untrimmed beard and moustache of the same dull hue. His hard, pale blue eyes were set deep above broad, sunburnt, fleshy cheeks. It was an unpleasant face; something in the lowering brows, the hard, furtive eyes, gave the beholder instantly an unpleasant impression; and about the man's whole demeanour there was an undefinable yet unmistakable air of menace and brutality. The Dutchman accompanying him was of a much milder and less aggressive type–a big, dark-bearded, slouching fellow, of dull and heavy countenance, with nothing much to differentiate him from scores of his fellows of the Transvaal, Orange Free State, and Cape Colony.

As Karl Engelbrecht strode up to the hotel, his eyes suddenly fell upon Poeskop. He started, frowned evilly, glowered at the three white men standing near, and then, taking a step or two forward, seized the Bushman by the collar of his jacket.

"So, my fine fellow, I have caught you, have I?" he said, in a deep guttural and manifestly angry voice. As he spoke, he cuffed the unfortunate Bushman heavily on the head with his huge hand.

Mr. Blakeney was a strong and determined man, and in no mood to stand by and see his servant knocked about. His blood rose instantly at the insolent aggression of this bully.

"Let the man alone!" he said angrily in Dutch, snatching Poeskop away so suddenly and with such force that he freed him from the Boer's grip. "He is my servant!"

Karl Engelbrecht turned instantly upon the Englishman. His face was inflamed with passion, and he struck a heavy blow with his right fist, which, if it had not been parried, would have caught Mr. Blakeney fair in the face. But the latter had been a good boxer in his young days, and had no difficulty in stopping the hit. He was an active man, hard as nails, and in the prime of life, and he was in no mood to take a blow from any man. He retorted by a swift left-hander, which crashed into the middle of the Boer's broad, fleshy face like a kick from a horse. The blood instantly gushed from Engelbrecht's nose. With an oath in Dutch the giant rushed upon his assailant, swinging at him some dangerous

right-handers; but Mr. Blakeney, although angry enough, was much too good a general to be overcome in this way. He fought very coolly, parried the round-arm blows, and every now and again planted on the Dutchman's face heavy and telling strokes that quickly told their tale. Pausing to get breath, to spit the blood from his mouth, and to wipe his streaming nose with the back of his hand, the Dutchman once more rushed in to the attack. This time he fought desperately, and Mr. Blakeney had some ado to repel the rush. Changing his tactics, he delivered two or three heavy body-blows, under which the Dutchman winced visibly; the third of these took the Boer's wind, and doubled him up. As his head went forward, the Englishman let drive one vicious upper cut which took Engelbrecht on the point of the jaw and stretched him instantly on the sand. The fight was over.

Chapter V.
THE TREK BEGINS.

Karl Engelbrecht gathered himself up after a short pause, but there was no further fight left in him. He turned to go.

"All right, my fine Englishman," he said, shaking his fist at his conqueror. "I don't know who you are or what you are, but no one does Karl Engelbrecht an injury without paying for it. I shall be even with you, and that before very long. Meanwhile I shall go straight to the magistrate's office, and get that scoundrel arrested for running away from my service."

As he spoke he pointed to Poeskop, who was smiling all over his yellow face at his former master's discomfiture.

"And I'll follow you to the magistrate's office directly," said Mr. Blakeney, "and have you summoned for assaulting this native."

Accompanied by the two lads, who were overjoyed, if a little awed, at the result of the contest, Mr. Blakeney went into the hotel to wash his hands and get rid of all traces of the encounter. He himself had scarcely suffered at all. He had a lump on his forehead and a red patch on his cheek-bone, and one of his knuckles was badly cut; beyond these slight injuries he has untouched.

"My word, uncle," said Guy, as Mr. Blakeney took his coat off and poured out some water, "you did punish that ruffian. I had no idea you were such a fighting man. It was splendid!"

"Well, boys," returned Mr. Blakeney, "I don't like fighting, and I have always made it a point to avoid a scuffle if it can possibly be done. But sometimes there comes an occasion when a man must take his own part. This was one of them. I couldn't stand by and see that hulking bully knocking Poeskop about. My idea is that every decent Englishman, or English boy, should be able to defend himself when compelled to, and for that reason I believe in every lad being taught to box. My old boxing lessons stood me in good stead just now. I suppose the Boer was at least a couple of stone heavier than myself; but he knew no more about fighting than a baby, and he paid the penalty."

He soused his face in cold water, washed his hands, and with the two lads and Poeskop went off to the magistrate's office. The upshot of the affair was that Karl Engelbrecht was proved to be entirely in the wrong. It was shown that he had persistently maltreated Poeskop, and that he had seldom if ever paid him his rightful wages. Other natives in the town, who were under Portuguese rule, but who had served with Engelbrecht, could speak to these facts. In the end the Boer was fined for assaulting the Bushman, and ordered to pay him a further sum of money due for unpaid wages. The Dutchman paid the money with a wry face, and it was clear that he was yet more inflamed with hatred against Poeskop and his English supporters than he had been before.

But for the most part the people of Mossamedes, including the governor of the town and other officials, were delighted at the punishment inflicted on the big Boer. He was known and feared as a quarrelsome bully, and now some one had been found to check his blustering career and cut his comb. Mr. Blakeney was advised privately, after these occurrences, to keep his eyes open. Karl Engelbrecht was a man of evil reputation, who would not be likely to stop at trifles in the achievement of revenge, and revenge he was known to have vowed. In the town nothing would be attempted, but in the veldt such a ruffian might very well try to do mischief. However, Mr. Blakeney treated the matter very coolly. He was well able to take care of himself, he said; and having wide experience of the veldt and veldt ways, he felt perfectly competent to set at naught the blusterings of Karl Engelbrecht and his followers. The big Dutchman, having got over the effects of the fight, was having a good time in Mossamedes. For some time past the Portuguese Government had been employing the Trek Boers settled in their territory as mercenaries in their warfare against any tribes that happened to give trouble. The Boers took their payment chiefly in cattle, raided from the defeated tribesfolk; and Engelbrecht, who had been lately leading a commando against some unfortunate natives, had returned with much plunder in oxen and goats. These he had sold for good prices; his pockets were full of money, and he and his freebooting associates were bent on having a high time at the various bars and canteens of the place.

It is perhaps necessary to explain here, in a few words, how it came about that Boers were thus to be found in Portuguese territory, so far away from the homes of the South African Dutch stock settled in the Transvaal. Nearly twenty years before, many families of Boers, disgusted with the anarchy and bad government of the Transvaal Republic, and embittered yet more at the English taking over the country, as they had done in 1877, had quitted the Transvaal and trekked north-westward across the desert in search of a new Promised Land, which they believed to exist somewhere in the far interior. These ignorant and misguided folk found in their long wanderings no land of Canaan, flowing, as they had fondly hoped, with milk and honey. Their trek extended over several years; they endured almost unexampled privations and troubles from thirst, fevers, and the attacks of natives; scores of them died; they lost the greater portion of their stock, and abandoned many wagons; some turned back, and only a comparatively small remnant emerged from the perils of this unparalleled trek. After wandering about the western regions of the Kalahari, the Okavango country, and Ovampoland, they crossed the Cunene River and entered Portuguese territory.

Here they were well treated. They were allotted farms and encouraged to colonize the country, and many families did actually settle down at Humpata. Since that time–about the beginning of 1881–these Trek Boers and their descendants had accepted their lot in the new country and become Portuguese subjects. They tilled the ground, ranched cattle, sheep, and goats, rode transport (that is, carried goods) to and from Mossamedes and Benguela, hunted elephants for their ivory, and other kinds of game for their skins and flesh. Latterly, as we have seen, they had been assisting the Portuguese in native wars. For this kind of warfare they were excellently well adapted, being good shots and riders, and well versed in every trick and circumstance of veldt fighting. The Portuguese had, in fact, found them highly satisfactory auxiliaries, and the unfortunate natives–too often treated with the grossest unfairness and trickery by all parties–terrible enemies.

Among the Trek Boers of Humpata and the neighbouring country were many decent, deserving, and well-conducted people, who were only anxious to make a fair and honest living out of the country. A leaven of them, however, were mere filibusters and adventurers, cruel, cunning, and deceitful, ready to overreach and rob any man, especially if he had a black skin, and always prepared to use their rifles on small provocation. Among these was to be reckoned Karl Engelbrecht, who, even among these lawless spirits, had acquired a sinister reputation. Most of these Dutch settlers were fine, big, upstanding men, strong, bold, hardy, and athletic–as indeed they might well be; for they and their families represented the survival of the fittest, after one of the most trying and adventurous passages on record. Their seven years of wandering had, in truth, weeded out all the weak ones, and left alive only the toughest and hardiest of a tough and

hardy race.

For the next few days Mr. Blakeney and his party were busied in pushing on their preparations for the trek. They filled the lower part of the wagon with various stores and provisions–meal, coffee, sugar, tinned provisions, jams, vegetables, and other small luxuries. They laid in also dried onions, always useful on an expedition of this kind, where green vegetables are unprocurable, as well as a bag or two of potatoes. They carried also sacks of mealies and Kaffir corn (the latter a kind of millet) with which to feed the horses. They anticipated a good deal of hunting; and you cannot pursue game on horseback, and run down giraffe, eland, and other fleet creatures, unless your nags are well fed and in good condition. This fact Guy had already become aware of during his stay in British Bechuanaland. Their saddlery, ammunition, guns and rifles had come round with them from Cape Town. Juno, their invaluable pointer, was also of the party. Juno seemed to be getting keener and keener as each day passed; she watched anxiously the loading of the wagon, and was evidently only too desirous to have the whole party out in the veldt. A good light tent had been procured, and Mr. Blakeney's kartel fixed up in the wagon. All was now ready for the trek, which they hoped to begin next day.

During these preparations they necessarily, moving as they did freely about the small seaport of Mossamedes, passed Karl Engelbrecht and his boon companions in close proximity. After his severe lesson the Boer, who was a coward at bottom, did not dare to attempt any further liberties with the Englishmen or their servants; but he scowled evilly as he passed, and had always some savage remark to make to his friends–delivered carefully in an undertone–as they went by. Mr. Blakeney and the two lads, for their part, took not the slightest notice of the freebooters; even Poeskop, strong in his reliance upon his English protectors, held his head well in the air, and assumed an air of supercilious indifference, which perhaps in his secret heart he felt was not altogether justified. For Poeskop, undoubtedly, knowing his former master and his evil ways so well, still retained within his soul certain secret quakings as he thought of or set eyes upon Karl Engelbrecht.

"My young baas," he would say to Guy, as they sighted the big, burly ruffian, "he is *slim*, and he is strong, and he is cruel. And he will try to make us suffer for his black eyes, which he still carries, the *schelm!* and his bleeding nose. *Maghte!* but it was good as a sackful of honey[#] to see Karl Engelbrecht floored by Baas Blackenny" (he always mispronounced the word), "and it does me good still to see his battered face."

[#] Honey is often carried by the natives in skin bags.

Then he would croon to himself in his croaking voice: ”But we shall suffer, we shall suffer; Karl Engelbrecht is planning something; Poeskop knows it, ay, he knows it. Well, Poeskop will look out. He sleep always like the *muishond* [a kind of weasel], with one eye open.”

On the last night before the trek Mr. Blakeney was with the two lads in their bedroom, having a chat with them, and helping them to complete their packings. They talked on many subjects, including the treasure hunt which lay before them. Then they bade one another good night, and Mr. Blakeney retired to his own room.

Next morning early Guy knocked at his door and aroused him. Guy was always the early bird of the party: earlier even than his uncle, who was always out and about before six.

”Uncle,” he said, ”I want you to come and look at something in our room.”

”All right, Guy,” was the reply. ”What is it?”

”Something rather odd, I think,” returned Guy, as they went down the passage. They entered the double-bedded room where the cousins slept, and Guy took his uncle across to the wall against which Guy’s bed stood.

”Look at this, uncle,” he said, kneeling on his bed and pointing to the wall. ”What do you make of it?”

The wall was in fact nothing more than a fairly stout partition of varnished wood. Mr. Blakeney knelt beside Guy, and looked closely at the spot where the lad’s finger rested. He saw at once that a neat hole had been bored through the partition from the other side, and a hollow left big enough to thrust the point of his little finger into.

”Well, what do you think it means, Guy?” he asked, screwing up his mouth with an odd expression.

”I think, uncle, it means,” returned Guy, ”that that fellow in the next room has been spying on us for some reason or other.”

”Who has the next room?” queried Mr. Blakeney, manifestly with some anxiety.

”Why, that Portuguese brute who is always about with Karl Engelbrecht–Minho, his name is.”

”Whew!” whistled Mr. Blakeney. ”I wish I had known this earlier. What time does he leave his room?”

”Not for another hour yet,” broke in Tom; ”and he always locks his door and takes his key with him.”

”Well, Tom,” said his father, ”you stay behind while Guy and I go out to the wagons and start the trek. Then we’ll come back to breakfast, and afterwards ride out together and overtake the wagons by the mid-day outspan. Meanwhile if, by hook or crook, you can get into this fellow Minho’s room, and see what this hole

means, do so. Be careful, though, and don't get into any unpleasantness with the man. If you can't get in without trouble, leave it alone. I'll see the landlord about it."

They returned in an hour and a half's time, and were met by Tom with a smiling face.

"I've done the Sherlock Holmes business," he said quietly. "Minho went out and locked his door. I tried his window, which like ours opens on to the veranda, and found that the artful beggar had fastened it in such a way that, while the top sash is open, you can't pull up the lower part. It was impossible to climb in through the top without running the risk of breaking the glass. Well, I waited impatiently half an hour, and then Maria–the native woman who cleans the rooms up, and has evidently a second key–went in and did up the room. While she was gone with a bundle of clothes for the wash I nipped in, and had a good look round at the partition on that side. I found that a hole had been neatly bored with an auger, and the cavity filled up with a round piece of wood, which had been painted to look just like a knot in the pinewood. This, with a little coaxing of the finger nail, comes out, and then you have a view into our room, and I have no doubt can hear quite well everything that is said in here. I put the bit of wood back, and slipped out again before old Maria had got back from her errand."

"The brute!" ejaculated Mr. Blakeney. "He has evidently been spying on us. And when he bored that hole he must have got into this room and cleared away any traces of his work." He knelt on Guy's bed and examined the aperture carefully again. "He has even taken the trouble to put on some dark paint round this side of the hole," he added, "so that the place looks just like a pine knot from this side. I wonder you spotted it, Guy."

"Well, I noticed it from the bed this morning," said Guy, "just before I got up. It was a mere chance. The place looked uneven, and when I examined it I found I could just get the tip of my little finger inside the hole. Then I saw that the place wasn't natural."

"Well, the mischief's done now," said Mr. Blakeney. "I have half a mind to tell the landlord–in fact, I think I will straight away."

Senhor José Moseles, whom Mr. Blakeney at once interviewed, was no friend of Antonio Minho. He knew the man to be a shady character, and a friend of the filibustering Boer, Engelbrecht. But in Mossamedes such characters were not uncommon, and landlords had to put up with them, if they paid their bills. Minho was just now flush of money, and indeed was usually well supplied with that commodity. But Senhor Moseles would look after him. It was not Mr. Blakeney's plan to arouse the man's suspicions just then. Moseles therefore arranged to take measures concerning the peep-hole a week or two later; which, Minho

having left the hotel, he did. The hole was plugged and varnished, and the matter, so far as he was concerned, ended.

This little matter attended to, the three Englishmen breakfasted. Then, having put together their small kits, their horses were brought round, and they quitted Mossamedes. Their route lay along the main road running from the seaport to Humpata, and there was no difficulty in finding their way. The road, if road it could be called, was rough and uneven, and the country parched, hilly, and uninteresting. They overtook the wagon at one o'clock, and found it outspanned till the heat of the day was past. At four they trekked, and made fair progress till nine, when they outspanned again. For nearly a week the expedition pushed on steadily eastward, through sterile and mountainous country, until they had reached the Trek Boer settlement at Humpata, by the Portuguese sometimes called San Januario. Here they halted for a couple of days to rest the oxen and take in some further stores, including poultry, meal, and other produce grown by the Boers in this neighbourhood.

The Dutch people of this curious little settlement, so remote from the Transvaal, whence they had trekked years before, interested Mr. Blakeney and the boys not a little. They knew the pathetic history of these people: of their long wanderings, and of the terrible sufferings they had sustained before attaining this region. They found them, as a rule, kindly and hospitable folk, if rough and primitive. So soon as the Trek Boers discovered that the newcomers spoke Cape Dutch, and came from Bechuanaland, so near to the Transvaal border, they were only too anxious to render them hospitality, and make inquiries about the country they themselves had quitted years before. The English travellers, on their part, had many little returns to make for such kindnesses as were thus shown them. They had Cape and Transvaal papers to give away; a spare bag of excellent coffee to exchange; and they won the hearts of several families by the gift of tins of Morton's jams, marmalade, and ginger, which to the sweet-toothed Dutch, who seldom met with such rare luxuries, were as manna in the desert.

"*Alle wereld!*" said Mevrouw Van der Merwe, a stout, good-natured old Boer dame, living in one of the best houses in the little settlement. "'Tis a pleasure to set eyes on fresh-looking folk again from South Africa, with news of the Transvaal, and the Free State, and the Old Colony. One gets tired of seeing nothing but these little yellow-faced Portuguese, who to my mind are, after all, no better than Griquas and Bastards. I always say to our people here, 'There are English and English, just as there are Boers and Boers. You get good and bad of every race of mankind.' For my part, I have met many good English, and have received many kindnesses from them, just as I have from you, Menheer Blakeney, and your son and nephew. And so they are getting more gold than ever out of the Transvaal?"

”Yes,” answered Mr. Blakeney. ”They are getting enormous quantities–something like thirteen millions of pounds sterling during the year.”

”Is it possible!” ejaculated the vrouw, pushing the tobacco canister over to Mr. Blakeney, and pouring him out another cup of coffee. ”Ah, well! I always say that gold will be the ruin of the Dutch in the Transvaal; and Paul Kruger is a great fool to allow so much mining. If I were president I would close down every gold mine, and let the country be used only for farming. The Heer Gott never meant people to dig and claw into the bowels of the earth after gold, like a lot of greedy baboons after ground nuts. But I knew Paul Kruger well in the old days. He was a greedy fellow always; greedy for power, greedy for money. I hear he is rich as a Jew man, and spends £400 a year in coffee money, for which the burghers pay him–entertaining a pack of useless folk that come flattering and fawning about him. But it will be his downfall. I know it, I know it. I always told him so. Love of money, love of power. He had better have stuck to his farming, as his old father did before him.

”Your Jameson raid,” she went on, ”is a bad sign. It means that Paul Kruger is successful a second time. But you English can never forgive that or Majuba; and there will be a big row some day, and then Oom Paul will have to go, and we Transvaalers shall lose our country. I know it, and my husband knows it, though every one else here declares that the Boers can always beat the English. But, you see, I remember as a girl Zwart Kopjes and Boomplaats, when your folk beat ours; and I say that you have more men than we, and your turn will come some day.”

”Well,” rejoined Mr. Blakeney, after the old lady had finished her tirade, ”your people are very warlike now. I’m sorry the raid happened. It was an idiotic business, and has done a good deal of mischief. I don’t like the feeling that is rising between the two races in South Africa. I fear, with you, that it will come to a big fight some day; and when it does, the English will never rest till they have made all South Africa theirs. The Free State Boers say openly now that they will take part with the Transvaal if a struggle comes; and the gold-mining folk at Johannesburg, and Rhodes and the rest of them, are bent on forcing on a war, which I am afraid now will have to come.”

”Yes,” said the old lady. ”It’s just like a couple of boys who have bad blood between them. They will go on growling and being unpleasant to one another, and then all at once the fight begins and the blood flows. Still even that is better than perpetual miscalling and swearing at one another, for all the world like a pair of tom-cats. Better, I say, have the fight over and have done with it.”

They spent two very pleasant days at Humpata, and then trekked. Before they left, Mevrouw Van der Merwe sent for Guy and Tom, and presented them with a quantity of dried fruits, peaches, quinces, and apricots. She added some of

her precious apricot komfit, by which the Boers set much store. She had taken a great fancy to the two lads; they reminded her, she said, of two of her own sons, whom she had lost of fever at Debra and Vogel Pan on the trek thither. Guy and his cousin were perhaps not greatly flattered at being compared to Boer boys, for whom they cherished, like most English lads, a secret disdain. But the old lady was very kind, and they thanked her heartily for her gifts. They left her sawing through a big koodoo marrow bone with a hand saw. Her husband had lately come in from the veldt, and had brought her a quantity of *biltong* (dried flesh) and this dainty, of which she was inordinately fond.

"Farewell," she said again, pausing from her task and puffing hard for breath. "And, Tom, mind and tell your father once more to be on the lookout for Karl Engelbrecht. I am sorry they have had blows–though Karl was well served out, and your father was a right stark fellow to give him a thrashing. But Karl is a bitter bad enemy, and he will not forget. Be on the lookout, all of you, and if he comes troubling you"–here she lowered her voice to a tragic whisper–"don't be afraid to shoot! Tell your father that, and say that is my last word–Karl is a *schepsel* and a dangerous foe. Farewell."

The various trophies lying about the Boer settlement and in the primitive habitations had greatly fired the ambition of the two cousins, who were now longing to reach the game veldt and begin shooting. At Humpata there had been indications of many kinds of wild animal: horns of buffalo, koodoo, roan antelope, water-buck, eland, and many other antelopes; and the hides of lions, giraffes, hippos, and other heavy game were abundant. Here, too, were tusks of elephant and hippopotamus, and the formidable horns of the black rhinoceros. It was manifest that they were on the outskirts of a wonderful game country. As the lads approached each day nearer to this land of wonder and of bliss, their spirits became more and more high, their suppressed excitement more uncontrollable. For three weeks Poeskop guided the expedition steadily towards the north-east. Then, one evening, as they sat round the camp fire, he came up to the group.

"Baas," he said, pointing to the grim range of mountains which towered in front of them in massy outline, dim beneath the starlit sky, "to-morrow we shall pass the berg. Beyond is the game country, and the young baases will then have shooting to their hearts' content."

Already the lads had shot some few head of game, reedbuck and impala and springbuck. They had heard the roar of lions and seen the spoor of buffalo. Their hearts leapt within them at Poeskop's news. That night their dreams were chiefly of glorious adventures, in which elephants, giraffes, buffaloes, and lions

played, with themselves, the leading parts.

Chapter VI.
THE SHADOWERS AND THE SHADOWED.

Antonio Minho, at eleven o'clock on the morning on which the Englishmen had quitted Mossamedes, was to be seen with Karl Engelbrecht in the coolest corner of the billiard-room in a well-known canteen in the town, engaged in earnest conversation. The two men had long glasses of cooling drinks in front of them, and looked thoroughly comfortable. Antonio Minho was a Madeira-born Portuguese, who, some six years before, having found that lovely island somewhat too hot to hold him, had made his way to Benguela and thence to Mossamedes. He was a clever rascal, who spoke English and Spanish as well as his own language, and in a year's time had found no difficulty in acquiring a fair knowledge of Boer Dutch. He had many transactions with the Trek Boers, and, having opened a general store, managed to extract from these farmers and hunters of the wilderness a good deal of profit. Karl Engelbrecht was one of his best customers, and the two had done much business together, the bulk of it of an exceedingly doubtful character. Each man had found the other useful to him, and a strong alliance, offensive and defensive, had been struck up between them.

"Well, Karl," said Minho, as he took a pull at his gin tonic and lit a cigar, "I have more news for you."

"What is it, my friend?" asked the Boer, in his thick guttural voice.

"Well, it's this," continued the Portuguese, contemplating the burning end of his cigar. "For several days, as you know, I have made it my business to discover what this Englishman and his two cubs are after. I have, as I told you, opened up communication through my bedroom wall, and by this means have overheard a good deal, as Blakeney has been in the habit of chatting with the boys before they went to bed each evening. Thanks to the two dear cubs, whose thirst for information is inexhaustible, I have managed to discover that they are on the track of some wonderful gold discovery. Poeskop, your Bushman friend, is, I gather, the man who is to lead them into some part of the interior where gold is to be found abundantly."

"Poeskop, my friend, is to do this, is he?" repeated Engelbrecht, with a grim, hoarse laugh. "Poeskop owes me for a good many rubs. Perhaps I may find

means to make him repay me. Well, what further? You know I am not much of a believer in gold and gold mines."

"I have discovered something besides," pursued Minho. "Do you remember a man named Hardcastle, an English mining engineer, who was in this country a year or so back?"

"Yes, I do," returned the Boer. "He took on that scoundrel Poeskop after he ran away from me. What of him?"

"He's dead," said the Portuguese, "and one of these two boys is his son. They have from this dead Hardcastle some kind of a clue to a gold field or a gold treasure of some sort, and Poeskop is the man who is to guide them to it. Now, you scoff at gold, and in the ordinary way I should be prepared to scoff too. I have seen and heard of too many frosts in the way of mineral discovery, even in the six years I have been out here. But look at this case! This man, Blakeney, whatever we may think of him"–a snort and an opprobrious expression from Karl Engelbrecht here interrupted the Portuguese's remarks–"whatever we may think of him," he went on, "and I know your opinion is not a flattering one, is no fool. Blakeney, I say, has come out on no other errand than to hunt up this treasure. Hardcastle was, I gather, himself hot upon the scent of the gold, and he was not a man likely to run about on a fool's errand. I knew him, and he was a shrewd fellow. Poeskop seems to be the backbone or mainspring of the whole thing. As far as I can make out, he, and he only, is the man who knows where the gold is."

"Then," broke in Engelbrecht, "all we have to do is to kidnap Poeskop, squeeze his secret out of him–a matter easy enough away out on the veldt–and rake in the plunder. There will be no difficulty in surprising the camp at any time, and the rest is easy enough."

"Steady, my friend," said Minho. "You go too fast. This Englishman, as far as I can make out, is a good veldt man, and not likely to be hustled out of his secret in this easy way. And Poeskop, as you yourself know very well, is as cunning a little piece of vermin as ever crawled on two legs. He'll not be easily squeezed or caught either. I've had my eye on Poeskop for a long time, thinking to make use of him; and I should have done so already if that man Hardcastle had not turned up, and you, I may add, had not been so unwise as to quarrel with a clever servant. Why, Poeskop is worth all the rest of your 'boys' put together."

"Well, if my plan doesn't suit you, what do you propose?" asked the Boer gruffly. Engelbrecht, as the result of much experience, had acquired a good deal of respect for the crafty and resourceful mind of his Portuguese ally; he recognized that the affair they were now engaged on was something out of the ordinary run of things, and he was prepared to listen to his advice.

"My plan," said Minho, a smile of oily cunning illuminating his fat, yellow face, "is a somewhat different one. I think it would be very unwise to attempt to

seize Poeskop before he has shown where the treasure is. If, as I hope and firmly believe, there is gold where they are making for, let us wait. Let us shadow them in their wanderings, and when they have laid hands upon the treasure, we shall find some means of making them part with it, even if"–and he smiled grimly at the thought that rose before him–"we have to use some of your strong measures to make them do so."

Karl Engelbrecht's right hand dived into his jacket pocket, from which he took a handful of Boer tobacco and filled his pipe. A hideous grin expanded over his broad face and illumined very unpleasantly his pale blue eyes.

"Ja!" he said, contemplatively. "That is a good idea of yours, Antonio. We will shadow them, and see them to their treasure ground. Then–well, we shall see what we shall see." The evil grin grew yet broader, and the Boer burst into a shout of laughter. "Ah!" he said, "I have two long accounts to settle; one with that *schepsel* Poeskop, the other with this Englishman. I shall not rest content, day or night, till I am even, and more than even, with them. But," he continued in a graver tone, "are you sure, Antonio, that these men are on the track of gold? What if the whole thing is a fool's errand, and the Bushman is deceiving them?"

"Trust to me, Karl, in this affair," returned the Portuguese; "I know what I am about, and I have heard enough to convince me that this thing is genuine. I want a change. I have been too long in Mossamedes, and I will come with you myself. We can take a wagon with a light load of trading stuff, and do some business. I have a lot of Hamburg gin, which I must work off somewhere. But we shall have to be very careful, so that the Englishmen have no suspicion that we are on their spoor."

"Ja," added Engelbrecht, emptying his glass. "We will keep at least two days' trek behind them. I will have a man or two out in front of us, keeping an eye on them. My Hottentot, Stuurman, is a capital fellow for a business like this. I will pack him off on a horse to-day with some provisions. He can follow the party up, and let us know their movements. At present they are taking the Humpata road–that much I have ascertained. We will get our things together, and start in a day and a half's time. That will be time enough."

"Right you are, Karl," added Minho. "I will be ready in twenty-four hours' time. Send your wagon round to my place, and I'll load up two or three thousand pounds weight of trading stuff. We must leave room for our kartels. Now, let us have one more drink, and be off." The two ruffians drank to the success of their precious conspiracy, and separated.

The English trekkers had negotiated, after considerable difficulty, the great mountain range that lay in front of them. There was some kind of a track, but it lay through wild ravines littered with boulders and overgrown with thorn bush and low timber, and it took them a long day and a half of severe labour before

they had accomplished the passage and emerged upon the open country beyond.

The whole camp–oxen, horses, and men–enjoyed a long rest that afternoon, and after a good night's sleep all were refreshed and cheerful upon the following morning. They were up as the sun rose, and after ablutions in a bucket of water, Mr. Blakeney and the two lads sat down to an excellent breakfast of klipspringer chops and fry–Tom had shot one of these little mountain buck on the previous day–with keen appetites. Good coffee and a tin of marmalade rounded off an ample meal. Each of them had a little squat wagon chair, such as the Boers carry on their travels. The frames were made of the tough wood of the *kameeldoorn* (giraffe-acacia), and the seats consisted of thongs of raw hide. These folded up, and were stowed under the wagon while they trekked. A small folding table did duty for all three of them.

"Now, lads," said Mr. Blakeney, as, having filled and lit his pipe, he stood up and looked over the country in front of them, "Poeskop says that we shall find plenty of game out here. I believe we shall. It looks all over like a game veldt. We may see giraffe, buffalo, eland, blue wildebeest, roan antelope, zebra, lion, leopard, and wart-hog at any time. It's beautiful veldt. It reminds me of part of Khama's Country and Mashonaland. I only hope the game will be as plentiful as it used to be there twenty years ago, when I was a lad a year or two older than you are now, Guy."

And, indeed, the scene was very fair. They stood on the lower slopes of the mountain range through which Poeskop had shown them a path. For some miles in front open forest of giraffe-acacia lay before them. Beyond this stretched a vast plain of grass, here and there dotted with a clump or two of trees or a patch of bush. Through the centre of this great yellow plain ran a dark-green ribbon of thorn bush, indicating the bed of a stream. Far away in the dim distance rested, blue on the horizon, another chain of mountains.

"It's perfectly splendid," exclaimed Tom enthusiastically. "Father, I'll get your stalking-glass."

The boy climbed up into the wagon and took down from a hook at the side a leather case, from which he drew one of Ross's telescopes. Seating himself on the ground, he adjusted the focus and gazed over the plain.

"There's game out there on the flat!" he cried. "I can see clumps here and there. What do you make them out to be, father?"

His father took the glass, and indulged in a prolonged survey.

"I take most of those clumps to be blue wildebeest and quacha," he said presently. "When I say 'quacha,' Guy," he added, "I don't mean the old Cape Colony, half-striped quagga, which is now quite extinct, but Burchell's zebra, which the Boers and up-country hunters still always insist on calling quacha. As a matter of fact, the old Dutch hunters called the true quagga 'quacha,' and

Burchell's zebra 'bonte quacha,' which latter means 'striped quacha.' Quacha, by the way, is an old Hottentot word, taken from the neighing call of the animal, which has been corrupted to our English quagga. Well, now, I think I see some other kinds of game, probably eland, hartebeest, or tsesseby–what the Boers call bastard hartebeest–and, I fancy, ostriches. We'll trek in an hour. The wagon will move along across the plain. Meanwhile we'll saddle our best ponies, and see if we can't find a troop of roan antelope or giraffe as we ride through the forest. We'll go ahead of the wagon. Jan Kokerboom knows the route, straight across the plain for the mountain yonder in the distance. Poeskop can come with us and help spoor. Hi! Poeskop!" he called out.

The little Bushman came up.

"Ja, baas!" he said, his eyes twinkling with pleasure.

"We shall go in front of the wagon, Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney, "and you can come with us. Take the bay pony, Rooibok; he'll carry you very well. And mind, if we find *kameel* [giraffe] you are not to shoot; at all events, until the young baases have each had a fair chance. I want them to shoot a kameel apiece. When they have done that, you and I can join in. Shall we find kameel, think you?"

"Ik denk so, baas," answered the Bushman. "I have been out since sun-up in the forest yonder, and I have seen spoor of kameel and rhinoster."

"Splendid," said Guy. "Now let's saddle up and be off."

They soon had their ponies ready, and, strapping on their bandoliers, fastened their spurs, took down their rifles from the wagon hooks, mounted, and rode down the hill.

"Now, boys," said Mr. Blakeney, "I want you to remember two things. If we find giraffe–kameel, as the up-country hunters all call them–we must try and drive them out on to the plain in front. Then we can run them down fairly comfortably. You must ride hard at first. Don't be afraid of using sjambok and spur. Try and push the giraffe beyond their speed, and they are yours. Ride right up to the stern of the beasts and put in your shots as you gallop, as near as possible to the root of the tail. Your bullets will penetrate the giraffe's short body, and you'll bring him down. You, Guy, take the biggest one of the troop. Follow him as hard as you can split, and stick to him till you get him. Blinkbonny, your pony, is a real good one, and knows what to do. You, Tom, take the next biggest, which will be, probably, a tall cow, and run her down. Now we'll get on. No talking, except in the merest whisper. Spread out, and keep an eye on Poeskop. You can't mistake giraffe spoor. It's like the huge, elongated footprint of a colossal ox, if you can imagine such a thing."

They rode into the forest and, spreading out a few paces apart, followed the lead of the Bushman, who, mounted on an upstanding pony of fourteen hands

three inches, looked an odd little figure. On they went in silence for half an hour, Poeskop pointing here and there to spoor as they passed it. A big troop of lovely red pallah swept across their front, the graceful antelopes bounding into the air as they shot past. Numbers of guinea-fowl were to be seen moving hither and thither, busily engaged in digging up the bulbs on which they feed. An hour had passed. They had sighted koodoo, and let them go unscathed, hoping for heavier game. Some tracks of buffalo had been crossed. But they were now hot upon the spoor of a good troop of giraffe. The boys noted with the keenest interest the huge, slipper-like impression left in the red sand. Here some of the troop had browsed round a giraffe-acacia; the scraping of their fore feet, as they had stretched themselves to their fullest capacity to seize some tempting morsel of foliage, was plainly apparent in the tell-tale sand. Poeskop, mounted as he was, described the operation in dumb show, with all the dramatic ability of his race.

Suddenly he drew rein and lifted a warning hand. Then pointing through a wide, open glade in the forest, he glared intently. His audience stared hard, and saw nothing stir for a full half-minute. Then something which they had mistaken for the trunk of a tree moved, and they saw instantly that it was a giraffe.

"Go on," whispered Mr. Blakeney; "ride for the right hand. Push them out in the open." They walked their horses forward, and then, on clearing a patch of timber, an amazing and most wonderful sight was before them. A hundred and fifty yards away, gathered round three or four spreading trees of the giraffe-acacia species, stood a troop of more than twenty tall giraffes. Most of the animals were browsing contentedly at the green leafage; some few stood with necks stretched out at an angle of forty-five degrees, quietly chewing the cud and apparently half asleep. The troop varied much in colour. A huge, old, mahogany-coloured bull, so dark as to appear almost black upon his back and shoulders, towered above the rest. Several fine cows of a rich orange-tawny colour stood next. Then came young cows, a young bull or two, and some stilty, half-grown calves, all varying in colour from orange-tawny and rufous-tan to a pale yellowish buff.

All this the hunters took in instantly; then, setting spurs to their ponies, they sprang forward in the chase. There was a strange, confused movement of tall heads and necks among the startled giraffe, and then the troop, having swung round their heads and noted the danger that menaced them, strode off at a curious, gliding shuffle. The hunters cantered, but their canter made but little impression. The shuffling walk of a giraffe is, as a matter of fact, far faster than any one unacquainted with these animals could imagine.

"Gallop hard, boys," shouted Mr. Blakeney excitedly, "or they will get away from us."

Following his example, the two lads now put spurs to their ponies and galloped in right earnest. Even in this open forest the chase was by no means an

easy one. Guy, being the best mounted, pressed ahead, and, passing his uncle, rode for the great dark bull, which was lunging along at the head of the troop, evidently trying to sheer right-handed for the deeper parts of the forest. But Guy's blood was now up, and, pressing his good pony yet more, he galloped faster than the flying giants. The troop swung across an open glade, and, as they strode along like tall, dappled spectres, it seemed to Guy that he must surely be gazing upon some long-forgotten pageant of the earth's primeval past. These extraordinary creatures could surely scarce belong to this modern world! The whole thing seemed almost unreal. Still he galloped on, and presently achieved his purpose. The big bull, seeing that he was foiled in his attempt to plunge deeper into the forest, sheered left-handed and increased his pace. The troop began to string out, the calves and younger animals falling behind. Guy was riding, like his uncle and cousin, in his flannel shirt, with the sleeves rolled up. It was a warm morning, and their coats were as usual strapped to their saddle-bows.

On they went, through thorn jungle, over fallen timber, dodging tree trunks. Now the big bull tacked round a tree with the deftness of a well-handled yacht. Now a tall cow bent her swan-like neck and ducked marvellously under the spreading branches of an acacia. Guy felt many a scratch and stab as his excited pony plunged through the thorny brakes. In a patch of *haak-doorn*, through which they forced a passage, his left stirrup-leather and stirrup were ripped clean from the saddle. He lost his hat. These were mere nothings in the heat of a chase such as this, and he galloped on. At last they were clearing the forest. Now they were on the grass, with nothing but wide, open plain in front of them. Barring falls, that big bull must surely soon be his. The great giraffe was now running apart from the rest of the troop, going great guns, and manifestly thinking only of the safety of his own skin. The smooth, long, shuffling walk had been long since exchanged for a strange rocking gallop, in which the hind legs were straddled widely, and the long neck swung up and down in a rhythmic motion, which reminded Guy of a gigantic pendulum. Meanwhile the long black tail, screwed oddly up, was executing wild and fantastic flourishes. The chase swept headlong over the pale yellow grass plain. A mile and more had been accomplished since they quitted the timber. The great bull was running well, but Guy noted with a sense of exultation that he was now no more than eighty yards ahead. Another mile slipped by. The bull was tiring; he was now no more than sixty yards ahead. Guy shook up his pony and gave him just one firm touch of the spur. The gallant beast answered by a wonderful and prolonged spurt, which carried his rider to within twenty yards of that great dappled figure, rocking and swaying, like some tall ship on an uneasy sea, in front of them. One more touch of the spur and Guy was within eight paces of the giant's tail. Dropping his reins, he raised his rifle and fired. The heavy Martini bullet struck the giraffe fair, close to the root of the

tail, and the great beast staggered to the shot. Still it pressed on. Guy instantly reloaded, and, taking aim as well as the motion of his pony would allow him, fired again. This time his bullet raked the giant's heart. Guy saw that its end had come, and galloped wide to the left. The bull faltered in his stride, staggered, strode on again, again staggered, and then with a crash that literally shook the earth fell to rise no more. The mighty limbs kicked twice or thrice, once the long neck was raised, then a shiver passed over the dappled frame, and the beast was dead.

Guy leapt from his reeking pony and, wild with excitement, turned to wave his rifle to the rest of the party. A quarter of a mile away on the left he saw Tom and his father riding close up to the rear of the main troop, which now contained about twelve giraffes. In a matter of a hundred yards Tom was right up behind a big cow. He fired, and the cow, turning away from her fellows, stood. Tom jumped off and finished her. Meanwhile Mr. Blakeney, having seen Tom bring his chase to a standstill, was himself galloping hard to make up leeway. He was soon up behind another tall cow, and she too went down. Three giraffes in the space of five minutes! Guy shouted congratulations to his fellow sportsmen, and turned to attend to his prize.

It was a magnificent beast, indeed, that lay before him. As Guy examined it, handled it carefully, almost lovingly, he realized the mighty proportions of the creature. His fingers could make no impression on the thick, tense skin of the back and ribs and neck. Almost the mighty beast seemed to be enveloped in a mantle of bronze. Presently Mr. Blakeney, having picked up Tom, rode up.

"Well done, my lad," he said. "You've got the finest camel of the troop. A tremendous old fellow. Let me tape him. I never saw a bigger."

The tape measure was carefully and scientifically applied.

"Eighteen feet nine, from hoof to tip of false horns! That's a great measurement," said Mr. Blakeney. "You seldom hear of a better. Only once or twice in five years of knocking about in the interior have I heard of giraffe of nineteen feet."

Chapter VII.

ADVENTURES IN THE VELDT.

They were now busily employed for the rest of that morning and some way into

the afternoon in skinning and cutting up their game. The flesh of an old bull giraffe is not good eating, and they were content to take portions of the hide, the feet–which make excellent trophies–the tail, and the skin of the head. From the other two they took further trophies, and a large quantity of flesh. The wagons came up with them presently, and the meat was loaded up. Then they trekked on for the river, where they camped for the evening. After the oxen had grazed, they were brought in at sundown, and fastened to their yokes for the night. Big fires were lighted, and the two parties, masters and servants, enjoyed a banquet of giraffe venison. The flesh of a fresh young cow-giraffe is excellent, somewhat like good veal, with a game-like flavour of its own. But the *bonnes-bouches* of the evening meal were the marrow-bones of these gigantic quadrupeds, roasted in the hot ashes. These were then sawn in half, and the marrow scooped out with long spoons of wood improvised for the occasion.

"Why, father," exclaimed Tom, as he finished his second helping of the savoury stuff, "this beats boiled beef marrow-bone out of the field. I never tasted anything so delicious."

"No, I don't suppose you ever have," said Mr. Blakeney. "Giraffe marrow-bone is the king of veldt fare. There's nothing to equal it. But we must cry enough. It's rich food, and I've known men in the low country bring on a fresh attack of fever simply from over-indulging themselves in too much of this good thing."

They sat after supper near the blazing fire–the boys writing up their diaries by its cheerful light, Mr. Blakeney smoking his pipe and skinning a beautiful crimson-breasted shrike which he had shot that afternoon in some thorn bush along the river. He and the boys had already begun a collection of birds, which they meant to take home with them.

There was no moon, but through the dark, velvety pall of the night-sky myriads of stars pricked forth in an array of marvellous brilliancy. Down the river there came the curious wailing titter of a jackal, then another. Not long after, a low moaning roar was heard from the same quarter. This was answered by another roar nearer the camp.

"Lions!" exclaimed Mr. Blakeney. "Seleti, put more wood on the fires. Do you, Mangwalaan, light another there, beyond the leading span of oxen. We shall have to look out."

The Bechuana boys piled up the firewood, and soon had yet another blaze going.

Just then Poeskop came up to his masters.

"I say, Poeskop," said Guy, who had finished his diary of the day's doings, "is it true that the jackal is the lion's provider, and goes ahead for him and smells out his food, and lets his master know of it?"

The Bushman squatted down near the fire, and smiled a broad smile that wrinkled up his whole face and nearly concealed his eyes.

"Nay, my baas," he said, "I don't think that. But the lion knows from the jackal's cry when he winds food, and comes after him."

Now, from the winding river, not more than a quarter of a mile away, there rose the loud roar of a single lion, then another, and then yet another across the river. Then the three roared in unison, creating a volume of sound that was not only strangely majestic and awe-inspiring, but seemed to make the whole air vibrate and tremble.

"Ah!" said Poeskop quietly, "they won't hurt us to-night. When they roar like that, lions have full stomachs, and are not hungry. It is only when they purr and growl, or, still worse, when they are silent, that you must look out for them."

"They've got our wind, Poeskop," added Mr. Blakeney, "and they're telling one another of the fact."

"Ja, baas," said the Bushman. "They smell meat and oxen; but they won't touch us to-night–at least, I don't think so. There's the old manikin, the father lion–that was the first roar; then his wife; and then a young, nearly full-grown lion, their son."

"How on earth do you know that, Poeskop?" exclaimed Tom.

"Well, Baas Tom," replied the little man with a snigger, "I was brought up in a wild country, much wilder even than this, and I learned to know every sound in the veldt by day and night, and the voice of every beast, big and little. My food and my life depended on it; and my parents, and theirs before them, knew all about these things, and told me of them. You may say I sucked them in with my mother's milk."

"Talking about jackals," he went on musingly; "they are funny beasts–the cleverest and most quick-witted in the veldt. We Bushmen have many tales about them. Shall I tell you one?"

"Yes, yes," said Guy and Tom together. "Fire away, Poeskop!"

"Well," proceeded the little Bushman, "there was once a jackal that lived in Namaqualand, not far from the sea. He saw one day a wagon laden with fish; and as he was fond of fish, and wanted a change of food, he tried to get into the wagon from behind. But it was filled up, and he could not do so. But he bethought himself of a plan. So he ran and lay in the road as if dead. He was a silver-backed jackal, and had a beautiful skin; and the *fore-louper* [ox-leader] came along and picked him up, and said to the driver, 'Here's a fine jackal skin for your vrouw!' 'Throw it up,' said the driver, and the boy threw the jackal into the wagon. It was a fine night, just like this, and the jackal busied himself in throwing the fish out of the wagon as far as he was able, sniggering to himself as he did so. Then, presently, he slipped down, and went back along the road to

his feast. But he found, to his great annoyance, that a great spotted hyæna and his wife had already found and eaten up most of the fish. Master Jackal thought a little, and decided to hide his vexation, and then explained to the hyæna his plan; and the hyæna said it was good, and he would try it one of these days. So a little while after the hyæna saw the wagon coming from the sea again, laden with fish, and, just as the jackal had done, stretched himself out for dead on the road in front. The fore-louper boy came up, and seeing a mangy hyæna said, 'Here's an ugly brute!' As he said this, he dealt the hyæna a heavy kick. The hyæna flinched, and the boy, smelling a rat, as you English say, ran back to the wagon-driver and told him. The two returned with sticks, and belaboured the hyæna within an inch of his life. But the hyæna, as he had been told to do by the jackal, lay still till they had finished with him. Then he got up, sore all over, and dragged himself off. He told his misfortune to the jackal, who pretended to sympathize.

"'Ah!' said the hyæna, 'it was your handsome skin that helped you. Never mind, I shall find another way next time.'

"The jackal sniggered to himself, and went off with his tail up, having enjoyed a very pleasant revenge."

There was much laughter at this simple Bushman yarn.

"Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney, "what part of the country do your people come from, and what race are you?"

"Well, baas," returned the little man, "my people are San or hunting Hottentots, and my clan is the Matsana Khoi-San, who lived once in the country north-east of the Ovampo tribes. We say that our forefathers were once paramount in all this country, from Ovampoland to the Orange River. But we have had many wars and troubles, and have been hunted about by stronger tribes, until there are few of us remaining. And so we live in the deserts with the wild beasts, and pick up our living as best we can. There are other Bushmen tribes among us–that is, San-Hottentots–the Ai-San and the Kun-San, and the Au-ai-San and the An-San, and others. They lead hard lives, and have many enemies. My mother was taken by a lion one night, when I was a child, and my father was killed soon after in a raid by the Ovampos. These people made a slave of me, and sold me afterwards to a white trader from Walfish Bay, who treated me well, and gave me my freedom. I was with him a long time, and he was a good master."

"How did you get your name, Poeskop?" queried Tom. "Did your father give it you?"

"No, Baas Tom," said the Bushman. "That was given me by a Dutchman with whom I worked for some time. He had been in the Old Colony, and knew all about the coast. He said my face reminded him of a seafish called poeskop, so he called me by that name, and it has stuck to me ever since. My Bushman name

was Akabip."

Poeskop pronounced this word with two appalling clicks of the tongue, which Guy and Tom vainly tried to imitate. The little man went into fits of laughter over their struggles, and they all roared together.

It was now time to turn in. In the hunting veldt most men are glad to retire by nine o'clock, often even earlier. Guy and Tom said good-night, and betook themselves to the tent, in which stood their low beds, constructed of iron and canvas. These folded up into wonderfully small space, and were put away on the wagon each morning. The two lads were at this time allowed to sleep the night through without being disturbed. Mr. Blakeney, Jan Kokerboom, the driver, and Poeskop each woke once in turn during the small hours, and saw to it that the fires were kept up and the camp in safety. As Poeskop had predicted, they were not disturbed by lions; and at dawn next morning the whole company were awake and astir, vigorous and refreshed, and ready for the adventures of another day.

Although they were now fairly in the land of big game, it was not part of Mr. Blakeney's design to waste time by the way. Each day the wagon was to trek steadily on under the guidance of Poeskop towards the appointed goal, that mysterious kloof of gold of which they often talked as they sat together round the camp fire. The wagon moved off after breakfast, therefore, while Mr. Blakeney and the two boys, with Poeskop–who had meanwhile set the course for the day–as after-rider, rode off into the veldt to the right front. They could see clumps of game grazing ahead of them, about a mile away in the distance, and towards these they took their way.

Crossing the river which intersected the plain, and which at this the dry season of the year held only a few pools of water here and there in its sandy bed, the hunters rode on quietly till they came within half a mile of the nearest troop. Mr. Blakeney took out his field-glass from its case–this he carried slung over his shoulder–and surveyed the prospect before them.

"That nearest troop, now getting fidgety," he said, "are tsesseby. It's no use running them across this big flat. They're the fleetest of all the antelopes, and stay for ever. Yonder are ostriches and Burchell's zebra. Tom and I will have a try at those. Do you, Guy, take Poeskop, and ride quietly for the big troop of blue wildebeest on the right. You'll have to ride hard, if they begin to run before you get within shot. But they may pull up when they get over the dip yonder, and give you a chance. Now then, Tom, away we go."

Guy and Poeskop cantered quietly in the direction of the blue wildebeest, a troop of some eighty of which were grazing quietly about a mile and a half away. They approached without difficulty to within some six hundred yards, and then, from the left of them, came the report of a rifle, then another, and yet

another. Already, then, Mr. Blakeney and Tom were engaged! Guy looked in that direction, but could see no more than the distant figures of his uncle and cousin scouring away after some specks–the game they were pursuing–in front of them. He now turned his attention to the wildebeest of which he was in pursuit. The noise of the shooting had already disturbed them. Their heads were up, scenting the air for danger, and those animals which had been lying down had sprung to their feet. There was no time to be lost. "We must *hart-loup* [gallop]," said Poeskop quietly; and shaking up the willing nags, the two dashed headlong for the game. Now, at last, the wildebeest took real alarm. Bunching together in a big phalanx, plunging and capering, and whisking their long black tails, the troop set off at what looked like a heavy lumbering gallop, but was in reality a swift pace, taking a course right-handed in the direction of the river-bed. Guy, as he galloped, watched the herd with intense interest. It was the first time he had run blue wildebeest, or, as he had been accustomed to call them in England, brindled gnu. Their big, heavy, somewhat buffalo-like heads, carried low as they ran, and the masses of dark hair that covered their necks, throats, and faces, gave them a cumbrous appearance; but there was no mistake about the pace they went. They swept over the grass plain as fast as the ponies could gallop, and they were evidently not yet stretching themselves out. It was going to be a long and a stern chase. Pursued and pursuers had run somewhat over a mile, still bending towards the river, with its thick fringe of bush and low timber; five hundred yards separated Guy from the nearest wildebeest. They were stringing out now; it was useless to think of firing just yet; and then a diversion happened.

Disturbed by the trample of four-score fleeing wildebeest, a troop of buffalo, which had been resting in the shade of the river bush, suddenly emerged from their concealment and began to run up wind, taking very much the course of the retreating gnu. They had not gone a hundred yards when there burst from the seclusion of the river greenery, just in advance of them, two huge, unwieldy figures. It needed not Poeskop's excited exclamation of "Rhinoster, baas!" to convince Guy that he now saw before him a brace of rhinoceroses, as well as buffaloes and blue wildebeest. It was a thrilling moment; and the lad, with blithe countenance and the light of supreme joy–the wild joy of the hunter–in his blue eyes, shook up his good pony to yet a faster pace. The blue wildebeest were neglected now; which should he first go for, the buffaloes or the rhinoceroses? His mind was instantly made up. The buffaloes were nearest, no more than two hundred yards away; he would have a try at them first. With a press of the knees and a touch of the spur, Guy sent his pony at his hardest gallop. In less than ten minutes he was close up to the herd. Suddenly reining up, and jumping from his nag, he took aim at a huge old bull, carrying a pair of massive horns. The shot was a good one; and as the troop thundered on, the bull turned aside, galloped

on for another fifty yards, and stood.

"Baas, get on the horse again," whispered Poeskop, who had ridden up with Guy's second rifle. "If he charges you on foot he'll catch you."

Guy looked at the grim beast, standing moodily waiting for his foes, with head down and eye askance, and thought the advice good. Jumping on to his pony again, he took the Martini rifle from Poeskop, handing him his Mannlicher in return, and moved to the right to get a better shot at the beast's shoulder.

Suddenly and without warning the bull charged, galloping down upon them at a pace that, considering its short legs and enormously massive frame, seemed little short of marvellous. The fleeing hunters, looking back as they rode, saw the bull within twenty yards of their horses' tails. Would he catch them?

"*Pas op* [look out]!" cried the Bushman, as they both turned and fled, digging their rowels into the flanks of their startled steeds. But the beast was too sorely wounded to run far. The charge was a short one, and the buffalo, dripping blood from his distended nostrils and mouth, stood again. Again Guy approached, this time very warily. He walked his pony to within fifty paces of the bull, and then, getting a quick but steady aim from his saddle, fired. As the loud report of the rifle rattled out upon the hot air, the sturdy brute staggered, sank to the veldt, and, with the strange moaning bellow characteristic of these animals in their last moments, yielded up his breath.

Guy rode up to the dead bull, and gazed with interest upon its mighty proportions, and especially at its grand horns, so gnarled about the centre as to remind him of the roots of some tough oak. They were, indeed, trophies to be proud of. Poeskop, who had ridden up, looking as pleased as Punch, was thinking of yet other feats.

"Baas," he said, his bleared eyes gleaming, "you must shoot a rhinoster. Look!" He pointed towards the river-bed, skirting along which two black figures were still plunging heavily.

"Yes, Poeskop, of course," replied Guy; "the rhinoster, by all means. Come along; forrard on! I'll keep the Martini for the present."

Once more they set their ponies at the gallop, and rapidly overhauled the two black figures ahead of them. Far to their left front, the herd of wildebeest were vanishing into the heart of the great plain; the buffaloes had sheered away yet more to the left, and were standing at gaze a quarter of a mile away, evidently meditating a rush for the coveted shelter of the river bush. Galloping on, the hunters were presently within a quarter of a mile of the rhinos, which, considering their gigantic size and unwieldy shape, moved at an astonishingly fast pace. Now the two beasts swerved suddenly to the right hand, and were presently lost to view among the river jungle. As Guy and the Bushman approached the place where the animals had disappeared, Poeskop whispered,–

"They stand somewhere in there, baas. You must look out, for the rhinoster is a nasty-tempered fellow, and they may go for us."

They turned, and rode very quietly into the bush. After two hundred yards of spooring, they were about to emerge from the denser thickets into an open glade, when Poeskop, who was leading, lifted up his right hand. Guy peered from behind their screen of shrubbery, and saw one of the two rhinoceroses standing facing their way. It was evidently scenting the air for danger, and listening intently; its huge misshapen head, garnished, as Guy noted, with a magnificent fore-horn, turning swiftly from side to side, as if peering this way and that. Guy knew from his uncle what poor sight these creatures have, and, dismounting, crept round to obtain a fairer and a closer shot. Poeskop meanwhile remained with the horses. Guy succeeded admirably in his stalk, and getting within thirty paces of the monster, let drive for its heart. The Martini bullet clapped loudly as it struck the animal's thick hide; and upon the instant, the infuriated beast, snorting like a steam-engine, charged for the smoke of the rifle.

Guy had jumped aside behind a tree and reloaded. So quick was the charge that the monster had vanished into the dense bush almost before its assailant had realized that it was past him. He ran for his pony, and met Poeskop bringing the nag to meet him.

"He's turned, baas, and gone up wind again," said the Bushman. "We will follow him up; but you must keep a sharp lookout."

They took the blood spoor, and went on for about a mile, and then crossed another opening in the bush. Suddenly, without a sound of warning, the rhinoceros started from a clump of thorn scrub in their front, and came straight for them. Poeskop's horse whipped smartly round, and took its rider soon out of danger. Not so Guy's mount, which seemed for some seconds paralyzed with fear, and stood rooted in its tracks, staring at the approaching monster. By dint of a violent wrench of the bridle, and fierce spurring, Guy got the affrighted pony's head round. It moved at last. It was too late, however; the rhinoceros, snorting loudly, was upon them. Guy, looking backward out of the tail of his eye, caught a glimpse of a huge, pig-like head and a massive fore-horn close to his pony's flank, and then he was hoisted into the air. There was a violent crash, and he remembered no more.

When he came to himself he was lying on the ground, his head supported by a saddle, and Poeskop looking anxiously into his face.

"That's better, my baas," said the little Bushman cheerfully. "Now you will soon be your own man again. Here, drink some more of this."

Guy drank from a flask of brandy, which Poeskop put to his lips, and felt better. His mind and recollection came back to him.

"What's happened?" he asked.

”Take another soupje, and I’ll tell you,” replied Poeskop. The lad did as he was told, and then the Bushman went on. ”Well, what happened was this,” he said. ”That rhinoster caught you, and just ran his horn through your horse, and threw you both over his head. I caught sight of you flying through the air, and I thought, Well, Baas Guy is done for, and his hunting has soon come to an end.”

”Not quite yet, Poeskop,” returned Guy, a smile flitting over his white face. ”I feel better already. Here, help me to sit up.”

Poeskop lifted him up, and propped him in a sitting posture.

”Why!” exclaimed the lad, rubbing his eyes, and looking at his pony, which lay near, ”there’s Bantam–dead!”

”Yes, baas,” added the Bushman. ”Bantam is dead. The rhinoster’s horn ran right through his lungs and heart, and I saw he was dying, and put a bullet into him to hasten his end and save him suffering. He was a fool, and might easily have escaped. As it was, he nearly did for you as well as himself by his stupidity. It’s a pity. He was a right good pony, and could gallop like a springbuck.”

”Poor Bantam!” groaned Guy, ”what an untimely end. He was a duffer to behave as he did, but I shall miss him badly. What’s happened to the rhinoceros, Poeskop?”

”He is dead, too,” said the Bushman. ”That was his last charge. He lies in the bush yonder, two hundred yards away. Now you must rest here while I make a fire and get some food for you. Baas Blakeney will see the smoke presently, and will come this way in search of us. Let me see if you can get to your feet, and you shall rest against yonder tree.”

Guy, who was already feeling much better, rose to his feet with the aid of the Bushman’s hand. He felt strangely stiff and sore and much shaken, but he had no broken bones, and his severest injury, beyond the shock of the fall, was a sprained thumb.

”On the whole, Poeskop,” he said, as he sat down against a tree, ”I think I got off rattling well. A toss from a rhinoster isn’t an every-day sort of a business, is it?”

”No,” returned the Bushman, grinning hugely, ”it isn’t. I have known two men tossed by rhinosters, and they were both dead men after it. But you are born to be lucky as well as rich. I saw it in your face when first I set eyes on you. You will be a great hunter, and have already made a first-class beginning. But you must beware of three things in the hunting veldt–a wounded buffalo, a wounded rhinoceros, and a hungry lion on a dark or stormy night. The last is the worst of all, and nothing, neither guns nor fires nor thorn kraal, will stop him.”

So talking to his young master, Poeskop busied himself in making a big fire and getting some food out of the saddle-bags. Guy having eaten some bread and meat, and drunk a little more brandy and water, felt vastly stronger. Poeskop

now set to work, and with a light native hatchet chopped the horns from the snout of the dead rhinoceros. Then, taking some of the flesh, he made a neat bundle against the coming of the other hunters. By three o'clock Mr. Blakeney and Tom had ridden up and learned the story of Guy's adventure.

Chapter VIII.
THE ELEPHANT COUNTRY.

"It's a bad job," said Mr. Blakeney, after hearing the news, "but it might have been worse. The pony is a loss, it is true; but I'm heartily glad you got through with so little damage, Guy. The fact is, I never imagined we were going to encounter rhinoceros so soon. I should never have forgiven myself if anything had happened to you. You must go steady, my lad, and don't be too adventurous. And in future, as we are likely to tackle rhinoceros and elephant, it will be better to have always in reserve a heavier gun, the double .500 or the eight-bore 'Paradox,' for a second shot. Poeskop, or whoever is with you two boys as after-rider, can carry it for you. Few beasts, not even rhinos, or elephant, or buffalo, can stand up against the smashing blow dealt by such a bullet. Still, these are heavy guns, and kick a good bit, and you needn't use them except in case of emergency, to turn a charge or stagger an animal at close quarters." As for Tom, he was so much overjoyed by Guy's supreme feat in slaying a rhinoceros, that he felt he would gladly have accepted the risk of that adventure, even to the extent of being tossed bodily into the air–horse, foot, and artillery.

The wagon came along presently, and they loaded up the trophies, and some meat from the buffalo and rhinoceros. Then they moved across the plain, making a long trek far into the evening before they outspanned for the night. Next day, after a rather restless and uncomfortable night, Guy felt far too stiff and sore from his fall to sit a horse. He remained with the wagon, therefore, taking things easily, and amusing himself by skinning half a dozen birds which Tom and Mr. Blakeney had recently shot. These included several very interesting species. First, there was a most lovely roller, a bird usually known to South African colonists as a blue jay. This, as Guy discovered by looking up the species in "Layard's Birds of South Africa," a most valuable book for the bird collector, turned out to be the lilac-breasted roller (*Coracias caudata*), a bird more than ordinarily remarkable, even in a country thronging with brilliant birds, for the

beauties of its plumage. The upper colouring was a ferruginous green, the reddish hue showing most strongly on the back; the under parts were pale, bluish green, as were the tail feathers; the rump was bright blue, the lilac breast touched with streaks of white and rufous, the forehead and chin buff. At each outer edge of the blue-green tail feathers there extended a single long feather of dark, blackish green. These are much sought after by certain native chiefs, of whom one was the redoubted Moselikatse, father of Lobengula, king of the Matabele. For this reason this roller is known as Moselikatse's bird.

Having finished with this handsome species, which is about the size of our English jay, Guy took next in hand a perfect little gem of a feathered creature–one of the curious bee-eaters, known to naturalists as *Merops bullockoides*. The upper colouring of this diminutive bird was a light green, the rump and vent blue, the throat a brilliant scarlet, the front, chin, and moustache white, with a greenish tint. The back of the head was rufous. These tiny creatures, which in the wonders of their colouring remind their captors of the glorious humming-birds, take their names from their family habit of devouring bees. They have longish bills, and, seizing the bee deftly across the body, give it a sharp squeeze and swallow it. There are various kinds to be found in Africa, all distinguished by most beautiful colouring. One species, the European bee-eater (*Merops apiaster*), passes to and fro between South Africa and South Europe. In the former country it exists largely on a red wasp, of which it seems particularly fond. All these little creatures, none of which measure more than eight or ten inches in length, including a tail of four to five and a half inches, are fond of water, and are often to be seen flitting after their prey over some deep river pool or quiet lagoon.

Having carefully divested the bee-eater of its skin and rubbed in a preservative powder known as taxidermine, the young collector put it beside the other to dry. Guy, while at school, had been a fair amateur bird-skinner, even with no more aid than the small blade of his pocket-knife. Before leaving England he had bought a small case of instruments at Rowland Ward's in Piccadilly, for the more careful manipulation of skins. He had also procured at the same place an excellent book, known as "The Sportsman's Handbook to Practical Collecting," which gave him all sorts of useful information on the preparing and setting up of skins, from birds and small mammals to the biggest of big game. By the aid of this book he was able to settle at once the sex of the bird he skinned, a matter of much importance to all collectors. In addition to these birds, he skinned and prepared an Angola kingfisher; a rufous-necked falcon (*Falco ruficollis*); a red and black weaver-bird (*Ploceus oryx*), a very handsome species, seen near the river in large numbers; and a pink-billed lark. To all of these skins, after having got them ready, Guy affixed a label with short particulars, showing the species, sex, and when and where they were shot.

Towards four o'clock Mr. Blakeney and Tom returned to the wagon. They had had an excellent day's sport, and Tom was in a state of high exultation, having run down and shot a fine gemsbuck cow, carrying a splendid pair of horns, measuring no less than thirty-eight and a half inches in length. Mr. Blakeney had secured from the same troop a good bull. It is a somewhat remarkable fact that the females of these grand antelopes carry longer and finer horns than do the males. In most species of African antelopes the converse is the case; and in many specimens, such as the water-bucks, the koodoo, the reedbuck, steinbuck, klipspringer, and others, the females are hornless.

In two days' time Guy had recovered from his toss by the rhinoceros, and was longing to be in the saddle again. They had reached the second range of mountains, and, after a long and hard day of trekking up and down hill, had surmounted the pass by which Poeskop guided them, and outspanned on the farther side. The spoor of elephants had been found near this camp, and next day was to be devoted to a hunt, if the party could come up with a herd. Poeskop alleged that this country was full of "oliphant," as he called them in Boer Dutch, and attributed their plenty to the growth of a favourite tree, the machabel, which grew in this locality.

After much discussion it was settled that they should hunt on foot. The ponies wanted a rest, and, to the uninitiated, shooting elephants from the saddle is not an easy matter. Moreover, so far as they knew, none of their nags had ever been in pursuit of these animals, and it was by no means certain that they would behave properly in the presence of such formidable beasts of chase. At dawn next morning they had breakfasted and were away. Mr. Blakeney carried his .500 express, a weapon powerful enough, with solid bullets, to account for the heaviest game. Tom, who was to accompany his father so soon as the hunt began, was armed with a double Africander rifle, carrying Martini-Henry bullets. Guy was armed with a .303, in which his uncle had a good deal of confidence; but Poeskop, who was to accompany him, carried the Paradox eight-bore in case of necessity. The Bushman had the strictest injunctions to stick close to his young master, and to hand the spare rifle instantly in case of a charge. All were clad in their lightest kit. They anticipated much walking, and probably a good deal of running. They wore, therefore, no more than flannel shirts, old breeches or flannels cut down to the knees, and velschoens. Their legs and arms were bare, their heads protected by the usual broad-brimmed felt hats. Poeskop appeared in nothing but an old shirt and a pair of velschoens. An odd little figure he cut, indeed, loaded as he was with the weight of a heavy rifle. The Bushman stepped out briskly, however, and by the end of the day his masters were fain to confess that, in spite of severe exertions, he was as fresh and as fit as any of them.

For three miles Poeskop conducted the little party along the lower slope

of the mountain. Finding the spoor he expected, he led them at a rapid walk, with an occasional jog trot, on the tracks of the gigantic game. They descended to the level ground; and presently, after another hour had elapsed, the Bushman whispered that they were approaching the troop. They were now in a fairly level piece of country, the open parts of it consisting of grass veldt. There was a good deal of timber and bush. On the whole, the veldt seemed favourable for hunting: it was not too open, and in case of pursuing or charging elephants, as Mr. Blakeney had carefully explained to the two lads, there were plenty of opportunities for dodging behind bush and tree-trunks, and so evading a charge.

The wind was light. Poeskop picked up a handful of dry sand and let it run through his fingers. The direction was all right, and the falling sand was puffed gently towards them. On they went, now stepping with the greatest caution so as not to break a twig or make any kind of unnecessary noise. Now they crossed the bed of a dry streamlet, negotiated some more bush and timber, and then suddenly, in a great opening of the forest, dotted here and there with islets of heavyish bush, came upon the herd. It was a wonderful spectacle. Sixty or seventy elephants, big and little, but most of them full-grown bulls and cows, were shambling slowly along; some plucking at clumps of bush, some tearing at branches of trees; two or three, with their huge gleaming tusks, stripping the bark from some good-sized timber and conveying it to their mouths. One or two great cows were caressing with their trunks some half-grown babies that moved alongside them.

With a motion of his hand Mr. Blakeney signified that he and Tom would take a big bull that was engaged in stripping a tree of its bark. Guy nodded, and indicating that he would go farther up the herd for his shot, turned back into the shelter of the forest and ran swiftly along. As he ran he heard the loud report of two barrels from his uncle's rifle; then Tom's Martini rattled out twice. In an instant the forest, but a moment before so silent and so peaceful–for the elephant moves with singularly noiseless tread–was in an uproar. Wild trumpetings conveyed the danger signal from one to another. The great beasts massed more closely together and moved on. Yet, at present, they were no more than walking quickly. They had not broken into a run.

Guy skirted the glade, and reached the point he had aimed at just in the very nick of time. As he crouched behind a patch of bush the troop came right past him, within fifteen yards. He let two or three cows and calves go by, and then, as a huge bull with immensely long tusks shuffled up, looking, as Guy thought, like some gigantic mammoth of the primeval world, the lad knew that the supreme moment had come. Raising his .303 very gently, he took aim for that part of the great beast's skull which lies between the eye and the orifice of the ear, and let drive. To his immense astonishment the mighty beast went down like a shot

rabbit. The tiny sporting bullet had pierced the brain, and the elephant never moved again. Full of confidence now, Guy rapidly worked another cartridge into the breech, and seeing that a bevy of big elephants, which were following hard upon the great bull, had swerved to the right, he left his concealment and ran in after them. Picking out the best bull he could see, he ranged up within twenty paces, and, not being able to get the head shot, fired for the shoulder.

This time the result was nothing like so encouraging. The great brute wheeled round with astonishing quickness, and with a trumpet that sounded to Guy like the scream of a dozen railway engines rolled into one, charged instantly. There was nothing for it but flight; and good runner as Guy was, he always said afterwards that never had he sprinted so fast as he did over the fifty yards of open ground across which the wounded bull now chased him. Poeskop, who was twenty or thirty yards behind as Guy fired, had turned short as the beast turned, and doubled back into some bush, and for the present was safe; but Guy, with the elephant following upon his heels, trumpeting wickedly as it ran, felt that he was in a very tight place indeed. Nearer and nearer came the great brute. The lad felt that each moment the monster's trunk would come slipping round his waist. A clump of trees and some bush stood just before him. How he accomplished it he never quite knew; but he reached the shelter, dodged round a tree like a rabbit, slipped behind some bush, and crouched close to the earth. As he expected, the elephant thundered on; and before it could check its impetus and turn, Guy had crept farther away.

But the bull had by no means yet done with him. It turned short in its tracks so soon as it had pulled up, and, with ears held at right angles to its head, looking, as Guy in his place of concealment thought to himself, for all the world like a pair of mighty sails hoisted to the breeze, and its trunk searching the air closely for the scent of its enemies, trotted quickly back. If by chance the beast got his wind, Guy knew quite well that he would have to sustain another charge, and the monster would be on top of him. Suddenly the brute halted thirty yards away from where the lad crouched, and again carefully tested the atmosphere with its trunk. Poor though its vision is, there is no creature in the world which has such marvellous scenting powers.

"I have it! I have it!" screamed the monster. In the puzzling eddies of air, that are almost always to be found in forest country, some faint whiff of Guy's presence had reached the infuriated beast; and now, with a trumpet that shook the leafage and rang far through the woodland, the great beast came crashing through trees and bush straight for Guy's place of concealment. Guy looked around. It was too dangerous to attempt to run now; in the thorn bush and scrub where he crouched he was too deeply involved to have any decent prospect of escape. He must stand the charge, and trust to his bullet turning the brute.

Almost in the twinkling of an eye, as it seemed, the bull was within ten yards. Guy had his rifle up and his finger on the trigger. Then, before he had time to pull, came the loud report of the Paradox, twenty paces to his left. Poeskop, good fellow that he was, had come to the rescue. Struck full in the ribs, and raked through and through by the eight-bore bullet, the bull was instantly diverted from his charge upon Guy, and now turned, trumpeting yet more fiercely, for the smoke of the big bore. As he turned Guy gave him a good shot, which raked him obliquely behind the shoulder. Flesh and blood, even the flesh and blood of the mightiest land mammal in the world, was not able to stand against the three wounds which it had now received; and the bull, feeling very sick, turned away from its revenge, and sought shelter in the forest again.

Poeskop crept up to his young master's side.

"Now, Baas Guy," he said, his narrow eyes gleaming with the light of battle and the fierce instincts of the savage hunter, "we shall have him. Come along!"

Throughout this somewhat trying episode Guy had never once lost his head. Now he felt as cool as possible. Something told him the danger was past and the victory near. They ran on in the wake of the elephant, and presently, going more cautiously, came up with it again. The bull could go no farther. He was standing in a little clearing among some machabel trees, swaying from side to side, the blood dropping from his mouth.

"He is very sick, baas," whispered Poeskop. "He will die soon."

"I can't wait," returned the lad. "I shall put him out of his misery."

"Pas op!" whispered the Bushman. "You can never trust an elephant. He may charge again."

But Guy was not to be gainsaid. Creeping within thirty paces of the sick monster, he took careful aim for the head shot again, between the eye and the ear, and pulled trigger. The bull knelt quietly down upon his fore-legs, his hind-legs sank under him, and there, resting in that attitude, he gave up the ghost.

"He is dood, baas," cried Poeskop joyfully. "You have done well. Two good bulls for your first elephant hunt is as much as any man can desire. This bull's teeth will weigh forty pounds apiece; the other's are much heavier. Hark!"

As he spoke there came sounds of firing in front of them, first one shot, then two others.

"Come on, Poeskop!" cried Guy. "They are still hard at it. We may come in for more of the fun."

Threading their way through the forest, they trotted for a long half mile, and then heard, not far in front, the scream of an angry elephant. Guy was beginning to get somewhat more accustomed to the sound; yet, as he was always afterwards ready to admit, there are few things in nature more awe-inspiring than the trumpet of a wounded or infuriated elephant. They moved forward very cau-

tiously for another few yards, and then came on the edge of more open ground. To the right they saw an elephant, manifestly a cow and wounded, shambling towards them. She was going slowly, and every now and again would stop, spread out her huge ears, and thrust out her trunk. Twice she picked up dust with her trunk, and blew it over her shoulders as if bathing herself.

"She is far gone," whispered the Bushman. "We can finish her as she goes by."

She was now within less than thirty yards of them, and as she came past each saluted her with a bullet. The cow staggered, came on, thought better of it, and then turned to make off. As she turned, Tom Blakeney ran out into the open, fifty yards away, and gave her yet another bullet. He stood and reloaded quickly, ready to turn and run for the shelter of the woodland if she should charge again. But the big cow was finished. She staggered as Tom's Martini bullet struck her, tried to save herself, and then with a heavy crash fell over on to her side, stone dead.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom, taking off his hat and flinging it up into the air. "I thought I should never get her. I've been after her nearly half an hour. Thanks for your help, Guy. Where's the pater?"

"Here, my boy," replied Mr. Blakeney, with a smile, as he too emerged from the forest. "I have been running on your spoor the last ten minutes. I was afraid you might get into trouble. However, you've got your cow, and very nice teeth she has. They weigh more than twenty pounds apiece, I should say."

Tom and his father were now joined by Guy and Poeskop. They held consultation and compared notes. It had been a great and successful hunt. Mr. Blakeney had brought down a big bull and a cow with good teeth. The tusks of the bull he estimated to weigh at least fifty pounds apiece, those of the cow about eighteen pounds apiece. Leaving Tom's dead cow, they now made their way back to the two bulls shot by Guy. Of these the smaller and more troublesome one, which had hunted Guy so unmercifully, carried teeth weighing some forty pounds apiece; while the huge male, so easily bagged at the youngster's first discharge, showed a truly magnificent pair of tusks.

"My word!" said Mr. Blakeney, as he contemplated the gigantic proportions of the beast, and its long, massive, gleaming tusks, with their splendid curves; "that's a grand fellow indeed. You seldom come across such a pair of teeth as that–seventy pounds apiece, if they weigh an ounce! I congratulate you, Guy. Your first elephant is a prize indeed! Now, tell me how it all happened."

Guy described his adventures: his easy success with the great bull, and the thrilling time he had had with the second.

"Well," said his uncle, "I'm not by any means sure that I am justified in letting you two lads begin elephant hunting so soon. But you've done right well.

Thank goodness, you escaped that second bull, Guy. A wounded elephant is one of the most formidable beasts in the world, and you never quite know what may happen when one is charging you. You are born to be lucky, Guy," he continued, "I do believe. But keep your head, and don't be too venturesome. They say the life of a professional elephant hunter averages no more than half a dozen years. I can well believe it. There are so many risks, and the labour is so enormous. Well, now, I reckon that these five elephants we have bagged will yield some four hundred pounds of ivory, which at ten shillings a pound will bring in two hundred pounds. Not a bad morning's work that, eh?"

"Father," interrupted Tom, with wild eyes and streaming face–for he was still, as indeed they all were, suffering from the effects of the great hunt–"I don't want to sell my tusks. I should like to take them home to mother, and have them hung up in the dining-room at Bamborough, over the sideboard or somewhere."

"So you shall, my boy," said Mr. Blakeney, with pleased face. "That's an excellent suggestion. But whatever your mother will say to me for allowing you to be hunting elephants in this way, I don't know."

Leaving Poeskop, who carried his native hatchet, to begin the task of chopping out the tusks of the slain elephants, Mr. Blakeney returned with the two lads to the wagon. The oxen were inspanned, and a trek was made that afternoon to the scene of the hunt. Here a fresh camp was formed, and the whole of the next day was spent in chopping out the remaining tusks and packing them away on the wagon.

Chapter IX.

IN THE THIRST-LAND.

"Baas," said Poeskop, on the evening of that day, as his masters sat together as usual at their cheery camp fire, "I saw something this morning which I didn't understand. I don't like it."

"What was it, Poeskop?" said Mr. Blakeney, looking with an amused smile at the Bushman's serious face, puckered just now into innumerable wrinkles.

"Well, my baas," returned Poeskop, "it was this. When I first went out this morning, at sun-up, to start cutting out the rest of the teeth, I found the spoor of some one who had been prowling round our camp and looking at all our elephants."

"Only some wandering native, I suppose," said Mr. Blakeney. "It's quite natural. This is a very thinly inhabited country, but there must be some tribe or other in the neighbourhood, even if they were only Bushmen or Berg Damaras. There's no harm in that, if they take nothing; and the ivory is all right, anyhow."

"Nay, baas," replied Poeskop, "it's not a *kaal* [naked] Kaffir. There are no natives within forty miles of us. What I did find was spoor of a man wearing velschoen. He's not a white man, but a Hottentot or Griqua. I don't like it, baas. There is some one spying upon us."

Mr. Blakeney knit his brows and thought. He was a little disturbed at Poeskop's intelligence; but after all they were a strong party, whom few would care to attack. And besides, who wanted to attack them? Then somehow the figure of Karl Engelbrecht rose before his mind's eye.

"What's your mind running on, Poeskop?" he queried. "A Dutchman?"

"Ja, baas," said the little man sententiously. "It is just that."

"And the Dutchman is Karl Engelbrecht?" he queried again.

"Ja, baas," said the Bushman quietly. "It is Karl Engelbrecht."

Mr. Blakeney thought a good deal over this circumstance, and determined for the future to keep a sharper lookout. Hitherto, although they were now in the lion veldt, it had not been deemed necessary to keep a watch at night. It is not the custom to do so. So long as fires are maintained, and some one awakes periodically to keep them supplied with wood, it is thought sufficient, and the whole camp is usually to be found wrapped in slumber. Hunters sleep light, and arms are always at hand; and the presence of a marauding lion or leopard, or any other member of the Carnivora, is soon announced by the savage barking of the wagon dogs, or by a disturbance among the oxen and horses.

For the future some one of the party was awake during the long night hours. All took their turns, and the guard was changed thrice during the time of darkness. So much Mr. Blakeney conceded to Poeskop's alarm and his own suspicions.

For the next few days, after the completion of the elephant hunt, they trekked through beautiful forest country, much of it adorned with wide and open grass glades, reminding the boys very much of an English deer park. They saw an immense quantity of elephant spoor, and several troops of the beasts themselves, but they were now anxious to press on; they had no room in the wagon for more ivory, and it was therefore decided to hunt the great pachyderms no more for the present. If they could not carry the ivory, it would be criminal waste of life to shoot the beasts that bore that precious commodity. And so they moved forward steadily on their way, determined, if by chance they returned by that route, to have at least one more good day of hunting. They had cleared the forest region, and had now entered upon a piece of thirst-land, which, as Poeskop informed

them, would take three long days and three nights of travel to negotiate. Not a drop of surface water lay along this stretch of desert, and it would be tough work to get the oxen through without loss of life.

On the second morning of the long thirst, after trekking great part of the night through heavy sand, the two boys and Mr. Blakeney were sitting at breakfast. Seleti and Mangwalaan, who had been herding the oxen while they fed, presently came in with their charges, and the order was given to inspan. Seleti brought news that a big troop of eland had been feeding close to the camp during the night. They had not gone by very long. Would the baases not like to hunt? Eland meat–here the Bechuana's eyes sparkled–was very good; better than elephant, better even than giraffe. The two lads were at once on their feet.

"Pater, we haven't shot eland, either of us," cried Tom eagerly. "May we go? We shall probably be gone no more than an hour, and we can soon pick up the wagon."

"Very well," said Mr. Blakeney. "Be off, and shoot a couple of eland if you like. Shoot cows for preference. We want some good meat, so bring in as much flesh as your ponies can carry. You had better take Poeskop with you, Guy; you're not yet a practised veldt man like Tom, and I wouldn't like you to get lost in this thirst-land. Tom can pick out spoor and knows his whereabouts, and can always hit off the wagon-trail and find his way, if you get separated."

"All right, uncle," said Guy. "We shall be back soon. Good-bye."

The lads took their rifles and bandoliers, saddled their ponies quickly, and were in such a hurry to be gone, believing the eland to be quite close, that they took with them neither coats nor water-bottles, but just rode gaily off, calling to Poeskop, who was still saddling his pony, to follow them. Seleti had given them the direction in which the elands had been grazing, and it was not very long before they had found traces of the animals they sought.

"That must be eland spoor," said Tom, pointing to a quantity of footprints, which showed that a large herd had gone by. "I never saw it before, but there's no mistaking it. It looks something like a buffalo spoor, or, better still, that of Alderney cattle."

Just then Poeskop, who had heard Tom's remark, rode up.

"Ja, baas," he said. "That is eland spoor right enough. It is a big troop, seventy or eighty at least. Something has startled them: they are running."

"That's a nuisance," rejoined Tom. "We may have to ride farther than we thought."

"Never mind," added Guy. "Once we get up to them, we shall soon run them down. At least, all the books I have ever read on African sport speak of eland as being very easily ridden in to."

They moved rapidly on the spoor, now walking their horses at a brisk pace;

but the troop had, by some means or other, been thoroughly alarmed, and had trotted ahead of them, without halting, for miles, bent manifestly on seeking more secluded pastures. It was not until twelve o'clock, after a short off-saddle to rest their nags, that the hunters came up with them. They were riding through a thickish belt of mopani forest, a tree which grows as a rule in light, gray, tufaceous soil, and abounds in "thirst" country. Suddenly Guy whispered to his companions,–

"Look! these must be elands."

Tom and Poeskop turned their heads quickly, and saw, through the trees on the right, some two hundred yards ahead, a number of big, fawn-coloured forms disappearing into the woodland.

"Ja, those are elands, baas," answered Poeskop. "They are running; we must hartloup."

They put spurs to their willing nags and dashed after the game. Clearing the thicker part of the forest, they emerged into much more open country, where for the first time they obtained a fair view of the noble herd of game in front of them. It was a goodly sight indeed. Nearly a hundred great elands, the biggest of them enormous creatures, heavier and fatter than a heavy ox in the prime of condition, were trotting along briskly in front of them. The eland seldom runs at a gallop until very hard pressed; but the fine, slinging trot at which the great antelopes moved was fast enough to keep the hunters at a steady canter to hold them in view. Seven or eight enormous bulls ran with the herd–huge, ponderous fellows, with coats of pale fawn, heavy dewlaps, massive horns twisted at the base, and dark-brown patches of thick, brush-like hair growing in the middle of their foreheads. Some fine young bulls, many splendid cows, and numbers of younger animals, completed the company. As Guy and Tom cantered side by side, watching this entrancing spectacle with the keenest interest, Tom exclaimed,–

"What magnificent fellows! We must get a bull as well as the two cows the pater spoke of. I shall bear to the left; the troop seems to me to be splitting up. You take those on the right hand, Guy. Now we must gallop hard."

It was even as Tom had said. Entering more woodland half a mile farther on, the troop had definitely broken up into two big sections. Tom, galloping as hard as the mopani growth would allow him, was rapidly closing up with the hindmost of the left-hand section. In another mile they had once more entered on a stretch of nearly open grass veldt. Here Tom set his pony going in earnest. He was quickly up to the tail of a magnificent old bull, upon which he had fixed his attention. The great antelope was in far too high condition to stand a prolonged chase. So fat, so plethoric was he, that he was now practically at the end of his tether. From the slinging trot he had relapsed to a heavy gallop; his sleek, short-haired, buff coat was moist with sweat, showing the bluish skin beneath;

clots of foam dripped from his mouth, and strung out over his mighty neck and shoulders.

Tom saw that the bull was his. His eyes rested upon those magnificent horns. Firing from the saddle, he gave the bull two bullets at very close range: the first penetrated the antelope's ribs, but did not stop him; the second broke his off fore-leg at the shoulder, and the great beast came down instantly in his tracks, as if struck by a pole-axe. Never again would the goodly antelope wander through the mopani forest, or graze peacefully over the grass plains. Tom jumped off instantly, gave the bull another shot, which put him out of his suffering, cast an admiring look at the splendid horns, and jumped on his pony again. Galloping along the spoor of a few of the retreating herd, which he was easily able to follow, in ten minutes he was within hail of the nearest of the troop. Now he singled out a fine cow, carrying a remarkably long and even pair of horns, and turning her from the rest galloped hard at her. In two miles the cow was beaten, and Tom, having raced past her, jumped off, and as she came by gave her a shot behind the shoulder which instantly stretched her dead. The eland is the softest and most easily slain of all African beasts of chase, and, unlike most of the antelope family, which are astonishingly tenacious of life, will often fall dead to a single well-planted bullet. Feeling mightily content, the lad examined his prize, handled the long, even horns, noted the fine basal twist, put his knife into the dead beast's loin and saw that she was very fat, and turned to knee-halter his pony.

To his astonishment Rufus, who had been plucking a few mouthfuls of grass, suddenly threw up his head and trotted off. Tom called to him in his most coaxing voice, but in vain; the pony, seeing that he was followed, broke from a trot to a smart canter, and presently, entering some thick woodland, became lost to sight. Tom blamed himself bitterly for his neglect in not having thrown the reins as usual over the pony's head, so as to hang down in front of its fore-legs. This is an invariable South African custom, which all ponies understand and obey. Tom had been so desperately intent on shooting and putting an end to the eland that he had for once omitted the act. He had ridden Rufus many times out bird-shooting, but had never hunted heavy game with him before. Why the pony should thus have bolted off, however, he could not imagine.

Tom was now in something of a quandary. Should he follow the pony, or turn to and skin the eland? He decided for the latter. He could then spoor up the pony, capture it, bring it back for the meat, and go on for the horns of the bull eland. He would never return to the wagon without those magnificent trophies, which he pictured to himself lying in the veldt a few miles away. It was now one o'clock; Tom had a very respectable thirst already upon him. Most foolishly, as he now remembered, he and Guy had ridden away from camp without their water-bottles–an act of folly of which, as Tom confessed to himself, he at all

events ought never to have been guilty. Well, there was nothing for it; he must skin the eland, cut up some meat, and probably by that time the other two would have returned in search of him. He had heard their rifles going. No doubt they had killed a cow, and would be soon on their way again. If they and he should chance not to meet, he must go in search of his pony, and somehow find his way back to the wagon.

Thus turning matters over in his mind, Tom drew his hunting-knife from his belt, and, having first fired a couple of shots to try and attract his comrades, began to skin the eland.

Meanwhile, Guy and Poeskop had ridden away on the heels of the herd of eland which had run right-handed. After a stiffish three-mile gallop, Guy had ridden up to the finest cow he could pick out, and with two bullets from his Mannlicher brought her down. During the run up he was somewhat astounded at the agility shown by these great antelopes; the bulls, it is true, pushed steadily on at a fast trot, but some of the cows jumped timber and bush in a style that would have done credit to a red deer. And the cow he had shot had, in her anxiety to escape, bucked clean over the stern of an animal running by her side.

Poeskop and Guy, who were still together, now set to work to skin the dead antelope. This they accomplished. Then cutting off the head, Poeskop set aside that part of the trophy, which Guy meant to carry himself, intending to skin the skull itself at his leisure after their return to camp. Next the Bushman cut off a quantity of the best part of the flesh, especially from the rump, loins, and brisket, and packing these, with a couple of marrow bones, carefully on the pony he rode, they prepared to set off. It was now two o'clock. Like Tom, they had set off hastily from camp without either food or water, and were already both hungry and thirsty. Guy, in particular, would have given a good deal for a pull at some lime juice and water or cold tea. The Bushman led the way; Guy, carrying the eland head in front of him, balanced on the pommel of his saddle, followed.

Poeskop struck for where he believed he would hit off the spoor of the wagon as it trekked forward on its route. But he had not quite reckoned upon the distance they had traversed that morning in pursuit of the elands, and at four o'clock they halted to rest their nags and take reckoning. The whole country seemed to Guy absolutely alike–a vast flat, covered for the most part with bush and thin forest, with here and there a small grass plain to vary the monotony. Far above them, the huge vacancy of the hot, brassy sky loomed unutterably vast.

The Bushman looked about him with a puzzled expression. Even he, in this wilderness where every object seemed to be repeated interminably, and not a hill, or swelling of the ground, or any kind of landmark, arose to offer guidance to the traveller, seemed for a few minutes to be at fault.

"Hallo, Poeskop!" said Guy wearily. "Have you lost your way? I hope not.

I've got a thirst on me that I would give a sovereign to quench."

"Nie, baas," said the Bushman cheerfully. "We have not lost our way yet. I shall soon show you the wagon spoor."

And, in truth, the little wizened fellow was not many seconds at fault. To Guy, as the little man looked this way and that, searched the sky, squinted at the westering sun, and opened his broad nostrils to the faint breeze that was now beginning to move over the parched veldt, it seemed almost as if Poeskop was smelling his way. At all events, his savage instinct quickly reasserted itself. Touching his pony by the heel, he went resolutely forward. For another hour and a half they marched on in silence. The veldt seemed very desolate and very sombre. A few small antelopes fled away from their approach; these were steinbuck and duyker, which exist apparently as readily without water as with it. The sun sank below the skyline, leaving the flaming heavens arrayed in a marvellous glow of radiant colouring; the light quickly faded.

"Poeskop," said Guy at last, "we shall have to camp out for the night. It's a bad job. I don't know what we shall do without water."

Scarcely had the words left his mouth when the Bushman pointed to the sand a few yards in front of them, and said quietly,–

"There's the wagon spoor, baas."

And so, indeed, it was. They rode on in the darkness for something more than three hours longer. Guy, who suffered much from thirst, and began to ache all over from the effects of fourteen hours in the saddle, the weight of his rifle, and the added labour of supporting the eland head in front of him, began to wonder if he could stick it out much longer. At last, towards nine o'clock, they saw, twinkling cheerily in the distance, the light of a fire. It was the camp fire. Their trouble was instantly at an end; Guy's aches and pains vanished; they cantered briskly forward, and in ten minutes were at the wagon.

"Hullo!" cried Mr. Blakeney cheerily, as they rode up; "so you've turned up at last. Who is there?"

"Poeskop and I, uncle," said Guy. "Hasn't Tom turned up yet?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Blakeney, without a trace of anxiety; "but he'll be here presently, no doubt. How do you feel? Dry?"

"Dry isn't the word for it, uncle," said Guy. "I never knew what thirst was until to-day; not even when I got lost at Bamborough, hunting hartebeest. I would have given £5 willingly for a glass of water in the last hour or two."

"Well, you were a pair of silly fellows to go tearing off without your water-bottles and without food; and when I heard of it afterwards, I knew you would suffer for it. Now have a drink, lad. Here, Seleti, fetch the baas some water."

Seleti brought water from one of the barrels, and, lukewarm, muddy, and ill-tasted as was the stuff, to Guy it seemed the veriest nectar he had ever tasted.

Then the Bushman drank.

”Now, Guy,” said his uncle, ”I wouldn’t drink much of that muddy stuff. Have a bowl of tea; it will quench your thirst far better, and pull you together.”

Guy took his uncle’s advice, and felt all the better for it. Then he ate some supper. They sat by the fire till 11 o’clock, expecting Tom to ride up at any moment; but no Tom appeared. They were in the middle of a dangerous piece of thirst country, and it was absolutely essential that the oxen and wagon should trek on. The cattle had already endured two days and nights without touching water; they must reach the river-bed in front of them within the next twenty-four hours, or die. Enough water had been carried in the wagon-barrels to supply human necessities and give a scant drink to the horses hitherto, but that was drawing to an end, and the horses must push on also.

Leaving the wagon to go forward, and retaining with them three of the freshest horses, some food, and full water-bottles, Mr. Blakeney, Guy, and Mangwalaan stayed behind at the fire waiting for the return of Tom. Poeskop had now to accompany the wagon and show the way to water. Dawn came round, but still Tom tarried. Mr. Blakeney began now to betray some anxiety. He knew that his boy had no water with him, and he knew that two days and nights of thirst in such a veldt constituted a very real danger.

They cantered back to their camp of the previous morning and took the spoor of the three hunters, hoping in that way to trace the wanderings of the lost lad. Mangwalaan was a splendid tracker, as good almost as Poeskop himself; but even to Mangwalaan that inhospitable wilderness refused to yield up its secret. Troops of eland and gemsbuck had wandered about the country meanwhile, obliterating all traces of the hunter’s devious wanderings; and after searching throughout the long and hot day, the three camped out in that desolate wilderness, dead tired, disheartened, and, in the case of two of them, with the foreboding of some nameless calamity weighing upon their spirits. They lit a fire, and almost in silence ate some food and drank a portion of the little lime juice and water that remained to them. Then Guy dozed off–he could keep awake no longer–and he and Mangwalaan slept.

He was awakened just before the dawn by the touch of his uncle’s hand. Starting up, he looked into Mr. Blakeney’s face, and was horrified at the change that had come over him. He looked ten years older, drawn, gray, and haggard. He had, in fact, been awake all night, in a state of intense nervous anxiety about his son.

”My lad,” he said in a hoarse voice, ”we must saddle up and be off again. The nags are tired, but they will stand up for a day longer. I pray God all may yet be well; but I fear–yes, I fear this hateful, waterless desert. It is a danger far worse than the worst lion veldt, or the most treacherous natives. I would to God

I had never let you two lads go hunting till we had crossed it."

For the greater part of that day they continued the search, which, to Guy's sinking heart, seemed to become more and more hopeless. Occasionally they would fire a shot and listen, but, alas! no answering shot returned. It was pitiful to watch his uncle's restless anxiety, his feverish haste. Towards one o'clock it became apparent that their own horses were already jaded. They were now near the wagon spoor again, and, with the view of reaching water and obtaining fresh mounts, they rode, at the best pace their ponies could manage, on the track. At half-past five o'clock they had reached the outspan and water. Poeskop came forward with an anxious face.

"Is Baas Tom here?" demanded Mr. Blakeney, in a hard, dry voice.

"Nie, baas," came the answer shakily. "He is not here. But his pony came in alone, and very done up, two hours since."

"O God!" groaned Mr. Blakeney, in a despairing tone, "what is to be done?"

It was a blow sufficient to daunt the stoutest heart. Tom had now, as his father well knew and understood, been wandering for two days and a night without water. He was a tough and a strong, and above all a courageous lad, but in this land of thirst even the strongest man can scarcely expect to hold out for more than three days and nights under such conditions. That was a miserable night indeed. Nothing could be done; but two parties were to be out on the search again at daybreak next morning.

Chapter X.

TOM'S STORY.–THE BABOON BOY.

Quitting the camp at the first streaks of dawn, after a hurried breakfast, Mr. Blakeney and Jan Kokerboom, the Koranna, together with Guy and Poeskop, rode off along the wagon spoor, intending after a mile or two to turn off into the veldt and search in different directions. It was a sad and subdued party; Mr. Blakeney's distress of mind was too obvious to be ignored, and Guy's usually buoyant spirits were depressed and clouded by anxiety for his cousin's fate. They had cantered two miles along the wagon track, when suddenly Poeskop, who had been staring in front of him, ejaculated in his most cheerful voice,–

"*Baas, baas, daar kom Baas Tom*! Heep, hurrah!" and, letting off his rifle in his excitement, the little man put spurs to his pony and galloped off. It was

true; the Bushman's sharp eyes had caught a glimpse of a figure far ahead of them among the bush. All galloped after him at headlong pace, and in three or four minutes they were off their nags and standing alongside the actual if somewhat dilapidated figure of Tom Blakeney. Mr. Blakeney was first up, in spite of Poeskop's start, and, jumping from his nag, had the boy in his arms and was patting him affectionately on the back.

"My dear, dear old Tom!" he cried. "Thank God you are all right." But Tom was too far gone to speak. He could stand up, it was true, but after forty-eight hours of burning thirst and exhaustion he was speechless. His dry, leathery tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He tried to ejaculate a word, but failed, and instead pointed to his mouth. Guy was the quickest to relieve him. Unstrapping his water-bottle from the saddle, he unscrewed the stopper and handed Tom some lime juice and water. The fierce, ravenous look in Tom's eyes, as he clutched the bottle, told eloquently enough what he had suffered and how great was his extremity. He took a long draught, and then his father touched his elbow and said gently,–

"Take it by degrees, Tom, or you may do yourself injury. Have a rest now, and take it in nips. Sit you down for a bit." Tom sat down, and they all sat around him. He was a pathetic sight, as he sat there, sipping at the water-bottle. His shirt was torn by thorns, and hung in tatters about him. His cheeks had fallen in, and he looked gaunt and haggard–a strangely altered figure from the fresh and comely lad who had ridden away so gaily from camp just two mornings before. But thirst and anxiety, under a burning sun, will make a wreck of most people in the space of forty-eight hours. At last he could get out a word.

"Thank God, I have reached you," he said. "I thought last night I was never going to see your faces again."

They put him on to Jan Kokerboom's pony, and took him back to the wagons, where there was immense rejoicing all round at the young baas's recovery–for Tom was a general favourite. After more lime juice and water, the lad ate some food and drank some tea; after which he lay down on a blanket, under the shade of a tree, and went fast asleep. Towards sundown he awoke, refreshed, cheerful, and nearly his normal self again. They had a merry supper together, and Tom told them his adventures, of which the reader already knows some part.

"After Rufus had bolted," he said, "and I found I couldn't catch him, I turned back and skinned the cow eland, cut off the head, trimmed it up as well as I could, and made ready a lot of meat. I had fired two shots to try and attract Guy and Poeskop, and I kept thinking they would be riding up. Well, two hours passed and nobody came, and I thought it time to be off. Taking some meat, I started on the spoor of the pony. After following it for nearly three hours, it became so mixed up with a lot of game spoor, and then so faint, that I clean lost it. I hunted

about in every direction, and at last had to own myself beaten, although, as you know, I'm a pretty fair hand at the business.

"Well, what was to be done now? I had wandered about in so many different directions on the tracks of the pony that I had by this time clean lost my bearings. However, I took what I judged to be the direction of your wagon route, after looking at my compass and the sun, and marched on. After skinning the eland I had acquired a tremendous thirst, and could have drunk gallons; before sundown I began to find serious inconvenience from want of water. You know it has been desperately hot; and shut up in dense bush and forest on this light, sandy soil, it seemed blazing. I never felt the heat so much. Well, it came to sundown that evening, and I knew I was lost. I began to feel uncomfortable. Still, I thought, I shall be all right in the morning, and shall hear guns going or find the road. I wouldn't let myself believe that I was in really a serious mess. I lit a fire and cooked a bit of meat, but I was too dry to make much of a meal. I slept fairly well; but every now and again I awoke with my tongue, throat, and mouth horribly parched, and feeling that I would give anything just for one little glass of clean water.

"Morning came, and I got up and went on my way. I was too thirsty to eat: my tongue, throat, and lips were very much swollen, and the mere action of swallowing was most painful; and so I just tramped on. I took the direction by sun and compass again, but I was this time so 'bushed,' and had wandered so far from where we had started, that I knew it would be a mere chance if I hit off the wagon track again. As for water, there was none, of course, in that miserable wilderness. Nor, at this time of year, was there the least speck of dew–everything as dry as a bone, including myself. Well, I wandered on and on that day, seldom resting, and gradually getting slower and weaker. All the afternoon I tired steadily, and by two o'clock could scarcely drag one leg after another. The veldt was the same: endless bush and mopani forest.

"I rested for an hour, and then, looking at my watch, I determined to walk for another two hours in as straight a direction as I could manage. Of course bush and timber divert one constantly from one's course, but I pushed steadily on at a slow pace. All this afternoon I kept on thinking of pleasant drinks. Cricket matches came constantly to my mind, with huge refreshing draughts of shandy-gaff, and so on. And often I pictured to myself the big dam at Bamborough, and imagined myself wading in up to my neck and drinking till I could drink no longer. My thirst, somehow, was not quite so bad as in the morning, but my mouth and tongue bothered me a great deal–they were just like so much leather–and my throat was horribly sore.

"Well, I marched steadily from three till close on five o'clock; then I felt so done that I sank down on the ground, and lay in a kind of stupor for some

minutes. I had done my best. It seemed to me that I was beat, and that the vultures would soon be picking my bones. Suddenly I pulled myself together and looked at my watch, which was still going. It was now five minutes to five. With the three minutes' rest I had taken, I was still short of the two hours' task I had set myself. Somehow a stubborn fit took possession of me. I had said I would walk for two hours. I always had rather a mania for finishing up a task and getting done with it. Feeble as I felt, I determined, in sheer doggedness, to walk another eight minutes. Then I would lie down, and for the rest–well, the worst must come to the worst. So I got up and pulled myself together, and stumbled on. It was a wonderful thing, but my blessed obstinacy saved me. In five minutes I came suddenly on the wagon spoor, going north-east. I could scarcely believe my good luck. I stared at the tracks of the wheels, at the spoor of the good old oxen. Never have I seen anything more beautiful. Then, throwing myself on the sand, I patted the spoor as if it were a friend and a living thing. It seems absurd now, but that is actually what I did.

"Well, the rest is soon told. It was now nearly sunset. I walked on till the light went; then I lay down and slept, waiting for the moon to rise. I awoke just as she climbed up from behind the bush, towards twelve o'clock. Somehow I felt wonderfully better. I knew that I should now see home and friends again, which I had begun seriously to doubt all day yesterday. I could hold the spoor all right in the moonlight, and tramped along slowly and wearily, but still steadily, till four o'clock. Then I rested for an hour and a half. Little did I think I was now within a few miles of camp, or I should have fired a rifle shot. As soon as dawn began to come I walked on again, and then, after twenty minutes, looking up, I saw Poeskop and you, dear old pater, galloping up towards me."

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Blakeney solemnly, "it was a wonderfully lucky escape. This thirst-land is a terrible country to get lost in, and many a man has died of thirst in it and left his bones. I think your sudden resolution to get up and finish your two hours' walk was a kind of miracle. I see the hand of God in it, my boy, and we ought to be, as indeed we are, truly thankful for it. I can't tell you what a load is off my mind. All yesterday and last night I was in an agony of anxiety, wondering what was to become of you."

"If you hadn't taken that sudden resolution to go on for another eight minutes, Tom," said Guy, "should you have ever got up again?"

"No, I don't think I should," returned Tom. "I was so dead beat, and I had practically given up all hope."

"Well, thank God you stuck to your task and went on," said Guy. "Otherwise you might have lain there, and died actually within five minutes' walk of salvation. It's a wonderful thing, whichever way you look at it."

"Yes, I doubt whether Tom would have got through another day," said Mr.

Blakeney. ”Thirst, in this thirsty country, kills a man. The heat and the terrible anxiety both add to the danger. In most parts of the veldt you know that if you walk for a certain distance you will strike water. Here, if you get bushed, as you easily can, it’s a matter of impossibility to find your way to perhaps one waterpit in hundreds of square miles of country. In 1879 a friend of Selous, the famous hunter, a Mr. French, died of thirst in very similar country, near the Chobe River, in less than two days. And in the same year, in the same country, three Kaffirs died of thirst within twenty-four hours of the time they had left the last water. This was in September, before the rains fall, when the heat is always terrific. Thank God once more that you are so well out of it, Tom. I shall always be chary of letting you hunt in thirst country again, and it’s a lesson never to go out without full water-bottles. There’s just one other thing. Many hunters, including Selous, in hunting in such country, always have a piece of cord fastened to the cheek ring of their horse’s bridle, and attached at the other end to the hunting belt. By this precaution, which in future we will all adopt, you can’t lose your horse, as Tom had the bad luck to do. I’ll see to the cords at once, and to-morrow you shall begin to use them.”

They stood at the water, where they were now outspanned, for a full twenty-four hours longer. By this time the oxen and horses, which had suffered a good deal from the trek through the thirst, had recovered. During that day, at Tom’s particular request, Poeskop rode back along the wagon spoor with the freshest pony, and recovered and brought in the head of the bull eland which Tom had first shot. It was a magnificent head, and Tom was rightly proud of it; and, in addition, it would be a reminder to him of a very perilous episode in his life history.

Poeskop turned up late at night with the trophy. He found the body of the bull picked nearly clean by vultures. The skin of the head was spoiled, but the horns were, of course, intact, and Tom welcomed them with an exceeding great joy.

Taking five shillings from his purse, he gave it to the little Bushman. ”There, Poeskop,” he said; ”you’ve done a good day’s work, and I’m much obliged to you. I can see by the look of the pony that you’ve had a tough ride of it.”

The Bushman, tired though he was, grinned his hugest and most pleasant grin.

”The baas is very welcome,” he said, ”and I am well paid for my trouble. And when the baas gets home again and sticks up the horns, as he says he will, he will remember Poeskop and the hunt in the thirst-land.”

”Yes, that I will, Poeskop,” said Tom quickly. ”You’re a good fellow to bring in the head. It’s a fine one, isn’t it?”

”Ja, Baas Tom,” added Poeskop; ”a right good head. That eland was a big,

full-grown bull, seven years old at least."

They trekked next morning, and, travelling for two days over more open country, reached a picturesque region of hills and kopjes. It was among these hills that a somewhat singular adventure overtook them. Tom, who had quite recovered his spirits, had been out with his father, Guy, and Poeskop in search of klipspringer. They had bagged a brace of these charming little antelopes, and were now passing through a poort or pass to another range of hills. On the rocky heights above a troop of baboons barked angrily at them, from the shelter of some dark bush and greenery, through which their hideous, satyr-like faces could be occasionally seen.

"Shall I have a shot at one, uncle?" said Guy. "It would serve the brutes right for making that hideous row. One might think the place belonged to them."

"No, don't fire, Guy," answered Mr. Blakeney. "They're troublesome rascals; but they won't interfere with us, and it's a pity to waste a cartridge. After all, they are so seldom molested here that I suppose they consider the place belongs to them. Here they are harmless. Down in Cape Colony they are a pest, and one is bound to get rid of them. Years ago some baboon discovered that the milk paunch of a young kid was a pleasant thing to devour. His discovery spread, and farmers now lose hundreds of unfortunate goats, killed in this way by baboons. And so they have to be shot or poisoned, or otherwise got rid of. They're artful brutes, and very difficult to circumvent."

Guy and Tom looked rather longingly at the big apes, running excitedly through the bushes above them, and making the while a most unpleasant din. Presently they crossed the smooth, sandy bed of a periodical stream. Here Poeskop, who was a little ahead, halted, and began to examine the ground very curiously. An exclamation or two escaped him. He moved forward, took a turn towards the hillside, and came back.

"What is it, Poeskop?" asked Mr. Blakeney, who had been watching the little man curiously.

"Come with me, baas," said the Bushman, with a puzzled look on his face. "I will show you a strange thing." They walked forward, and Poeskop directed their attention to the spoor of some animals which had been moving about the valley. "What does the baas see?" queried the Bushman.

"I see the spoor of *baviaans* [baboons]," answered Mr. Blakeney, examining the soil.

"Yes," broke in Tom, "baboons, right enough. But what's this?–something besides baboons."

Mr. Blakeney and Guy moved forward to where Tom stood, and saw instantly that other footprints were mingled with those of the great apes. Mr. Blakeney stooped, and examined critically the smooth sand and the whole tracery of

footprints displayed so clearly.

"It's a strange thing," he said, half to himself; "but one could almost swear that here was the spoor of a child."

He glanced sharply at Poeskop, who had remained silent, but was now regarding him with an odd smile on his yellow face.

"Yes," said the little Bushman, in response to his master's look; "that is the spoor of a child–a baboon boy!"

"A baboon boy, Poeskop?" reiterated Mr. Blakeney. "What do you mean?"

"Well, baas," answered Poeskop, "I mean this. We Bushmen, and other natives of this country, know that sometimes the baboons carry off a child and bring it up with them, and the creature lives with them and grows wild and picks up their habits. It is not often that it happens, but it does sometimes. There is a baboon boy here, among these hills–that is certain. Here, you see, is his spoor, as plain as daylight. There are his footmarks, and there the prints of his fingers. He runs on all fours, just like a baviaan."

"It seems a queer yarn," said Mr. Blakeney, looking at the spoor musingly, "and I never heard of such a thing before. Can it be true? What becomes of the poor thing?"

"Well, baas," answered Poeskop, "I don't think they often grow up. The life is too hard for them. But my father once told me that he knew of a wild man who lived among the baboons, far away yonder"–the Bushman pointed north-east–"and was called the King of the Baboons. He was killed by a native tribe, who began to be afraid of him and the apes he lived with."

"A strange story, indeed," said Mr. Blakeney. "Well, we can't let this poor wretch stay with these baboons. We must hunt them up and try to get hold of him."

"It will be a tough job, baas," said Poeskop; "but we will try."

"How shall we do it, Poeskop?" said Guy. "Go after them now, and try to shoot the old men baboons?"

"No, Baas Guy," said the Bushman, "that would be no good. We should never catch them up these hills, and we might shoot the wrong baboon and kill the boy. Leave it to me. I will hide up here among the rocks, and follow up the troop. They will go to rest at sundown in some cave; and if I can mark the place, we can go for them at night, and perhaps take the boy."

So Poeskop was left among the wild hills, while Mr. Blakeney and the boys strolled quietly back to the wagon–which was now outspanned at the entrance to the kopjes–and made ready for the evening. They had supper, and presently, a little before eight o'clock, Poeskop walked quietly into the camp.

"Well, Poeskop," chorused the two boys, "what's the news? Have you marked them down?"

”Ja, baas,” said the Bushman, a pleased smile playing on his features, ”I have marked them down.”

”Baboon boy and all?”

”Ja, baboon boy and all. They are gone to sleep in a big cave, not far from where we saw them, and we shall find them presently.”

”That’s excellent,” said Mr. Blakeney. ”Now, Poeskop, get your supper and have a pipe. When shall we start?”

”Not till the moon gets up a bit, baas,” answered the Bushman. ”We can then find our way better, and the baviaans will all be fast asleep.”

They waited a couple of hours, till ten o’clock. The moon rose slowly behind the hills and shed a glorious light, tipping the wild kopjes with pale silver, and casting blue-black shadows from bush and tree and ant-hill. Mr. Blakeney had delved among the wagon stores and brought out some blue lights, with which, as well as with a couple of lanterns, they were provided for the assault. Three-quarters of an hour’s walk brought them near to the scene of operations. Sheltering behind some bush, they now lit the two lanterns, and moved forward for the final act. It was a stirring moment. Not a sound was heard through the vast solitude of these lonely hills, save for the ceaseless droning of a cicada in a bush hard by. The very night birds were asleep or absent. The clear moon gazed down upon the little group of serious men with placid serenity. Very silently they moved forward, Poeskop and Mr. Blakeney leading. Turning an angle of bush, Poeskop nudged his master. Mr. Blakeney swiftly lighted a blue light at his open lantern, and the pair dashed forward. They stooped and entered a dark cavern, the boys close at their heels, and then a weird scene, indeed, met their gaze.

They stood in a large cave some thirty yards square. The roof was fairly lofty, once they had passed the portal, and the wonderful illumination of the blue light, now held upwards by Mr. Blakeney, lit up every nook and cranny of the place. In the corner, huddled together as if for mutual encouragement and protection, was a troop of some score of baboons, big and little. All the creatures were alarmed and angry. The older and bigger beasts showed their teeth threateningly, and *quah-quahed* fiercely at the intruders. In the centre of the group the eyes of the onlookers were instantly fixed, on a figure which, as all could clearly see, differed somewhat from the rest of the apes. It had a black face, but it was human, and, undoubtedly, the baboon boy.

”Now, lads,” said Mr. Blakeney, ”you guard the entrance. Let all escape that will, but whatever happens seize the boy yonder. Shoot any of the brutes that go for you. I’ll stir them up.”

As he spoke these words the fury of the baboons seemed to be redoubled; they barked fiercely, their raucous voices resounding hoarsely through the cavern. Holding the blue light aloft in his left hand and a revolver in his right, Mr.

Blakeney advanced upon the group. Poeskop kept pace with him. Two grim old men baboons suddenly quitted the group and ran at a shamble swiftly upon Mr. Blakeney. The first barrel of his revolver accounted for the leader at close quarters; before he could press the trigger again, the second, a huge baboon, leaped for his throat. Mr. Blakeney somehow managed to elbow the brute off, and its teeth met in the fleshy part of his shoulder. At the same moment a bullet from Poeskop's carbine, the barrel pressed against the baboon's ribs, pierced its body. It relaxed its grip and dropped dead.

[image]

A huge baboon leaped for his throat.

The commotion set up by these attacks and by the firing was indescribable. It seemed to the two lads guarding the entrance that they stood in some wild inferno. The hoarse barkings of the older beasts; the howls and shrieks of the young animals; the smoke drifting across the startling illumination of the blue light; the dark, rough, uncouth figures of the apes, now beginning to scatter for flight–all these things seemed like the strange semblance of some wild dream. Now the baboons were separating. They ran in two parties round the walls of the cavern. Eight of the biggest, snapping and feinting in savage affright, Guy and Tom allowed to pass and escape out at the cave mouth. Two or three half-grown beasts and some mother baboons, with some quite small animals, went next. Next came a huge old female, with the baboon boy running at her heels. Guy and Tom ran back for the entrance, and planted themselves there. The baboon, grunting savagely and showing her formidable teeth, ran at Tom, and was in the act of springing at his throat, when a terrific kick from the lad caught her fairly on the point of the jaw and stretched her on the sand. Guy fired his Mannlicher instantly at the creature's head, and the thin bullet at once stretched her dead. At this the dark figure behind her–the baboon boy–turned and fled, seeking the farthest corner of the cave. By this time there seemed little fight left in the small remnant of baboons. The boys came forward from the entrance once more, and the maddened creatures swept out and away into the night. Besides themselves, but one figure remained in the cavern–the baboon boy.

"Now, lads, back to the entrance again!" cried Mr. Blakeney, "and we'll soon finish the business."

Kindling another blue light, he and Poeskop advanced upon the dark figure crouching behind a big projection of rock. As they approached, the thing, with a strange inhuman, angry grunt, manifestly copied from the baboons, darted away

and ran round the cave wall. Poeskop flung down his carbine and rushed in pursuit. The three Englishmen, the ludicrous side of the chase overmastering the element of horror in this weird scene, burst into laughter as the Bushman chased the preternaturally active baboon boy round and round the cavern. Twice as it passed the entrance one of the boys made a grab at the creature. It sheered off, however, and, as they hesitated to leave their post, ran on. But Poeskop, suddenly ceasing from his pursuit, now made a cut across. Mr. Blakeney barred the way to the fleeing figure, and the Bushman, throwing himself upon the naked, black-skinned thing, held it in a grip that never relaxed. The creature bit, fought, scratched, and struggled fiercely. It was all of no avail. In five minutes Poeskop and Mr. Blakeney had the wild thing fastened up securely. Between them they carried it moaning down the hill and through the valley, and presently got it to their camp fire. There, surrounded by their curious native servants, who had heard the tale from Poeskop, they examined their capture with an interest strangely sharpened by amazement.

Chapter XI.
THE BERG DAMARAS.

It was, indeed, a strange, wild-looking creature that lay there before them in the full blaze of the fire, in its face a beast-like, hunted look, and its eyes glancing fiercely yet furtively at its captors. It was a black boy, that was certain. It was stark naked, and its skin was very dark. The head, covered with kinky wool, rather long for an average African, was big, and the forehead round and prominent. Poeskop, who knew more about the native races of this part of South Africa than any man present, pronounced it to be a Berg Damara boy, and its age somewhere about seven or eight. It had manifestly been consorting with the baboons for a considerable time, for its knees were hard and horny from much contact with the ground, as also were its hands and feet. Evidently it had been running on all fours for many months, if not for a year or two. It had no power of human speech, but grunted and chattered like the baboons it had consorted with. Even in its face it seemed to have acquired something of the savage nature of its comrades, and at times there was a hideous, ape-like expression which, as Tom expressed it, "made one feel quite uncomfortable."

They offered the wild boy food, which he refused. Then fastening him

securely to a wagon wheel, and covering him with a blanket, they retired to rest. Poeskop, who was much interested in the capture, woke several times in the night, and saw that the wild boy had not tampered with his fastenings.

When Mr. Blakeney awoke next morning and looked out from his wagon, he saw before him a curious and most laughable scene. Tom was sitting by the wild boy, having in front of him a large bowl of mealie-porridge, sweetened with sugar, into which had been poured some condensed milk and water. With this savoury mess Tom was evidently trying his hand upon the wild creature. To his father's astonishment, he had apparently already met with some success. The wild boy seemed pretty sharp-set, and having seemingly convinced himself that his captors meant him no immediate injury, was more at his ease than the terrified, hunted-looking creature of the previous night. Still there was something very bestial and uncanny about him.

"Now," said Tom, holding a spoonful of porridge and milk close to the wild boy's face, "say *skorf*."

The wild boy made a wry face, and lunged with open mouth at the spoon. Evidently he had tasted the food and wished for more. Tom drew back the spoon. "*Skorf*," he repeated. "*Skorf, skorf, skorf*." With each repetition of the word he held the spoon a little closer, and at last, to Mr. Blakeney's astonishment, the wild boy grunted out some sound resembling very distantly the word Tom was waiting for. After this feat Tom rewarded the strange-looking black imp with several spoonfuls of the porridge. Then again he made him repeat the word, or grunt out some kind of equivalent. The whole scene was so ludicrous that, as Tom finished up the basin and administered to the wild boy the last spoonful, Mr. Blakeney could no longer contain himself, but burst into a shout of laughter.

"You two are getting on splendidly," he said, as soon as he could gather speech. "How long have you been at your lesson, Tom?"

"About twenty minutes, pater," returned Tom. "He was awfully annoyed at first, and wouldn't buck up a bit. I could see he was very hungry, though, and took time, and in a little while he saw my meaning, and began to grunt out some kind of imitation of the word I was repeating. Do you know, pater, I believe the creature has spoken before. I can't tell you quite why. But there was a queer, knowing look in his eyes, as if he had heard people speak at some time or other, no doubt long ago, and was just trying to call to memory something. I wonder how long he's been living with the baboons."

"Wait a bit, Tom," said his father; "this is very interesting. I shook myself so much laughing just now at you two that I hurt my shoulder. Here, Guy," he went on, as his nephew came in with his shot-gun and a couple of brace of francolin, "give me a hand with this wound. That bite the old man baboon gave me last night is very painful, and we must dress it again."

Guy ran for some clean water and carbolic, and, his uncle having taken off his flannel shirt, unfastened the dressing put on the night before. The wound was very angry and inflamed, and the shoulder was swollen and puffy.

"My word, uncle," said Guy, as he gently sponged the wound with carbolic and water, and then applied a fresh dressing, "that brute gave you a horrid bite."

"Yes," answered Mr. Blakeney cheerfully, "It's a nasty place. The old man baboon got his teeth right through my thick, elephant-cord coat as if it had been tissue paper, and fastened well on to my shoulder. In another second, if Poeskop hadn't fired and killed him, he would have had a mouthful of my flesh clean out. A baboon's bite is far worse than any dog's; in fact, I've seen an old man baboon tear out the throat of a big hound, and kill him without giving him the ghost of a chance of retaliation. The brute went at my throat last night. It's a lucky thing I fended him off, and he only got me by the shoulder. I shall be all right in a few days. I'll take it quietly, and sit in the wagon and eat slops."

They sat down to breakfast, and then, calling Poeskop up, held consultation as to the baboon boy. Poeskop, who knew the Berg Damara tongue, tried the child in various ways, repeating simple sentences slowly. The boy made no reply, save by curious grunts and ape-like contortions of the face; if he had ever possessed the power of speech, he seemed to have for the present quite lost it. Still, as the Bushman spoke to him, there was at times a strange glimmer of perception about his eyes, as if his mind were striving to recover some lost memory. Once even he opened his mouth, and seemed upon the very verge of speech. They all waited breathlessly for what was to follow, but the boy closed his mouth with a snap, assumed the ape-like expression, which he had no doubt borrowed from his friends the baboons, and they could get no more out of him.

Tom gazed long and earnestly at the odd-looking little creature.

"I think," he said presently, "we'll call you 'Peter.' I remember reading once a most curious story about a German lad who was found without power of speech and as wild as a savage. He was called Peter the Wild Boy, and there was some strange mystery about his birth. I forget what became of him, but the mystery of his birth was, I fancy, never cleared up. Now, Peter," he continued, getting up, "I mean to make you a respectable member of society. And, first of all, I'm going to put you into a decent pair of breeks. Clothed, and associating with high-toned folk like ourselves, by degrees we may get you into your right mind."

So speaking, he went to the wagon, found an old pair of trousers, which he cut off at the knees, and brought them back to the group. They tried to make the wild boy understand what was wanted of him. It was a most absurd scene, and they all laughed till they ached again and the tears ran down their cheeks. At first Peter thought some injury was about to be attempted on him. He showed his teeth, and as Tom and Poeskop laid hold of him, fought, scratched, and tried

hard to bite his would-be benefactors. They ceased for a few minutes, and then Guy took up the breeches, held them up, patted his own knee-breeches, and tried to make the wild creature understand what was wanted.

"The little Juggins!" said Tom angrily; "he ought to have more sense."

Peter at once caught the angry look in Tom's eyes, and grinned and chattered at him angrily in response. They all shrieked again with laughter; and then Tom, as if to apologize, sat down by the little wild creature, patted him on the back, stroked him, and gave him a piece of bread and marmalade. Peter appreciated this peace offering, and calmed down rapidly.

"Poor little beggar," said Tom apologetically; "we must go quietly with him. After all, we can't make a Christian of him in a morning."

Meanwhile Poeskop bethought himself of a plan. Undoing his belt, he took off his old trousers full in front of Peter, held them out in an explanatory way, sat down and put them on again. Then coming to the lad's side, he took the cut-down breeches and gently insinuated, first one, then the other, of his feet into them. Peter seemed now dimly to comprehend what was required of him. They hoisted him gently to his feet, pulled the garments up, buttoned them, pulled the buckle tight at the back, and the trick was done. Tom, in his delight, patted the boy on the back and drew his attention to the nether garments of all the party, finally stroking Peter's new breeches admiringly. The little creature seemed suddenly to comprehend the whole business. His face expanded into a broad smile–by far the most human-like expression that had yet appeared there–and he looked down at his new garments with real contentment. Thus was his first step towards civilization successfully accomplished.

For the next few days they trekked on steadily through beautiful country. Tom and Poeskop attended untiringly to the wild boy's education, Mr. Blakeney occasionally rendering them assistance. In another day's time Tom had induced the child to wear an old flannel shirt. He showed no inclination to run away. Still they took the precaution to fasten him up with a cord fixed to a broad piece of leather, which Tom sewed round his waist. And at night Tom–who was becoming really interested in the little creature, and had no intention of losing him again–gave up sleeping in the tent with Guy, and lay down under his sheepskin kaross by the fire, with a blanket under him, Peter meanwhile sleeping at the length of his cord two or three yards away. They had washed the little fellow thoroughly with carbolic soap and water, and made him clean. And Poeskop now washed him daily. As a matter of fact, he was not objectionably dirty when first captured. Baboons in the wild state keep themselves remarkably clean, and the child evidently was not afraid of fresh water.

For two days Peter still ran about on all fours, much to Tom's annoyance. On the third day the force of example began to tell, and he attempted to walk

after the manner of the other human beings he saw about him. He had so long shambled along like a baboon on his hands and feet, that his attempts at walking upright were not at first completely successful. Still he persevered, and was occasionally rewarded by Tom with bits of sugar or a piece of bread and jam. It was a matter of some vexation to Tom that, as they strolled around the camp at outspan places, Peter still chose to avail himself of the strange veldt fare to which he had been accustomed. He would pull up and devour certain roots and bulbs. Once he caught and ate a small lizard, rejecting only the head. And he would eat spiders, caterpillars, and even scorpions–after he had carefully and most deftly torn away the sting–and other unpleasant trifles. Tom's annoyance at these habits was extreme.

"Here I'm feeding him on Christian fare three times a day," he would say, "and the little beast must go and make me sick by devouring all these filthy things which he picks up in the veldt."

"My dear Tom," replied Guy chaffingly, "the poor beggar must have his dessert! Even we Christians enjoy nuts, ginger, raisins, wine, and other things, after dinner, when we're living in a state of complete civilization. And, after all, what's the difference between poor Peter wolfing down a lizard, or a caterpillar, or a chrysalis, while we white folk delight in oysters, and periwinkles and whelks, lobsters and prawns, which are nothing but marine insects; frogs, eels, spawn (I'm thinking of cod's roe), the livers and lights of various beasts–I mean what we call 'fry'–kidneys, tripe, and other things of that sort. The French eat snails. The whole thing is only a matter of individual taste and environment, as scientific folk call it."

"That's all very fine, Guy," retorted Tom, "but we ought to draw the line somewhere. And Peter, now that he is becoming a respectable biped, has got to draw it at lizards and scorpions and caterpillars."

After the very next meal the two cousins and Peter went for a stroll through some timber just outside the camp. Peter, ranging at the end of his cord, suddenly turned aside at a tree, pulled off with two little horny fingers a piece of bark, and drawing forth a huge fat grub from its hole, devoured it instantly, with manifest gusto. Even Guy, who had just enjoyed an excellent dinner, as had Peter, was disgusted at this performance.

"Nasty little beggar!" he exclaimed angrily, jerking at Peter by his cord. "You ought to know better. Come out of it, and don't do that again!"

Peter grinned angrily, and showed his white teeth. He knew he was being scolded, and he resented it. Tom laughed heartily.

"I'm glad you're convinced at last," he said. "Now you'll agree with me that Peter needs reform, and that he must be broken off his baboon propensities."

"I'm convinced, absolutely," answered Guy, with a disgusted look still on

his face. ”It’s enough to make one sick. I’ll help you all I know to wean the little beggar of these disgusting practices.–Peter, you little beast,” he added, again plucking the wild boy by the cord, ”you’re not to do it. Here, come and take my hand, and walk like a gentleman.”

The little, wild creature, after looking intently into Guy’s face, and seeing a smile of good humour replace the frown of disgust, came up, put his black paw into Guy’s strong, sunburnt hand, and together the three wandered back to the wagon.

On the sixth day after the adventure with the baboons, they reached a long range of hills, among which Poeskop’s sharp eyes soon detected signs of native life. He informed Mr. Blakeney that the last time he had travelled that way the place was uninhabited. Entering a broad, open valley, here and there littered with boulders and adorned with patches of bush, they outspanned not far from a stream of water that ran by. Then Poeskop, accompanied by Mr. Blakeney and the boys, all fully armed, went up the slope of a low hill towards some huts that nestled among trees and rocks. It was manifest that natives were about, and that the little settlement was a good deal perturbed at the advent of the travellers. Black figures flitted hither and thither, and cries could be heard.

”What are they, Poeskop?” asked Mr. Blakeney.

”Berg Damaras, I think, baas,” replied the Bushman; ”but I don’t quite understand the place. They seem to have houses up in the trees. I’ll go forward and see what they have to say. I don’t think they’ll harm us; but if they try to, do you and the young baases shoot.”

They moved on together for another hundred and fifty yards, and then Poeskop went ahead, and keeping about a hundred yards in front neared the village. The commotion became yet louder, shrill female voices were heard, and men appeared, armed with bows and arrows and assegais; the aspect of affairs looked by no means peaceful. Still advancing, and without betraying an atom of fear or suspicion, the Bushman moved confidently forward till he was within earshot. Then, raising his voice, he addressed the natives. As he had supposed, they were Berg Damaras, a wild, miserable, down-trodden people, who are infamously treated by other tribes, and shelter themselves in the remotest places they are able to find among the wide and unpeopled deserts of this part of Africa.

Poeskop soon calmed their apprehensions and established friendly relations with them. They had a curious tale to tell. They had been in this place no more than a few months, having been driven from their previous locality by the assaults of lions, which had destroyed a good many of their clan and created a terror among them. The lions had either followed them to this valley, or they had stumbled upon a fresh band of man-eaters, and their lives were rendered a burden to them by the night attacks of these dangerous Carnivora. They had

at last resorted to the expedient of building huts among the trees, where they passed their nights, and, as lions cannot climb, managed to escape annihilation.

Poeskop having opened up amicable relations with these unfortunates, Mr. Blakeney and the boys came up and were introduced. The Berg Damaras seemed miserably poor. They numbered not more than seventy or eighty souls, men, women, and children, and evidently lived a harassed, shuddering kind of existence. Occasionally stronger tribes, such as the Ovampo and Ganguellas, raided them, murdered such of them as they caught, and carried off their women and children as slaves. The lions seemed to have completed their dejection, and they had little spirit left in them. These people speak a pure Hottentot tongue, and have many ancient Hottentot manners and customs. Yet, unlike the yellow-skinned Hottentots, their skins are black. They are supposed to have been a feeble, aboriginal negroid race, who became enslaved by the Namaqua Hottentots, and, acquiring the tongue of their conquerors, lost their own language.

Having given the headman of these miserable people some tobacco and beads, and gained his confidence, Mr. Blakeney and the boys strolled round the kraal. They were especially interested in the sleeping huts, placed among the foliage of some tallish trees. These had been very ingeniously devised, platforms of stout poles serving for floors. The walls were composed of ant-hill clay and branches, the whole being covered by deep thatches of reeds and grass.

"Well," said Mr. Blakeney, "I've heard of such a thing before, but I never expected to see natives driven by lions to make their huts among the branches of trees. Many years ago, when Moselikatse, father of Lobengula, swept over a great part of South Africa and destroyed whole kraals of Basutos and Bechuanas, the people were so reduced, and the lions, from feeding on human flesh, became so bold, that some of the tribesfolk were compelled for a time to roost among the trees in this way. But they must be poor creatures to put up with such a terrorism. A kraal, even a little one, of Zulus or Kaffirs, or indeed even Bechuanas and Basutos, would in ordinary circumstances never submit to such a state of things. They would just sally out, hunt up the lions in daylight, and kill them with their assegais. They might lose a few slain in the operation, but they would clear out the lions somehow."

"I suppose," said Guy, "these poor creatures are too weak and too few in number to tackle a lion. They look far too depressed for anything of the kind."

"Yes," replied Mr. Blakeney, "no doubt that's the case. And, after all, one can hardly blame them. Even for a white man and a good shot, armed with a modern rifle, a lion is by no means a pleasant beast to tackle. One is never quite sure how the affray is going to turn out. The Zulus must have been hardy fellows indeed in the old days, in the time of Chaka and Dingaan, and Panda and Cetywayo. If a lion annoyed a kraal and killed oxen or goats, a number of young soldiers

were told off to kill it. And kill it they had to, with their spears, and no other weapon. Of course, on the other hand, they knew that if they didn't kill the lion, their own lives were forfeit. Chaka and Dingaan, and even Cetywayo, allowed of no failures of this kind. Cowardice meant death. Not that the Zulus ever feared death. A braver and bolder race of savages never existed."

That afternoon the white man's camp was visited by a number of the Berg Damaras. They were hospitably entertained, and regaled with coffee and some small presents. One of them noticed Peter, the wild boy, and, drawing his comrades' attention to the child, they were soon engaged in a conversation of which the lad evidently was the main topic. Poeskop noticed this, and asked them what the boy was. They at once said that he was one of their own race, and asked the Bushman where the lad came from. Poeskop related the tale of his capture. This stirred much debate and interest among the group. They surrounded the child, examined him closely, handled him, and talked excitedly the while. Again the headman held animated converse with Poeskop. Meanwhile the white men gathered round. They could see that something of interest was passing.

Poeskop presently came up to Mr. Blakeney and told his story. The boy was a Berg Damara right enough, and had undoubtedly belonged to their kraal. About a year and a half before, when they were making their way from their last place of habitation thither, the child had strayed away, or in some way become missing, no one quite knew how. They had little time or energy for prolonged search, being then half-starved and in great distress, and they went on their way without him. Undoubtedly he had fallen among baboons, or been stolen by them; they had heard of such things before. They recognized the boy, not only by his likeness to the child they had lost, but by certain tribal marks. Questioned further, they said the boy's mother was dead, killed and devoured by a lion a few months before. The father was up at the kraal. At Mr. Blakeney's request he was sent for. He came shortly, was shown the child, whom he at once recognized, and was told the tale of its capture. This he listened to unmoved, rather as if he were listening to the tale of some dog that he had formerly owned. Presently he went up to Peter, looked into the child's face, and spoke to him–in fact, asked him a question. Peter looked up very eagerly, as if he knew the voice. The man went on to repeat his name, "Amral." This he spoke in a low, kindly voice, repeating the word several times. Again it was clear the boy recognized the voice and the name. Something in the intonation probably touched some chord of memory long forgotten. He opened his mouth, strove visibly and painfully to find speech, and, failing, lowered his eyes. At that moment a shadow passed lightly over the group and rested for a moment upon the child. All looked up. Far above, between them and the sun, a great vulture swung in mid-air.

"*Tkoobi kanisi!*" said the man, his face turned now to the semblance of a

stone image, and, taking no further interest in the child, he moved away.

”What does he mean?” asked Mr. Blakeney of Poeskop.

”When the shadow of the vulture rested upon the child,” replied the Bushman, in a serious voice, ”the father took it as an evil sign. ’Death sees thee!’ he said, and you will find that he will have nothing further to do with the boy. I know these Berg Damaras. They are a strange people, stranger even than my own race.”

Poeskop was right. The man, though he knew himself to be the father of the boy, would have nothing further to say to him. Probably, as Poeskop explained, he was so poor and spiritless, so little desirous of undertaking the further maintenance of a child upon his drooping shoulders, that he was not sorry to throw the blame upon the shadow of ill omen, and wash his hands of his long-lost offspring.

”Never mind,” said Tom; ”I’ll be a father to Peter. I bring him up, look after him, make a decent Kaffir of him, and he shall work for me at Bamborough when we get home again. I’m sure he’ll make a smart lad and a good herd boy. He’s got brains–look at his great bulging head; and there’s a knowing look in his funny baboon face, which tells me he’ll be all there when the time comes. Won’t you, Peter?”

Peter looked up, grinned at his young master–he really began to smile now–and ejaculated a strange grunt which Tom quite comprehended.

Chapter XII.
THE LION CAMP.

Evening, the swift evening of Africa, was stealing on apace. The Berg Damaras now left the camp, their chief warning the white men to be prepared for an assault by lions, which, he declared, were here so bold that they feared neither thorn kraals, fires, nor assegais. Mr. Blakeney pronounced himself well prepared for any eventuality. During the afternoon Jan Kokerboom and his assistants had cut down a large number of thorn bushes, and made a strong scherm or fence, within which the oxen, after grazing, were enclosed for the night. The horses were fastened up to the wagon wheels on the side close to the main camp fire. Four fires in all were lighted and kept going. They sat down to supper, therefore, all in high spirits, feeling that they were well prepared against the night assaults of lions or any other Carnivora.

Peter, the wild boy, was still with them. His father, as they believed him to be, had, after the episode of the vulture's shadow, declined resolutely to have anything further to do with him. The Berg Damara headman, whom Mr. Blakeney had asked to take charge of the child, had shaken his head, and manifested extreme disinclination to add further to his responsibilities by taking a useless encumbrance into his tribe. They could scarcely feed themselves as it was, he explained. The white men had found the child; they were rich and powerful; they could keep him, and take him away with them. Tom was delighted, and, backed up by Guy, begged that he might be allowed to keep Peter. He would make a useful servant some day, he pointed out. He was already becoming attached to the party, especially to Tom, whom he seemed to regard as his master and protector. Mr. Blakeney turned over the matter in his mind. At supper time he called Poeskop, and asked him what, in his opinion, the Berg Damaras would do if the boy was left on their hands. Poeskop's reply was readily forthcoming. He smiled grimly, and said,–

"What do I think, baas? Well, I think they will leave him to the lions. The chances are that, if he escapes the lions, he will be starved to death. I don't think they will give him food. Already, as you can see, they are half starved themselves; and when Berg Damaras and Bushmen are in such a plight, and hard put to it, they can't afford to be kind and compassionate like the white people. I know them well, and I know that the boy would die. If his mother were alive, it would be different. She would find him food somehow."

"Well, Tom," said Mr. Blakeney, "you can have your way, and keep the boy. It would be a cruel thing to leave him to the mercies of these starving people. We'll take him with us, and make the best of the poor little beggar."

Tom promptly showed his contentment by taking a steinbuck cutlet from the frying-pan and handing it to Peter, who squatted near him, watching with elfish eyes the white men having their supper. The wild boy snatched eagerly at the savoury morsel. Tom drew back the cutlet, and, pointing a rebuking forefinger, said in a tone of reproof,–

"No, not that way, Peter. I've told you before. Take your food like a gentleman."

The wild boy already understood much of Tom's tutelage. Still gazing with greedy eyes, he held out his paw, and allowed Tom to hand him the food. Then, conveying it to his mouth, he quickly made short work of it, devouring it very much as an ape devours its food. The white men having supped, Peter was fed, Tom superintending the process, and seeing to it that his charge made his repast in a reasonably decent fashion.

"Peter," said Tom, when all was finished, "I have hopes of you. You certainly are improving. You didn't lick your plate to-night–of course I was keeping an eye

on you–and you are learning not to snatch at everything like a beastly monkey. I do believe I shall make a man of you yet."

The wild boy looked at his instructor's face; it was a strange, yearning, almost pathetic look–the look of a dog trying to make out his master's meaning. Then he reached out a black hand, and softly laid it on Tom's arm. It was the most gentle, the most human-like, gesture he had yet exhibited.

"Poor little chap!" said Mr. Blakeney; "I believe he begins to feel the instincts of humanity working within him."

"Yes," said Guy, "I'm sure he does. He'll do all right, Tom. You're making a first-class reformer."

Tom patted the little fellow on the shoulder, and went to the wagon and took down a blanket, which he handed to Peter. The wild boy, who now showed no sign of any inclination to run away, and had for the last twenty-four hours been allowed complete liberty, at once wrapped himself up, snuggled close to the fire, and fell fast asleep. For another two hours the three white men sat round the fire, the boys writing up their diaries, Mr. Blakeney smoking and reading. Then they chatted for a while, and at nine o'clock or thereabouts prepared to turn in for the night. Guy went to the tent; Mr. Blakeney climbed to his wagon. Tom prepared his blanket and kaross by the fire, as he had done since Peter's capture. He still judged it advisable to keep the boy under his control at night, and, fastening the cord to his belt, made the other end secure round the belt which Peter wore for the purpose. Then settling himself with his feet to the comfortable blaze, he gazed for a few minutes upwards at the brilliant array of stars, and was quickly sleeping the wonderful and refreshing sleep of the wilderness.

How long Tom had slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by a sharp tug at his belt. Snatching up his loaded rifle, which lay by his side, he sat up and looked around him. Peter was crouching on his hams two or three yards away, his blanket fallen from his shoulders, his eyes wildly excited. He was barking fiercely, just as a baboon barks when enraged or alarmed. In another instant there was violent commotion in the ox kraal. The native servants, sleeping at the fire near by, had been awakened by the wild boy's warning barks; they were now on their feet, and, rushing to the kraal with their guns and blazing fire-sticks, began letting off their rifles at some object among the oxen. Mr. Blakeney jumped down from his wagon in his pyjamas, rifle in hand. Guy, similarly equipped, burst out of his tent. Tom, unbuckling the cord at his belt, sprang up with his weapon. The three ran towards the scherm.

"A lion, baas! a lion!" cried Jan Kokerboom excitedly, as they neared the scene. "There he is. Shoot, boys, shoot!" Then, putting up his gun, he again fired. Poeskop and Seleti were reloading; Mangwalaan held up a flaming torch to give light. It was a weird scene, only fitfully illuminated by the blazing torch and the

light of the men's fire close at hand. Another rush took place among the oxen; then a dark figure cleared the thorn fence just behind the group of affrighted animals.

"He's gone!" yelled Poeskop, who had just got another cartridge into the breech of his Snider. "He's gone!"

It was quite clear that the warnings of the Berg Damaras had not been given without reason. The lions had begun their assaults. Fortunate it was for the camp that they had confined their attentions to the ox kraal. Now, pulling aside the thorns at the entrance, and lighted by fresh firebrands, Mr. Blakeney and the rest of the party entered the kraal. On the far side lay a dark object, which a closer approach showed to be a dying ox. The poor brute had evidently been seized upon by the lion at its first assault. Its shoulders and back had been badly scored and bitten, and the ferocious brute, gripping the nose of the ox in one of its powerful forepaws, had evidently, by a mighty wrench, dislocated the unfortunate beast's neck. In another minute, even as they looked, it breathed its last. The rest of the oxen stood huddled together in a bunch to the right hand, snorting and bellowing, manifestly in a state of intense fear and excitement.

There was not much to be done. It was, of course, far too risky to think of cutting more thorns to make the fence higher and more secure. With lions about it would be worse than madness to venture out into the darkness beyond the light of the camp fires. They made up and lighted a fresh fire in the middle of the ox kraal, and Jan Kokerboom had strict injunctions to keep it going all night. As for the lion, both Poeskop and Jan believed it to be wounded; probably it would scarcely venture to return that night. Still, as Poeskop said, with lions you never know where you are, especially if they are hungry. The remaining fires were strengthened, and the white party returned to their quarters.

"Hullo!" said Tom, on getting back to his fire, "where's Peter?"

Peter had disappeared. Just then Guy, entering his tent, cried out,–

"Here's the little beggar, cowering behind my camp bed. You'd better have him out."

Tom fetched him out, calmed his apprehensions, and set him by the fire again. The wild boy seemed at last persuaded that the danger was past, and his young master having fastened the cord dangling at the child's waist to his own belt again, Peter once more wrapped himself in his blanket and went to sleep. Tom, lying a few feet away from him, was not slow to follow his example.

It seemed but a few minutes to the English lad, yet the space of a full hour had certainly elapsed, when Tom was violently startled from his sleep by a wild, terrified yell, which sounded close to his ears. There was something so horrifying about that wild scream, violently shattering the previous stillness of the night, that a shudder of apprehension went thrilling through Tom's whole person. In

the same instant there was a rough pull at the lad's belt; he was turned half over. and, before he had time to snatch up the rifle by his side, he felt himself being dragged away over the ground at a rapid pace. The lad's mind instantly grasped the situation. Something–a lion, no doubt–had got hold of the unfortunate Peter, and was dragging him off; and Tom, being coupled to him by the long cord, was being dragged also. In an instant Tom had unbuckled his belt and was free. Springing to his feet and looking round, he saw by the light of the fire a huge yellow-maned lion, which had Peter by the neck, and was dragging him away into the darkness.

Meanwhile, the unfortunate black boy, after uttering that first wild, terrified yell, was shrieking out for help. Poeskop was running up to the rescue, and he afterwards affirmed that the boy had, beyond all doubt, suddenly recovered his native tongue, and was crying out and imploring assistance in Berg Damara. Tom rushed to the fire, seized upon a long piece of burning wood, and with that ran back to the lion, which was now dragging its unfortunate victim well beyond the circle of the firelight, and belaboured the brute about the head and face with the burning brand. It was a marvellously plucky act, but it was useless. The fierce brute held on grimly to its prey, and merely hastened its pace, now moving at a swift trot. Tom turned to rush for his rifle, and in the same instant something seemed to flash out from the darkness, and knocked him down. It was a lioness, which, as Poeskop and Guy came running up with their weapons, stood over the lad, growling horribly–a fierce, throaty, menacing growl–as if daring them to come on.

Guy and the Bushman fired together, and at the twin report the lioness, shot through heart and brain, sank quietly down upon Tom, and lay stark dead. At this moment Mr. Blakeney came up to their assistance. Between them they dragged the grim brute off Tom, who was by this time nearly suffocated. A full-grown lion weighs a good deal more than twice as much as a heavy man, and Tom, although happily not seriously hurt, was pretty well flattened, and had most of his breath knocked out of him. They got him to his feet, felt him all over, and asked anxiously if he was hurt.

"N–no!" gasped the lad; "I'm–all–right–I think. G–go on after Peter. Hark! He's there somewhere. The other lion's got him. Hark!"

They listened for a moment. There came faint, agonized cries from out the darkness. They were the unfortunate wild boy's last appeals. They ceased. All was still.

"Bring fire-sticks," cried out Mr. Blakeney. "You, Poeskop, stay with Baas Tom, and get him to the fire. Guy, Jan, Seleti, come with me. You, Mangwalaan, stay by the oxen."

Jan Kokerboom and Seleti armed themselves with flaming brands, and the

four advanced into the darkness. They could see little beyond a dozen feet in front of them. Again they listened. The wild boy's voice was no more heard, but in its place there came from the outer darkness a sickening scrunching of bones. It was the lion devouring his victim, apparently some forty yards away.

"Oh," cried Mr. Blakeney, "I can't stand this. We must go on." They moved forward ten yards, and then, from some thick bush in front of them, there came a low, cavernous, threatening growl from the brute, disturbed at its prey. Mr. Blakeney and Guy fired together, and reloaded. They could hear the man-killer dragging the unfortunate lad yet farther into the bush. Again they fired. Now the men's torches were getting low. Still they advanced again, though much against the will of the two natives.

"Baas," whispered Jan Kokerboom, "this is madness. My fire-stick will be out in another minute, and we shall all be killed by the lions. There are more about. I have heard them."

Still Mr. Blakeney and Guy pushed on a few yards farther, until their advance was barred by thicker and stronger bush.

"It's useless, Guy," said Mr. Blakeney, in a stern voice. "We've done all we can. We must go back. By this time the poor creature is dead, undoubtedly. It's a bad job, but we can do no more. Come!"

They turned quickly, and with the torches flickering out made their way back to the camp fires. For the rest of that night they got little rest. Tom first had to be attended to. The lioness in her attack had badly shaken him; but beyond some deep scratches inflicted by one paw on the back of the shoulder as she held him down, he was unhurt. These wounds were dressed with carbolic and water, as usual. Two hours later an attack made by another pair of lions on the cattle scherms was successfully repelled, and an old, worn-out lion shot through the thorn fence by Jan Kokerboom and Mangwalaan. Towards dawn the white men slept for a couple of hours or so.

After breakfast they prepared to take vengeance upon the murderer of the unfortunate wild boy. Mr. Blakeney wished much to persuade Tom to stay behind and help Seleti and Mangwalaan to look after the camp.

"No, pater," pleaded Tom; "this is really my business. You know what an interest I took in the poor little chap. In a way I looked on him as belonging to me. I'll keep behind. My shoulder is not very bad, and I can, at all events, carry a spare rifle in case you need it."

Mr. Blakeney gave way, and the three, accompanied by Poeskop and Jan Kokerboom, went forth on their mission of vengeance. With them they took the wagon dogs to aid in hunting up the lion. They had little difficulty in finding the path of the man-eater. In the thorns, through which the fierce brute had dragged its victim, were to be seen shreds of the poor wild boy's old flannel shirt and

knickerbockers, bestowed upon him by his young master. Here was where the monster had bitten through the poor little fellow's neck and finished him, and had even begun to devour some of his flesh. A large dark patch of blood and other hideous traces marked the spot. Farther on they came to a more grisly relic. In a little clearing, among some dense bush, there lay the head and the right forearm and hand of the unfortunate boy. Both had been severed easily from the trunk.

Tom turned with horror from these sad relics.

"Pater," he said, "if I were not so mad with the brute that did this, I think I should be sick. If you and Guy don't kill the monster, I will."

"We'll kill him, my boy," said his father grimly, "even if we have to follow him all day."

They moved on in silence, and, after going three hundred yards farther, spoored the lion and its prey to a dense, triangular piece of bush lying close to the little stream that ran through the valley. Poeskop quickly ran round this piece of bush, and made certain that the murderous brute had gone no farther. Mr. Blakeney now disposed his little force so as to command each side of the triangle. Poeskop and Guy crossed the stream, and guarded that side. Jan Kokerboom kept watch at the point where the lion had entered, well in sight of Mr. Blakeney, who, with Tom carrying a spare rifle, took the angle on the extreme right. Then the dogs, which had followed hot upon the trail, were cheered into the thicket. They were a plucky lot of curs, well used to this kind of work, and they did their duty well. Plunging into the bush and undergrowth, they quickly told that the game was afoot.

"To him, Nero! To him, Nelson! Push him up, Ponto!" cried Mr. Blakeney, in his strong, clear voice. The dogs, encouraged at the sound, renewed their attack.

"Push him out, boys!" again cried their master heartily. "Have at him, Nero!"

Nero, a huge, brindled cross-bred, half mastiff, half greyhound, with a touch of bull–a true Boer mongrel, picked up in the Transvaal–plunges into the fray again, well backed by the rest of the pack. The lion can stand the baiting no longer, and, creeping noiselessly through the covert, suddenly appears within thirty paces of where Mr. Blakeney stands ready for him. Seeing his adversary, the brute, his mouth and face still darkly smeared with the blood of his victim, bares his teeth, puts his head down, growls savagely, and, lashing his tail a few times from side to side, takes two or three stealthy strides right out into the open. Then suddenly he elevates his tail, straight and rigid as a poker. Mr. Blakeney knows the danger signal well; his nerves are like iron; he is as steady as if he were shooting at a francolin. Already he is down on one knee, the better to get his shot. Tom stands staunchly at his flank, ready with the second rifle. Taking

swift aim, Mr. Blakeney pulls the trigger; the heavy .500 bullet strikes the man-eater full in the chest, and, raking the body and tearing through heart and lungs, instantly finishes its career. The brute falls to the shot, and after a convulsive struggle or two rolls over dead. Never again will he slay the shuddering Berg Damaras, or murder a harmless boy.

Tom's hat went flying up into the air.

"Hurrah!" he cried, in his high, cheery voice. "Well shot, pater! We've killed the brute, and avenged poor Peter. Hurrah!"

Guy came bursting round the corner of the covert, and, seeing the triumph, added two more "hurrahs" to Tom's exultant shouts.

There, in truth, lay the murderous brute, and the poor, innocent wild boy was avenged. He was a huge, dark-maned lion, fat and in high condition, and in the very prime of his strength. Poeskop and Jan now came running up, full of joy and congratulations.

"Ah, baas! that is a great lion," said the Bushman. "I never saw a bigger or a heavier. Look at his forepaws. Why, he could kill an ox as easily as I could kill a chicken. The Berg Damaras up yonder may well be glad. Two lions killed last night, and this old *mannetje* this morning. They will sleep in peace for a long time to come."

While Jan Kokerboom set to work to skin the lion, Poeskop, by Mr. Blakeney's directions, made his way into the thicket to see if he could discover any further remains of the unfortunate Peter. Meanwhile, a number of the Berg Damaras, guided by the rifle shot, had made their way down to the spot. Their delight on discovering, not only that the man-eater had been slain that morning, but that a lion and lioness had also been killed during the night, was very great. Something of their load of depression seemed lifted from their spirits. They even began to smile, a thing none of the English party had observed during the previous day. As to the death of their kinsman, the unfortunate Peter, they seemed not in the least affected; but, as Mr. Blakeney pointed out to the boys, wandering tribesfolk, such as Bushmen and Berg Damaras and the like, lead such precarious lives, and are so often confronted by death, danger, and starvation, that they become callous and indifferent to suffering, whether it affects themselves or others.

Poeskop presently returned. Beyond a few bones and a piece or two of flesh, he had found no further traces of the boy. The lion had devoured him. They returned to camp, leaving the Berg Damaras to deal as they pleased with the now flayed carcass of the dead lion. With this and the flesh of the other two lions the poor wretches seemed highly delighted. The hearts of these beasts, the headman explained, when they had eaten them, would give them courage, and the rest of the flesh and fat would be useful to them. Returning up the valley, Guy shot a fine waterbuck bull. After taking the horns and skin, this also was handed

over to the tribes-people, who were now well provided with meat. The flesh of the waterbuck is coarse and unpleasant, and not at all palatable to Europeans; and as the hunters had plenty of meat at their camp, the Berg Damaras were welcome to this fresh food supply. On reaching camp Tom took a spade, and, with Guy, went out to bury the poor remains of Peter, the wild boy–the head and the severed arm. Tom returned from his task sorrowful enough, and was depressed and quiet for the rest of the day.

”Poor little Peter!” he said that evening at supper. ”His meeting with us, which we all thought such a fine thing for him, was but a miserable bit of luck after all. I do believe, if he had remained with the baboons, he might have lived for years.”

”Ay, Tom,” rejoined his father, ”it’s a strange world; and human destiny, whether in the case of the black man or the white, is one of the most inexplicable of all mysteries. Still, we did the right thing in rescuing poor Peter. Think of it. What an existence would have been his if we had not discovered him. To live with the beasts of the field–and such beasts as baboons–surely even you, Tom, fond as you were of the little chap, could never have wished him such a fate.”

”No, pater, I suppose not,” acknowledged Tom; ”but it was a cruel end. I shall never forget the little fellow, and it will be a long while before I shall get his death-scream out of my memory.”

Chapter XIII.
GUY IS MISSING.

More than a month had elapsed since the beginning of the trek. They were now, as Poeskop had informed them, within little more than a week’s journey from the kloof of gold of which they were in search. It was full a week since they had left the Berg Damara village behind, and they had progressed well and steadily during the interval. One morning Mr. Blakeney and Tom had ridden out together in search of game. Guy was sitting on the wagon, for a change taking a rest, going through some of his specimens, and packing away odds and ends. They were trekking across a wide, open grass plain, whereon various herds of game, for the most part hartebeest, blue wildebeest, and Burchell’s zebra, were to be seen grazing in the distance. At half-past twelve the oxen were outspanned, and a halt was made. Guy, having finished his work and eaten some lunch, was now,

with the aid of the Ross stalking-glass, ranging the wide grass flats, watching the various troops of game, and wondering what kind of luck his uncle and cousin were having. It had been a most beautiful morning. The hot, rather suffocating winds, which had been blowing persistently from the north for the last few days, had vanished. A most cool and refreshing breeze now came up gently from the south, borne from the cool regions of the far Antarctic; and there was a feeling of vigour in the sparkling atmosphere which, albeit it was now just past high noon, made Guy's restless English blood eager for action.

As he looked, he suddenly spied through the clear telescope a single ostrich, stalking across the veldt. It was a long way off–five miles certainly–but he would go after it. Telling Seleti to saddle up his pony, Guy's preparations were soon made. After their experiences in the thirst-land, he was not going to take any more unnecessary risks, and he had fastened to his saddle his water-bottle, coat, and a hunting case containing a little food. Thus equipped, he picked up his sporting Martini rifle–he had lent Tom his Mannlicher–and, swinging himself lightly into the saddle, rode off at a brisk canter, humming, in the lightness of his heart, a cheerful song. Poeskop gazed admiringly after him as he rode away.

"There goes a proper young baas!" he said to Jan Kokerboom, as they sat at their meal. "'Tis a fine thing to be an Englishman." Jan admitted that it was, and Guy's figure gradually receded into the distance.

Guy rode steadily for five or six miles, at the end of which he discovered that the ostrich had been moving away north-westward, and was still two or three miles distant. Some light bush now hid it from view, and, taking advantage of this screen, Guy pressed on until he saw that he was about to enter upon the plain again. Before issuing from the bush, he got off and carefully examined the country in front of him. Yes, there was the ostrich right enough, feeding quietly less than a mile away. It was a splendid cock bird, and its white plumes, showing up finely against its black body colouring, made Guy long to possess them. Walking his horse out of the covert, Guy now touched the good beast with his spur and galloped for the big bird, hoping to get a shot at it before it had discovered that the approaching object was anything more than a zebra. It was a wild, unfrequented veldt, and surely, argued Guy to himself, an ostrich in these parts would not be very suspicious. Half a mile was covered. He was now within seven hundred yards of the bird; surely he was going to get a fair shot directly.

But even as he thus flattered himself, he was discovered. The ostrich's head went up, and then, with a limp and a flutter of the wing feathers, the bird moved off. It went so lame that Guy at once perceived that something was the matter with it. So much the better–he would have an easy victory. Suddenly, fifty yards in front of him, there rose from the long grass veldt another ostrich, a hen bird manifestly. Nothing ailed her, and she rushed away like a steam engine, covering

whole leagues, as it were, in her enormous strides. Guy reached the place whence she had started, and saw, as he expected, a nest full of huge, shining eggs. At a swift glance, as he galloped by, he reckoned that there must have been twelve or fourteen of them. But he had no time to attend to them now; he would ride back that way, and take toll of them as he went to the wagon. For the moment all his energies and attention were centred on the maimed or sick bird in front of him, the magnificence of whose plumes he could now plainly discern.

He galloped, but still the limping creature managed, not only to keep a start, but even to increase its lead. In a while it squatted, as if it had reached the end of its tether, and Guy thought now surely it was his. It was not so, however. As he approached within four hundred yards the great bird rose and pursued its way, stumbling, staggering occasionally, as if it would fall on its head, and flapping its wings, plainly in great distress. It was very annoying that, notwithstanding its apparent sickness, the bird could yet manage as it did to keep going. Mile after mile went by, and still the ostrich stumbled along, just beyond reasonable shooting distance. Once again, having gained a fresh lead, in response to a long spurt on the part of Guy, it sat down again; and once more Guy was most provokingly baulked of what he now looked upon as his legitimate booty–those magnificent plumes that waved and dangled so annoyingly, just beyond reach of his trusty Martini.

The lad had now become downright angry. That bird should be his, if he had to ride till evening; and so, about five hundred yards still separating them, the hunted and the hunter moved swiftly across the plain for another mile. Three o'clock went by–four o'clock–surely the bird would soon give in! But now it was running quite differently. There was no trace of the falterings and stumblings that he had so long noticed. The cock was apparently quite recovered, and running as strongly and as straight as had its mate. Then suddenly there flashed upon Guy's mind what had happened. The creature had been playing the fool with him all this time. It had simulated lameness and sickness, just as will a plover or a partridge, merely to decoy him away from its nest, which he had by a lucky chance ridden by and discovered.

Guy smiled grimly to himself as the cleverness of the whole ruse was borne in upon him. Nevertheless, he was wild with vexation; and setting his teeth, he said to himself very softly that he would make it hot for the shamming bird yet. And, indeed, he did so. He was now full twenty miles from camp; hills and kopjes rose not very far in front of him–hills which, now ruddy brown and plain to see, looked four hours ago blue in the distance. His pony was a good one, and in first-rate condition. It was not by any means at the end of its resources, and Guy called upon it for one more long and sustained effort. Two more miles were past. Then Guy, to his joy, discovered that the ostrich was really coming back to him.

The long and persistent chase under the hot sun had at last told upon it. He had certainly gained one hundred and fifty yards in the last hour.

Once more the great bird set itself going, and raced away. So rapid was its flight that it seemed as if Guy and his nag were this time to be completely distanced. But it was soon very plain what the bird was aiming at. It was trying for an offing, so as to work its way round to the right, and thus, as evening fell, regain its mate and her nest once more. Guy saw the manoeuvre, and, galloping across the wide arc that the ostrich was now making, managed, by dint of pressing his pony for another and a final effort, to cut it off. The foolish bird stuck obstinately to its point; its pace was now slackening; and Guy succeeded in getting within fifty yards of its line. Slipping off his pony, he fired as the big bird came by, and, aiming well forward, struck the ostrich fair in the body. Even so tough a creature as this, the largest of all feathered fowl, could not resist the impact of a solid Martini bullet at fifty paces, and the bird suddenly fell dead in its tracks, a mere quivering bundle of flesh and feathers.

It was a splendid prize. Guy, as he walked up and looked at the dead bird, saw at once that the plumage was magnificent. Knee-haltering his pony, and taking off its saddle, he now refreshed himself after his desperate ride, and set to work to divest his capture of its finest plumage. The white feathers were magnificent, and Guy could scarcely admire them sufficiently. Making neat bundles of the prime whites, the shorter whites, the beautiful black and white plumes, and the black feathers, he now saddled up again, slung the longest feathers over his back, fastened the rest to his saddle, and mounted.

The point now to be decided was, What should he do for the night? He knew that the camp lay away behind him, far across the dry and weary plain. But it was twenty long miles away; his pony was very tired and thirsty; and in the darkness now coming on he might easily lose his direction. Only a mile or two in front of him rose the line of low hills. Here he was pretty sure to find water for his pony. On the whole, it seemed better to make his way thither, water his pony, light a good fire, rest till early morning, and then ride back to camp. Having thus decided, he rode his nag at a walk for the kopjes. Night was falling rapidly as he entered the hills. After following an open valley for a quarter of a mile, he came, as he expected, to a vlei of water, recruited by a fountain flowing from the hill above. Here he off-saddled for the night. His pony drank till it cared to drink no more. Meanwhile he cut some grass for fodder, tied his nag to a bush, collected wood for a fire, and, taking out the meat and bread he had brought with him, ate his supper.

His position was a well-chosen one. At his back he had an impenetrable screen of thick bush and rock. He had seen no indication of lions as he rode into the hills. A big fire blazed cheerfully in front of him, and plenty of wood lay

handy so soon as its first strength died away. The lad was very sleepy after his long ride. He lay for an hour or more gazing drowsily into the red blaze in front of him, turning over in his mind the events of the afternoon, and following with a feeling of placid contentment the shifting scenes depicted in the heart of the fire by various pieces of burning wood. His pony munched its food contentedly close to his head. Gradually his eyes closed, his head sank deeper into the saddle which formed his pillow, and he slept.

Guy had not enjoyed the blessed oblivion of slumber more than an hour–it seemed to him not a minute since he had closed his eyes–when he was suddenly and most rudely awakened. Strong hands gripped him fiercely on either side, and pinned him to the ground. With a cry he tried to spring to his feet. But his hands and feet were both securely held. He struggled violently, but his struggles were ineffectual against superior strength and numbers. Almost before he was fully awake he was bound hand and foot, and lay helpless in the hands of his captors. Then he had time to look about him. The light of the fire showed him that his assailants were four in number, two white men and two black. The faces of the white men were known to him. It was with something like a shock of dismay that he realized the fact that he was in the hands of Karl Engelbrecht and Antonio Minho, who were now regarding him, as they stood over him, with unmistakable signs of triumph on their unpleasant faces.

"What's all this about?" cried the lad angrily in Dutch. "And what do you mean by attacking me in this way? You shall suffer for it, and that before many hours are over."

"Softly, my young friend," answered Minho, a bantering smile illuminating his oily, yellow face. "You go a little too fast. You, and not Karl and myself, are likely to be the suffering party. We find you are necessary to our plans, and so we invite you to come with us. If you keep a civil tongue and behave yourself, we shall treat you reasonably well. If you are troublesome and impertinent, you will be corrected."

"Ja," added the slower-tongued Boer, who had by this time found his speech. "We shall stand no nonsense from you. Keep your mouth shut, you schepsel, unless you are spoken to. We want no tantrums, and no noise. If you don't behave, we shall teach you to, and that with the sjambok." As he spoke the great Boer touched significantly his riding whip of giraffe hide, just now stuck through his belt.

The English lad's eyes blazed with anger at this threat. If he had been free, he would at that instant have struck the Dutchman in the face, great as was the disparity in size and age between them. But he was helpless; and he saw, answering his own fiery look, such an expression of malevolence and hate spread over the Boer's countenance, that he judged it the wiser course to resume a less

pugnacious demeanour. After all, pugnacity, when you are tied hand and foot, avails nothing.

"What do you want with me?" he went on, in a tone of assumed indifference, addressing himself to the Portuguese.

"We propose to take you with us on a short journey," returned Minho. "We shall tell you more of our plans later on. Meanwhile, you had better submit yourself quietly, and don't make a fuss, or it may be worse for you. There are more painful things even than sjamboks," he added, with a significant leer; "rifles and knives, for instance."

"Now, then," said Engelbrecht, in his thick guttural voice, "pick him up, you two."

The two strong natives, who were standing ready to obey their master's orders, stepped forward, picked up Guy, and set him on his feet. Then, saddling and bridling his pony, they unfastened the raw-hide riem that bound his feet, hoisted him to the saddle, and set off. All carried rifles; the Boer marched at the pony's head, holding its bridle. Guy's hands were firmly tied, and there was not the faintest chance of escape. Half a mile farther up the valley they came to Karl Engelbrecht's camp. Here a wagon was outspanned, and there were more natives. The word was now given at once to trek. Guy was placed on the wagon, and his feet carefully bound again, and in half an hour they set forth, steering a course through the hills which would take them north-west, in a direction almost diametrically opposite to that in which the English party was progressing. They trekked rapidly, and the oxen were pushed to their utmost speed.

Quitting the hills presently, they entered upon thin forest country, and thereafter their course was set, manifestly, for a chain of mountains which lay upon the horizon some fifteen miles distant. This range was reached before evening set in. Entering a deep and secluded gorge, Engelbrecht's party ensconced themselves in a strong defensive position, commanding a narrow pass, the entrance to which they blocked temporarily by rolling down boulders and rocks from the hillside. Here, with plenty of wood and water about them, and holding what they evidently looked upon as an impregnable position, the shadowers believed themselves in absolute security, and prepared to take the next step in the operations upon which their energies and schemes were fixed.

Engelbrecht and Minho had, in the course of their pursuit, followed pretty closely all the movements of the party in front of them. The Boer had with him clever and resourceful native servants. These he employed as spies, sending them forth scouting in front of him. These men, accustomed from their youth up to read accurately every sign and indication of veldt life, had traced with minute care every phase of the wanderings of the English trekkers. They had reported the various happenings–had observed the number of elephants slain in the big

hunt, and had satisfied themselves and their master that the English leader and his party were all, white and black, good hunters and excellent shots. They were known to be very well armed, and it was obvious that any open attack upon them would mean severe fighting, in which the assailants, in all probability, would be beaten off or most seriously mauled. Besides, it was not the policy of the two allied ruffians to make any kind of attack before the gold treasure should have been discovered.

Upon the day before Guy had ridden out after the ostrich, Engelbrecht had made a forward trek, and placed his camp much closer to the English party than he had hitherto ventured. Minho was against this move, but the Boer was now growing somewhat reckless, and his persistency had carried the day. Guy's rifle had been heard that afternoon, spies were watching his movements from the hills, and his entrance to the valley and the place where he had camped for the night were carefully noted. The spies hastened back to the Boer's outspan, and reported all they had seen.

Then ensued a discussion between Engelbrecht and the Portuguese as to what course to pursue. Antonio Minho was in favour of letting the young man return to his own camp unmolested. But Engelbrecht's patience, as we have seen, was becoming somewhat exhausted. He was a man of action, and a plan had suddenly come into his mind which he at once unfolded. It was this. If they captured the English lad, they could hold him as a hostage, and make any terms they pleased with the gold seekers; nay, they might even force them to enter into a kind of partnership, by which the gold, when discovered, should be parcelled out equally between the two expeditions. This seemed to the Boer, upon the whole, a better and safer plan than attacking the Englishmen after they should have secured their treasure. After all, the attack might be repelled. Karl knew these Englishmen could shoot, and they would, no doubt, fight hard; and even if they were surprised and shot down in a night attack or ambuscade, there might be awkward questions to answer thereafter. Lawless and bloodthirsty though the man was, he knew that, even from amid the silence and solitudes of the desert, murder will out, especially the murder of white men. He still cherished bitter animosity and hatred against these intruders, especially against Mr. Blakeney, the man who had conquered him in the affair of fists at Mossamedes; but upon the whole he judged that he would now have a safer chance of gratifying his revenge, by seizing Guy and using him as an instrument for squeezing his rivals, than by more violent measures.

During an hour Karl and the Portuguese keenly debated the question, whether or not they should seize and carry away the lad, now sleeping in absolute ignorance of their vicinity no more than half a mile away. In the end the plan seemed good to Minho. The capture was effected; and now, having carried

off Guy Hardcastle to a place which the Boer had in his mind–a place which could be made impregnable against any assault–they prepared to take their measures for squeezing Mr. Blakeney, and bringing him to the terms and demands upon which they had fixed their minds.

Chapter XIV.
POESKOP TO THE RESCUE.

Upon the afternoon on which Guy Hardcastle had been so busily engaged with the ostrich hunt, Mr. Blakeney and Tom had returned about four o'clock. By six o'clock, when it was getting dark, they were–although expecting him in camp at any moment–by no means anxious about him. Mr. Blakeney had heard from Poeskop that Guy had gone out after an ostrich, and ostrich hunting is always a difficult and oftentimes a long and tedious business. Night fell, supper was over, and still the lad tarried. A rifle was now discharged at intervals, and the fires were replenished, so that the wanderer might be guided to the safe haven of the camp. Still no Guy. There was nothing more to be done that night. They imagined that he had wandered farther away than he had intended, and was camping out somewhere. The veldt was not a waterless one, and there was therefore little anxiety on that score. Still, as morning came, Mr. Blakeney was determined to lose no time in going out in search. Something might have happened. The lad might have been thrown, or have suffered some other casualty.

After a hurried breakfast, taking with them Poeskop, Mr. Blakeney and his son rode out, Poeskop carefully following the spoor made by Guy's pony on the previous day. It took them a long time to puzzle out the intricacies of the spoor, and trace the devious wanderings of the ostrich hunt. But they came in time to the place where Guy had killed the bird. Then they traced him to the valley among the hills where he had camped. Here they at once discovered other spoor as well as Guy's. To the Englishmen, accustomed as they were to veldt life, it was difficult to understand what had actually happened. To Poeskop the whole story was plain enough. He searched about quietly for a few minutes, then he told his tale.

”Karl Engelbrecht has been here,” he said suddenly.

”Karl Engelbrecht!” repeated Mr. Blakeney. ”Surely you are mistaken, Poeskop?”

"No, baas," reiterated the Bushman; "there is no mistake. Karl has been here. I know his spoor too well. He and another white man, the man from Mossamedes, Antonio Minho, have been here."

Mr. Blakeney knew by experience the extraordinary powers of South African natives, and especially those of Bushman blood, in reading spoor. But he was staggered.

"How can you know it is the spoor of Antonio Minho?" he asked.

"Baas," replied Poeskop, "I have followed Minho many a time in the soft, sandy streets of Mossamedes. There is no mistaking his spoor. Once I have seen a man's footprints, or an ox's, or a horse's, I can tell it anywhere. To you it may seem difficult; to a Bushman, no!"

"Well," rejoined Mr. Blakeney, "anything else?"

"Ja, baas," pursued the Bushman. "There are, as you see, two others. They are natives–Karl Engelbrecht's servants."

"This is bad news, Tom," said Mr. Blakeney, with a troubled brow. "Wherever Karl Engelbrecht is there is mischief. Minho is a scoundrel, and we know that he had some inkling of what we were after. The Boer has a grudge against us, which he would like to pay off. I don't half like the look of things." Then, turning to Poeskop, he went on: "Well, what else?"

"You see, my baases," replied Poeskop, "there has been a bit of a scuffle here. These men have caught Baas Guy, tied him up, I think, and put him on his horse, and gone off with him. Now let us follow their spoor."

They followed the tracks up the valley for half a mile, and then came on plain evidences of the Boer camp.

"Here's a pretty how-d'ye-do!" said Mr. Blakeney seriously. "What on earth are these villains doing in this part of the world, Poeskop? We must follow them up."

The Bushman took up the spoor, and they followed the Boer wagon tracks without any difficulty. By afternoon they had cleared the forest region, and were now halted in a small grove of giraffe-acacia trees by a pan of water, about twelve miles distant from the mountain range in which Engelbrecht and his party had ensconced themselves.

"Baas," said Poeskop, "you and Baas Tom must wait here. Karl Engelbrecht has trekked for the berg yonder. He cannot be far in; his oxen could not have travelled much beyond the *poort* [pass] which you see there"–he pointed to a dark ravine giving entrance to the hills–"in the time. So soon as evening comes, I will ride on, tie up my horse near the poort yonder, and creep about till I find what has been done, and where Baas Guy is. What say you? Is not that the best plan?"

"Yes, Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney, "I think that is the best thing that can be

done. You will have an hour or two's good moon to-night; and if you can't creep about and find out things, I don't know who can."

Poeskop grinned at the compliment.

"Baas, I will find out all right," he said eagerly. "I like Baas Guy–he is my baas; and I will, somehow or other, bring him away with me if I can. At all events, I will reach him. We Bushmen, you know, can creep like the snake on his stomach. I shall becreep Baas Guy to-night. You will see. Poeskop knows. You stay here. I will come back by morning. If I can bring Baas Guy, well and good. If not, we try some other plan."

"Very well," said Mr. Blakeney, "we will wait here. Do the best you can, but don't run Baas Guy into danger. Get him away if you think you have a fair chance. Now, how many cartridges have you, if these fellows come out and we have to use our rifles?"

"I have seventeen," interrupted Tom, hastily running his fingers over his bandolier.

"And I have fourteen myself," added his father.

Poeskop fingered his greasy old bandolier.

"Nine, baas!" he said, grinning.

"Why, you're as niggardly as a Boer with your cartridges," said Mr. Blakeney, with a laugh. "I've often told you that you don't carry enough for emergencies. Here, when we're in a tight place and may want every bullet we've got, you're short."

"The baas is right," said Poeskop apologetically. "I'll never come so short again. Never mind. Perhaps I may find some more in Karl Engelbrecht's camp; who knows?"

"Well, don't play the fool and do anything rash," added his master. "What we want to do is to rescue Baas Guy, and get away. At our own camp we have plenty of rifles and cartridges, and, with our other men, can give a good account of Karl Engelbrecht and all his blackguards."

Guy, meanwhile, had passed the day by no means comfortably. He had been duly fed, it is true, his hands being untied for the purpose; but while they trekked he had been fastened up again, and placed on Engelbrecht's kartel in the forepart of the Boer wagon. There he lay throughout the long, hot day, wondering what his people were doing after discovering his absence, and what was to be the upshot of his captivity. At evening, after they had passed into the kloof and the entrance had been barricaded, he was taken down from the wagon and placed by the camp fire, where, his hands being again unbound, he was supplied with meat, bread, and coffee. Having made a respectable meal, Guy felt somewhat more cheerful; and the liberty of his hands being allowed him for half an hour further, he was enabled to stretch himself, chafe his benumbed wrists, and

restore the circulation.

He noticed various circumstances as he looked about him. Karl Engelbrecht and Minho kept themselves pretty much to themselves, sitting at their own fire, and engaging in a good deal of earnest conversation. Once the big Boer got up and stretched himself, and came over to the fire at which Guy sat. Here were gathered the five natives comprising Engelbrecht's retinue–a villainous-looking Griqua, who had special charge of Guy, two Hottentots, and a couple of Bihé natives. The Boer looked fixedly at the English lad, but said not a word to him. He addressed a few sentences to his servants; told Thebus, the Griqua, to fasten up his captive's hands again, and look sharply after him during the night; and stalked back to his own fire.

Half an hour later he and Minho retired to their kartels, and were soon sound asleep. The natives sat talking round the fire for another quarter of an hour; and then, tired with their hard day's trek, and the labour of barricading the poort, they made their way to Engelbrecht's wagon, beneath which, having ensconced themselves under their blankets, they were not long in following their master's example. There remained by their camp fire, which lay farthest away from the wagon, only Guy and the Griqua. The latter threw a blanket carelessly over his captive, and then settling himself comfortably under his kaross, a few feet away, went to sleep. Thebus was a light sleeper, he had by his side a loaded rifle, and he knew that the English lad was securely fastened.

Guy awoke very quietly some hours later. The moon had sunk; the Southern Cross, which he had last seen glittering bolt upright in the dark, star-sown night sky, now lay well over on its side. What had roused him? He knew that something had touched him; what exactly, his senses could not inform him. Then he felt a quiet, almost caressing touch upon his shoulder, and a voice whispered very softly in his ear, in Dutch, "Lie still, baas; it is Poeskop!" Guy did as he was told, and, immediately, he felt hands busy at the rawhide riem that bound his ankles. Then he became aware that a knife was at work; then his legs were free. A dark figure wormed itself up, towards his hands, and with the same silence and expedition his wrists were set free.

"Now," whispered the voice in his ear again, "creep away to the other side of the fire. Go very gently."

"But Thebus?" whispered Guy.

"Thebus all right; he'll not move again," returned Poeskop. "Come!"

Guy shuddered. He guessed what had happened, but did as he was told, and began to roll himself very gently over the sand towards the other side of the fire. Suddenly a dog barked in its sleep. The three figures–they appeared to be but two, for Poeskop lay crouched close alongside the Griqua–lay motionless as stones. Then all was silent again.

”Now,” whispered Poeskop, after a pause of three minutes. They crept away, and after what seemed to Guy to be ages–so great was the strain–had reached the farther side of the fire. Guy looked across. Thebus lay as if sleeping, and Poeskop had so arranged Guy’s blanket that it seemed as if he, Guy, were still beneath it. They crept yet farther, and were beyond the light of the now fading fire. It was a warm night, and Guy, what with the labour of crawling and the intense nervous excitement, dripped with perspiration. Still farther they crept into the darkness, and then Poeskop, taking Guy by the hand, led him very softly round the camp towards the mouth of the kloof. They reached the inner end of the poort, now blocked with huge boulders, and began to climb as softly as they could. The Bushman pulled himself over the obstacles with the lightness and the noiselessness of a cat. Guy did his utmost to follow his example, but he was much heavier; and presently a boulder, becoming dislodged under his weight, fell with some little noise. Instantly there rose from the stillness of the camp, sixty yards away, the furious barking of wagon dogs. Men stirred about the wagons.

”Quick!” cried Poeskop, in a hoarse whisper. ”We must run!”

They were quickly over the litter of rocks, and running down the gorge as fast as the semi-darkness would permit. The camp was astir; voices were heard calling to one another; they could even make out Karl Engelbrecht’s deep tones shouting commands.

”Run, Baas Guy!” urged Poeskop, turning to his follower. ”If Karl catches us we are dead men.”

They ran yet faster. They had a good start, and in fifteen minutes had reached the mouth of the gorge. Here, in a snug corner among some bush, Poeskop had fastened up his horse. It was a risk. If a lion or a leopard had come that way, the Bushman’s plans might have been easily overthrown. But the good nag was safe. Unfastening it in an instant, Poeskop led it out into the open.

”Now, Baas Guy,” he said, ”jump up. I hear them following us. We have no time to waste.”

Guy needed no persuasion. He, too, had heard the voices of their pursuers; they could now even discern the beat of their footsteps. He sprang up. Poeskop leaped lightly behind him.

”Ride for the light yonder,” he whispered, pointing to a brilliant star right in front of them, low down towards the horizon. A kick from Poeskop’s bare heels, and away they went, the pony cantering along sturdily in the semi-darkness, despite the burden of a double load.

”We shall be all right now,” said Poeskop. ”It will take them half an hour or more to pull down those boulders and make a passage for a horse; but we must push on. Karl Engelbrecht and the Portuguee will certainly ride after us, perhaps

also some of their men. They will have blood for the Griqua–if they can. And here comes daylight; we have no time to spare."

Guy looked towards the east, which lay nearly in front of them. It was true. Already the sky was paling. Dawn would be upon them in less than half an hour.

"Poeskop," he said, without turning in the saddle, "did you kill the Griqua?"

"Ja, baas, I did," replied the Bushman. "It was his life or mine. As I crept past him he stirred. I had my hand on his mouth. He struggled, and there was nothing for it but the knife."

"I'm sorry, very sorry," said Guy seriously. "You ought not to have done it. I hate the idea of killing a man like that. I wish now you hadn't come after me!"

"Well, baas, it was, as I say, my life or his. If Engelbrecht had caught me in his camp trying to rescue you, I was a dead man. And you yourself–if it suited his plans best, he would have put a bullet through you as soon as looked at you. Besides, Thebus was my enemy. Many a time he has sjamboked me, and drawn blood, when I was in Karl Engelbrecht's service. He treated me as badly as Karl himself did. I always said I would be even with him, and now I am. Pas op!" he cried, as the horse stumbled in a meerkat hole.

The poor beast floundered, tried to save itself, but came down on its head, bringing both riders to the ground. They were up in an instant, and, getting the pony to its feet again, remounted.

But, alas! it quickly became apparent that the pony had in some way injured its shoulder in the fall. It went very lame; and the lameness, as they rode on, increased instead of wearing off. Daylight was now rapidly overtaking them. The eastern sky was becoming suffused with wondrous hues of gold and crimson and pale green; long shafts of rosy pink were scattered upwards towards the zenith.

Poeskop turned and looked behind him.

"Baas," he said, "this is a bad job. They will all be coming after us soon on their horses, and then, with this lame pony, we are done for, unless we can lie up somewhere and defend ourselves. I don't like it."

"How far away are we from Mr. Blakeney and Baas Tom?" asked Guy.

"About an hour and a half's ordinary riding," replied the Bushman; "less than an hour if we could gallop hard. We must get off, and run alongside."

They slipped off the pony. Poeskop, who had his own carbine slung at his back, handed Guy a rifle and bandolier.

"Why, these are mine!" exclaimed Guy. "How did you get them?"

"I found them by the Griqua," responded the Bushman, "and so brought them away with me. Now, baas, hartloup!"

Guy took hold of the pony by the bridle, and they trotted along on either side at a good pace. For a little while the pony, relieved of its burden, seemed

to move more freely. The improvement was but a fleeting one, however; the lameness grew worse. It became evident to the two runners that their pace was rapidly decreasing.

"This will never do," said Guy, looking with dismay at Poeskop. "What's to be done?"

"The pony is dead beat, baas," rejoined the Bushman. "We must just leave him to take his chance, and push on. I'll take the water-bottle, and we must run."

So speaking, and taking the water-bottle, they pressed on. They had now come some three miles from the mouth of the kloof where Poeskop had first left the pony. Another nine or ten miles lay between them and the woodland where Mr. Blakeney and Tom lay waiting the result of Poeskop's expedition of discovery. Guy was a first-rate runner, and had the pace of the Bushman. Poeskop, on the other hand, could go at a steady jog trot during the whole of a long day, and had often compassed fifty miles in a journey of ten or twelve hours. They were encumbered with their rifles and ammunition, and Poeskop carried the water-bottle, all of which tended, of course, to increase their difficulties.

As they trotted across the open plain Poeskop looked behind him.

"They're not coming yet," he said. "We must make the most of our start."

Away they went, running steadily at a pace of rather better than seven miles an hour, which, under all the circumstances, and seeing that they were moving through longish grass, was excellent going. For a couple of miles they kept this up.

"Baas," said Poeskop presently, looking at Guy with a strange, comical expression on his yellow, pinched face, "your legs are too long for me. I can hardly keep up with you."

"All right," said Guy cheerfully; "I'll slacken off a bit."

But at that moment Poeskop looked round over his shoulder towards the entrance to the gorge.

"They're coming!" he cried. "I shall run your pace after all. Now we must go till we drop. If I were only a hartebeest and you a springbok! Run, baas, run!"

Guy glanced back, and saw four mounted figures just emerging from the dark gorge on to the yellow plain. Broad daylight was upon the veldt. It was evident that their pursuers must have already sighted them. The situation was becoming serious indeed. They ran stoutly on, saying not a word, and directing their course for a clump of bush and low timber which, with two or three other similar patches, rose like islets upon the sea of plain.

But their pursuers were now galloping hard, and were getting over the ground just twice as fast as the two footmen toiling along in front of them. Already the hoof-strokes of the galloping horses could be distinguished by the two runners.

”Baas,” gasped Poeskop, ”we shall just reach the timber, and that’s all. We shall want three minutes to get breath and steady ourselves.”

Well and stoutly as they ran, it seemed as if the last three hundred yards that separated them from the islet of bush never would be accomplished. The haven was reached at last, and the two fugitives plunging in, sank down behind a couple of trees having a low screen of bush in front of them, and prepared for action.

The nearest of their pursuers, Karl Engelbrecht, was now but three hundred yards away. A hundred yards behind him galloped a native servant; then followed Minho, the Portuguese, and another mounted native. Engelbrecht drew rein, jumped from his horse, and taking quick aim, fired at the two runners just as they took shelter behind the trees. The bullet whistled idly by. The Boer waited till his comrades came up, and then, spreading out a few yards apart, they advanced at a walk upon the islet, their plan evidently being to envelop it. By the time they had approached within two hundred yards, the fugitives had recovered breath, and were prepared for them.

”Baas,” whispered Poeskop, a fierce light gleaming in his set face, ”you are the best shot. Fire first. Take plenty time.”

Guy nodded. They were lying down; and resting his elbows on the ground and putting up his Martini rifle, he aimed at the big figure of the Boer, who, now mounted again, was advancing upon the patch of covert. Two hundred and fifty yards was the distance. The ivory rifle-sight was upon the Boer’s body, Guy’s finger upon the trigger. Should he fire? No, the lad thought; he would not spill the man’s blood if he could help it. He lowered the rifle, and, taking aim at Engelbrecht’s horse, pulled. It was a long shot, but a pretty good target. The result was, perhaps, most unexpected to Karl Engelbrecht himself, who had scarcely anticipated much resistance. At the loud report of the Martini, his horse fell instantly to the ground. In the next minute the poor beast was choking in its death struggle. Karl stumbled to his feet with a big Dutch oath, dropped in the grass, and, taking aim for the place whence the shot had been fired, let drive. It was a good shot; so good that the Westley-Richards .450 sporting bullet hit the tree behind which Guy crouched, striking it a terrific smack, within six inches of the lad’s face.

Guy shifted his position and prepared for another shot. Meanwhile, Poeskop had got the Boer within range, and had let drive three successive shots in such close proximity to Engelbrecht’s carcass that that worthy had deemed it wise to beat a hasty retreat. Worming himself through the grass, therefore, Engelbrecht crawled back a hundred paces or more, where he was joined by Antonio Minho, who, from that comparatively long range, now fired a shot or two at the patch of bush in front of them.

Meanwhile, one of the natives was riding round to the left, evidently with the object of getting a flanking shot into the defenders' position. Guy had no intention of being thus outflanked. He realized that his opponents meant business, and that this was no time for leniency, or any half-hearted measures. The mounted native came round within less than two hundred yards. As he turned and pulled up his horse, in order to fire from the saddle, Guy got a fair bead on him, and, pulling trigger, sent a bullet into the man's shoulder. The native staggered in his saddle, dropped his rifle with a loud yell, and, sorely wounded, lay forward upon the neck of his horse and rode off. Circling away from the dangerous proximity of the islet, the man rejoined his master, and fell fainting to the soil. Poeskop was delighted with the success of the defence thus far. The group of assailants was now some three hundred and fifty yards away, but a well-judged bullet from the Bushman's rifle struck the wounded native's horse, and completed the discomfiture of the party. Karl Engelbrecht, cursing the young Englishman and his assistant, and swearing horrible vengeance at some future time, now deemed it well to retreat. A dead and wounded horse, and a badly injured native, was sufficient punishment for him. Tying up his man's wound, and putting him upon the spare horse, the Boer and his party now drew sullenly off, their retreat hastened by the figures of two horsemen which they descried far off upon the plain behind Guy and Poeskop. On the way back to their mountain retreat, Minho rode a little off the route to secure the Englishman's unfortunate horse, which was now grazing on the veldt. Finding that the poor beast was too lame to travel, he shot it dead. This brutal act was witnessed by Poeskop from a tree into which he had climbed.

"Poor Blesbok," said Guy, at the intelligence. "I'll do my best to make things level with the brutes. I'm sorry now I didn't shoot Engelbrecht instead of his horse. I had a fair chance, and let it go. As for that Portuguese cur, I'll be even with him, somehow or other."

"My baas," returned Poeskop, grinning in high contentment, "if you'll take my advice, you'll never give Karl Engelbrecht another chance in this world. You might as well offer a good joint of meat to a stinking hyæna. If you don't watch it and kill Karl, he'll kill you. I know him. He'll never rest till he has another slap at us. Never mind; we've bested him this time, and we'll best him again...... Hurrah! here come Baas Blakeney and Baas Tom. They'll be pleased, anyway."

Guy and the Bushman stepped out of the covert which had proved so timely a refuge for them, and, waving their rifles, drew the attention of the two horsemen, who were now cantering towards them. In twenty minutes they were to-

gether once more.

Chapter XV.
THE KLOOF.

The mutual congratulations that ensued were very real and heartfelt.

"My dear Guy," said his uncle, as he threw himself from his horse and wrung his nephew's hand, "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you safe and sound. I have imagined all sorts of dangers from your captivity. Now tell us what has happened."

Guy related as shortly as possible all his adventures since he had left their camp. Then Poeskop told of his doings, and how he had managed the rescue.

"Well, you have both done excellently well," said Mr. Blakeney. "It's a clever feat to have outwitted these scoundrels, and beaten them off as you have done. We heard your firing as we waited at the edge of the forest yonder, and galloped this way. But you had really finished the fight, and well beaten Engelbrecht, before we could take a hand. I congratulate you, Guy. Here comes in the advantage of an athletic training and early practice in rifle-shooting. An old veldt man could not have done better. The question now is, What are these rascals likely to be up to? I don't think Engelbrecht, after this mauling, will be very keen to attack us again. And in our own camp, and with all our own men about us, we should have no trouble in repelling him. Still, we must keep a sharp lookout."

Poeskop, questioned as to his idea of the Boer's future movements, was of opinion that Engelbrecht would never think of attacking them with his present force. He might go off and try to raise more men. But that would take time; and in the meanwhile they would be at the Gold Kloof, and could make more ample preparations against further assaults. On the whole, the Bushman was of opinion that Engelbrecht would certainly try to take his revenge; but he inclined to the belief that it would probably be more in the way of an ambush on the coastward trek. This could be guarded against by careful scouting.

They returned to their own camp, where Jan Kokerboom and the other men welcomed them with great delight. Guy's first action on getting back was to do something to show his gratitude to Poeskop for his clever and courageous rescue. He knew that the little Bushman had always immensely admired a Marlin

repeating carbine which he (Guy) sometimes used. Taking this out of the wagon, he now handed it to his follower.

"Here, Poeskop," he said; "here's a little present for you. You did me a real good turn, and I shall never forget it. You are a good fellow, and when we come to the town again I hope to do something more for you. I was in a very tight place when you crept into Karl Engelbrecht's camp and got me out of it."

Poeskop duly returned thanks, and the incident ended. But the real feeling of friendship between the young Englishman and the half-wild Bushman was yet further cemented by the events of these few days.

They trekked once more, and after steady travelling for some days further, through a wild and remote wilderness, came at length to that goal of their desires, the Gold Kloof. One magnificent evening they outspanned under the shadow of a great mass of towering mountain, the highest peak of which must have been full seven thousand feet high. Within this range lay their secret. As the white men looked up at the peaked and serrated crests of the berg before them–now glowing with crimson and rose under the magic of the African sunset–they could not help being sensible of the spell of mystery and expectation cast over them by the witchery of that wonderful hour and the sight of this magnificent mountain land, which had lain here during ages of the past, remote and unknown, hugging within its solitudes the wealth that all civilized men covet so greatly. The fires of evening passed, and the mountains sank into more sober colouring. Puces and mauves and brown, contrasted in the deeper shadows with cobalt and indigo, were succeeded by yet darker and more sombre hues. Finally night sank, and only the faint looming of the great berg could be perceived. A thin silver crescent of a moon swam in the palest green sky; the stars pricked forth in amazing brilliancy; and the whole firmament became arrayed in its night robe of the deepest and most velvety blue-black.

They spent a most cheery evening by the camp fire, and turned in to sleep with all sorts of anticipations for the morrow.

After breakfast the next morning they advanced, under the guidance of Poeskop, into the heart of the mountain. Trekking through a wide and well-timbered valley, bordered on either side by towering and majestic walls, they entered suddenly–after the dry country through which they had for six weeks been travelling–upon what seemed to the two lads a perfect fairyland. Rain had lately fallen, and nature, responding in her eager way to the welcome moisture, had awakened, as by the spell of a magician's wand, into a most wonderful and verdurous beauty. The grass grew green in the valley, the trees were arrayed in new and brilliant foliage, the flowers everywhere checkered the veldt and shed splendour upon the hillsides. Acres of lilies–white, pink and white, crimson, and pale blue–starred the earth; while irises, gladioli, pelargoniums, heliophilas, and

many other flowers, flourished in wild luxuriance. The round, plushlike, yellow and orange balls of the acacia trees spread abroad upon the soft breeze a most delicious, honey-like scent. Up the mountain sides various heaths, now in the full beauty of their flowering, brilliantly relieved the dark greens and red browns of bush and rock. Huge aloes stood sentinel upon the kloofsides, and held aloft immense spikes of dark crimson flowers. Amid all this wealth of flower life, innumerable birds of gay and brilliant plumage, now on their way south with the rains, flew hither and thither. Here were to be noticed especially those lovely feathered creatures, the emerald, the golden, and Klaas's cuckoos, whose glorious colouring is among the chief marvels of South African bird life. Gorgeous sunbirds dipped their long tongues into the sugary hearts of the blossoms scattered so plentifully around; and resplendent kingfishers of divers hues sped in arrowy flight up and down the clear stream that murmured through the centre of the valley. Far aloft, wheeling and circling above the tall mountain peak which dominated the range, numbers of vultures were to be seen, cleaving the clear air of morning with wonderfully majestic flight.

"Hullo, Poeskop!" said Tom; "aasvogels?"

"Ja, Baas Tom," rejoined the Bushman; "they nest in the cliffs yonder. So long as I can remember, and I first saw these valleys when I was so high"–he stooped his hand within a couple of feet of the earth–"the aasvogels have bred here. From the side of the berg yonder you can overlook the Gold Kloof."

"Can you, though?" broke in Guy. "Let's push on. How long will it take to reach the place?"

"It is a longish trek yet," said Poeskop. "We have to go winding through the hills, and it will be late afternoon before we reach the poort."

They moved steadily up the lovely kloof until midday, when they outspanned for a couple of hours to rest and feed the oxen. The work had been heavy. Many small trees had to be cut down to admit the passage of the wagon, boulders had to be pushed and levered aside, and all were glad of rest and refreshment. At two o'clock they inspanned and trekked again. Two valleys lay before them. Poeskop led them up that lying on the right hand. More tree-cutting and hard travel lay before them. The gorge was in places so littered with monstrous boulders that progress at times seemed almost impossible.

"I don't quite understand it, baas," said the Bushman, as he walked by Mr. Blakeney's side in front of the wagon. "The mountain seems to have been falling about here. When I last came this way there was nothing like the quantity of rocks that there now are about the valley."

"Perhaps there has been a bit of an earthquake in these parts," rejoined Mr. Blakeney. "I don't quite understand such a litter of boulders myself. The natural work of time and weather would hardly suffice to account for this valley of rocks.

The mountains seem to have been in labour hereabouts."

At four o'clock they came at length to a mighty angle of mountain, where the face of the cliff, jutting out from the main mass of rock wall, ought, according to Poeskop's notion, to bear some faint resemblance to the profile of a man. But much of the cliff had fallen, and, as Poeskop confessed, the likeness had vanished.

"Now, my baases," said the Bushman, his bleared eyes gleaming with suppressed excitement, "after we turn that hoek you will see a narrow poort, and beyond that lies the kloof where the gold is. Come!"

Leaving the wagon, the four pressed on. The mountains encircling them had here, at the farther end of the valley, narrowed greatly. The precipices that frowned above them seemed almost menacing in their proximity. The place was wondrously silent. They turned the angle of the cliff, and then Poeskop suddenly halted in his tracks and stared about him. He seemed utterly bewildered.

"Where, where is the poort?" he stammered, glaring wildly in front and upon either side. "Where?" He rubbed his eyes and looked again. "The poort is gone!" he said solemnly. "What has happened?–Poeskop knows not!"

"What do you mean, Poeskop?" demanded Mr. Blakeney, somewhat sternly. "Don't play the fool."

"I am not playing the fool, baas," answered the little yellow man, a strange quiver of anguish in his voice. "The poort has gone. Look!"

And indeed it was not difficult for Mr. Blakeney and the two boys, staring in front of them, to picture what had happened. The mountain walls, through which a narrow cleft–Poeskop's poort or pass–had, not three years before, led, had fallen in. Some mighty convulsion of nature had so shattered and shaken them that they had collapsed; and where, as the Bushman explained, he had passed through between beetling walls, a solid barrier of rock and boulders, strangely riven and tumbled, now rose in a vast mass before them to a height of at least four hundred feet.

Poeskop stood, with scared and fallen face, staring at this strange and utterly unlooked-for obstacle.

"What is to be done now?" he said ruefully, "and how are we to get at the gold? We cannot climb that cliff; and if we could, we should not be able to get down on the other side."

"When you passed through the poort here, which is now blocked up," said Mr. Blakeney, "how far did you go before you came out into the Gold Kloof?"

"About a quarter of a mile, baas," answered Poeskop.

"And do you mean to tell me," pursued his interrogator, "that there is no other passage into the kloof?"

"None whatever, baas," answered the Bushman. "I know it well–every yard, every foot of it. In the old days, before this thing happened"–he pointed to the

barrier of cliff and *debris*–"you walked through a quarter of a mile of narrow poort, in some places no more than ten feet across, and came out into the kloof. The kloof is shut in by high walls, much higher in some parts than this, and there is no other way of getting in or out. Of that I am as certain as I am that in one hour it will be nightfall. If we had wings, we could get into the valley. Without them, I don't think it is possible. The cliffs are high and sheer; not even a baboon could get down them."

They went sorrowfully back to the wagon, outspanned for the night, and, after supper, sat discussing long and earnestly the solution of the difficult problem that lay before them.

"I know!" cried Guy suddenly. "We'll have to make a rope-ladder, or a ladder of some sort. We're bound to get into this place. I know my father would, if he were here!"

Mr. Blakeney smiled at the lad's enthusiasm.

"Rather a large order, isn't it?" he said. "Five or six hundred feet of rope-ladder! And where's the rope to come from? We may have as much as a couple of hundred feet on the wagon. I brought that much, thinking we might need it; but for the rest, I for one don't see my way to it."

"I know, baas!" cried Poeskop. "We can do it; but it will take time. There is plenty game round about here. We can shoot elands, and hartebeest, and zebras, and blue wildebeest, and cut riems and bray them; and there is your rope-ladder."

"I believe you are right," said Mr. Blakeney thoughtfully. "The thing never occurred to my mind. It's an excellent idea, and if we can carry it through we shall be beholden to you, Guy. Our plan now is to start right away and begin shooting game. Only the largest animals will be of use to us. We shall want big and strong raw-hide riems, roughly dressed."

Next morning they set about the task to which they had now to devote themselves. It was an unpleasant and most thankless business, this of slaying game merely for their hides. They compared themselves with the skin-hunting Transvaal and Free State Boers of a generation before; and at the end of a week all thoroughly loathed the job. Yet it had to be done. Day after day the three white men rode out into the plains and shot game, and rode back to camp laden with skins. These the five natives cut into long thongs, or riems, and dressed and brayed in the rough but effectual South African fashion. At the end of fifteen days this part of the work was accomplished. Next they set to work to make the ladder. First, Mr. Blakeney and Poeskop, after a careful survey of the country, found their way up a long, gently-sloping nek on the northerly or left-hand side of the valley in which they were encamped, by which they attained the edge of the Gold Kloof. That evening, when they came in with their report, their discovery was received with rapturous applause by all in camp. Next morning Mr. Blakeney, Guy, Tom,

and Poeskop sallied forth with four horses, laden with over five hundred feet of rope and riems, to measure the depth of the cliff wall down which they were to hang their rope-ladder. It was a long and toilsome ascent; but at length the little party stood above the kloof, and knee-haltering the horses, crept to the edge of the chasm and looked over.

It was a wonderful scene. Far below lay spread one of the fairest valleys that the eye of man has ever rested upon. Green and well bushed it was in places, and here and there thorn trees and wild olives spread their shade. Through the very centre of the valley ran a clear, shallowish stream, which seemed to take its source in a narrow cleft or ravine far up at the eastern end of the kloof. A troop of graceful red pallah wandered along the stream, apparently no whit the worse for their imprisonment in this lovely valley. Wildfowl and wading birds of various kinds checkered the surface of the stream, or ran hither and thither along the yellowish-red sands of the shallows. The kloof appeared to be about a mile and a half long by half a mile in breadth. Right in front of the watchers, on the other side of the valley, towered the mountain of the aasvogels, around the summit of which numbers of huge vultures were circling in the clear sunlit air.

"What a lovely spot!" exclaimed Tom. "It looks like gold all over."

"Yes," added Guy; "and it's quite certain we've got it all to ourselves."

"How does the stream escape out of this kloof?" asked Mr. Blakeney of Poeskop.

"It makes its way somewhere under the mountain, baas," answered the Bushman, "and comes out to the right of the poort where I used to enter–"

"And from there flows down the valley where our camp lies?" interrupted Mr. Blakeney.

"Ja, baas, that is just so," said the Bushman.

"Poeskop," again interrogated Guy, "whereabouts does the gold chiefly lie?"

"All along the banks of the river-bed, Baas Guy," returned Poeskop, "and in the river, right through the kloof. But the most of it is in the upper half of the kloof. Right up towards the deep, narrow cleft where the stream runs down from the mountain," he added, pointing to the far end of the valley, "there is plenty gold; heaps of it. You may find nuggets about the stream every ten yards or so."

"That's all right, Guy," broke in Mr. Blakeney. "No doubt the matrix of the gold lies in the bowel of the mountain yonder. Ages of time and hot sun, and weathering, and no doubt such convulsions as lately barred the poort through which Poeskop used to enter the kloof, loosened the gold, and the rains and torrents have washed the stuff down-stream and worn it into nuggets. That roughly is, I suppose, how it all happened.–Now," he continued, "let us get to work, and measure the depth of this wall of cliff."

They undid the rope and riem, and fastened them together. Then they tied a

big stone to one end and lowered it over the precipice. It seemed ages before that stone touched the floor of the kloof. But at last it did so; and carefully marking the distance, they hauled it up again. Then, with a yard measure which they had brought with them, they measured the length required. Four hundred and twenty feet three inches, exactly, lay between them and the level of the treasure they sought. Hastily repacking the rope and riem on the four horses, they set off at once for camp, bent now on constructing their ladder of rope and hide as expeditiously as possible.

For three long days all hands were busily employed at work on the ladder. At length it was completed, and lay in four portions, ready to be conveyed to the edge of the cliff. It was a question whether or not they would use steps, or rungs, of wood or of hide. The latter were finally settled upon. It would have taken much longer to cut and prepare and fasten wooden rungs; and, upon the whole, steps of raw hide seemed to the adventurers lighter and more easy to fasten to the rest of the structure.

A long night's rest, and then, leaving Jan Kokerboom and Mangwalaan to guard the camp, they packed the ladder upon four oxen, and taking with them Seleti, the Bechuana lad, and September, the Zulu, set off for the cliff top. Arrived there, it was a matter of two long hours before they had pieced the four portions of the ladder together and made all ready. Then came the work of getting the ladder over the cliff. Poeskop had been busily reconnoitring the wall of the precipice before they set to work. He had chosen an excellent spot, where the rock walls sheered gently inwards towards the base. Very carefully they let the ladder over, and lowered it yard by yard. At last, after one or two delays, it touched the bottom of the kloof. Hearty cheers from Guy and Tom, in which Poeskop's shrill voice joined, signalized the successful accomplishment of a difficult piece of work.

"Now then," said Mr. Blakeney, "who's first?"

"I think I ought to be," cried Guy eagerly, "by right of patrimony. If my father had lived, he would certainly have gone down first."

"No, pater," urged Tom; "I'm the lighter of the two. Let me go. It will be safer."

"Well, on the whole," said Mr. Blakeney, smiling at their enthusiasm, "I think Poeskop had better go first. His claims are undeniable. His weight is about two and a half stone less than either, and he was the first of us to set eyes on the kloof. Let him go."

"Very well," said Guy.–"Poeskop, you go first, and I'll follow."

They had fastened the top end of the ladder with the greatest care to a sturdy wild olive tree which grew there. They had taken the utmost precaution to guard against any chafing at the edge of the cliff, and, to strengthen the ladder yet more, had added two extra pieces of hide to the side-supports for thirty feet

from the end where it was fastened to the tree. All being prepared, Poeskop, with his carbine slung to his back, put his foot on the first rung of the ladder, and began the descent. The little man had not an atom of fear in his composition, and he went down steadily, hand under hand, with the greatest composure. The rope and hide structure bore his weight easily. There was no strain, and it was evident that the great care which Mr. Blakeney had bestowed on the making had not been thrown away.

At last, after what to the watchers at the top seemed an interminable length of time, the Bushman reached the foot. Stepping out from under the base of the cliff to a spot where he could see his masters, he waved his hat and called out in English, "All right."

"Now then, it's my turn," cried Guy.

"All right," said his uncle. "Away you go. But take care. Don't be in a hurry."

Stepping over the edge of the precipice, and hanging on firmly with either hand, Guy went briskly down. It seemed a rather fearsome height; but the lad had a cool head and had been an expert climber, scaling many a lofty tree in search of hawks', rooks', and carrion crows' eggs. Still, more than three parts of the way down, as the cliff sheered inward and the ladder hung dangling in mid-air, it was none too pleasant. The task was presently accomplished, however, and Guy stood by Poeskop's side. Next came Tom, and after him Mr. Blakeney, Seleti and September remaining at the top to look after things and guard the end.

"My word," said Mr. Blakeney, as he set foot on the ground with a sigh of relief, "that's one of the nastiest jobs I ever tackled. I was never much of a climber as a boy, and I didn't quite realize what such a descent was like until I was ten paces over the cliff and looked downward. It's more the sort of game for rock rabbits and lizards than for a douce, middle-aged man."

"Never mind, pater," said Tom, who had slipped down the ladder with the ease of a lamplighter, "you'll soon get used to it. After another ascent and descent you'll think nothing of it."

"Don't you make any mistake, my boy," retorted his father. "It's very easy for a light, limber lad like you to get down that ladder. You'll find it a vastly different job getting up. Four hundred and twenty feet of rope-ladder *upwards* is a stiff task, and you'll find yourself not so keen to do it very often–I'm convinced of that fact."

All four now being safely landed at the bottom of the kloof, the question which instantly absorbed their attention was, Where was the gold? Poeskop led the way, and, walking swiftly, at a pace certainly exceeding four miles an hour, they hastened towards the far end of the valley.

"Hullo!" cried Tom, as a handsome little reddish antelope, spotted and lined with white, bounded away from one patch of bush to another. "Bushbuck, by all

that's wonderful! We've seen pallah. I wonder what other kind of game is shut up in this kloof."

Almost as the words came out of his mouth he was answered, for a magnificent bull koodoo strolled out of a thorn grove by the river a hundred yards away, and, with a family party of hornless cows and young animals, stood staring at the intruders, who now in their turn halted to gaze at the spectacle.

"You beauties!" said Mr. Blakeney enthusiastically. "It seems a shame almost to intrude upon you! And, indeed, we won't shoot here unless we are absolutely driven to it. It's a place of enchantment, and we ought not to bring death here if we can help it."

Forward they went again. After walking twenty minutes, Poeskop crossed the river at a shallow ford where a sandbank ran out into the stream, and stopping, said, "Baas, I think we shall find the gelt here."

Chapter XVI.
GATHERING GOLD.

Instantly they all set to work with a feverish intensity which almost surprised themselves. Poeskop was hunting about on the big spit of sand and shingle, quartering the surface very much as a pointer quarters its ground in search of game. In less than five minutes he had found what he expected, and, holding up between his right finger and thumb a flattish object, which shone perceptibly in the strong sunlight, exclaimed,–

"*Here so, baas! Here is de gelt!*"

One and all of the trio searching near him forsook their task and rushed up to him. Mr. Blakeney took the piece of metal from the Bushman's outstretched hand. It was a flattish nugget, pale yellow in colour, smooth and rounded as to its edges, manifestly much water-worn, and measuring about three inches in length by one in breadth. He examined it very closely, weighed it in his open palm, and said quietly,–

"Yes, that's gold, right enough. Where that came from there ought to be lots more. Guy, I congratulate you. We have accomplished our object, and I think the search is likely to be a very profitable one." Then, glancing at Poeskop's delighted expression, he added in Dutch, "Well done, Poeskop; you were quite right. The gold is here. We must now set to work and find all we can. I suppose there's

plenty of it?"

"*Banje* [plenty]!" replied the Bushman, his odd yellow face expanded into the widest grin of which it was capable. "*Banje!*"

"Well, now," said Mr. Blakeney, "what we have to do is to explore this place carefully and systematically. To-day, and for the next week, we'll go over the surface and work our way upstream towards the ravine at the head of the kloof. When we've gone over the surface, we'll set to work with pick and shovel, and wash the gravel and soil. We shall have to knock up some kind of cradle, but I know how to do that. I was on the Lydenburg alluvial fields, in the Eastern Transvaal, in 1875, and saw a good deal of rough mining. I knew at once that this was a real gold nugget. We'll have a test at the wagon to-night, but I haven't the least doubt in the world that this nugget, which weighs about four ounces, is the genuine metal. That, at £3, 15s. per ounce, means £15–not by any means a bad result for about five minutes' work."

"Splendid, pater!" put in Tom enthusiastically. "Why, I feel like a millionaire already." As he spoke, he was turning over some gravel with the tip of his boot. "Hullo!" he said, suddenly stooping and picking up something small and bright. "Here's another!"

And so in truth it was. Tom's nugget was smaller than that found by Poeskop, and was rounder in shape. But a nugget it was, of pure gold, free from any trace of quartz, and weighing about an ounce and a half; and the party were proportionately delighted. They now set to work, and, arming themselves with sticks, cut from the neighbouring bush, for the purpose of turning over the gravel, hunted with minute care over the big spit and in the clear shallows of the stream flowing by. By twelve o'clock, when they knocked off for half an hour's rest, and ate some lunch under the grateful shade of an adjacent acacia tree, they had all been more or less lucky. Poeskop had gathered up nine nice nuggets of varying size. Next to him Guy had been most successful, having picked up seven; while Mr. Blakeney and Tom followed with five each.

"I'm going to keep my best nugget and give it to mother, to make a brooch or a bracelet of," said Tom, as he dived into his pockets and examined his spoil.

"All right, Tom," added Guy; "I'll do the same by Ella. There's a fine nugget, which ought to make her a real good necklet."

"And I'll provide for Marjory," said Mr. Blakeney, laughing at the lads' eagerness. "But where does Arthur come in?"

"Oh, I'll look after Arthur," said Tom. "I feel such a bloated capitalist that I can provide for anybody. There," he went on, selecting a good nugget, "is Arthur's *dot* or dowry, or whatever you like to call it."

Lunch over, and Mr. Blakeney's pipe finished, they went to work again. From half-past twelve till three o'clock they steadily pursued their investigations.

At two o'clock the greatest and most amazing discovery of the day was made by Guy. While turning over some gravel, just at the edge of the stream, he came upon what he took to be a submerged, rounded stone, of which there were plenty scattered about the bed and edges of the rivulet. In trying to push this out of its cradle of sand and gravel he found it unexpectedly heavy. At last he shifted it from the soil in which it lay, and lifted it out. Its weight astonished him. Suddenly a thought flashed across his mind. He whipped his hunting-knife from the sheath, and scraped away a coating of what looked like rusty soil which covered it. Then, cutting into the stone, a streak of bright yellow showed instantly. The lump was solid gold. His shouts brought the rest of the party running up to him.

"Here's something like a nugget!" said the lad, with flushed face. "Look, uncle, it's gold right enough; and it weighs, I should think, at least ten pounds. It's certainly the weight of a light pair of dumb-bells!"

Mr. Blakeney stooped and picked up the stone, and carefully examined it. Then, taking out his knife, he cut into it as Guy had done. Again there showed a streak of bright yellow.

"Yes, that's gold right enough," he said, in answer to Guy's intense look; "and it must weigh well over ten pounds. I see there's just a thin skin, apparently of quartz, on one side. Deduct, say, a couple of pounds for that and quartz further inside, and you have something like eight or nine pounds of virgin gold. A magnificent find, indeed! I congratulate you, Guy, with all my heart."

Leaving the big nugget, they worked till three, and then knocked off for the day. The occupation was so exciting, so entrancing a one, that it was difficult to tear themselves away. But, as Mr. Blakeney pointed out, they had the climb out of the kloof before them, and an hour's walk to camp, and they would scarcely reach the wagon much before sunset.

The valley, as they walked down it on their way to the ladder, looked marvellously fair. Flights of wild duck, geese, widgeon, and teal flew up and down stream. A big troop of guinea-fowl, at least fifty or sixty strong, was making its way to some favourite roosting-place; the sharp, metallic cry of the various members of the flock, calling to one another, sounded curiously resonant in this rock-engirdled kloof. Many birds of lovely plumage flitted hither and thither; occasionally a small steinbuck, duyker, or bushbuck would dart away in front of them. The flowers and flowering shrubs starring the green of the kloof and climbing the cliffsides added not a little to the beauty of the scene.

"What a lovely spot, uncle!" said Guy, as they marched steadily forward. "I feel almost as if I should like to throw up gold-digging, and settle for life in such a paradise."

"I'm afraid, Guy," replied his uncle, "you would soon grow tired of the place. It's very beautiful, certainly; but it's mighty lonely. And you would have a rare

business to keep yourself supplied with even the bare necessaries of life. Think of the long trek from Mossamedes–six weeks' travel before your tea and coffee, and sugar and other small luxuries, can reach you. Take my word for it. No one has enjoyed the life of the hunter and explorer more than I have done. I knocked about, as you know, for years in South Africa before I settled down. After a time, even the most inveterate wanderer begins to sigh for rest and some of the comforts of civilization. I speak of what I know. I dislike town life; and the huddling together of huge populations, with an immense deal of misery for two-thirds of the poorer folk, is to me absolutely hateful. I believe the system, for which machinery is largely answerable, is absolutely wrong, and will lead to untold misfortunes to the so-called civilized nations in the future, if persisted in. But on the other hand, fascinating as is the life of the wilderness for a time–say a year or two at a spell–you would become weary of it if you had to settle down in such a place as this, fair though it is, for the rest of your existence. The fact is, mankind is to a great extent gregarious, and you would want some kind of company as an occasional relief from the monotony of too much solitude."

"Besides," broke in Tom, who had been listening quietly to his father's ideas, "I should say this kloof, jolly as it looks, would be pretty feverish–wouldn't it, pater?–especially after the rains."

"Yes, Tom; I think it would. This country is a good deal nearer the equator than British Bechuanaland, which I take to be the healthiest part of South Africa; and where you get the combination of moisture and heat you are bound to have fever. That reminds me, we shall have to look after our health on the homeward trek. The rains haven't fairly set in yet, but they will soon, and I shall have to put you fellows on a course of quinine. I don't want to take you home mere pallid spectres, like men who have been suffering from Zambesi fever."

They reached the rope-ladder at length, and then began the upward climb. As Mr. Blakeney had warned them, the ascent was a very different matter from the journey down. For the first fifty feet or so, as the ladder swung and swayed in empty air, it was by no means pleasant progression; and by the time they had reached the top, all were out of breath and exhausted.

"My word, pater!" gasped Tom, as he threw himself on the ground and lay panting. "Shall we have to do this often? It's a beast of a climb, and our gold will be jolly hardly won if we're to have much of this sort of thing."

Mr. Blakeney sat up. Evidently he was thinking hard.

"Well," he said, "it is a terribly tough, as well as a very nasty, climb. I for one don't want to attempt it very often. It's worse than I bargained for. I think we'll have to camp in the kloof till we've finished our gold search."

Poeskop, who had stayed behind to make the ends of the ladder fast to two stout bushes which grew near the foot, and so prevent the unpleasant oscillation

of the last fifty odd feet, now made his appearance. The sight of his queer little sharp-chinned face (now streaming from the toil of the climb), as it appeared over the edge of the cliff, sent Guy and Tom, and indeed Mr. Blakeney himself, into fits of laughter, to which the good-humoured Bushman freely responded.

"What ho! Poeskop!" cried Tom; adding in Dutch, "How do you like the climb?"

"Hard work, Baas Tom," responded Poeskop cheerily, as he squatted on his hams to rest, and wiped the sweat from his face with his usual handkerchief, a jackal's tail. "But I've seen harder jobs even than this. If you had lived the life of a wild Bushman, as I did till I was a grown man, you'd soon understand that a day like this is mere child's play. Nowadays I know that I get two good meals every single day of my life, rain or shine. When I was a lad the great puzzle of my life was to find or catch food at all. When your skorf comes to you as easily as it does to me now, a day's work is just nothing at all. Why, baas, as a lad of ten or twelve, I've travelled three days at a stretch, fifty miles a day, without food or water, and thought nothing much about it."

"Yes," said Tom reflectively; "I quite see your point. A hard day's work to a well-fed, healthy man, who gets his breakfast and dinner 'regular,' is a mere healthy exercise canter. Still, Poeskop, it was a tough climb, eh?"

"Ja, baas," responded the Bushman, grinning; "but think of what you have in your pockets."

Tom looked down at his breeches pockets, bulging with nuggets, and roared with laughter.

"Quite so, Poeskop," he said; "it's worth it all."

They now started with Seleti and September, who had spent a quiet and perfectly uneventful day at the cliff top, and made their way rapidly down to the wagon. There, after their supper, they turned to their treasure, which meanwhile reposed in a Kaffir blanket, and Mr. Blakeney, having got out his scales, began to estimate the value of the day's find. Altogether, not counting Guy's big nugget, which they christened "Poeskop's Pride," they had gathered forty-nine nuggets, giving a total weight of ninety-eight ounces. This amount of gold, at the value of £3, 15s. per ounce, would figure out therefore at a total of £367. These nuggets, varying in size and weight from a pea to more than five ounces, had scarcely any indication of quartz or other extraneous substance about them, and were manifestly nearly all pure and solid metal. Deducting £17 for wastage, Mr. Blakeney estimated their value at not less than £350.

Then came Guy's monster nugget to be dealt with. It weighed exactly twelve pounds ten ounces. At a liberal estimate the thin coating of quartz running down one side, and other impurities with which it was coated, could not possibly exceed two pounds. This would leave a weight of gold of nine pounds

ten ounces, or, reduced to ounces, one hundred and eighteen ounces. At £3, 15s. per ounce, then, "Poeskop's Pride" was worth £442 at the least. Adding this sum to the £350, the value of the smaller nuggets, a total of £792 would represent the value of the day's work.

"Not by any means a bad day's work, even for four hard-working men like ourselves," said Mr. Blakeney, with a smile, as he looked round at his audience–the two lads and Poeskop.

"I should think not, indeed," added Guy.

Mr. Blakeney now went to the wagon, and produced a bottle of champagne which, with five others, he had brought for such high occasions as the present; and as medicine, if occasion needed. Opening the bottle–it was Giesler 'eighty-nine, a first-rate brand–he poured out a tot all round in the *kommetjes*, or little earthenware basins, used by the Boers and most up-country trekkers for coffee. Then they pledged one another, and drank to the complete success of the expedition. Poeskop, as pioneer of the grand discovery, was served out with a drink of the same excellent liquor. He had never tasted or even seen champagne before, and the effervescing wine, getting into his broad nostrils, set him off in so violent a fit of sneezing that he upset the remainder of his tot.

"My baas," he said presently, after he had somewhat recovered, "I don't think I like this medicine. It is not so good as 'pain-killer' [a drug beloved of all African natives], and I would much rather have a *soupje* of Cango brandwein."

The Bushman's struggles with his champagne, and his plaintive speech after the mishap, were received with much laughter.

"All right, Poeskop," said Mr. Blakeney, "you shall have the Cango."

Going to the locker of the wagon, he brought out a bottle of the good Cape brandy of that name, and, pouring out a dram, handed it to the Bushman. Poeskop, smacking his broad lips over this liquor, was at once satisfied, and expressed himself as more than well pleased at the exchange. The rest of the men were, in honour of the evening, also each served out with a tot of the same spirit. At ten o'clock a merry evening beneath the stars came to an end, and all sought their resting places.

Next morning Mr. Blakeney announced his intention of trying to get the wagon up to the cliff, near where they had let down the rope-ladder. It would be a hard and difficult trek, and some trees and bush would have to be cut down. But he had carefully surveyed the ascent by which they reached the place, and he thought it could be accomplished. His chief reason for getting the wagon up was, that he disliked very greatly the idea of maintaining two separate camps at some distance apart from each other. He knew that it was by no means improbable that Karl Engelbrecht, and any allies he might get together, would make another attack on them. A strong camp might be formed near the ladder. There was a

fountain in the hill close by; and it would be much more convenient to load the wagon there than to have to carry every ounce of gold they won each day down to their present camping ground.

All parties, including Poeskop and the other native servants, heartily approved of the scheme; and the whole of that day, therefore, was spent in clearing a road up the long and steep mountain ascent, over the nek, and on to the plateau overlooking the Gold Kloof. Next day they inspanned the oxen, now much refreshed and recruited by their rest and good feeding, and ascended the long mountain slope. It was, as Mr. Blakeney had anticipated, a tough trek, but it was accomplished. They passed the nek, gained the plateau, and made a permanent camp within a hundred yards of the cliff edge overlooking the Gold Kloof. The position was an excellent one against attack. Their rear rested against the base of a mountain peak above them; they had a secure water supply; and any assault delivered against them must be made across the open plateau. There was plenty of good grazing for the cattle and horses among the long grass which here covered the plateau. Occasionally the oxen were taken down to the valley, where they had first outspanned, for change of diet. At night they were kraaled in a strong thorn scherm, which effectually protected them against the raids of leopards, lions, or other Carnivora.

This matter having been arranged satisfactorily, the gold-seekers turned their attention entirely to the work of denuding the kloof of as much of its treasure as they could find and make their own within a given time. For three days they descended the ladder at early morning, climbing up to their camp each night with loads of gold. But the labour entailed in this process seemed so great and so unnecessary, that Mr. Blakeney finally made up his mind to take down food and necessaries for a week, and camp in the kloof near the gold they sought. They found that this plan obviated much labour and saved much time. Jan Kokerboom was left in command of the main camp, with the strictest commands to keep the most vigilant watch and ward. Seleti, Mangwalaan, and September were each sent out during the week to take a glance round the country, to inspect the pass, and to ascertain whether any foes were approaching the kloof. Once in three days Poeskop was sent up the ladder to receive Jan Kokerboom's report.

For six days on end the four diggers, now living in the Gold Kloof, stuck resolutely to their task. Each day they worked steadily up the stream, unearthing nuggets, plying pick and shovel, and washing soil in a rough cradle which Mr. Blakeney constructed. Their success was wonderful. Poeskop had spoken truly when he had affirmed that the kloof was full of gold. During the first six days' work, after the day of the opening search, they gathered never less than four hundred ounces; on two of these, thanks to some large nuggets, their finds totalled close on six hundred and a little over eight hundred ounces respectively.

Each night they camped under the shelter of some bush, close to the ladder. They slept in their blankets, with a good fire at their feet; and the weather remaining fine and open, with little dew, they were perfectly comfortable. They had with them a kettle in which to boil their coffee, a three-legged Kaffir pot, which served them for baking and stewing, and a saucepan. They had brought down a supply of meal and some baking powder, from which Tom or Guy each day made and baked sufficient bread for their wants. The kloof, a magnificent natural game preserve, provided them with as much game, furred or feathered, as they cared to shoot; and their stew-pot each night furnished them with a savoury meal of the flesh of buck or guinea-fowl, or wild pigeon or partridge. Sometimes they shot a couple or two of fat wild duck, mostly *geelbek* (yellow-bill), the best of all South African wildfowl, which, baked in the three-legged pot, with embers above and below, and basted with a little fat occasionally, afforded them a delicious banquet.

These were delightful days, which are likely to remain for ever marked in letters of red in the memories of the two young adventurers and of Mr. Blakeney. The toil was hard, but healthy; the kloof was wonderfully beautiful; the weather was magnificent; the gipsy-like existence was fascinating; the daily excitement and anticipation of seeking and unearthing great quantities of the most valuable mineral in the world kept them one and all at concert pitch.

The following Sunday, having climbed up their ladder on the Saturday night, they enjoyed as a day of rest in the main camp. After their work of the preceding six days, they were all glad enough to spend the day quietly about the wagon–resting, reading, writing up their diaries, and listening to the reports of Jan Kokerboom and his subordinates. Nothing had happened to disturb the quiet tenor of life in camp during the absence of the gold-seekers. Nothing had been seen or heard of Engelbrecht or his followers, although a vigilant watch had been maintained, and the neighbouring country occasionally patrolled. Jan Kokerboom had shot a leopard one night, close to the camp fire, as it clawed down the venison of a koodoo which had been recently slain. The brute, stretching itself up to the low branch of a tree on which the venison hung, within fifteen feet of the camp fire, had been observed by Jan. Snatching up his rifle he shot it in the throat, breaking its spine, and instantly ending its predatory career.

For three weeks the gold-diggers steadily pursued their search. Thoroughly exploring the river-side, they were occasionally delayed for several days together by the finding of some unexpectedly rich deposit in the banks of the stream, or some smooth spit of sand, left bare during the absence of the rains. The heap of gold which they were accumulating each day near the foot of the ladder was steadily assuming large proportions. In another week or two, Mr. Blakeney, who had carefully weighed their finds every evening, calculated that they would

literally have made their pile, and be ready to trek for the coast and home.

Chapter XVII.
THE SHADOWERS' ATTACK.

Towards the end of the fourth week of the search, while the diggers were at work at the far end of the kloof, they were startled one morning by the figure of a man running up the valley towards them.

"Hallo!" cried Guy excitedly, as he paused from his work with the pick and stretched his back; "who on earth is this coming our way? Look, uncle! I believe it's Jan!"

Mr. Blakeney shaded his eyes and looked down the kloof.

"Yes," he said, after regarding the figure attentively, "it's Jan. What can he want? He must have news of importance. I suppose it's Karl Engelbrecht again."

Jan Kokerboom, who presently trotted up, had news undoubtedly, and news that was disturbing. On the previous afternoon, Seleti (who had, under Mr. Blakeney's instructions, been exploring the country for any signs of Engelbrecht and his gang) had come across the spoor of two mounted men, who had evidently tracked the wagon up to the entrance of the mountains, noted the valley up which it had passed, and, turning rein again, had cantered away.

"Well, I expected this," said Mr. Blakeney, his brow knitted in thought. "I never imagined that Karl Engelbrecht, who knows what we are after, and is writhing under two nasty rebuffs, would give up his revenge or leave his thirst for plunder unsatisfied. These men, who have shadowed us all the way from the coast, are shadowing us still. We shall have to look out for their next assault, which, I believe, will be a desperate one. The business now is to find out how many there are of them, and what their plans may be.

"Sit down, lads," he continued, filling and lighting his pipe; "we'll knock off for a spell.–Poeskop," he went on, speaking in Dutch, "you must go back with Jan, climb the ladder, take two or three days' supplies of biltong with you, and go and look up Karl Engelbrecht. If they are still shadowing us, you must just shadow them. Find out, if you can, when they mean to have a shot for us, and then cut back as fast as your legs can carry you and give us warning. We must be prepared for them, and I've no doubt we shall be able to give them a pretty hot reception."

The curious wrinkling of the yellow skin of Poeskop's face, and the humorous twinkle that showed in his Mongol-like eyes, convinced the three white men that the task proposed was thoroughly to the Bushman's liking. His splendid white teeth gleamed expressively as he broke into a wide grin of satisfaction.

"Ja, baas," he said; "I shall becreep them. Poeskop was not bred a Bushman for nothing; and he will spy out Karl Engelbrecht's camp, and find out what he means to do, and when he is going to attack. He has had two hard knocks already; we shall give him a third, which will make him what you call 'sit up.' But baas must have a care: this time Karl will do his hardest to kill us all and take the gelt."

The two natives now started back for the ladder and the main camp. Mr. Blakeney and the two boys continued the work of digging till afternoon, when, taking with them the gold they had found that day, they made their way back to the foot of the cliff. Here, adding their nuggets to the heap already accumulated, they climbed the ladder, and found themselves once more in the security of their own camp. Nothing further had happened that day, and Poeskop had long since started away on his journey of reconnaissance.

Meanwhile it is necessary to return to Karl Engelbrecht and his proceedings. After the escape of Guy from his camp, the death of the Griqua, his own repulse by Guy and Poeskop, and the wounding of another of his men, the Boer, although raging furiously at the ill-success of his schemes, had felt himself scarcely strong enough to attack a party who were evidently quite capable of defending themselves. In this feeling he was strengthened by his colleague in rascality, Antonio Minho, who by no means relished the business of attacking the English party, except with a much superior force.

Engelbrecht knew of a commando of Boers who had been away in the country to the north, engaged on a punitory and marauding expedition against a tribe of natives. He calculated that, by trekking steadily for ten days, he would intercept this party on their return journey. His calculations were rightly made, and he fell in with his freebooting fellow-countrymen returning to Humpata in triumph and great spirits. They had had, from their point of view, a first-rate time, having thoroughly subdued the tribe against which they had marched, killed a number of unfortunate natives, burnt their corn and crops, and captured some two thousand head of cattle.

Karl, who was hand and glove with these men, whom he had often himself led on commando, had no great difficulty in persuading some of them to accompany him on a fresh expedition of plunder. He held out high inducement in the shape of gold, which, it was known, the Englishmen were in search of; and the plan of inflicting revenge and humiliation on men of that accursed nation had, in addition, no small weight with the British-hating filibusters. Eight stalwart Boers, then, with two wagons and a number of well-armed native servants, sig-

nified their intention of aiding Karl Engelbrecht in his new campaign, and sharing the rich booty which they counted on lifting from the Englishmen. Halting for a few days to rest and recruit their trek oxen and horses, the party returned upon Engelbrecht's wagon spoor, and presently found themselves at the place where the Englishmen had last been sighted.

It was not difficult to hit off the wagon spoor of the gold-seekers' party; and now, eager to come to grips with their opponents, of whom they counted on making an easy prey, the Boers presently came in sight of the mountains wherein the Englishmen were so busily engaged in gathering the fortune that lay awaiting them.

Halting at this point, Engelbrecht with one of his Boer allies had ridden into the valley and convinced himself that here, at last, he had run the hated Englishmen to ground. Somewhere in these rude hills his foes were at work. It would be his business to trace them to their gold deposits, to locate accurately their camp, and then, descending upon them some morning at early dawn, attack them in such overwhelming force as to effectually beat down all opposition. Revenge–a bloody revenge, Karl meant it to be–was within his grasp; and gold–plenty of it, captured from his enemies–would, he firmly believed, make a man of him for the remainder of his life.

Already Karl saw himself back in the good Transvaal country, the owner of some of the richest farms in Marico, with a great, a palatial, farmstead of his own, surrounded by vast flocks and herds, and a wielder of much power in the national Volksraad. Why, indeed–his broad chest dilated as he thought of it–should he not aspire to like power and prominence with Paul Kruger himself! Paul was growing old; in a few years his course would be run, and some strong man would be needed to take his place. Thus dreamed Karl Engelbrecht, as he rode back to his wagon that day after spooring his adversaries to their mountain retreat, where, as he rightly calculated, they had been now some weeks at work in their hunt for gold.

Karl, after consultation with Antonio Minho, had soon laid his plans. That afternoon he dispatched his most trusted spy–a Hottentot man, Quasip by name–to spend a couple of days in exploring the interior of the mountain and spying out the land. Quasip was to keep off the wagon track, to creep about quietly, and to find out exactly what the Englishmen were doing and where their camp lay.

Quasip returned at the end of two days and nights, having perfectly accomplished his mission. He had located the English camp, observed its situation and defensive advantages, peered over into the Gold Kloof, noted the rope-ladder, and also the pile which the Englishmen had accumulated, without attracting the notice or suspicion of those within the camp. The Hottentot had entered the valley and made himself acquainted with the Gold Kloof before Mr. Blakeney's

boy Seleti had discovered the approach of the Boers; and he had been able to accomplish his mission and make his report to his master without detection–a clear gain for Karl Engelbrecht and his party.

But Poeskop meanwhile, on his part, had been by no means idle. He had located the freebooters' camp, and ascertained the strength of the Boers and their men. Returning from his expedition, and wandering, as he always did, hither and thither in search of any spoor or sign that might tell of danger, he had encountered a footprint that was unknown to him: a spy had entered the valley since the two horsemen reported by Seleti had ridden in. Poeskop spoored the Hottentot's tracks to the vicinity of his master's camp, and satisfied himself that his rival–for he saw at once that he had a rival, and a very clever one–had made himself acquainted with all their doings. He had, in fact, convinced himself that now indeed danger threatened speedily. Returning to camp, he made his report on the very afternoon on which Quasip the Hottentot had told his own master of his discoveries. Both spies had accomplished their tasks to admiration: neither had encountered the other. Yet Poeskop had scored, inasmuch as he knew what the Boer spy knew; while the Hottentot and his master were ignorant, thus far, that they themselves had been spied upon.

Poeskop entered the camp, and at once unburdened himself of his information. Mr. Blakeney was scarcely surprised. He was anticipating attack, and had long since taken means to repel it. But it was a serious matter to know that eight fresh Boers–men who could shoot, and were thoroughly used to veldt fighting–were now with Karl Engelbrecht. These, with Karl himself and Minho, would raise the white attacking force to ten men. Add to this some six or seven natives, who could shoot more or less well, and it was clear that the little garrison above the Gold Kloof would have to confront almost overwhelming odds.

Still their situation was a very strong one. Any assault made upon them must be delivered from the front. Already, behind the thick and impenetrable fence of thorns, they had raised stone breastworks, through or over which they could shoot while they themselves were almost perfectly concealed. Their water supply was just behind them; and for food, if the siege should last more than a day or two, which was very improbable, they must sacrifice one of their spare oxen. As for arms, they possessed enough to furnish six of their whole party with two rifles apiece; two others would each have a rifle. There remained one over, which would bring up their total weapons of defence to fifteen. To these might be added four shot-guns, which, loaded with buckshot and used at close quarters, would be of sensible assistance.

Poeskop, after a night's rest, was again dispatched on a journey of investigation. The little Bushman was now thoroughly in his element. He craved excitement, of which hunting and warfare represented to him the highest forms;

and he craved, and saw with prophetic eyes, revenge–a final revenge–upon Karl Engelbrecht. He returned the same night with serious news. The Boers had quitted their camp that afternoon, and, leaving a sufficient guard to look after the wagons, had ridden into the mountain. With them were six native servants, carrying rifles. They were now resting in some thick bush at the commencement of the first valley, about six miles away.

"That means," said Mr. Blakeney, "that they will attack us to-night or at early morning. Well, we shall have a sleepless night; but we'll be ready for them, anyway."

Night came; and after supper each man settled himself in his blanket by the post assigned to him, behind the breastwork of stones. Twenty yards beyond this extended the long and thick hedge of thorn bush which ran right up the edge of the cliff. Beyond that, the declivity that led up to their camp was bare for nearly two hundred yards. They had cut away the last patches of bush on this open glacis, over which their enemies would have to advance. They could only be outflanked by their foes breaking through the thorn fence on the side near the precipice and getting round that way. To guard against this contingency, Mr. Blakeney and Tom took positions which covered that corner. Guy came next. Next to him would be Poeskop; and on their right, again, Jan Kokerboom, September, Seleti, and Mangwalaan. These two last, being somewhat excitable Bechuanas, were warned against letting off their rifles too rapidly, and were enjoined to fire slowly and take careful aim. Jan Kokerboom, himself a cool and excellent shot, had the task of looking after these two and September the Zulu.

It seemed an interminably long night. There was no moon, but the stars burned overhead with a wonderful brilliancy. In their camp all was as quiet as the grave. A low fire burned. It was Mr. Blakeney's plan to let their assailants believe that they were all sleeping, quite unaware of any attack to be made against them. Poeskop, at his own special request, was abroad, away in front of their defences, creeping about in the darkness, listening intently for any sound that should herald the Boers' approach.

Hour after hour slipped by on leaden wings. To the watchers the tension was very great. It seemed as if, amid all the anxiety and strain of waiting, the night would never pass. After one o'clock Guy and Tom, in spite of the expected assault, found it very hard to keep awake. Mr. Blakeney let them sleep; and for an hour or two the lads enjoyed the sweetest slumber, so it seemed to them, that they had ever experienced. At three Mr. Blakeney awoke them. Pulling themselves together, they found themselves presently wide awake and wonderfully refreshed and heartened. Another hour went by, and still there was no break in the serene peace of the African night. In a little while Poeskop, who had been scouting all night, crept into the laager by a narrow loophole reserved for him next the

mountain wall, and crawled along the line. He reached Guy.

”They come!” he whispered in Dutch. ”Look out, baas!”

This message he repeated to Mr. Blakeney and Tom, ten and twenty yards farther on, and then returned to his post near Guy, where his spare rifle lay. Still no sign of their enemies. Would they never come? It seemed to Guy, to Tom, to all of them, as if for some reason the assault was not to be delivered. But the Boers knew their own plans, and had excellent reasons of their own for postponing their attack.

Now in the far east the paling sky tells that day is near at hand, and the light is perceptibly coming. A faint glow of colour shows in the heavens; the gray east is turning to a pale green.

Hark! What was that? The hearts of the men waiting and watching beat loudly within their breasts. Even to the boldest–and there was not a coward in the little line of defenders–the moments of suspense before the actual fighting begins are always trying. The sound of stealthy footsteps could be distinguished. Certainly some one was approaching from the front. Then suddenly, in the dim morning light, there rose from behind the thorn fence in front of them many forms, and a number of men began to pull down, in desperate haste and with frantic energy, the outer line of defence. If that object were attained, and the attackers obtained an entrance, their numbers would inevitably tell, and the defenders would be overwhelmed.

”Shoot, my lads!” cried Mr. Blakeney, his voice ringing clear and sharp on the still morning air. Instantly there followed the report of eight rifles. Four of the attackers fell, and two others were slightly hit–at twenty yards range there could be no missing; and yells of rage, mingled with groans and curses in vehement Dutch, arose from behind the thorns. But the Boers, surprised though they were, were by no means yet done with. Karl Engelbrecht, standing at the middle of one line of attack, called to his men to fire, and, taking rapid aim in front of him, let drive. Of his ten unwounded supporters nine followed his example, one native skulking with the wounded. The Boer volley was at once answered by the second discharge of the little English garrison, who, crouching behind their breastworks, had their assailants at great advantage. Again two of the attacking force fell, while another (Engelbrecht himself) was wounded.

The Boers and their natives had, by this time, more than enough of it. With one consent they broke and fled, nor stayed their career till they were out of sight. A hearty cheer rose from the defenders as they realized their victory.

So soon as the Boers ran, Mr. Blakeney called to his men to cease firing; and beyond the discharge of a couple of bullets, which the impulsive Mangwalaan and his next-door neighbour Seleti sent after them to hasten their flight, the retreating filibusters were not further molested. When he had convinced himself that the

fight was really over and the victory won, Mr. Blakeney walked along his thin line of defence, and asked what injuries had been sustained.

Thanks to their excellent measures of defence, the casualties of his party had been surprisingly light. Mr. Blakeney himself had been hit in the fleshy part of the right shoulder; but beyond some bleeding, which Guy and Tom at once attended to, no great damage had been done. Seleti, the most excitable of the party, who had jumped up after the first volley and exposed himself to the Boer bullets, had sustained a nasty wound, which had pierced his left shoulder, and left him a cripple for weeks. Guy found himself with his hat off after the affray, and, picking it up, discovered that it was neatly punctured, within an inch of the top of his head, by two bullet-holes in front and rear. Tom had the lobe of his right ear grazed. Beyond these casualties, no other harm had been sustained by the gold-seekers.

Mr. Blakeney's flesh-wound having been washed and bound up, and Seleti's shattered shoulder similarly treated, the English party now pulled aside a corner of the thorn scherm and went down the line of their crippled opponents, whose groans and cries for assistance proclaimed that there was no further fight left in them. Three men lay dead. Among these was the Portuguese, Antonio Minho, with a bullet through his head. A big, burly Boer, identified by his wounded comrades as Hendrik Marais, lay also dead, shot through the heart; and a Damara wagon-driver had been also slain.

Of the five wounded men, three were Boers, two natives. Of these, one of the Dutchmen, his chest pierced by a .450 bullet, died within the hour; the remaining four had sustained wounds which, although more or less severe, seemed quite likely to yield to treatment. Collecting the rifles of these unfortunates, the defenders now carried the wounded men into their own camp, and, laying them down under the shade of the wagon, proceeded to dress their hurts. Then followed breakfast, which was welcome enough to all.

Chapter XVIII.

THE LAST OF KARL ENGELBRECHT.

At ten o'clock, shortly after they had again attended to the wounded men and given them some refreshment, Jan Kokerboom, who was patrolling up and down the line of defence, called out that a man was coming up the hill. Mr. Blakeney,

Guy, Tom, and Poeskop at once ran forward, and, mounting the stone breastwork, looked down the ascent. Sure enough, a single figure, that of a Boer, was seen to be approaching. He carried a rifle, to which was tied a dirty white handkerchief. Keeping their rifles at the ready, the garrison waited until the man had walked to within fifty yards, when Mr. Blakeney called out to him to put down his firearm. The man obeyed, and continued to advance, still holding the handkerchief at arm's length. The defenders now quitted their shelter and advanced to meet him.

"What do you want?" asked Mr. Blakeney in Dutch, as the man, a big sturdy Boer, with a red beard, came up to them.

"I've come," answered the man, "to say that my friends and I are sorry we ever threw in our lot with Karl Engelbrecht, and we want to know who is dead and what has happened to the wounded."

"Well, in the first place," replied Mr. Blakeney, eyeing his man steadily, and speaking to him very coolly, "it's rather late in the day, isn't it, to come to us in this way, after all the mischief that has been done. Your blood is upon your own heads, of course; but I have a shrewd suspicion that if you had caught us napping, we should have had a pretty bad time of it. How many of us would have been alive now, do you think, if your ruffianly friend Engelbrecht had got into our camp?"

The man actually blushed a furious red; his eyes stared at the ground in front of him; he knew not what to say.

"I suppose," continued Mr. Blakeney, "that, now you have been beaten, you are sorry for yourselves. It's a dirty game, surely, isn't it, attacking men who have done you no sort of injury. I don't know whether there's any shame left among you and your fellows, but you ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

The man at last found voice. "Yes," he said, "we are ashamed of ourselves, and that is why I've come to see you. I was always against this scheme of Engelbrecht's, but I was over-persuaded. I don't mind raiding Kaffirs, but I always said that it was a mistake going against white men."

"Rather a poor distinction, isn't it?" queried Mr. Blakeney. "The fact is, you back-country Boers have got into the habit of thinking that, where you go, rifles, and rifles only, are the law and the prophets. Sooner or later–sooner, I hope and believe, than later–you and your folk in the Transvaal and elsewhere will have to be taught that the day of the tyranny of the rifle is past, and that you will have to obey laws and behave decently like civilized folk. For fifty years–since your people left Cape Colony and entered the Transvaal–you have practically obeyed only such laws as pleased you."

The Boer did not like the lecture a bit. He twisted his right heel in the soil, and glanced sullenly at the Englishman.

"However," went on Mr. Blakeney, in a less serious tone, "I don't want to pursue an unpleasant subject, and I'm not much of a predicant.[#] But before I show you your wounded men, I want to know what you and your people are going to do."

[#] Predikant, Boer Dutch for preacher or parson.

"We are going to leave Karl Engelbrecht and trek back by ourselves to Benguela," returned the Boer; "and I am deputed to say we are all sorry we ever interfered with you."

"Well," answered Mr. Blakeney, "that's better news. Now come and look at your dead and wounded."

First assisting to bury the dead men, whose names were taken down by Mr. Blakeney, the Boer was conducted to the camp, where he spoke with his wounded comrades. The upshot of his visit was that two of the more lightly wounded Dutchmen were carried away that afternoon on horses sent up for them, while the remaining two, whose injuries precluded their immediate removal, were left in the English camp. At the end of a week these men also were in a fit state to travel, and, being carried down the hill in a rude litter, were got to their own wagons.

Three days later the same Boer envoy, Roelof Vorster, who had first appeared with the flag of truce, came, accompanied by a friend, for the last time to the Englishmen's camp. With them marched half a dozen native servants carrying six fine tusks of ivory. These were deposited near Mr. Blakeney's wagon. The Boers' mission was this. They wished, on behalf of themselves and their fellows, again to express their sorrow that they had joined forces with Karl Engelbrecht, and they desired to thank the Englishmen from their hearts for the aid, nursing, and care bestowed upon their wounded men; and they tendered the six tusks of ivory as some small token of their gratitude. Mr. Blakeney thanked them, and accepted the present.

"Not that we want the ivory," he remarked; "but I believe you honestly mean what you say. Take my advice. Give up the companionship of such rascals as Karl Engelbrecht, and make up your minds to leave filibustering alone. It doesn't pay you in the long run. When do you trek, and what has become of Engelbrecht?"

"We trek to-morrow early," returned Vorster. "I believe Engelbrecht treks also to-morrow. But we have no traffic with him now. He is the cause of our losses, and we have nothing more to say to him. Now, Meneer Blakeney, we have come to say farewell. You are an honest man, and we shall none of us forget your

kindness, and the kindness of the young meneers with you."

They had coffee together, said their good-byes, and the Boers quitted the camp. Next day, Poeskop, who had gone out to reconnoitre the Boer outspan place beyond the mountain, reported that all the wagons had departed, the Boers trekking west for Benguela, while Karl Engelbrecht's solitary wagon had gone northward by itself.

At last, then, the English party felt that their troubles and dangers were completely at an end. Their shadowers had vanished, defeated utterly. One of them, Antonio Minho, lay dead and buried above the Kloof of Gold; the other had taken himself off, his evil schemes wrecked, his plottings scattered to the winds. They breathed again, and were now all prepared to return to that absorbing quest on which they had travelled hither. Next morning the four diggers went down the ladder again, and settled themselves in the kloof for the last week of their gold quest. By that time Mr. Blakeney reckoned that their work would be accomplished, and that they would have accumulated gold to the value, roughly, of some £55,000. Over their camp fire, the evening before, they had been discussing these matters. Should they camp for a month longer, and trust to their good fortune bringing them yet further store of wealth? Although they had ransacked the more open deposits of the valley pretty thoroughly, they might look, with renewed exertion, to win probably another £20,000. And if they cared to spend more time, and embark in yet bigger operations, they might, by turning the course of the river, uncover still greater wealth. Such a task, however, even if they had the strength and the numbers to accomplish it, meant severe digging of many weeks' duration. Moreover, the rains were at hand, and in another month, probably, the pleasant stream, which now rippled so placidly through the kloof, would be a raging torrent, with which, until some months had elapsed, it would be impossible to deal.

"Well, uncle," said Guy, "for my part I shall have had enough of digging and gold-finding, after this next week's work. We have, as you say, already won, or in sight, some £55,000, which will be more than enough for the whole lot of us. If we want more we can come again some day, or perhaps get a concession from the Portuguese Government, peg out claims, and form a company."

"But," interrupted Mr. Blakeney, "I'm by no means certain that this kloof is in Portuguese territory at all. So far as I can discover, after much examination and cross-questioning of Poeskop, the Portuguese have never visited this piece of country at all, much less exercised any rights over it. I am inclined to think our gold valley lies in a kind of no-man's-land, and is not even owned or claimed by any sort of native chief. Sooner or later it may fall to the lot of England, which I heartily hope it may do.

"There is one matter you've touched upon, Guy," continued his uncle,

"which I think we ought to discuss here and now. Whose do you make out this gold to be that we have been digging out for these weeks past?"

"Why, the firm's," said Guy, with a laugh; "the long firm–you, Tom, and myself."

"No, that will hardly do, I think," answered Mr. Blakeney. "To you, most certainly, belongs the lion's share. If your father had lived he would have come here and made his fortune; and it is only right that you, to whom your father willed, as it were, this wonderful valley, should succeed him."

"My dear Uncle Charles," interrupted Guy eagerly, "please don't talk like that. What should I have done without you? You have fitted out the expedition, planned the whole thing, brought me here, shown me how to find the stuff–done everything, in fact. I know my father said something in his last letter about our going halves, but that is manifestly unfair to you, who have had the whole weight of this discovery on your shoulders. If you like to let me stand in to the extent of, say, one-third of the plunder, I shall be more than well content. Even a quarter, or less, would satisfy me well."

"My dear Guy," answered his uncle, "you are talking rank nonsense, and I can't listen to you. What I propose is this. You shall take two-thirds of the value of the gold, if and when we manage to get to Cape Town, or some other market. And, mind you, we haven't by any means marketed our stuff yet. Of the remaining one-third, I think Tom, for all his trouble, ought to have a share, say a quarter–or say £5,000–with which he can make a real good start in farming some day, and build himself a house. I think such a settlement ought to content us all."

"No, no, no, uncle!" broke in Guy. "I will never agree to any such absurd division. You have done everything for me, and practically carried me here and found the gold for me. Where on earth should I have been without you?"

After a good deal more discussion, Guy remained quite unconvinced by the quiet but weighty arguments of his uncle. Finally it was agreed between them that the arrangement ought to be as Guy's father had proposed, and that the gold should be divided equally between them. Then came the remuneration of the men. Poeskop, questioned as to what he would like to have as his reward for showing the way to the kloof, replied that he did not know–he would leave it to his masters. Perhaps enough money to buy a horse, a new rifle, and ten head of cattle would be about the mark. This, of course, his masters put aside as inadequate. Although the gold was of little use to him–in all these years he had never attempted to win or dispose of it–it was but fair that he should be well paid for his secret. He had expressed a wish to return to Bechuanaland with his new baases. It was arranged that the sum of £1,000 should be put at his disposal, so soon as the gold was realized. With this he could buy some land, stock it, and have enough over to purchase a wagon. As for the rest of the men, Mr.

Blakeney and the boys agreed that a hundred pounds apiece, in addition to the wages paid to them during the expedition, would be handsome remuneration for their services.

For the next few days, then, the four diggers, having descended once more into the kloof, were working away industriously, picking, and digging, and washing. They had skimmed most of the cream from the rich treasure of the valley, and the gold they now won had to be sought deeper and required much more labour. Still it was there, and their operations unearthed some wonderfully rich nuggets, weighing pounds instead of ounces. They felt, one and all, absolutely at peace in their pursuit. They had defeated their enemies, slain and wounded some, and driven off the remainder, and were now free from the long anxiety which had pursued them during their journey from the coast. The shadowers had vanished, and now not a cloud appeared in the sky of their prosperity. So thought all of them; all, that is, except Poeskop, whose mind oftentimes ran on recent events. Somehow the Bushman had always regretted that he had not traced Karl Engelbrecht farther afield in his flight. He knew Karl well–too well; he knew his savage and vengeful nature; and he could somehow never quite venture to assure himself that the man and his evil plottings were for ever done with. This feeling grew upon him, and on the fifth evening of their sojourn in the kloof it had overmastered him to such an extent that he begged his young baas and Mr. Blakeney to let him climb the ladder and spend a day in scouting about the surrounding country.

"Why," said Guy, with a smile, as they sat at supper that evening, "what can you possibly want to go spying again for? Our troubles from that quarter are all at an end. Engelbrecht and his friends had such a dose of it that they will never want to tackle us again. You're getting fanciful, Poeskop!"

"Ja, Baas Guy," returned the Bushman, with a grin; "I am fanciful. I always have been since I lived naked in the veldt and dug for roots. And my fancy now is that I should like to climb the ladder to-night, and go beyond the camp and have a look round. I feel restless, shut up here, and I want a change."

"But you can't climb to-night, Poeskop?" argued Mr. Blakeney. "I don't want to stop your going. I daresay it will do you good to have a day off and prowl around. But you had better wait till morning."

"*Nie,* baas," persisted the little man, "I think I will go to-night. There will be a young moon coming up directly, and I see well enough. I could climb that ladder, mind you, baas, if the night were as dark as pitch."

So Poeskop had his way, and presently, taking his carbine on his back, went silently to the ladder, and climbed away into the dim heights above them, with steps so secret and so stealthy that the watchers below heard and saw absolutely nothing. The Bushman disappeared into the night, vanishing up the cliff face

very much as a bat vanishes into the dark spaces in which it loves to make its flight.

And, in very sooth, Poeskop had reason for uneasiness. Karl Engelbrecht was not yet done with his revenge. After retiring beaten from the attack on the English camp, he had trekked out of the mountains, and outspanned with the remnant of his Boer allies some ten miles away. There, after mutual recriminations, the two parties split up, and the filibusters who had joined forces with him, disgusted with their losses and their ill-success, moved away for the coast. Engelbrecht himself, as had been observed by Poeskop, had trekked northward into unknown veldt. But the Boer, although he had betaken himself beyond the ken of the gold-seekers, had by no means abated one jot or tittle of the fierce anger and hatred that had for so long possessed him. In a few days he had recovered from the flesh wound sustained in the attack on the English camp. During these days of enforced quiet his mind, still consumed by an overpowering passion for revenge, turned over incessantly murderous plans against the men who had so lately defeated him. If, by some means, he could gain the gold valley and lie in ambush, he might surely, he thought to himself, with the aid of his henchman Quasip, a notably good shot, dispose of two of the most hated of his rivals without much difficulty. Poeskop and the man Blakeney should fall to their first two barrels, and they could surely manage the two lads thereafter. There were risks, it was true–risks which, in his calmer moments, he would have weighed in the balance many times before accepting; but in his present frame of mind the man saw red and nothing else. Revenge called him loudly back to the Gold Kloof; and go he must. Somehow or other he would find means of compassing the destruction of his foes.

Taking with him his Hottentot Quasip, and accompanied by a native after-rider mounted on a spare horse, Karl Engelbrecht then rode back for the mountains surrounding the Gold Kloof. He had with him a fortnight's supply of biltong and other necessaries, but he reckoned upon accomplishing his designs within a week. They approached the mountains by a narrow ravine some miles to the right of the main valley by which the gold-finders had found their way into the hills. By this means Engelbrecht hoped to escape any scouting observations made by the English party. From this ravine the after-rider, Klaas, was sent back with the three horses to Engelbrecht's outspan, two days distant, with minute instructions to return to the same place seven days thence.

Then, climbing the mountain, the Boer and his Hottentot set out to find the way to the Gold Kloof. It was a long and a difficult task, but, thanks to their instinct of locality, they made their way over the hills, and, passing under the vultures' peak, found themselves next day overlooking the Gold Kloof on the opposite side to that on which the rope-ladder hung. Several times during this

day they reconnoitred most carefully for the gold-searchers, whom they could see at work far beneath them. They passed on to the head of the kloof, and marked very carefully the cliffs and edges of the ravine whence issued the stream that ran down the gold valley.

"Now," said Engelbrecht to his companion, after regarding the place from every point of view for a long hour, "supposing we get down into the kloof by the rope-ladder yonder, and supposing we settle these precious folk below, what are we to do if their servants in the camp above cut or pull up the ladder?"

"*Ek wit nie, baas* [I don't know, master]," replied the Hottentot. "We should be in a nasty place."

"Well, I'll tell you," answered the Boer. "We could *build* our way out of the kloof by light ladders. There are two difficult places down this krantz which we couldn't scale. The rest is climbable. If we are put to it, we will build ladders, set them against these places, and get out. It is to be done. The axes we have with us I brought for some such job. I can make a ladder as well as any man in Benguela or Mossamedes, and if we are shut up in the kloof yonder we'll just set to work and build ourselves out of it. Two ladders, one of forty feet at the base, another of thirty feet half-way up, will, I reckon, pass us over those dangerous places; the rest is climbable."

That afternoon the two men, making a wide circuit, got round the head of the ravine, and approached the Englishmen's camp in the rear. The camp, as we have seen, had at its back a shoulder of the mountain. Engelbrecht, in the evening, before sunset, reconnoitred this shoulder, and discovered that with care the descent could be made. There were many bushes, by the aid of which the steep declivity could be accomplished. The English party, as a matter of fact, had somewhat neglected this approach. They knew only of one avenue to their camp, that by which they themselves had made their way thither, and by which also their enemies had attacked them. And now all danger of any fresh assault seemed far remote.

That night Engelbrecht and his Hottentot slept among some bush on the mountain side, within three hundred yards of the English camp. They had well calculated the movements of the gold-seekers and their native servants guarding the camp, and had determined to hazard the descent by the rope-ladder at about two hours after sunrise next morning. By that time, they reckoned, the party down the kloof would have quitted their resting-place and gone off for the head of the valley, where their operations now lay. Three of the servants in the camp would probably be away–so Quasip, from his previous spying operations, reckoned it out–with the oxen and horses, grazing far down the hill. Jan Kokerboom would most likely be alone at the wagon. If they could avoid his scrutiny, as they hoped to be able to do, they could descend the ladder and conceal themselves

without difficulty in the kloof below. In the afternoon, as the diggers returned to their sleeping-place, they could be easily ambuscaded. Some dangers there might be–dangers which had been pointed out to his master by Quasip; but in the mind of the Boer, thirsting as he was for revenge at any price, these were as naught compared with the chances of success. At dawn the pair of ruffians descended very softly from their place of concealment, and letting themselves down the steep declivity with the greatest care and caution, by means of bushes and stunted olive-wood trees, which lent them invaluable aid, safely accomplished their purpose. Now, seeking the centre of a clump of high bush close to the cliff edge, they lay within a hundred and fifty yards of the ladder, and about two hundred yards from the camp, from which they were still completely screened. Two hours went by. Surely by this time the coast must be nearly clear, and their attempt might be made? With extreme caution Engelbrecht raised himself from his hiding-place, and, peering through the bushes, looked down into the kloof. Far away, up near the head of the valley, he could discern two or three men, their figures dwarfed by the distance, at work. That was right enough. Now for the attempt on the ladder.

With beating hearts the two men crawled quietly from the bush in which they were ensconced, and crept, well under the lee of more bush, towards the ladder. Up to half an hour ago they had heard voices about the camp and the lowing of cattle. The voices had ceased, and the cattle had evidently been driven down hill to pasture; all was now quiet. If any one remained in camp it would be Jan Kokerboom, and presumably he would be asleep. Very slowly, very cautiously, the two men crawled on hands and knees towards the ladder. The journey was safely accomplished. They lay now by the ladder of rope and hide, seventy yards only from the camp, but concealed from it by some high bush and a little group of wild olive trees. Karl Engelbrecht now nodded to his henchman to begin the descent. Quasip little liked the job; but he was the servant of an iron-willed and ruthless master, and he knew he had to go through with it. Rising very cautiously, he gripped the upper part of the ladder and went over the side.

It was a breathless moment for both. The Hottentot, his face deeply puckered with anxiety, began the downward climb. Engelbrecht shuffled his huge form to the edge of the cliff and saw his man's descent. He watched him till the lower angle of the cliff concealed him from view. The movement of the ladder presently ceased. Quasip had reached the bottom. His own turn had now come. Mingled with some natural feeling of suspense was also a sense of elation. His man was down the cliff; half their difficulties were over. In ten minutes he himself would be safely at the foot, near to that great pile of gold–and then revenge and plunder. The blood of his hated enemies and a vast treasure would be his.

But Karl Engelbrecht, cleverly as he and his Hottentot had laid their plans,

and made their approach to the ladder, had overlooked or never suspected one elemental fact in the situation. They were in complete ignorance that on the previous night Poeskop, their arch-enemy Poeskop, whom they now supposed to be far away up the kloof, digging for gold with his masters, had ascended the ladder. And Poeskop for the last five minutes had been attentively regarding Karl Engelbrecht. Something–he never afterwards could explain satisfactorily why or how it was–but something that morning had impelled him to remain in camp, mending his old, ragged pair of trousers, and to send Jan Kokerboom, who loved stalking and was not difficult to persuade, to shoot a head of game down the hill. While Poeskop sat silent and reflective, under the shade of the wagon, patching his old breeches, some faint sound, or vibration rather, from the direction of the edge of the cliff, caught his preternaturally sharp ears. He listened. Yes, he was certain now: there was a sound from the direction of the ladder. He knew that sound, but it puzzled him why he should hear it just then. None of his masters could be climbing upward!

Poeskop was instantly on the alert. Creeping, with the silence and adroitness of a serpent, in the direction of the cliff edge, he presently peeped through the bushes, and beheld his arch-enemy Karl Engelbrecht, lying prone on the lip of the precipice, evidently watching very intently some one on the ladder. For a moment the Bushman was uncertain what to do. Then it dawned upon him, from the movements of Engelbrecht, that the person beneath was descending and not climbing the ladder. He decided to wait for the Boer's next move, which, indeed, was not long in coming.

Engelbrecht softly rose, gripped the ladder fairly, and began to descend. His great frame disappeared over the cliff edge. Then a wonderful smile, a smile of triumphant hatred, swept over Poeskop's face. He knew now that at last his hated enemy was delivered into his hands. He waited till the big Boer was a third of the way down the precipice, and then, swiftly creeping to the edge, looked over. Karl Engelbrecht was going steadily down, hand under hand. He was not accustomed to a task like this; but he had nerves of steel and a good head, and he was getting used to the dizzy height and the sway of the ladder. Suddenly an exclamation from the cliff above him made him look up. What he saw struck, for the first time in his life, a freezing terror at his heart. He saw above him, leering at him with fiendish glee and malevolence, the face of Poeskop, the Bushman.

"So," cried Poeskop in Dutch, "I have you at last! At last, Karl Engelbrecht! I have waited a long time, but now I am even with you, *edele heer* [noble sir]," he added, with jeering sarcasm. "You won't like the fall, but you've got to face it, and you'll strike plaguy hard at the bottom. At last, Karl, the devil has thee! The devil has thee!"

Death, indeed, stared the Boer in the face. He knew he was doomed; he

knew that nothing in this world would turn the fell purpose of the man above him. But, brute as he was, Engelbrecht was no coward, and, setting his teeth, he made one despairing attempt to snatch salvation. His rifle hung at his back. Clinging to the rope-ladder with one hand, he disengaged the weapon with marvellous dexterity, swinging as he was over that frightful abyss, and, pointing it upward, tried to align it on the Bushman. Next instant he pulled trigger, the bullet whizzed far upward into space, and the report of the rifle rattled with deafening reverberation around the cliffs.

Poeskop delayed no longer. The madness of revenge ran seething through his veins. Whipping out his long hunting knife from its sheath, he hacked with desperate energy at the tough hide of the ladder. One side went, the ladder drooped and collapsed, and the Boer hung helpless and awry by the frail support of the other side only.

"Die! die! die! you schelm!" gasped Poeskop, his voice shrill with passion, as he shore and hacked for the last three times at the raw hide. With the final frantic stroke the remaining strand went, and with it the whole ladder and its burden. From a height of three hundred feet Karl Engelbrecht fell to the bottom of the cliff. Thrice he turned over in mid-air; then, with a sickening thud, his huge frame struck the hard earth, within a few feet of his startled Hottentot. That terrific fall reduced the giant upon the instant to little more than a hideous pulp of broken bones, blood, and pounded flesh; and from the moment of the impact, the Boer neither breathed nor stirred again.

Chapter XIX.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

The report of Engelbrecht's rifle shot had at once roused the attention of the gold-diggers at the head of the kloof; and although the final catastrophe had overtaken the Boer before they had extricated themselves from some bush behind which they were working, they were all three instantly aware that something was happening in the neighbourhood of the upper camp.

"Come, lads," said Mr. Blakeney, "we must be off. I don't know what's up, but there's some mischief brewing, I'm certain."

At once they set off at a steady trot towards the rope-ladder. They had traversed some six hundred yards, and emerged from a small grove of thorn trees

about three hundred yards from the ladder foot, when an exclamation from Guy suddenly brought them to a halt.

"Look!" he cried. "There's some one–Poeskop, I believe–at the top of the cliff; and, by Jove, the ladder's gone!"

Mr. Blakeney and Tom stared hard at the cliff top, and saw at once that Guy's assertion was right. Poeskop it was, gesticulating at the summit of the precipice, and the ladder had vanished.

"There's something very wrong here," exclaimed Mr. Blakeney. "Come on!"

They were not long in covering the last three hundred yards that separated them from the foot of the cliff, and there a strange and tragic scene awaited them.

Standing alone, by the confused heap of the fallen ladder, which itself partly covered the dead body of Karl Engelbrecht, was the Hottentot Quasip, who was evidently much too terrified by the appalling tragedy that had taken place to attempt any hostilities. The man was trembling with terror, and, as Mr. Blakeney approached him, threw down his rifle and awaited the Englishman's speech.

"What does all this mean?" asked Mr. Blakeney sternly, holding his rifle in readiness.

It was some moments before the Hottentot could pull himself sufficiently together to reply coherently. Then he spoke.

"My baas there," he said, pointing to the dead Boer, "was coming to attack you. He made me climb down first, and then started himself. Some one from your camp above must have seen him. The baas fired a shot as he hung on the ladder, and then the ladder was cut, and he fell to the bottom and was killed."

"A pretty story, indeed," was Mr. Blakeney's comment, as he moved a pace or two forward and picked up the man's rifle. "So you two meant, I suppose, to stalk and murder us while we were at our work.–And but for Poeskop's fancy to climb out last night," he added, turning aside to Guy and Tom, "they might very well have accomplished their purpose. Poeskop's restlessness was providential indeed. The little man's instincts are wonderful."

"Yes," said Guy, "he seems almost to smell danger when it's about."

"Well," went on Mr. Blakeney, gazing at the awful remains of the dead Boer, lying a mere huddle of broken humanity beneath the tangle of the ladder, "we shall have no more trouble from that quarter, which is a blessing. But we're in a very pretty mess. I suppose Poeskop had no alternative in cutting the ladder and hurling Engelbrecht to the bottom, but he has left us in a very awkward predicament. What's to be done, I wonder?"

"Hadn't we better secure this miserable Hottentot?" said Tom, glancing at Quasip.

"Yes, you're right, Tom," replied his father. "I don't suppose he'll attempt anything again, now his precious baas is done for; and he looks as if all the stuff-

ing were knocked out of him. But we may as well make sure."

Tom went to their camping ground hard by, and brought back a couple of raw-hide riems. With these they fastened the wrists and ankles of the Hottentot, and placed him under the shade of an olive tree. The man submitted quietly enough. As they had surmised, all the fight had been frightened out of him.

"Now," said Mr. Blakeney, "we must see what we can do with Poeskop."

Coming out from under the cliff, they looked up and saw Poeskop's yellow face far above them, peering anxiously over the precipice. The Bushman put his hands to his mouth and shouted shrilly. It was some minutes before they could make out his words, so great a distance was between them. Then Tom suddenly said,–

"I have it. He asks: 'Is Engelbrecht dead?'"

Making a speaking trumpet of his hands, Mr. Blakeney roared out very slowly, in deep, stentorian tones, "Ja, Engelbrecht is dood!"

There was a fine echo up the cliff. It was quite clear that Poeskop comprehended the message. He rose to his feet, and clapped his hands with joy. Then, throwing himself down once more, he asked again in Dutch,–

"What shall I do, baas?"

They understood him, after several repetitions, and Mr. Blakeney again shouted up the cliff,–

"Get riems. Make a rope, and let down."

For some minutes it seemed that the Bushman could not comprehend this message. Then, after more repetitions, delivered very slowly, it dawned upon him, and he shouted down,–

"Yes! In three days."

After this message he sprang to his feet and disappeared.

"Well," said Mr. Blakeney, "we're in a curious position, and must look upon ourselves as prisoners for the present. With ordinary luck I think Poeskop and the other men will be able to relieve us. What Poeskop has bolted away for is quite clear. He knows he has somehow got to find three hundred and twenty feet of hide rope. Altogether I think they may have up there–the remnants of what we did not use for the ladder–eighty or a hundred feet. He and the other three men have got to find the rest. They'll, of course, go out, leaving one man in charge of the oxen and horses, and shoot game till they get enough raw hide for the purpose. Poeskop says three days; I believe it will be nearer a week before they can do the business. I don't think there will be any interruptions, but I'll ask the Hottentot what became of the other party of Boers."

Five minutes' cross-questioning of Quasip elicited the fact that Engelbrecht and his allies had quarrelled, after the repulse of their attack on the camp, and that the Boers had trekked for Benguela.

”That’s all right,” said Mr. Blakeney to the two lads. ”Barring accidents, our men will perform their task, and put together a rope strong enough to haul up the ladder here. Now we’ll have some food, and then settle to work again. We’ve got three or four days before us, and we may as well make the best of them, and add to our stock of gold. Luckily we’ve got a week’s supply of flour, coffee, and other necessaries. We have plenty of meat, and can shoot more when we need it. We shall be all right, and must just go about our work quietly till the rope comes.”

They turned away from the dread spectacle of the dead Boer, and rekindled their fire. A kettle being boiled, they made some coffee. Mr. Blakeney ate some lunch, but the two lads, beyond drinking some coffee and eating a morsel of bread apiece, had little stomach for the meal. The horror of the tragedy of Karl Engelbrecht had upset them.

”Pater,” said Tom, ”I can eat no lunch, and I don’t think Guy has much appetite either. That sight over yonder has fairly sickened me.”

”Well,” said his father, ”it is rather horrible, I grant. I became hardened to horrors of this kind in the Basuto War of 1879. At the storming of Morosi’s Mountain in that year we witnessed many unpleasant incidents, which hardened one’s stomach to scenes of this kind. This fall of Engelbrecht is, I admit, far worse than the state of affairs the morning after our fight the other day, when we had to look after the enemy’s dead and wounded.”

”Yes, uncle, far worse,” added Guy. ”I, for one, shall never forget the ending of Karl Engelbrecht. It’s horrible!”

After lunch they went back to the scene of the tragedy. The Hottentot Quasip, on being questioned, volunteered to help them.

”Baas,” he said, addressing Mr. Blakeney, ”you think badly of me, and I daresay you have good cause. But I am not so bad as you think me. I was Engelbrecht’s servant, and had to do his bidding. If I dared to disobey him I should have been flogged, and perhaps shot. Like your own man, Poeskop, I was afraid of him, and only wanted to get out of his service.”

”Well, that may or may not be,” said Mr. Blakeney coolly. ”Anyhow, I’ll give you a chance. I’ll untie you, and if you work for us quietly and well during the daytime you shall have your liberty. At night you’ll have to be tied up, until we feel we can trust you.”

”Very well, baas,” said the man. ”That is good enough for me. I’ll prove to you that I am willing to work for my skorf, and that I am not so bad as you may think me.”

Untying the Hottentot, therefore, they set him to work with pick and spade to dig a grave for his dead master. They themselves, meanwhile, proceeded to disentangle the ladder from the confusion in which it had fallen. This was a work

of some little time. Then they removed the battered corpse of Karl Engelbrecht–a terrible spectacle–and laid it in the grave dug by Quasip. This done, they proceeded up the valley, and spent the remainder of the day in their gold-mining operations. They took the Hottentot with them; it was evident that he was sincere in his attempt to please them. He plied pick and shovel, and worked away steadily till dusk, when they relinquished their labours and returned to their camping ground.

For the next three days they steadily pushed on with their mining work. On the whole they did much better than they had anticipated, coming upon a fresh and very rich find of gold, which lay a few feet below the surface in some alluvial ground at the head of the stream. Each night they added considerably to the big pile of treasure already accumulated near the ladder foot. That morning Poeskop had appeared at daybreak at the top of the cliff, and shouted down to them. It was difficult to gather clearly what he said, but they understood him to mean that in two more days he would be ready for them.

"That means five days' waiting instead of three," said Tom, as they returned to breakfast.

"Yes, it's a long wait," replied his father. "But I expect they may have had some trouble in shooting game and getting hide for the rope. However, a day or so extra down here won't hurt us."

"Not a bit," said Guy, who took the whole matter very good humouredly. "We shall be all the richer."

"Oh, that's all very well," retorted Tom, "but I want to get out of this place. I shan't feel happy till I'm on the top of the cliff yonder, and we've inspanned the oxen and are trekking for home. By the way, pater," he went on, "which route are we going home? By Mossamedes or Benguela?"

"Well, Tom," returned his father, "that's what I've been puzzling my head over for a long time past. If we go out by a Portuguese port we shall have to show our gold; there will be all sorts of inquiries; and very possibly the authorities may try and lay claim to the whole of our findings. Not only do I think this possible, but much more than probable. That would be a pretty ending to all our adventures, dangers, and hard work."

"Uncle," exclaimed Guy, "we'll never yield a red cent of this gold to any Portuguese in the world! These filibusters of Boers have had a shot for us and our treasure. It isn't likely that we shall cart our nuggets to Mossamedes, and calmly allow these Portuguese, who, as you have shown us, have misgoverned their country so shamefully for three or four hundred years, to rob us in that way. Besides, it's much more than doubtful whether we are in Portuguese territory here at all."

"Quite so, Guy," replied Mr. Blakeney. "I'm entirely with you. For several

days past I have been turning the whole thing over in my mind. I am honestly certain, from Poeskop's information, that we have discovered and won this gold in neutral ground–in land belonging to no man. That being so, we're not going to allow the Portuguese authorities even a royalty on our find. To avoid any disturbance with them we shall have to make a long and troublesome trek right across country to Bechuanaland. This will take us several months. It's a nasty business. We shall have to go through feverish veldt, and the rains will be upon us. Still, it's the only thing to be done, and we shall have to do it. What do you lads say? Are you prepared for further difficulties?"

"Of course we are, pater," broke in Tom. "Anything is better than meekly handing over our hard-won gold to the Portuguese Government. Guy, what do you say?" he added, turning to his cousin.

"Why, I'm entirely with you, Tom," returned Guy. "I say trek south and east, by all means, for Bechuanaland."

"Carried *nem. con.*," said Tom cheerfully. "Pater, we'll travel by the overland route. What do you make out our course to be? I confess I'm rather vague. I suppose we'll have to pass Lake Ngami, cross the Kalahari thirst-land, and go down through Khama's Country and the Protectorate."

"That's just what we shall have to do, lads," said Mr. Blakeney. "Once at Lake Ngami, we shall manage very well, although the 'thirst' is a bad one after you leave the Lake River, before reaching Khama's chief town, Palachwe. But the main difficulties lie between here and Lake Ngami. We shall have to find our way down to the Okavango, cross that river somewhere–by no means a simple operation with a heavily-loaded wagon–and trek for the lake. I confess I don't like the look of the first part of the journey. It's almost unknown country, and bound to give us a lot of trouble."

On the fourth morning of their enforced confinement in the kloof, Jan Kokerboom appeared at the top of the cliff, showed the end of a raw-hide rope, which he dangled over the precipice, and made them understand that all would be ready next day. On the fifth day, therefore, the three adventurers awoke betimes with cheerful anticipations. They had finished their gold-digging; their heap of treasure was completed; and they now only looked forward to a speedy escape from the valley in which they had delved so long and so successfully. Quasip was, as usual, unbound, and allowed to wait on them at breakfast. Poeskop's face had not yet appeared over the top of the precipice, but they confidently looked forward to setting eyes on his yellow visage very shortly. They made an excellent meal of stewed guinea-fowl, which Guy had shot the evening before; and a whole tin of marmalade–a piece of reckless extravagance, Mr. Blakeney called it–was, in celebration of their last meal in the Gold Kloof, sacrificed for the occasion.

Half an hour after breakfast, cheers of applause greeted the appearance of

Poeskop at the head of the cliff. It was quite clear he was in as high spirits as his masters beneath him. He waved his hand to them and shouted. The Bushman was joined by Jan Kokerboom, and then Mangwalaan and September peered over with grinning faces. Then all withdrew from the edge, and the tail end of the rope began to creep down the face of the precipice.

To the watchers below it seemed an unconscionable time before it reached the bottom; but at last it was within reach of their fingers. Then a hearty cheer from the lads informed Poeskop at the top that all was well. Next, the end of the rope was made fast to the ladder, and the business of hoisting up the ladder itself began. It was a long, and by no means an easy, operation. There were several sticks and stoppages, requiring care and manipulation on the part of the hoisters; but at length, at the end of a couple of hours, the task was completed, the ladder hoisted, and the upper end securely fastened. Then, with all the nimbleness of an ape, down came Poeskop. His story was a simple one. They had shot game in order to obtain hide and make the fresh rope, and the beasts of chase had not been so plentiful, or so easy to come by, as on the former occasion. Moreover, the absence of the three best shots in the party, Mr. Blakeney, Tom, and Guy, had made a good deal of difference. However, the task was accomplished, and communication once more restored.

That very afternoon began the work of carrying up the gold. This was a long and most tedious process. It was impossible, owing to the severity, and it may be added the risk, of the climb, to carry up more than a small load at a time. But all hands save one set willingly to work, and by degrees the business was done. Seleti, the humorist and butt of the camp, still raftered from his wound, and was not equal to the descent of the rope-ladder. He had never, in fact, attempted it; and the very real terror and distress which he once exhibited at the prospect of the downward climb, or indeed at any near approach to the edge of the cliff, had disarmed his master's anger, although it was not sufficient to deter the chaff and laughter of his fellow-servants.

However, Seleti was kept well occupied in cooking for the party, doing odd jobs, and looking after the oxen and horses. In two days the long and severe labour of bringing up the gold was over. They had worked from earliest dawn till the fading of the last gleam of daylight, and all were tired out by their exertions. None of them, they declared, ever wanted to see the bottom of the kloof again, or to climb that awful ladder. They had brought up the last of the stores and implements, and all were stiff and sore from their great strain. Most of them had raw and blistered hands from much handling of the ropes. Quasip, although viewed at first with much disfavour by the rest of the natives, proved himself so cheerful and so willing that gradually he wore down the enmity of all his captors, and was taken into some degree of favour.

Having transferred the heap of gold from the bottom to the top of the cliff, it was now put into strong new sacks, tied up, and sealed. The sacks and the rough sealing wax were the products of Tom's fertile imagination. He had insisted on their being bought at Cape Town. If, he urged, they were going to find gold, why not take appliances for securing the safety of the treasure? Many times during the expedition had Tom been chaffed for his pains; but the laugh was now on his side, and he did not forget to remind Guy and Mr. Blakeney of the fact. The wagon was carefully reloaded, the gold being placed at the bottom, with the remaining stores, which had now very considerably diminished, at the top. There was just room for Mr. Blakeney's kartel and no more, and the after-part of the interior of the wagon carried as much as it could hold. All things now being in order, the oxen were inspanned, and the long trek for home began.

They quitted the kloof and its neighbouring mountains with strangely mingled feelings. Joy and satisfaction were theirs, in that they had conquered all their obstacles, achieved their purpose, and gained a considerable fortune. The whole expedition had been full of romantic incident. They had passed through many adventures, and had escaped many perils. Upon the whole, fair as was the Gold Kloof and its vicinity, they were not sorry to set eyes upon it for the last time. Death and tragedy had had their part there; and somehow, as Guy said, and they all agreed, the kloof would, in the recollection of each one of them, always be associated with that last terrible episode in their Odyssey–the death of Karl Engelbrecht.

Once more, then, as the wagon rolled away down the mountain, the three white men and Poeskop crept to the edge of the precipice, and looked for the last time on the fair and lovely valley, which for them had proved indeed an El Dorado. Then, mounting their horses, they slowly followed the wagon.

It was a long trek before the wayfarers reached British Bechuanaland. Travelling south, and crossing various streams, they presently struck the Kuito River, and followed it down to its junction with the Okavango. Somewhat lower down they crossed the Okavango, after much difficulty, and travelled south-east until they reached Lake Ngami. During this part of their journey they underwent many adventures, and suffered at times much from fever. The rains fell, and they were delayed for weeks by the impassable state of the country. Crossing the Kalahari to Khama's Country, they recovered much of their health and spirits in the pure and dry air of this desert region. At Palachwe, where they arrived in rags, and with scarcely any remnant of their stores left to them, they were enabled to refit, and to procure all necessary provisions for their trek south through the Protectorate. Finally, five months after quitting the Gold Kloof, they reached Johannesburg, whither they had travelled direct, for the purpose of realizing their treasure. During all this long wandering, the Hottentot Quasip, who had begged

to be allowed to travel with them, had served them well and faithfully, and proved himself a reliable man all round. Thenceforth, having purged himself of his unfortunate connection with the ruffian Engelbrecht, which he always declared had been his misfortune and not his fault, Mr. Blakeney took him into regular employment.

At Johannesburg the gold was safely and quietly disposed of. Mr. Blakeney had roughly estimated the value of the treasure, after making due deductions, at about £58,000. The gold turned out to be singularly free from impurities, and the price realized for it amounted to £62,000. After setting apart, therefore, Poeskop's £1,000, paying each of their men their wages and the sum of £100 by way of bonus, and a further bonus of £50 to Quasip, there remained for division between Guy Hardcastle and Mr. Blakeney the sum of rather more than £60,000, which, as all parties agreed, furnished a sufficiently handsome return for the risks, labours, and hardships of less than a year's adventure. From Mr. Blakeney's share had to be deducted, according to agreement, Tom's portion of £5,000.

At Bamborough Farm, whither they returned at once after disposing of their gold at Johannesburg, their reception was a memorable one. It was a joyful meeting, indeed, after their long absence–an absence accentuated by the fact that, during many months, Mrs. Blakeney and her children had had no communication of any kind from the trekkers. For this she had been to some extent prepared; yet, none the less, those long months of silence and of doubt had been very trying to her and her girls. Some happy weeks of reunion had passed before the wanderers had told the tale of their adventures in full, and completely satisfied the natural curiosity of their hearers.

Guy Hardcastle and Tom Blakeney took part in the Boer War, fighting in the same colonial contingent, and each retiring at the close of the great struggle with the rank of captain. Their adventures in that stirring campaign cannot, for lack of space, be related here.

Guy is now settled on a fine farm in British Bechuanaland, adjoining his uncle's ranch. Here he has built himself a roomy and most comfortable homestead, and, having induced his fair cousin, Ella Blakeney, to become his partner and his helpmate for life, has settled down to an existence for which he is admirably fitted. He and his wife mean, however, by no means to grow rusty in their Bechuanaland home. They pay an occasional visit to Cape Town or its marine suburbs, and during their honeymoon made a trip of some duration to the Old Country; this trip they intend to repeat at intervals.

Tom, who looked after their place for them during their absence, is a near neighbour of theirs, living, thus far, as a bachelor on a farm of his own within a few miles of their own homestead and of Bamborough. For the present he vows that his adventures are by no means ended, and that he has no intention

of settling down to married life. Of these declarations, however, his sisters, who know Tom and his idiosyncrasies fairly well, are profoundly sceptical.

THE END.

*** END OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE GOLD KLOOF ***

A Word from Project Gutenberg

We will update this book if we find any errors.

This book can be found under: https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43114

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the Project Gutenberg™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for the eBooks, unless you receive specific permission. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the rules is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. They may be modified and printed and given away – you may do practically *anything* in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

The Full Project Gutenberg License

Please read this before you distribute or use this work.

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at https://www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use & Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work,

you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. "Project Gutenberg" is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation ("the Foundation" or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country outside the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate ac-

cess to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at https://www.gutenberg.org . If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this ebook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Guten-

berg™ web site (https://www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original "Plain Vanilla ASCII" or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and The Project Gutenberg Trademark LLC, the owner of the

Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3. below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES – Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND – If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS,' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PUR-

POSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY – You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need, is critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at https://www.pglaf.org .

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project

Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is in Fairbanks, Alaska, with the mailing address: PO Box 750175, Fairbanks, AK 99775, but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

For additional contact information:

Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation meth-

ods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: https://www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

https://www.gutenberg.org

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.