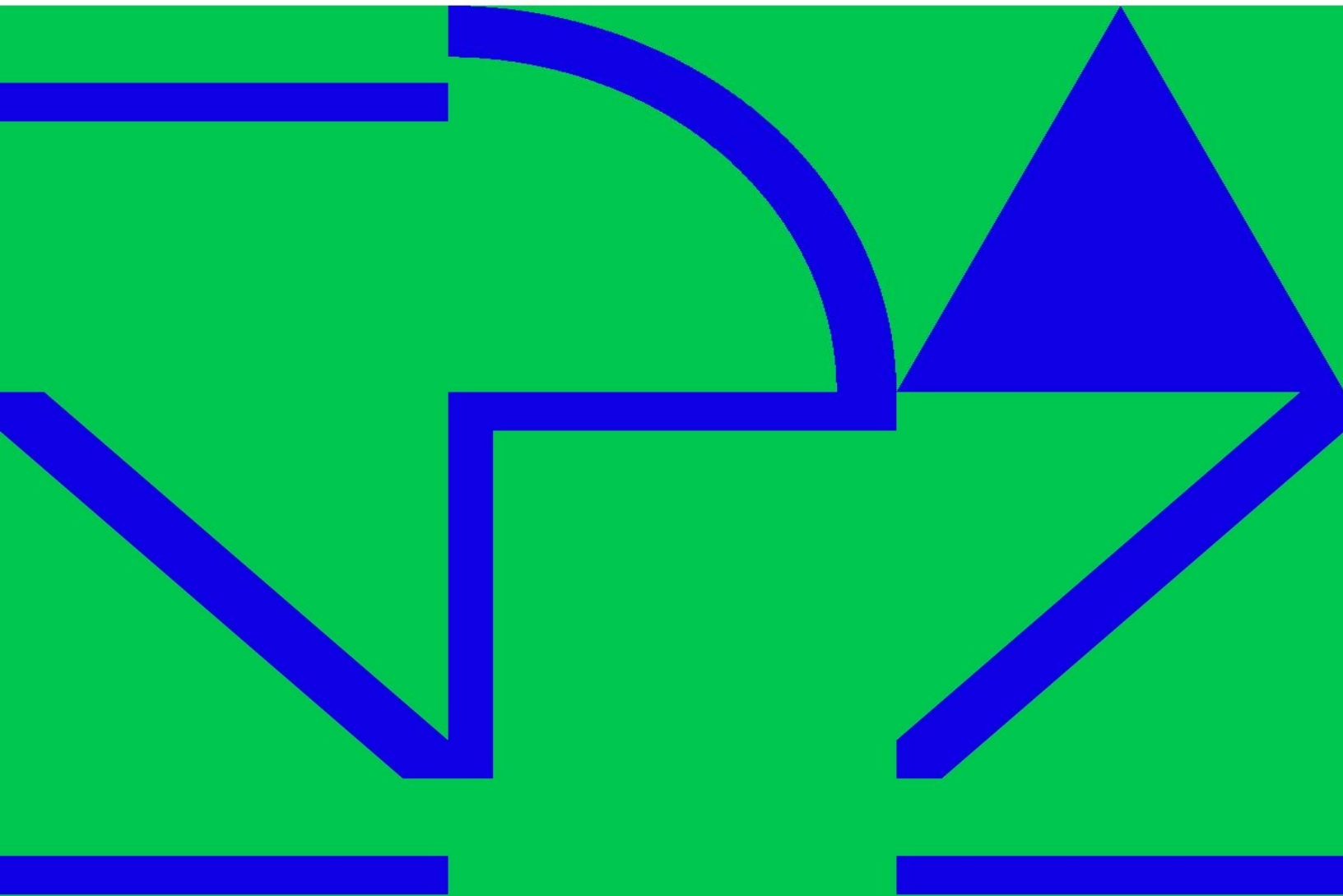


Diamond Dyke

The Lone Farm on the Veldt - Story of South African Adventure

George Manville Fenn



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Author: George Manville Fenn

Illustrator: W. Boucher

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George Manville Fenn

"Diamond Dyke"

Chapter One.

Query Bad Shillings?

"Hi!"

No answer.

"Hi! Dyke!"

The lad addressed did not turn his head, but walked straight on, with the dwarf karroo bushes crackling and snapping under his feet, while at each call he gave an angry kick out, sending the dry red sand flying.

He was making for the kopje or head of bald granite which rose high out of the level plain—where, save in patches, there was hardly a tree to be seen—for amongst these piled-up masses of glittering stone, lay deep moist crevices in which were shade and trickling water, the great blessings of a dry and thirsty desert.

"Hi! Do you hear, Dyke?" came again, shouted by a big athletic-looking young man, in flannels and a broad-brimmed Panama hat, and he gave his thick brown beard an angry tug as he spoke.

"Oh yes, I hear," muttered the lad; "I can hear you, old Joe. He's got away again, and I shan't come. A stupid-headed, vicious, long-legged beast, that's what he is."

"Hi!" roared the young man, as he stood in front of an ugly corrugated iron shed, dignified by the name of house, from which the white-wash, laid thickly over the grey zinc galvanising to ward off the rays of the blinding Afric sun, had peeled away here and there in patches.

Some attempts had been made to take off the square, desolate ugliness

of the building by planting a patch of garden surrounded by posts and wire; but they were not very successful, for, as a rule, things would not grow for want of water.

Vandyke Emson—the Dyke shouted at—had been the gardener, and so long as he toiled hard, fetching water from the granite kopje springs, a quarter of a mile away, and tended the roots he put in the virgin soil, they rushed up out of the ground; but, as he reasonably said, he couldn't do everything, and if he omitted to play Aquarius for twenty-four hours, there were the plants that looked so flourishing yesterday shrivelled to nothing. He had planted creepers to run all over the sides and roof, but the sun made the corrugated iron red hot—the boy's exaggerated figure of speech, but so hot that you could not keep your hand upon the roof or wall—and the creepers found the temperature too much for their constitution, and they rapidly turned to hay. Then he trained up tomatoes, which grew at express speed so long as they were watered, formed splendid fruit, were left to themselves a couple of days, and then followed suit with the creepers. Joseph Emson smiled behind his great beard, and said they were a success because the tomatoes were cooked ready for use; but Dyke said it was another failure, because they were just as good raw, and he did not like to eat his fruit as vegetables cooked in a frying-pan covered with white-wash.

Still all was not bare, for a patch of great sunflowers found moisture enough for their roots somewhere far below, and sent up their great pithy stalks close to the house door, spread their rough leaves, and imitated the sun's disk in their broad, round, yellow flowers. There was an ugly euphorbia too, with its thorny, almost leafless branches and brilliant scarlet flowers; while grotesque and hideous-looking, with its great, flat, oblong, biscuit-shaped patches of juicy leaf, studded with great thorns, a prickly pear or opuntia reared itself against the end gable, warranted to stop every one who approached.

"It's no good," Dyke once said; "the place is a nasty old desert, and I hate it, and I wish I'd never come. There's only six letters in Africa, and half of them spell fry."

"And that's bad grammar and bad spelling," said his half-brother; "and you're a discontented young cub."

“And you’re another,” said Dyke sourly. “Well, haven’t we been fried or grilled ever since we’ve been out here? and don’t you say yourself that it’s all a failure, and that you’ve made a big mistake?”

“Yes, sometimes, when I’m very hot and tired, Dicky, my lad. We’ve failed so far; but, look here, my brave and beautiful British boy.”

“Look here, Joe; I wish you wouldn’t be so jolly fond of chaffing and teasing me,” said Dyke angrily.

“Poor old fellow, then! Was um hot and tired and thirsty, then?” cried his half-brother mockingly. “Take it coolly, Dicky.”

“Don’t call me Dicky,” cried the boy passionately, as he kicked out both legs.

“Vandyke Emson, Esquire, ostrich-farmer, then,” said the other.

“Ostrich-farmer!” cried Dyke, in a tone full of disgust. “Ugh! I’m sick of the silly-looking, lanky goblins. I wish their heads were buried in the sand, and their bodies too.”

“With their legs sticking straight up to make fences, eh, old man?” said Joseph Emson, smiling behind his beard—a smile that would have been all lost, if it had not been for a pleasant wrinkle or two about his frank blue eyes.

“Well, they would be some good then,” said Dyke, a little more amiably. “These wire fences are always breaking down and going off *spang*, and twisting round your legs. Oh, I do wish I was back at home.”

“Amongst the rain and clouds and fog, so that you could be always playing cricket in summer, and football in winter, and skating when there was ice.”

“Don’t you sneer at the fog, Joe,” retorted Dyke. “I wish I could see a good thick one now.”

“So that you could say, ‘Ah, you should see the veldt where the sun shines brightly for weeks together.’”

“Sun shines!” cried Dyke. “Here, look at my face and hands.”

“Yes; they’re burnt of good Russia leather colour, like mine, Dyke. Well, what do you say? Shall we pack the wagon, give it up, and trek slowly back to Cape Town?”

“Yes, I’m ready!” cried the boy eagerly.

“Get out, you confounded young fibber! I know you better than that.”

“No, you don’t,” said Dyke sulkily.

“Yes, I do, Dicky. I know you better than you know yourself. You’re not of that breed, my boy. You’ve got too much of the old dad’s Berserker blood in your veins. Oh, come, now: withdraw all that! British boys don’t look back when they’ve taken hold of the plough handles.”

“Bother the plough handles!”

“By all means, boy; but, I say, that isn’t English, Dyke. Where would our country’s greatness have been if her sons had been ready to sing that coward’s song?”

“Now you’re beginning to preach again, Joe,” said the boy sulkily.

“Then say ‘Thank you,’ my lad. Isn’t it a fine thing for you to have a brother with you, and then, when there isn’t a church for hundreds of miles—a brother who can preach to you?”

“No; because I know what you’re going to say—that we ought to go on and fight it out.”

“That’s it, Dicky. Didn’t some one say that the beauty of a British soldier was that he never knew when he was beaten?”

“I’m not a soldier, and I am beaten,” cried Dyke sourly.

“Not you. I know you better. Why, if I said ‘Yes; let’s give it up,’ and packed up all we cared to take, and got the wagon loaded to-night, you’d repent in the morning when we were ready to start, and say, ‘Let’s have

another try.”

“Well, perhaps I might say—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Joseph Emson; “what a young humbug you are, Dicky. Fancy you going back with me to the old dad, and us saying, ‘Here we are, back again, like two bad shillings, father. We’ve spent all our money, and we’re a pair of failures.’”

“Well, but it is so hot and tiresome, and the ostriches are such horribly stupid beasts, and—”

“We’re both very tired, and disappointed, and thirsty, and—”

“I am, you mean,” said Dyke. “Nothing ever seems to worry you.”

“Hah! I know you, Dicky, better than you know me. I feel as keenly as you do, boy. No: we will not give up. We haven’t given the ostriches a fair trial yet.”

“Oh, haven’t we!”

“No; not half. I know we’ve had terribly bad luck just lately. We did begin well.”

“No: it has all been a dreary muddle, and I’m sick of it.”

“Yes, you often are of a night, Dyke; but after a night’s rest you are ready enough to go on again in a right spirit. No, my lad, we’ll never say die.”

“Who wants to! I want to have a try at something else. Let’s go and hunt and get lion and leopard skins, and fill the wagon, and bring them back and sell them.”

“Plenty of people are doing that, Dicky.”

“Well then, let’s go after ivory; shoot elephants, and bring back a load to sell. It’s worth lots of money.”

“Plenty of people are doing that too, boy.”

“Oh, you won’t try, Joe, and that’s what makes me so wild.”

“You mean, I won’t set a seed to-day and dig it up to-morrow to see why it hasn’t come up.”

“That’s what you always say,” said Dyke grumpily.

“Yes, because we came out here with so many hundred pounds, Dicky, to try an experiment—to make an ostrich-farm.”

“And we’ve failed.”

“Oh dear, no, my lad. We’ve spent all our money—invested it here in a wagon and oxen and house.”

“House! Ha, ha, ha! What a house!”

“Not handsome, certainly, Dicky.”

“Dicky! There you go again.”

“Yes, there I go again. And in our enclosures and pens, and horses and guns and ammunition, and in paying our men. So we can’t afford to give up if we wanted to.”

“But see what a desolate place it is!”

“Big, vast, level, and wild, but the very spot for our purpose.”

“And not a neighbour near.”

“To quarrel with? No, not one. No, Dyke, we mustn’t give it up; and some day you’ll say I’m right.”

“Never,” cried the boy emphatically.

“Never’s a long day, Dyke.—Look here, lad, I’m going to tell you an old story.”

“Thankye,” said Dyke sullenly. “I know—about Bruce and the spider.”

“Wrong, old fellow, this time. Another author’s story that you don’t know.”

“Bother the old stories!” cried the boy.

The big manly fellow laughed good-humouredly.

“Poor old Dyke! he has got it badly this time. What is it—prickly heat or home-sickness, or what?”

“Everything. I’m as miserable as mizzer,” cried Dick. “Oh, this desert is dreary.”

“Not it, Dyke; it’s wild and grand. You are tired and disappointed. Some days must be dark and dreary, boy. Come, Dyke, pluck! pluck! pluck!”

“I haven’t got any; sun’s dried it all out of me.”

“Has it?” said his brother, laughing. “I don’t believe it. No, Dicky, we can’t go home and sneak in at the back door with our tails between our legs, like two beaten hounds. There are those at home who would sorrow for us, and yet feel that they despised us. We came out here to win, and win we will, if our perseverance will do it.”

“Well, haven’t we tried, and hasn’t everything failed?”

“No, boy,” cried the young man excitedly. “Look here: my story is of a party of American loafers down by a river. Come, I never told you that.”

“No,” said Dyke, raising his brown face from where he rested it upon his arm.

“That’s better. Then you can be interested still.”

“One needs something to interest one in this miserable, dried-up desert,” cried the boy.

“Miserable, dried-up desert!” said his brother, speaking in a low deep voice, as he gazed right away through the transparent air at the glorious colours where the sun sank in a canopy of amber and gold. “No, Dicky, it has its beauties, in spite of all you say.”

“Oh Joe!” cried the boy, “what a tiresome old chap you are. Didn’t you say you were going to tell me a story about some Americans down by a river? Oh, how I should like to get to a mill-race and have a bathe. Do go on.”

“Ah! to be sure. Well, I only want you to take notice of one part of it. The rest is brag.”

“Then it’s a moral story,” cried Dyke, in a disappointed tone.

“Yes, if you like; but it may be fresh to you.”

“Tain’t about ostriches, is it?”

“No.—They were throwing stones.”

“What!—the loafers?”

“Yes, from a wharf, to see who could throw farthest, and one man, who was looking on, sneered at them, and began to boast about how far he could throw. They laughed at him, and one of them made himself very objectionable and insulting, with the result that the boasting man said, if it came to the point, he could throw the other fellow right across the river. Of course there was a roar of laughter at this, and one chap bet a dollar that he could not.”

“And of course he couldn’t,” said Dyke, who forgot his prickly heat and irritation. “But you said it was all brag. Well?”

“The boastful fellow, as soon as the wager was laid, seized the other by the waistband, heaved him up, and pitched him off the wharf into the river, amidst roars of laughter, which were kept up as the man came drenched out of the river, and asked to be paid.

“‘Oh no,’ said the other; ‘I didn’t say I’d do it the first time. But I kin dew it, and I will dew it, if I try till to-morrow morning;’ and catching hold of the wet man, he heaved him up again, and threw him by a tremendous effort nearly a couple of yards out into the river. Down he went out of sight in the deep water, and out he scrambled again, hardly able to speak, when he was seized once more.

“‘Third time never fails,’ cried the fellow; but the other had had enough of it, and owned he was beaten.”

“But it was by an artful trick,” cried Dyke.

“Of course it was, boy; but what I want you to notice was the spirit of the thing, though it was only bragging; I kin dew it, and I will dew it, if I try till to-morrow morning. We kin dew it, and we will dew it, Dyke, even if we have to try till to-morrow morning—to-morrow-come-never-morning.”

“Oh!” groaned Dyke, sinking back upon the sand; “I am so hot and dry.”

Chapter Two.

Dyke rouses up.

That was months before the opening of our story, when Dyke was making his way in disgust toward the moist shade of the kopje, where, deep down from cracks of the granite rock, the spring gurgled out.

Only a part ran for a few yards, and then disappeared in the sand, without once reaching to where the sun blazed down.

Joe Emson shouted once more, but Dyke would not turn his head.

“Let him follow me if he wants me,” muttered the boy. “He isn’t half so hot as I am.”

Hot or not hot, the big fellow took off his broad Panama hat, gave his head a vicious rub, replaced it, and turned to shout again. “Jack! Ahoy, Jack!”

There was no reply to this, for Kaffir Jack lay behind the house in a very hot place, fast asleep upon the sand, with his dark skin glistening in the sunshine, the pigment within keeping off the blistering sunburn which would have followed had the skin been white.

“I shall have to go after him,” muttered Joe Emson; and, casting off the

feeling of languor which had impelled him to call others instead of acting himself, he braced himself up, left the scorching iron house behind, and trotted after Dyke, scaring a group of stupid-looking young ostriches into a run behind the wire fence.

He knew where he would find his half-brother, and there he was, lying upon his breast, with a cushion of green mossy growth beneath him, a huge hanging rock overhead casting a broad shade, and the water gurgling cool and clear so close that he had but to stretch out his hand to scoop it up and drink from the palm.

Outside there was the scorching, blinding sunshine, however, and among the rocks all looked black, and seemed rather cool.

“Oh, you lazy young sybarite!” cried Joe Emson, as he came up. “You always know the best places. Why didn’t you answer me?”

“What’s the good of answering?” cried Dyke. “I can’t help old Goblin getting away again. He will go, and nothing will stop him.”

“But something shall stop him,” said Joe. “I’ll have an iron bar driven into the ground, and tether him with a rope.”

“No good,” said Dyke drowsily: “he’d eat the rope and swallow the bar.”

“Then I’ll tether him with a piece of chain.”

“He’d roll it up and swallow it.—I say Joe, I feel sure he had that curb chain and the two buckles we missed.”

“Nonsense! Come, get up, and help drive him in.”

“I’m too tired, and it isn’t nonsense. He’s always on the lookout for bits of iron and broken crockery. I took a hammer and a cracked willow-pattern plate one day, and broke it up in bits and fed him with them. He ate them all.”

“Well, of course: birds do pick up stones and things to fill their gizzards.”

“And that’s just how I feel,” said Dyke.

“Eh? How?”

“As if my gizzard was filled with sharp bits of stone, and it makes me irritable and cross.”

“And lazy. Come: jump up.”

“I can’t, Joe. I said last time I’d never go after the goblin again, and I won’t.”

“Yes, you will; you’ll come and help me drive him in.”

“No: let him go.”

“Nonsense! He’s the best cock bird I’ve got.”

“Then the others must be bad ones,” grumbled Dyke.

“Get up, sir!” cried Joe, stirring the boy with his toe.

“Shan’t. I don’t mind your kicking.”

“Get up, or I’ll duck you in the spring.”

“Wouldn’t be such a coward, because you’re big and strong. Hit one of your own size.”

“I declare I will,” cried Joe, bending down and seizing the boy by the arm and waistband.

“All right, do: it will be deliriously cool.”

Joe Emson rose up and took hold of his big beard.

“Don’t leave me everything to do, Dyke, old boy,” he said appealingly. “I wouldn’t lose that great ostrich for any money.”

Dyke muttered something about hating the old ostrich, but did not stir.

“All right. I’ll go alone,” said Joe; and he turned away and walked swiftly back.

But before he had gone a dozen yards Dyke had sprung up and overtaken him.

"I'll come, Joe," he said; "but that old cock does make me so wild. I know he understands, and he does it on purpose to tease me. I wish you'd shoot him."

"Can't afford the luxury, little un," said Joe, clapping his brother on the shoulder. "Let's make our pile first."

"Then the goblin will live for ever," sighed the boy, "for we shall never make any piles.—Where is he?"

Joe shaded his eyes and looked right across the barren veldt, where the glare of the sun produced a hazy, shimmering effect.

"There he is!"

"Don't see anything."

"Yes, you can. Your eyes are sharper than mine. There, just to the left of that rock."

"What!—that one like a young kopje?"

"Yes, just to the left."

"What!—that speck? Oh! that can't be it."

"Yes, it is; and if you had the glass, you could tell directly."

"But it's so far, and oh dear, how hot it is!"

"It will be cooler riding."

"No, it won't," grumbled Dyke; "there'll be hot horses under you, then."

"Yes, but cool air rushing by you. Come, old lad, don't sham idleness."

"It isn't sham," said Dyke. "I don't think I used to be idle, but this hot sun has stewed all the spirit out of me."

Joe said nothing, but led the way round to the back of the long low house, to where a high thick hedge of thorns shut in a lean-to shed thatched with mealie leaves and stalks; these, the dry remains of a load of Indian corn, being laid on heavily, so as to form a good shelter for the horses, haltered to a rough manger beneath.

As Dyke approached, he raised a metal whistle which hung from his neck by a leather thong, and blew loudly. A low whinny answered the call, and a big, raw-boned, powerful horse and a handsome, well-bred cob were unhaltered, to turn and stand patiently enough to be bridled and saddled, afterwards following out their masters like dogs.

And now as they passed the end of the stable, all the languor and lassitude passed away from Dyke on the instant. For he now caught sight of their Kaffir servant lying fast asleep just beneath the eaves of the corrugated iron roof.

The sand hushed the horses' hoofs, and the Kaffir slept on, with the flies buzzing about his half-open mouth, as if they mistook the thick red lips for the petals of some huge flower.

"I'm not going to stand that," said the boy.

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll see," whispered Dyke. "If I'm to be toiling after goblins, he's not going to sleep there like a black pig. Go on a little way and look back."

Joe Emson smiled in a heavy, good-humoured way, as he took the bridle his brother handed to him, and the smile developed into a silent laugh, as he saw the boy's energy over a bit of mischief.

For Dyke actually ran back to the stable, brought out a bucket of water, stood counting the furrows of the iron roofing, and then carried the pail round to the other side and set it down.

His next movement was to fetch a roughly made step-ladder, count the furrows on his side, then place the ladder carefully, and at such a slope that it lay flat on the roof, so that, steadily preserving his balance, he walked up with the bucket of water from round to round till he could see

across the ridge to where his brother stood with the horses a hundred yards away, watching over the big nag's mane, and grasping now what was to happen.

Dyke knelt down now behind the ridge, to which the top of the ladder just reached, and had calculated his distance so well, that upon tilting the bucket a little, some water trickled down two of the furrows of an iron sheet, and began to drip from the eaves upon the Kaffir's nude chest.

There was no movement, so a little more water was poured, and this brought forth a pig-like grunt, as if of satisfaction.

More water—more grunts.

More water, and a shuffling movement.

More water, and an angry gasp; the Kaffir raised his head, looked up at the sky, the dripping eaves—looked round, and settled down to sleep.

All this was invisible to Dyke, but he could tell by the sounds that his shower was having effect; and as soon as the man ceased to move, the boy sent down a third of the bucketful.

This produced a sharp ejaculation, and the man sprang up into a sitting position, and looking angrily round, saw that Emson was standing far away with the horses, and that no one else was near. His next glance was at the cloudless sky, and the dripping eaves, to which a few bright drops still hung and ceased to fall.

Only a rare shower, the man seemed to think; and, muttering to himself, he shuffled a little into a dry spot to lie down yawning, when rush came the rest of the water, deluging him this time, and making him jump up and burst into a torrent of objurgations against the sky in his own tongue, shaking both his fists the while, till, *bang, clatter, crash!* the bucket came rattling down, and he turned and ran out toward where Emson stood looking on.

Dyke descended quickly, and making a circuit, he ran round, and then appeared slowly from the end of a fence fifty yards from the house, walking quietly across to join his brother.

As he drew near, the Kaffir was gesticulating and talking away in broken English, mingled with more words of his own tongue; and when Dyke joined them and took the rein of his little cob, the man turned excitedly to him.

“What’s the matter, Jack?”

The Kaffir looked at him suspiciously for a moment or two, but Dyke mounted and returned the gaze in the most unruffled manner.

“Big rain—big wet rain—big water—big bucket—all wet, wet,” cried the Kaffir.

“Make the mealies grow,” said Dyke coolly.

“Make mealie grow!” cried the man. Then a change came over him. The look of doubt and wonder became one of certainty, and his face expanded into a broad grin which displayed all his white teeth. “Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah!” he cried, pointing to a couple of wet patches on the leg of the boy’s trousers; “you make rain—Massa Dyke make rain. Wet, wet. Ah-ah-ah-ah!”

“You come along and help drive the ostrich,” said Dyke, setting his cob to canter; and, followed by the Kaffir at a quick trot, which soon dried up his moisture, they went over the heated red sand toward where the speck in the distance had been pointed out as the object they sought.

Chapter Three.

An Ostrich Race.

“I say, Joe, you are right,” said Dyke now, with animation. “Tisn’t half so hot riding.”

“Of course not. One begins to get moist, and the sun and air bring a feeling of coolness. It’s only the making a start. Now then, shall I try to cut him off?”

“No, no!” cried Dyke excitedly; “I’ll do it. I’ll make the brute run. You follow up.”

“Right!” said Emson; “that is, unless he tracks my way.”

“Oh, he won’t do that,” said Dyke, with a merry laugh, and in his animation the boy seemed to be quite transformed.

It was a good long ride to where the ostrich they sought to bring back to its pen could be seen stalking about, looking about as big as a guinea-fowl, but gradually growing taller and taller to its pursuers as they rode on. After a time it ceased picking about and ran first in one direction and then in another, as if undecided which line of country to take before leading its pursuers a wild race out and across the veldt.

By this time it looked fully four feet high; soon after it was fully five, as it stood up with its neck stretched out, and its weak, large-eyed, flat head turned to them with a malicious expression.

The trio now separated, the horsemen riding more and more apart as they advanced, till they were each a couple of hundred yards from the Kaffir, who suddenly uttered a warning cry, to indicate that the great bird was beginning to run off straight away.

“All right, Jack, I see,” cried Dyke; and pressing his cob’s sides he went off at a gallop, not, however, in pursuit of the bird, which ran right forward, with its head turned to watch its pursuers all the time.

Dyke’s tactics, the result of experience, were of quite another kind. He turned his cob’s head, and went off like the wind at right angles to the course the ostrich was taking, and the effect was instantaneous. There was all the open veldt, or plain, spreading out for hundreds of miles before the bird, and it had only to dart off and leave the swiftest horse far behind. But its would-be cunning nature suggested to it that its enemy had laid a deep scheme to cut it off, and instead of going straight away, it turned on the instant to spin along in the same direction as that taken by the boy, and get right across him.

“Ah, you silly, muddled-brained, flat-headed idiot!” yelled Dyke, as he raced along over the plain, his steed sending the red sand flying at every

spurn of its hoofs as it stretched itself out. "I'll be there first, and cut him off. You can't do it—you can't do it. Ah-h-h-h!"

This last shout, ending in a rattle of the tongue, seemed to stimulate the little cob to make fresh efforts; and laughing merrily to himself in the exhilaration of the race, Dyke had only to keep slightly drawing his left rein, to make the ostrich curve more and more round towards him, till he had actually deluded the bird into taking the exact direction he wished—namely, right for the pens from which it had escaped.

On sped the cob, running over the sand like a greyhound, and on rushed the ostrich, its long legs going with a half-invisible twinkling effect like that produced by the spokes of a rapidly revolving wheel; its wings were half-extended, its plumage ruffled, and its long neck stretched out, with its flattened head slightly turned in the direction of the rider.

And so they rode on and on, till the low range of buildings in front became nearer, the yellow sunflower disks grew bigger, and the sun glared from the white house. Still the bird saw nothing of this, but continued to run in its curve, trying to pass its pursuer, till all at once it woke to the fact that there was a long range of wire fence before it, over which were bobbing about the heads of Joe Emson's flock of its fellows, and there it was with the fence in front, and the two horsemen and Kaffir behind.

Then there was a change of tactics.

Dyke, who was hundreds of yards in front of his companions, knew what was coming, and gave his short-handled rhinoceros-hide whip a whish through the air, and then cracked it loudly, while a chorus of discordant cries arose from the pens.

"Give up, you ugly old rascal, or I'll twist this round your long neck," cried Dyke; and a great chorus arose from the pens, as if the tame birds within the wire fence were imploring the great truant to be good, and come home.

But nothing was further from the great bird's thoughts. It could easily now have darted away, but it felt that it was driven to bay, and began to show fight in the most vicious fashion, snapping its flat beak, hissing, snorting,

rattling its plumage, and undulating its long neck, as it danced about, till it looked like a boa constrictor which had partially developed into a bird.

Then it dashed at its pursuer, snapping at him in its rushes. But the bill was not the thing to mind; a few lashes with the whip were enough to ward off its attack. The danger to be avoided came from those tremendous legs, which could deliver kicks hard enough to break a man's bones.

Three times over did the great bird strike at Dyke, as it was driven down to the pen with lash after lash of the whip, which wrapped round the neck, as the head rose fully eight feet above the ground. Then came another stroke which took effect, not upon Dyke's leg, but upon the horse's flank, just behind the stirrup, in spite of the clever little animal's bounds to avoid the kicks.

What followed was instantaneous. The horse whirled round, snorting with pain, and struck out at his enemy, sending out its heels with such violence and effect, that they came in contact with one of the ostrich's shanks, and the next moment the giant bird came to the ground, a heap of feathers, from which the long neck kept darting, and one leg delivering heavy blows.

Chapter Four.

Another Failure?

"Why, Dyke, boy, you've done it now," cried Joe Emson, cantering close up, his horse snorting as the ostrich struck at him with its snake-like head.

"Yes, you had better have left me where I was by the spring," said the boy disconsolately. "I hated the old wretch, but I didn't want to hurt him."

"I know, my lad, I know," said Emson. "I'm not blaming you, but it does seem a pity. What bad luck I do have with these birds, to be sure.—Lie still, you savage; you can't get up!"

This to the bird, which, after striking at him two or three times, made a desperate effort to rise, fluttering and beating with its wings, and hopping a little, but trailing its broken leg as it made for the pen, within which were all its friends.

“Yes, you had better have stayed at home, old fellow,” said Dyke, apostrophising the unhappy bird; “then you wouldn’t have got into this state.—I say, Joe, couldn’t we set its leg? It would soon grow together again.”

“If he were one of the quiet old hens, I’d say yes; but it would be impossible. Directly we went near, there would be a kick or a peck.”

“I’ll try,” said Dyke; and going gently toward where the bird lay crouched in a heap, he spoke softly to it, as he had been accustomed to speak to the others when going to feed them. But his advance was the signal for the bird to draw back its head, its eyes flashing angrily, while it emitted a fierce roaring sound that was like that of some savage, cat-like beast. It struck out with beak and wings, and made desperate efforts to rise.

“Stop!” cried Emson sharply.

“I’m not afraid,” cried Dyke. “I’ll get hold of his neck, and try and hold him.”

“I know,” said his brother; “but the poor creature will knock itself to pieces.”

“But so it will if you leave it quiet,” cried Dyke; and then, sharply: “Ah! you cowardly brutes, let him alone.”

This was to some half-a-dozen cock birds in the pen, which, possibly in remembrance of the many times they had been thrashed and driven about the pen by their injured king, seized the opportunity of his downfall to thrust out their long necks and begin striking at him savagely, seizing him by the feathers, and dragging them out, till he shuffled beyond their reach.

“His fate’s sealed if he is put with the rest; that’s very evident,” said Emson.

“Killum!” said the Kaffir, nodding his head.

“Let’s shut him up in the stable,” said Dyke, “and tie him down while we set his leg.”

“It would mean such a desperate struggle that the poor bird would never get over it; and if it did, it would mope and die. Better put it out of its misery.”

Just then a big rough dog came out of the house, where it had been having a long sleep through the hot part of the day, and after giving Dyke a friendly wag of the tail, walked slowly toward the injured ostrich.

That was enough to make the bird draw back its head and strike at the dog, which avoided the blow, and growling fiercely, prepared to resent the attack.

“Come away, Duke,” cried Dyke. “To heel, sir.”

The dog growled and seemed to protest, but went obediently behind his younger master.

“I had better shoot the bird, Dyke,” said Emson.

“No, no; don’t. Let’s have a try to save it. Perhaps when it finds that we want to do it good, it will lie quiet.”

“No,” said Emson; “it will take it as meant for war.”

“Well, let’s try,” said Dyke.—“Here, Breezy: stable.”

The cob walked slowly away toward its shed, and the other horse followed, while Dyke hurriedly fetched a couple of pieces of rope, formed of twisted antelope skin.

“What do you propose doing?” said Emson.

“All run in together, and tie his neck to one wing; then he’ll be helpless, and we can tie his thighs together. You can set the leg then.”

“Well, I’ll try,” said Emson. “Wait till I’ve cut a couple of pieces of wood for splints. What can I get?”

“Bit of box-lid,” replied Dyke; and in a few minutes Emson returned, bearing in addition a flat roll of stout webbing, such as is used by upholsterers, and by the poor emigrants to lace together across a frame, and form the beds upon which they stretch their weary bones at night.

“I think I can set it, and secure it,” said Emson.

“Why, of course you can.”

“Yes, but as soon as it’s done, the poor brute will kick it off. Now then, how about tying him?”

“Rush him,” said Dyke laconically. “Come along, Jack, and help.”

But the Kaffir shook his head rapidly.

“Why, hullo! You won’t back out, Jack?”

“No. Him kick, bite: no good.”

“Never you mind that,” cried Dyke. “You rush in with us, and hold his head, while we take his legs and wings. Do you understand?”

“No,” said the Kaffir, shaking his head. “Killum—killum!” and he made a gesture as if striking with a club.

“Not going to kill,” cried Dyke. “You rush in and hold the head. Do you understand?”

“No,” said the Kaffir.

“He won’t,” cried Emson. “We shall have to do it ourselves, Dyke. Make a noose and lasso the brute’s head. Then when I run in to seize the leg, you drag the neck tight down to the wing, and hold it there.”

Dyke nodded, made a noose at the end of his hide rope, and advanced gently toward the ostrich, which struck at him, but only to dart its head

through the loop; and this was drawn tight.

“Now, Joe, ready?” cried the boy, as the dog set up a furious barking, and joined in the rush that was made by the brothers, who succeeded in pinning down the bird. Emson holding the legs, while avoiding a buffet from the uppermost wing, Dyke slipped the rope round the bone, dragged down the head, and after a furious struggle, the bird lay still.

“Think you can manage now?” panted Dyke, who was hot from exertion.

“Yes; I’ll tie his legs together, after setting the broken one. It’s the only chance for him.”

“Yes; it’s all right,” cried Dyke; “he’s getting weaker, and giving in.”

“Seems like it,” said his brother sarcastically, for as the boy spoke, the great bird began to beat with its wings with terrific violence, keeping it up for fully five minutes, and giving the pair a hard task to hold it down, while the Kaffir looked on calmly enough, and the dog kept on charging in, as if eager to seize one of the legs, and hold it still.

“Well, there then, he is giving in now,” panted Dyke, who had been compelled to put forth all his strength to keep from being thrown off by the violent buffeting of the bird’s wings. “Look sharp, and get it done.”

Dyke got one hand at liberty now to wipe the feather-down from his face, where the perspiration made it adhere, and as he looked up, he could not refrain from laughing aloud at the row of comical flat heads peering over the wire fence, where the ostriches in the pen were gathered together to look on.

“Yes,” said Emson gravely; “he is giving in now, poor brute. He’ll never hunt the young cocks round the enclosure again.”

“And they know it, too,” cried Dyke. “Look at them wagging their silly old heads and trying to look cunning.—But hullo why don’t you go on?”

“Can’t you see?” said Emson. “The horse’s hoofs must have struck him in the side as well. The poor old goblin is dead.”

Dyke leaped to his feet in dismay, and stared sceptically from his brother to the bird, and back again and again.

It was true enough: the great bird, which so short a time ago was seeming to spin with such wonderful speed across the veldt that its legs were nearly invisible, now lay on its side, with the stilt-like members perfectly still, one being stretched out to its full length, the other in a peculiar double angle, through the broken bone making a fresh joint.

“Oh, the poor old goblin!” said the boy, hurriedly unloosening the rein which held down its head. “I didn’t choke it, did I? No: look, the loop was quite big.”

“No; the ribs are crushed in,” said Emson, feeling beneath the beautiful plumage. “Another loss, Dyke. We shall find out all his good qualities now.”

“Breezy kick and killum,” said the Kaffir sententiously. “Bird kick, horse kick; killum—shouldn’t kick.”

“Here, you go back to your kraal, and set up for a wise man of the south,” cried Dyke pettishly. “How long did it take you to find out all that?” “Yes, killum dead,” said the Kaffir, nodding. “Bosh!” cried Dyke, turning impatiently away. “Well, we must make the best of it,” said Emson then. “His feathers will be worth something, for they are in fine condition. Let’s get them off at once.”

The heat of the sun was forgotten, and so was Dyke’s want of energy, for he set to work manfully, helping his brother to cut off the abundant plumes, tying them up in loose bundles with the quill ends level, that they might dry, and carefully carrying them into the room used for storing feathers, eggs, and such curiosities as were collected from time to time; Dyke having displayed a hobby for bringing home stones, crystals, birds’ eggs, and any attractive piece of ore, that he found during his travels. These were ranged in an old case, standing upright against the corrugated iron wall, where, a few boardings nailed across for shelves, the boy had an extremely rough but useful cabinet, the lid of the case forming the door when attached by a pair of leather hinges tacked on with wire nails.

“There,” said Emson, when the last plumes had been removed; “what do you say to having the skin off? It will make a mat.”

Dyke nodded, and the Kaffir now helping, the bird’s tough skin was stripped off, and laid, feathers downward, on the roof to dry.

“Jackals can’t reach it there, can they?” said Emson.

“No, I think not. Leopard might come and pull it down.”

“Yes: don’t let Duke be out of a night; there has been one hanging about lately.—But what are you going to do?”

“Dissect him,” said Dyke, who was on his knees with his sharp sheath-knife in his hand.

“Nonsense! Leave it now.”

“I want to see the poor old goblin’s gizzard, and open it. I know he has got knives and all sorts of things inside.”

“Then you may look,” said Emson. “I’m going to feed the horses and have a wash; they haven’t been unsaddled yet.”

He went to the thorn-fence and disappeared, while, hot and tired now, Dyke made short work of opening the great bird, and dragging out the gizzard, which he opened as a cook does that of a fowl, and exclaimed aloud at the contents:

“Here, Jack, fetch me some water in the tin;” and while the “boy” was gone, Dyke scraped out on to the sand quite a heap of pieces of flinty stone, rough crystals, and some pieces of iron, rusty nails, and a good-sized piece of hoop.

“I must have a look at you afterwards,” said the boy, as he picked out some forty or fifty of the dingy-looking rough crystals, gave them a rub over and over in the dry sand upon which he knelt, to dry them, and then thrust them—a good handful—into his pocket.

“Do for the collection,” he said to himself with a laugh. “Label: crystals of

quartz, discovered in a goblin's gizzard by Vandyke Emson, Esquire, F.A.S., Kopfontein, South Africa."

"Wanterwater?"

"Yes, I do 'wanterwater,'" cried Dyke, turning sharply on the Kaffir, who had returned. "I want to wash my hands. Look at 'em, Jack!"

"Narcy!" said the man, making a grimace.

"Hold hard, though; let's have a drink first," cried the boy. "It looks clean;" and raising the tin, he took a deep draught before using the vessel for a good wash, taking a handful of sand in the place of soap.

"Find the knife?" said Emson, coming back from the stable.

"No, but look here," cried Dyke, pointing to the great piece of hoop-iron. "Fancy a bird swallowing that."

"Iron is good for birds, I suppose," said Emson quietly.—"Here, Jack, drag that bird right away off; remember, a good way. Mind, I don't want the jackals too close to-night."

The Kaffir nodded, seized the bird's legs as if they were the shafts of a cart or handles of a wheelbarrow.

The load was heavy, though, and he shook his head, with reason, for such a bird weighed three hundred pounds, and it spoke well for its leg muscles that it could go at the rate of forty or fifty miles an hour.

"Too big," grumbled Jack; so Dyke seized one of the legs, and together they walked away with the dead bird, dragging it quite a quarter of a mile out beyond the ostrich-pens, ready for the jackals to come and play scavenger. After which Dyke returned to his brother, and they went in to where Tanta Sal, Jack's wife, had prepared a substantial meal.

Chapter Five.

Big Birdnesting.

“You’re a dissatisfied young dog, Dyke,” cried Joe Emson good-humouredly, as he smiled down from his high horse at his brother; “always grumbling.”

“I’m not,” cried Dyke indignantly.

“You are, boy. Just as if any one could be low-spirited when he is young and strong, out in this wide free place on such a lovely morning.”

“It’s all right enough now,” replied Dyke, “because it’s early and cool; but it is so horribly lonely.”

“Lonely! Why, I’m always with you,” cried Emson—“the best of company. Then you’ve Jack and Tanta Sal, and Duke, and Breezy, and all the ostriches for pets, and the oxen; while, if you want more company, there’s old Oom Schlagen out one way, and old Morgenstern out the other.”

“Ugh! Stupid old Boers!” cried Dyke.

“Well, they’re civil to you, and that’s more than Oom Schlagen is to me. It’s because you have got that Dutch name. I say, father meant you to be a painter, I’ll be bound, and here you are, an ostrich-farmer.”

“Oh yes, and we’re going to be very rich when the birds are all dead.”

“And they seem as if they meant to die, all of them,” said Emson sadly, as he rode along by his brother, each with his rifle across his saddle-bow. “I don’t seem to have got hold of the right way of managing them, Dyke: we must follow nature more by watching the habits of the wild ones. I have tried so hard, too.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Dyke merrily. “Who’s grumbling now!”

“That’s better, and more like yourself, old fellow,” said Emson, smiling down pleasantly. “That’s more like the light-hearted chap who promised to stick to and help me like a brother should. You hurt me, Dyke, when you turn so low-spirited and sulky. I’ve plenty of troubles, though I say little, over my venture here; and when I see you so down, it worries me more than I can say.”

They rode on over the open veldt that glorious morning in silence for some minutes, and Dyke looked down at his horse's mane.

"It makes me feel that I have done wrong in bringing a bright, happy lad away from home and his studies to this wild solitary place. I ought to have known better, and that it was not natural for a boy like you to feel the hard stern determination to get on that I, ten years older, possessed. I ought to have known that, as soon as the novelty had passed away, you would begin to long for change. Father did warn me, but I said to him: 'I'm a man, and he's only a boy; but we've been together so much, and always been companions, Dyke and I can't help getting on together.'"

"And we can't," cried the boy in a husky voice. "Don't, please don't, Joe, old chap; I can't bear it. I've been a beast."

"Oh, come, come," cried Emson, leaning over to clap him on the shoulder; "I didn't mean to upset you like that."

"But I'm glad you have," cried Dyke in half-suffocated tones. "I know well enough I have been a beast to you, Joe, and the more quiet and patient you've been with me, the worse I've got, till I quite hate myself."

"Oh no, not so bad as that."

"Yes," cried Dyke excitedly, "it's been worse; and all the while you've been the dear, good old chap to me; just the same as it always was when I was little, and grew tired and cross when we were out, and you took me up on your back and carried me miles and miles home."

"Why, of course I did," said Emson, smiling.

"There's no of course in it. I was always petty and disagreeable, and ready to impose on your good-nature; but you never had an unkind word for me."

"Well, you were such a little one, and I was always so big."

"I can see it all, Joe, and it's made me miserable many a time; but the kinder you've been, the worse it has made me. You and father always spoiled and petted me."

“Not we. Only kind to you, because we liked you. I say, Dyke, what games we used to have! You see, I never had a brother till you came. There, it’s all right. Now then for a canter.”

“Not yet,” said Dyke. “I feel as if I could talk to you this morning.”

“But you have talked, and it’s all over now; so come along.”

“No,” cried Dyke firmly, and he caught his brother’s rein.

“I say, old chap, are you the boss here, or am I?”

“I am, this morning,” said the boy, looking up in his brother’s big manly face. “I want you to listen to me.”

“Well, go ahead then, and let’s get it over.”

“It’s been like this, Joe. I’ve got in a bad way of thinking lately. It’s all been so disappointing, and no matter what one did, nothing came right.”

“Yes, that’s true enough, old chap,” said Emson, rather drearily; “and we have tried precious hard.”

“You have, Joe, and I’ve been a regular sulky, disappointed sort of brute.”

“Coat been a bit rough, Dyke, old chap, eh? Out of sorts.”

“I suppose in my head; but, Joe, I am sorry—I can’t say it as I should like to, but I—I will try now.”

“Just as if I didn’t know. We’ve been chums so long, old man, ever since you first took to me when I was a big stupid fellow, all legs like a colt, and as ugly, and you were a pretty little golden-haired chap, always wanting to stick your soft chubby little fist in my big paw. There, it’s all right. Old times again, old un, and we’re going to do it yet, eh?”

“And you’ll forgive me, Joe?” said Dyke earnestly.

“Forgive you?” cried Emson, looking at his brother with his big pleasant manly face all in wrinkles. “Get along with you! What is there to forgive?”

“I will try now and help you, Joe; I will, indeed.”

“Of course you will, old chap,” cried Joe, a little huskily too; “and if you and I can’t win yet, in spite of the hot sun and the disease and the wicked ways of those jolly old stilt-stalkers, nobody can.”

“Yes, we will win, Joe,” cried Dyke enthusiastically.

“That’s your sort!” cried Emson. “We’ll have a good long try, and if the ostriches don’t pay, we’ll hunt, as, I know, we’ve got plenty of room out here: we’ll have an elephant farm instead, and grow ivory, and have a big warehouse for making potted elephant to send and sell at home for a breakfast appetiser. Who’s going to give up, eh? Now, then, what about this canter? The horses want a breather—they’re getting fidgety. I say, feel better now, old chap, don’t you?”

Dyke pinched his lips together and nodded shortly.

“So do I.—Here! What’s that?”

He checked his horse, and pointed far away in the distance.

“Ostrich!” cried Dyke.

“Yes, I saw her rise and start off! My word! how she is going. I can see the spot where she got up, and must keep my eyes on it. There’s a nest there, for a pound. That means luck this morning. Come along steady. Lucky I brought the net. Why, Dyke, old chap, the tide’s going to turn, and we shall do it yet.”

“But the goblin’s dead.”

“Good job, too. There’s as good ostriches in the desert as ever came out, though they are fowl instead of fish. It’s my belief we shall snatch out of that nest a better game-cock bird than ever the goblin was, and without his temper. Come along.”

Dyke felt glad of the incident occurring when it did, for his mind was in a peculiar state just then. His feelings were mingled. He felt relieved and satisfied by having shifted something off his mind, but at the same time

there would come a sense of false shame, and a fancy that he had behaved childishly, when it was as brave and manly a speech—that confession—as ever came from his lips.

All the same, on they rode. And now the sky looked brighter; there seemed to be an elasticity in the air. Breezy had never carried Dyke so well before, and a sensation came over him, making him feel that he must shout and sing and slacken his rein, and gallop as hard as the cob could go.

“Yohoy there! steady, lad,” cried Emson; “not so fast, or I shall lose the spot. It’s hard work, little un, keeping your eye on anything, with the horse pitching you up and down.”

Hard work, indeed, for there was no tree, bush, or hillock out in the direction they were taking, and by which the young Englishman could mark down the spot where he imagined the nest to be.

So Dyke slackened speed, and with his heart throbbing in a pleasantly exhilarated fashion, he rode steadily on beside his brother, feeling as if the big fellow were the boy once more whom as a child he used to tease and be chased playfully in return. Emson’s way of speaking, too, enhanced the feeling.

“I say, little un,” he cried, “what a game if there’s no nest after all. You won’t be disappointed, will you?”

“Of course not.”

“Member me climbing the big elm at the bottom of the home-close to get the mag’s nest?”

“To be sure I do.”

“Didn’t think we two would ever go bird’s-nesting in Africa then, did we?”

“No; but do you think there is a nest out yonder, Joe?”

“I do,” cried Emson, “I’ve seen several hen birds about the last few days; but I never could make out which way they came or went. I’ve been on

the lookout, too, for one rising from the ground.”

“But is this a likely place for a nest?”

“Well, isn’t it? I should say it’s the very spot. Now, just look: here we are in an open plain, where a bird can squat down in the sand and look around for twenty miles—if she can see so far—in every direction, and see danger coming, whether it’s a man, a lion, or a jackal, and shuffle off her nest, and make tracks long before whatever it is gets near enough to make out where she rose. Of course I don’t know whether we shall find the nest, if there is one. It’s hard enough to find a lark’s or a partridge’s nest at home in an open field of forty or fifty acres; so of course, big though the nest is, and the bird, it’s a deal harder, out in a field hundreds of miles square, eh?”

“Of course it is.”

“Scuse my not looking round at you when I’m speaking, old chap; but if I take my eye off the spot, I shall never find it again.”

“I say, don’t be so jolly particular, Joe,” cried Dyke, laughing.

“Why not? It’s just what you and I ought to be,” said the big fellow with simple earnestness. “We’re out here in a savage land, but we don’t want to grow into savages, nor yet to be as blunt and gruff as two bears. I’m not going to forget that the dear old governor at home is a gentleman, even if his sons do rough it out here.”

“Till they’re regular ruffians, Joe.—I say: see the nest?”

“Oh no; it’s a mile away yet.”

“Then there isn’t one. You couldn’t have seen it at all that distance.”

“I never said I could see the nest, did I? It was enough for me that I’ve seen the birds about, and that I caught sight of that one making off this morning. We call them stupid, and they are in some things; but they’re precious cunning in others.”

“But if they were only feeding?”

“Why, then, there’s no nest. But I say breeding, and not feeding; and that’s rhyme if you take it in time, as the old woman said.”

“But you talked about hen birds. Then there may be more than one nest?”

“Not here. Why, you know how a lot of them lay in the same nest.”

“At home, shut up in pens, but not on the veldt.”

“Why, of course they do, and ’tis their nature to, like the bears and lions in Dr Watts. You don’t know everything quite yet, old chap. If you took the glass, and came and lay out here for two or three days and nights, and always supposing the birds didn’t see you—because if they did they’d be deserting the nest and go somewhere else—you’d see first one hen come to lay and then another, perhaps six of them; and when they’d packed the nest as full as it would hold, with the sand banked up round the eggs to keep them tight in their places with the points downwards, so as to be close, you’d see hen after hen come and take her turn, sitting all day, while the cock bird comes at nights and takes his turn, because he’s bigger and stronger, and better able to pitch into the prowling jackals.”

“How did you know all this, Joe?”

“Partly observation, partly from what I’ve heard Jack say,” replied Emson modestly. “Everything comes in useful. I daresay you won’t repent saving up all those odds and ends of stones and shells and eggs you’ve got at home.”

“Why, I often thought you’d feel they were a nuisance, Joe. I did see you laugh at them more than once.”

“Smile, old man, smile—that’s all. I like it. You might grow a regular museum out of small beginnings like that.”

“Then we ought to have stuffed the goblin,” cried Dyke merrily.

“Oh, come, no; that wouldn’t do. Our tin house isn’t the British Museum; but I would go on collecting bits of ore and things. You may find something worth having one of these days, besides picking up a lot of

knowledge. I'd put that piece of old iron the ostrich swallowed along with the rest."

"Would you?"

"Yes; but now let's have all eyes, and no tongues, old chap. We are getting near where that bird got up off the nest."

"If there was one."

"If there was one," assented Emson. "Now then: think you're mushrooming out in the old field at home, and see if you can't find the nest. Move off now a couple of hundred yards, and keep your eyes open."

Dyke followed out his brother's advice, and for the next hour they rode over the ground here and there, to and fro, and across and across, scanning the sandy depressions, till Emson suddenly drew rein, and shouted to Dyke, who was a quarter of a mile away.

Dyke sent his cob off at a gallop and joined him.

"Found it?" he cried excitedly.

"No, old fellow. It's a failure this time. Man wants sharp eyes to get the better of an ostrich. I made sure we should get it, but we're done. We've been over the ground times enough, and it's of no use."

"What! give up?" cried Dyke merrily. "Didn't say we'd find it the first time, but I mean to have that nest, if I try till to-morrow morning."

"Well done, little un," shouted Emson, laughing. "That's the right spirit, and I should like to have had the eggs; it would have started us on again. But I'm afraid we shall be wasting time, for we've lost count now of the position where I saw the bird rise, and in this great waste we may wander farther and farther away."

"But we can tell by the hoof-marks where we've been."

"Yes; and we've pretty well examined the ground. I tell you what, we'll

bring the glass this evening, and lie down watching till dark. We may see a bird come to the nest, and then we'll mark down the place, and one shall stop back, while the other rides forward, and number one can telegraph which way to go with his arms."

"I am disappointed," said Dyke, looking round about him over the level plain.

"So am I, old chap, but we won't be damped. It's only putting it off.—What are you looking at?"

"That," said Dyke; and, kicking his nag's sides, he went off at a canter for a couple of hundred yards, and then sent up a joyous shout.

"Why, he has found it!" cried Emson; and galloping up, there sat Dyke, flushed and happy, beside a depression in the sand, evidently scraped out, and with the sand banked round to keep the eggs in their places. There they all were, thirty-nine in number, neatly arranged with their points downward, while outside were several more, and on Dyke bending down, he found that they were all of a comfortable temperature; those lying outside being cold, and apparently freshly laid.

"Well, you have eyes, old chap!" cried Emson, slapping his brother on the shoulder, and then proceeding to loosen a coarsely meshed net from behind his saddle. "Bravo, Dyke! I told you the tide had turned. We'll get these home at once and put them under one of our hens. Shouldn't wonder if we get a nice little lot of chicks from these."

"If we can get them home without breaking."

"Oh, we'll do that," cried Emson, dismounting and spreading out the net upon the sand before they began carefully removing the spoil of the nest—that is to say, the eggs, which evidently contained chicks.

This done, the net was folded over and tied here and there so as to form a long bag, the ends fastened securely; and each taking an end, they mounted, and swinging between them the huge bag, which now weighed nearly a hundredweight, started for home. They left the new-laid eggs to be fetched that evening, or next morning, leaving them just as they were spread, looking clean and fresh, about the outside of the nest, much to

Dyke's regret.

"Why, we could manage them too," he said.

"We might, but if we did we should have mixed them up with the others, which would be a pity; for if we put them under a bird, they would only be addled, whereas if we keep them separate, they will be good either to set under another hen, or to eat. They will not hurt there."

Dyke said no more, but held on tightly to the end of the net, helping his brother to keep their horses a sufficient distance apart, so that the egg purse might keep well off the ground, and not be shaken too much by the horses' gentle pace.

"Wonder what the young birds think of their ride," said Dyke merrily. "We shall have one of them chipping an egg presently, and poking out his head to see what's the matter, and why things are getting so cold."

"Cold, in this scorching sun!" said Emson; "why it would hatch them out. Hold tight."

"Right it is!" cried Dyke in seafaring style. "I say, what a smash it would be if I let go!"

"Ah, it would," said Emson; "but you won't. Cry stop when you're tired, and we'll change hands.—Steady, boy!" he continued to his horse, which seemed disposed to increase its speed, and they jogged gently along again.

"I always used to read that the ostriches did lay their eggs in the sand and leave them for the sun to hatch."

"There is some truth in it," said Emson; "but the old writers didn't get to the bottom of it. The sun would hatch them if it kept on shining, but the cold nights would chill the eggs and undo all the day's work. It's of a night that the birds sit closest.—Like to change now?"

"Yes: they are getting heavy for one's wrist," said Dyke; and the great purse was lowered to the ground, the eggs clicking together as if made of china. Then the brothers changed places and hands; raised the net; the

horses hung apart again, and the slow journey was resumed.

“Gently!” cried Dyke before they had gone very far. “If you hang away so hard, I shall be dragged out of the saddle.”

The tension was relaxed, and they went on again riding by slow degrees back to Kopfontein, which they finally reached with their heavy and fragile load intact.

Dyke was hungry enough, but they neither ate nor rested till their eggs were borne into one of the pens where three hens and their husband had a nest which contained only ten eggs, and these were known to be addled, for the time was long past for hatching; and upon the brothers approaching the nest, there was a great deal of hissing and cackling, the cock bird beginning to roar like a lion, and stalking menacingly round the net, which he kept on inspecting curiously.

“Be on the lookout for a kick,” said Emson, as the net was lowered.

“Oh, he won’t kick me—will you, old chap?” cried Dyke, giving the large bird a playful poke, which had the effect of sending him off remonstrating angrily, as if he resented such liberties being taken with his ribs. For he turned when he reached the fence, and stood fluttering his short wings, clucking, and making threatening gestures with his head.

The hen bird sitting was much more amenable to their approach, for, after a little persuasion, she rose in a very stately way, blinked her rather human-looking, eye-lashed optics, and stalked to the other wives to stand with them, hissing and cackling a little, while the bad eggs were removed and the fresh thirty-nine were put in their place, Emson arranging them as regularly as he could in accordance with the bird’s habits.

But as Dyke handed them to him one by one, they had hard work to get them in on account of the impatience displayed by the wives, two of which displayed a great eagerness to have first sit upon the nestful, and needing to be kept off until all were ready.

Then began a severe quarrel, and a good deal of pecking before the youngest and strongest succeeded in mounting upon the nest, shuffling the eggs about so as to get them more in accordance with her own idea

of the fitness of things, and then, when all were in order, she settled down with her plumage regularly covering up the eggs, while the other birds now looked on.

“Do you double up your perambulators?” said Dyke mockingly. “Yes, madam, I see you do; but pray don’t put a toe through either of the shells.”

The hen uttered a strangely soft clucking kind of noise, as if in reply, and there was a peculiar look of satisfaction about the huge tame creature as she covered the gigantic clutch.

“So they are,” said Dyke—“something like eggs, aren’t they?—I say, look at the others,” he continued, as they stalked off to go apparently to discuss the new arrivals with the cock bird over at the other side of the enclosure.

“There,” said Emson, “you can have these addled eggs cleaned out, Dyke, and we’ll make chunking cups of them. When shall we fetch the other lot? This evening?”

“If you like.”

“No; we’ll leave it till to-morrow, and give the nags a rest.”



Chapter Six.

Lions at Home.

Fortune smiled her brightest upon Joseph Emson when they first came up the country, travelling for months in their wagon, till Kopfontein, with its never-failing spring in the granite chasm, was settled upon as being a capital place to carry out the idea of the ostrich-farm. Then the rough house was run up, and in course of time pens and other enclosures made, and by very slow degrees stocked with the gigantic birds, principally by help of Kaffir servants; Jack showing himself to be very clever in finding nests of eggs, but afterwards proving lazy and indifferent, excusing himself on the plea that "Baas got all eggs. No more. All gone."

It seemed to be a capital idea, and promised plenty of success, for at first the feathers they obtained from the Kaffirs sold well, making capital prices when sent down to Cape Town. Then the supply from the native hunters began to fail; and when at last the young farmers had plumes to sell of their own raising, prices had gone down terribly, and Emson saw plainly enough that he was losing by his venture.

Then he began to lose his birds by accident, by the destructive propensities of the goblin and a vicious old hen or two; and lastly, some kind of epidemic, which they dubbed ostrich chicken-pox, carried the young birds off wholesale.

Then Dyke began to be damped, and grew dull, and soon his brother became low-spirited too, and for a whole year matters had gone on from bad to worse; Emson often asking himself whether it was not time to make a fresh start, but always coming to the same frame of mind that it was too soon to be beaten yet, and keeping a firm upper lip in the presence of his brother.

The morning after the finding of the ostrich's nest, they started again, taking the net, and keeping a keen lookout in the hope of discovering another.

“There’s no reason why we should not,” said Emson. “I’ve been too easy with Jack; he has not disturbed the birds around for months.”

“I think we can find the nest again,” said Dyke.

“Why not? We’ll find it by the footmarks, if we cannot any other way. But I think I can ride straight to it.”

They kept a sharp lookout, but no ostrich sprang up in the distance and sped away like the wind. About six miles from home, though, something else was seen lying right out on the plain, to which Dyke pointed.

“A bird?” cried Emson. “Yes, I see it. No; a beast. Why, Dyke, old chap, there are two of them. What shall we do? Creep in and try a shot, or let them go off?”

“I should try a shot,” said the boy excitedly. “Why, one is a big-maned fellow.”

“Then perhaps we had better let them alone.”

“What! to come and pull down one of the oxen. No: let’s have a shot at them.”

“Very well,” said Emson quietly; “but see that you have a couple of bullets in your rifle. Make sure.”

He set the example by opening the breech of his piece, and carefully examining the cartridges before replacing them.

“All right,” he cried. “Now, look here, Dyke. Be ready and smart, if the brutes turn upon us to charge. Sit fast, and give Breezy his head then. No lion would overtake him. Only you must be prepared for a sharp wheel round, for if the brutes come on with a roar, your cob will spin about like a teetotum.”

But no satisfactory shot was obtained, for when they were about a quarter of a mile away, a big, dark-maned lion rose to his feet, stood staring at them for nearly a minute, and then started off at a canter, closely followed by its companion.

Dyke looked sharply round at his brother, as if to say, "Come on!" but Emson shook his head.

"Not to-day, old chap," he cried. "We're too busy. It would mean, too, a long gallop, tiring our horses before we could get a shot, and then we should not be in good condition for aiming."

"Oh, but, Joe, I daresay that is the wretch that killed the white ox, and he is hanging about after another."

"To be sure: I forgot that," cried Emson excitedly. "Come on. But steady: we can't lose sight of them, so let's canter, and follow till they stand at bay or sneak into the bushes."

That was more to Dyke's taste, and side by side they followed the two lions, as the great tawny-looking beasts cantered over the plain, their heads down, tails drooping, and looking, as Dyke said, wonderfully like a couple of great cats sneaking off after being found out stealing cream.

There was no need to be silent, and Dyke kept on shouting remarks to his brother as they cantered on over the dry bush and sand.

"I don't think much of lions, after all, Joe," he said; "they're not half kings of beasts like you see in pictures and read of in books."

"You haven't seen one in a rage, old fellow," said Emson good-humouredly.

"I don't believe they'd be anything much if they were," said Dyke contemptuously. "They always seem to me to be creeping and sneaking about like a cat after a mouse. Now look at those great strong things going off like that, as soon as they see us, instead of roaring at us and driving us away."

"Smell powder, perhaps, and are afraid of the guns."

"Well, but if they did, that isn't being brave as a lion, Joe. Why, when they killed the white ox, there were four of them, and they did it in the dark. I don't believe when you shot that the bullet went near either of the brutes."

“No, but we scared them off.”

“They killed the poor old bullock first, though.”

“Well, didn’t that give you a good idea of a lion’s strength; the poor beast’s neck was broken.”

“Let’s show them to-day that we are stronger, and break *their* necks,” said Dyke. “Look out: they’re gone.” For the two great beasts suddenly plunged into a patch of broken ground, where great blocks of granite stood up from among the bushes, and sheltered them with larger growth.

It was the only hiding-place in sight, and for this the lions had made, and now disappeared.

“We shan’t get a shot at them now, old chap,” cried Emson; “they lie as snug as rats among those bushes. We want old Duke here.”

“Oh, don’t give up,” cried Dyke. “I know that place well; it’s where I found the aardvark, and the bushes are quite open. I am sure we can see them.”

“Well, as you’re so set on it, we’ll try; but mind this, no riding in—nothing rash, you know.”

“Oh, I’ll take care,” cried Dyke. “I shan’t get hurt. You only have to ride right at them, and they’ll run.”

“I don’t know so much about that, old cocksure; but mind this, horses are horses, and I don’t want you to get Breezy clawed.”

“And I don’t want to get him clawed—do I, old merry legs?” cried the boy, bending forward to pat his nag’s neck. “Sooner get scratched myself, wouldn’t I, eh?”

The little horse tossed up its head and shook its mane, and then taking his master’s caress and words to mean a call upon him for fresh effort, he dashed off, and had to be checked.

“Steady, steady, Dyke, boy,” cried Emson; “do you hear?”

“Please sir, it wasn’t me,” replied the boy merrily. “It was him.”

“No nonsense!” cried Emson sternly. “Steady! This is not play.”

Dyke glanced once at his brother’s face as he rode up, and saw that it looked hard, earnest, and firm.

“All right, Joe,” he said quietly; “I will mind.”

The next minute they had cantered gently up to the patch, which was only about an acre in extent, and the bushes so thin and scattered that they could see nearly across where the lions had entered.

But there was no sign of the cunning beasts.

“Look here, Joe; you ride round that way, and I’ll go this; then we are sure to see them.”

“Capital plan,” said Emson sarcastically. “Bravo, general! weaken your forces by one-half, and then if I see them I can’t fire for fear of hitting you, and you can’t fire for fear of hitting me. Try again, clever one.”

“Oh, all right, you try,” said Dyke, in an offended tone.

“Ride round with me, then, either five yards in front or five behind. Will you go first?”

“No, you go,” said Dyke distantly.

“Come along, then. Keep a sharp lookout, and if you get a good chance at the shoulder—fire. Not without.”

“Very well,” said Dyke shortly, “but you see if they don’t sneak out and gallop away on the other side.”

“They won’t leave cover if they can help it,” said Emson; and his words proved true, for as they rode slowly round with finger on trigger, scanning the openings, the cunning brutes glided in and out among the great boulders, and crawled through the bushes, so that not a glimpse of them could be obtained.

“There!” cried Dyke, after they had ridden round twice. “I knew it. While we were talking on one side, they’ve crept out on the other and gone off! They’re miles away now.”

“Exactly!” said Emson; “and that’s why the horses are so uneasy. I say, little un, you don’t get on so fast as I should like with your hunting knowledge. Look at Breezy.”

Dyke glanced at his cob, and the little horse showed plainly enough by its movements that whatever might be its master’s opinion, it was feeling convinced that the lions were pretty close at hand.

“Well, what shall we do—ride through?”

“No,” said Emson decidedly, “that would be inviting a charge. I’m afraid we must separate, or we shall never get a shot. As we ride round one side, they creep along on the other.”

“Did you see them?”

“No, but look there.”

Dyke looked where his brother pointed, and saw plainly marked in the soft sand the footprints of the lions.

“Well, let’s separate, then,” said the boy eagerly. “I’ll mind and not shoot your way, if you’ll take care not to hit me.”

“Very good: we’ll try, then; but be careful not to fire unless you get a good sure chance. Look here; this will be the best plan. One of us must sit fast here while the other rides round.”

“But the one who stops will get the best chance, for the game will be driven towards him. Who’s to stop?”

Emson thrust his hand into his pocket, and drew it out again clenched.

“Something or nothing?” he cried.

“Nothing,” said Dyke sharply.

“Nothing. Right. Your chance,” said Emson.

“Then I’ll stay here?”

“Very well then; be ready. I shall ride ahead, and the lions will sneak round till they find you are here, and then they’ll either go right across, or break cover and gallop off. There’s every chance for a shot. Right forward in the shoulder, mind.”

“Won’t charge me, will they?”

“Not unless they’re wounded,” replied Emson.—“Ready?”

“Yes.”

Emson rode slowly off, and as he went he kept on crying “Here!” at every half-dozen yards or so, giving his brother a good idea of his position and that of the lions too.

Meanwhile Dyke, with his heart beginning to beat heavily, sat facing in the other direction, both barrels of his rifled piece cocked and pointed forward, nostrils distended like those of his horse, and, also like the animal, with every sense on the alert.

“Here—here—here,” came from beyond him, and gradually working more and more to the left, while Dyke felt a great deal more respect for the prowess and daring of lions than he did half an hour before.

The stillness, broken only by his brother’s recurring cry, repeated with such regularity, seemed awful, and the deep low sigh uttered by Breezy sounded quite startling; but there was nothing else—no sound of the powerful cats coming cautiously round, winding in and out among the rocks and bushes, and not a twig was stirred.

“Here—here—here,” kept coming, and Dyke sat gripping the saddle tightly with his knees, feeling a curious quiver pass into him from the horse’s excited nerves, as the swift little beast stood gazing before it at the ragged shrubs, ready to spring away on the slightest sign of danger. The rein lay upon its neck, and its ears were cocked right forward, while Dyke’s double barrel was held ready to fire to right or left of those

warning ears at the first chance.

There was the clump on the boy's left, the open ground of the veldt on his right, and the sun glancing down and making the leaves of the trees hot; but still there was nothing but the regular "Here—here—here," uttered in Emson's deep bass.

"They're gone," said Dyke to himself, with a peculiar sense of relief, which made his breath come more freely. "They would have been here by now. I'll shout to Joe."

But he did not. For at that moment there was the faintest of faint rustles about a dozen yards in front. One of the thin bushes grew gradually darker, and Dyke had a glimpse of a patch of rough hair raised above the leaves. Then Breezy started violently, and in an instant two lions started up.

"*How!—Haugh!*" was roared out. The maneless lion bounded out of the bushes, and went away over the sand in a series of tremendous leaps, while the companion, a huge beast with darkly-tipped mane, leaped as if to follow, but stopped and faced the boy, with head erect and tail lashing from side to side, while the horse stood paralysed with fear, its legs far apart, as if to bear the coming charge, and every nerve and muscle on the quiver.

Dyke sat motionless during those brief moments, knowing that he ought to fire, but feeling as if he were suffering from nightmare, till the majestic beast before him gave vent to a tremendous roar, turned, and bounded away.

Then Dyke's power of action came back. Quick as a flash, his piece was to his shoulder, and he fired; but the lion bounded onward, hidden for the time by the smoke; yet as it cleared away, the boy had another clear view of the beast end on, and fired once more.

At this there was a savage snarl; the lion made a bound sidewise, and then swung round as if to charge back at its assailant, when Breezy tore off at full speed, but had not gone fifty yards before another shot rang out, and Dyke looked round to see his brother dismounted and kneeling on the sand, while the lion was trailing itself along with its hind-quarters

paralysed.

In another minute Emson had remounted and ridden up to the dangerous beast; there was another report from close quarters, and the lion rolled over and straightened itself out.

“Dead?” cried Dyke excitedly, as he mastered Breezy’s objections, and rode up.

“Yes; he’ll kill no more of our oxen, old chap,” cried his brother. “Well done, little un! You stopped him splendidly. That last shot of yours brought him up for me to finish.”

“Think I hit him, then?”

“Think?” said Emson, laughing. “You can easily prove it. Your bullet must have hit him end on. Mine were on his left flank.”

“He *is* dead, isn’t he?” said Dyke dubious.

“As dead as he can well be,” said Emson, dismounting, and throwing his rein over his horse’s head. “Yes; here we are. Your bullet caught him half-way up the back here; one of mine hit him in the side, and here’s the other right through the left shoulder-blade. That means finis. But that shot of yours regularly paralysed him behind. *Your* lion, little un, and that skin will do for your museum. It’s a beauty.”

“But *you* killed him,” said the boy modestly.

“Put him out of his misery, that’s all. He is a splendid fellow, though. But he won’t run away now, little un.—Let’s get on.”

“But his skin?” said Dyke eagerly.

“Too hard a job now, Dyke, under this sun. We’ll come over this evening with Jack, and strip that off. Now for the eggs.”

Chapter Seven.

Life on the Veldt.

The task of finding the emptied ostrich nest proved harder than they expected; but their ride across the barren plain was made interesting by the sight of a herd of gnus and a couple of the beautiful black antelope, with their long, gracefully curved, sharp horns. Just before reaching the nest, too, they had the rather unusual sight, in their part, of half-a-dozen giraffes, which went off in their awkward, lumbering trot toward the north.

At last, though, the nest was reached, the scattered eggs gathered into the net, and heedless of these chinking together a little, as they hung between them, they cantered on.

“Won’t do them any good shaking them up so, will it?” said Dyke.

“I’ve given up all idea of setting these,” said Emson. “I should say it would be very doubtful whether they would hatch, and we want a little change in the way of feeding, old fellow. We’ll see which are addled, and which are not.”

Tanta Sal was at the door as they rode up, and her face expanded largely, especially about the eyes and mouth, at the sight of the eggs.

“I say, look at Tant,” said Dyke merrily. “Did you ever see such a face?”

“Never,” replied Emson quietly. “She’s not beautiful from our point of view.”

“Beautiful!”

“Tastes differ, old chap,” said Emson. “No doubt Jack thought her very nice-looking. English people admire small mouths and little waists. It is very evident that the Kaffirs do not; and I don’t see why a small mouth should be more beautiful than a large one.”

“And there isn’t so much of it,” cried Dyke.

“Certainly not, and it is not so useful. No: Tant is not handsome, but she can cook, and I don’t believe that Venus could have fetched water from the spring in two buckets half so well.”

“Don’t suppose she could, or made fires either,” said Dyke, laughing.

“Very good, then, little un. Tant is quite good-looking enough for us.—Hi! there, old girl, take these and keep them cool. Cook one for dinner.”

The woman nodded, took the net, swung it over her back, and the next minute the creamy-white eggs were seen reposing on the dark skin.

After seeing to the horses, Dyke made some remark to his brother about wanting his corn too, and he went quietly round to the back, where Tant was busy over the fire, preparing one of the eggs by cooking it *au naturel*, not boiling in a saucepan, but making the thick shell itself do duty for one.

She looked up and showed her teeth as Dyke came in sight, and then went on with her work, which was that of stirring the egg, whose treatment was very simple. She had chipped a little hole in one end, big enough to admit a stick, and had placed the other end deep down in the glowing dry cake ashes, squatting down on her heels on one side of the fire, while Jack sat in a similar position on the other, watching his wife as she kept on stirring the egg with the piece of wood.

“Oh there you are, Jack,” said Dyke; “we’ve shot a big lion.”

“Baas kill?”

“Yes. You’re coming with us to skin it this evening?”

The Kaffir shook his head, and then lowered it upon one hand, making a piteous grimace.

“Jack sick, bad,” he said.

“Jack no sick bad,” cried Tanta, leaping up angrily.

As she spoke, she raised one broad black foot, and gave her husband a sharp thrust in the ribs, with the result that he rolled over and then jumped up furiously to retaliate.

“Ah, would you!” cried Dyke; and the dog, which had followed him, began to growl. “Yes, you hit her, and I’ll set Duke at you,” cried Dyke. “Can’t

you see he's ashamed?"

Jack growled fiercely, and his wife reseated herself upon her heels, and went on stirring the egg again, laughing merrily the while.

"No sick bad," she said; and then wanting to say something more, she rattled off a series of words, all oom and click, for Jack's benefit, the Kaffir listening the while.

The egg was soon after declared to be done, and formed a very satisfactory omelette-like addition to the hard biltong and mealie cake which formed the ostrich-farmers' dinner.

"I'd a deal rather we'd shot an antelope, Joe," said Dyke, as he ground away at the biltong, that popular South African delicacy, formed by cutting fresh meat into long strips, and drying them in the sun before the flesh has time to go bad—a capital plan in a torrid country, where decomposition is rapid and salt none too plentiful; but it has its drawbacks, and is best suited to the taste of those who appreciate the chewing of leather with a superlatively high flavour of game.

"Yes, it is time we had some fresh meat, old chap," said Emson good-humouredly. "After that slice of luck with the birds, we'll try for some guinea-fowl or a springbok in the morning."

"I wish we had a river nearer where we could fish," said Dyke, as he worked away at the dried meat.

"Yes, it would be handy, if we could catch any fish; but we usen't to get a great many—not enough to live on—in the old days at home."

"Not often," said Dyke. "I say, it is tough."

"Well, yes. A well-beaten-out piece would not make a bad shoe sole, little un. But about that fishing? It would take a great many of those sticklebacks you always would fish for with a worm to make a dish."

"Well, they used to bite, and that's more than your carp would, Joe. Why, you only used to catch about one a month."

“But, then, look at the size. One did make a dish.”

“Yes, of only head and bones. Ugh! I’d rather eat biltong.”

Emson laughed good-humouredly.

“Well,” he said, “we can’t go fishing without we make a hundred miles’ journey, so we can’t get fish. How would a lion steak eat?”

“Worse than a cut out of the poor old goblin’s breast. But, I say, are we to go and skin that old savage to-night?”

“I’ll go with Jack, and do it, if you’re tired.”

“That you won’t,” cried Dyke. “But, I say, Jack’s bad sick he says.”

“Yes, I suppose so. He generally is now, when we want him to work. We’ve spoiled Master Jack by feeding him too well; and if it wasn’t for Tanta Sal, Master Jack would have to go upon his travels. That woman’s a treasure, little un. She’s a capital cook; and what a wonderful thing it is that it comes so natural to a woman, whether she’s white or black, to like washing shirts. Do you know, I believe that Tanta Sal would take to starching and ironing if she had a chance. Have any more?”

“No: done,” said Dyke, wiping his knife carefully, and returning it to the sheath he wore in his belt.

“Then let’s go and have a look at the chickens. Why, the other day I felt as if I could open all the pens and say to the birds, ‘There, be off with you, for you’re no good.’”

“But now you’re going to have another good try.”

“Yes; and we must give them greater liberty, and try to let them live in a more natural way.”

“And that means always hunting them and driving them back to the pens.”

“We shan’t mind that if they all turn out healthy,” said Emson. “Come

along.”

“Wait till I call Tant,” said Dyke; and he went out to the back to summon the Kaffir woman, who came in smiling, cleared away, and then proceeded to feed her lord; Duke, the dog, waiting for his turn, and not being forgotten.

It was like playing at keeping bantams in Brobdingnag, Dyke said, as they entered the pens pretty well provided with food for the birds, and going from enclosure to enclosure, armed each with a stout stick, necessitated by the manners and customs of their charge. For though it was plain sailing enough scattering out food for the young birds, which stalked about looking very solemn and stupid, the full-grown and elderly, especially the cocks, displayed a desire for more, to which “glutton” would be far too mild a term to apply; while the goblin’s successor, as king of the farm, seemed to have become so puffed up with pride at his succession to the throne, that the stick had to be applied several times in response to his insatiable and aggressive demands.

But at last the feeding was done, the hens in attendance on the nest of eggs visited, where all seemed satisfactory, and then the horses were saddled, and Jack and Duke summoned.

The latter dashed up instantly; but Jack made no reply.

“Yes, he is spoiled,” said Emson. “It has always seemed to be so much less trouble to saddle our own horses than to see that he did it properly; but we ought to have made him do it, little un.”

“Of course we ought,” said Dyke. “It isn’t too late to begin now?”

“I’m afraid it is,” said Emson.—“Here! Hi! Jack,” he shouted; and the dog supplemented the cry by running toward the house, barking loudly, with the result that the Kaffir woman came out, saw at a glance what was wanted, and turned back.

The next minute there was a scuffling noise heard behind the place, accompanied by angry protesting voices, speaking loudly in the Kaffir tongue.

Then all at once Jack appeared, carrying three assegais, and holding himself up with a great deal of savage dignity; but as he approached he was struck on the back of the head by a bone. He turned back angrily, but ducked down to avoid a dry cake of fuel, and ended by running to avoid further missiles, with his dignity all gone, for Tanta Sal's grinning face peeped round the corner, and she shouted: "Jack bad sick, baas. All eat—seep."

"Yes; that's what's the matter, Jack," said Emson, shaking his head at him. "Now take hold of the horse's mane, and I'll give you a good digestive run."

There was no help for it. Jack seized the mane and trotted off beside the horse, while a derisive shout came from behind the house, and Tanta's grinning face re-appeared.

This was too much for Jack, who turned to shake his assegais at her: the movement was unpropitious, for he stumbled and fell, but gathered himself up, caught up to the horse, and trotted on again, keeping on in the most untiring way, till a flight of carrion birds was sighted, hovering about the granite boulders, and perching here and there, as if ready for the banquet to come.

Duke charged forward at this, and the birds scattered, but did not go far; while the dog's approach started half-a-dozen jackals from among the bushes to which they had retired, and they now began scurrying over the plain. "I wonder how they find out that there's anything dead, Joe," said Dyke; "we did not see a single jackal or bird this morning."

"Eyesight," said Emson quietly. "The vultures are sailing about on high, and one sees the dead animal; then other vultures see him making for it, and follow."

"And the jackals see the vultures, and follow too?"

"That seems to be the way, old fellow. Anyhow, they always manage to find out where there's anything to eat."

"I say, don't he look big?" said Dyke, as the carcass of the dead lion lay now well in sight.

“Yes; he’s one of the finest I have seen. You ought to get the teeth out of his head, little un; they’d do to save up for your museum.”

“I will,” said Dyke.

The next minute they had dismounted, and were removing the horses’ bridles to let them pick off the green shoots of the bushes. The rifles had been laid down, and Duke had gone snuffing about among the rocks, while Jack was proceeding to sharpen the edge of one of his assegais, when the dog suddenly gave tongue. There was a furious roar, the horses pressed up together, and from close at hand a lion, evidently the companion of that lying dead, sprang out and bounded away, soon placing itself out of shot.

“Ought to have been with us this morning,” said Dyke, as he called back the dog.

“Couldn’t have done better if we had had him,” said Emson, quietly rolling up his sleeves, an example followed by the boy.

“Think that one will come back again?” was the next remark.

“Not while we are here,” was Emson’s reply; and then, as the evening was drawing on, he set to work helping Jack, who was cleverly running the point and edge of his assegai through the skin from the lion’s chin to tail, and then inside each leg right down to the toes.

A busy time ensued, resulting in the heavy skin being removed uninjured, and rolled up and packed across Emson’s horse.

“You’ll have to leave the teeth till another day,” said Emson, as the stars began to peep out faintly, and they trotted homeward; but before they had left the carcass a couple of hundred yards, a snapping, snarling, and howling made Duke stop short and look inquiringly up at his masters, as much as to say:

“Are you going to let them do that?” But at a word he followed on obediently, and the noise increased.

“Won’t be much lion left by to-morrow morning, Joe,” said Dyke.

“No, boy. Africa is well scavenged, what with the jackals, birds, and flies. But we’d better get that skin well under cover somewhere when we are back.”

“Why? Think the jackals will follow, and try and drag it away?”

“No; I was feeling sure that the other lion would.”

Emson was right, for Dyke was awakened that night by the alarm of the horses and oxen, who gave pretty good evidence of the huge cat’s being near, but a couple of shots from Emson’s gun rang out, and the animals settled down quietly once again, there being no further disturbance that night on the lonely farm.

Chapter Eight.

The Desert Herds.

“I tell you what, little un,” said Emson some mornings later, “I’m going to start a crest and motto, and I’ll take a doubled fist for the crest, and *Nil desperandum* for motto.”

“And what good will that do you?” said Dyke, hammering away as he knelt on the sand with the lion’s skull held between his knees.

“What good! Why, I shall always have my motto before me—‘Never despair,’ and the doubled fist to—”

“To show that you are always ready to punch Kaffir Jack’s head,” cried Dyke quickly; and bang went the hammer on the end of the cold chisel the boy held.

“No,” said Emson, laughing—“to denote determination.”

“‘Inasmuch as to which?’ as the Yankee said in his book.—Pincers, please. Here, what have you done with those pincers, Joe?”

“Haven’t touched them. They’re underneath you, stupid.”

“Oh, ah! so they are,” said Dyke; and picking them up, he took careful hold of one of the lion’s tusks, after loosening it with the hammer and chisel, and dragged it out without having injured the enamel in the least.

The two sharply-pointed fangs had been extracted from the lower jaw, and Dyke was busily operating on the skull, which was, like the bones scattered here and there, picked quite clean, the work of the jackals and vultures having been finished off by the ants; and as Dyke held up the third tusk in triumph, his brother took the piece of curved ivory and turned it over in his hand, while Duke and the horses seemed to be interested spectators.

“Magnificent specimen of a canine tooth,” said Emson thoughtfully.

Dyke laughed.

“I know better than that. It can’t be.”

“Can’t? But it is,” replied Emson. “What do you mean?”

“Canine means dog, doesn’t it? Dog’s teeth can’t grow in a big cat. It’s a feline tooth.”

“They can grow in human jaws—in yours, for instance. You have four canine teeth, as the naturalists call them; so why can’t they grow in a lion’s?”

“Because it’s unnatural,” said Dyke, beginning to chip away some of the jawbone from around the last tusk. “Canine teeth can grow in my jaws, because you said one day that I was a puppy.”

“I say, don’t, little un. You’re growing too clever, and attempts at jokes like that don’t seem to fit out here in this hungry desert. Mind what you are about, or you’ll spoil the tooth.”

“I’m minding; but what did you mean about your *Nil desperandum*?”

“That I’ll never despair. When we’ve tried everything we can out here, and failed, we’ll go back home and settle in London. Something always turns up, and you’re so handy, that we’ll start as dentists, and you shall

extract all the teeth.”

“All right, Joe. My word! this is a tight one. But people wouldn’t have their teeth taken out with hammer and chisel.”

“You could use laughing gas.”

“They wouldn’t laugh much, gas or no gas,” cried Dyke, “if I got hold of their teeth with the pincers, like this. I say, this is a tough one. He never had toothache in this. You have a go: your muscles are stronger than mine.”

“No; have another try.”

“But it makes me so hot.”

“Never mind. Remember my crest and motto—doubled fist for determination, and ‘Never despair.’”

“Who’s going to despair over a big tooth?” cried Dyke, holding on to the pincers with both hands, giving a good wrench, and tearing out the tusk. “That’s got him. Phew! it was a job. I say, they’ll look well as curiosities.”

“Yes, they’re a fine set,” said Emson, taking out his little double glass, and beginning slowly to sweep the plain.

“See anything?” asked Dyke, as he rose to his feet, and put the hammer, chisel, and pincers in a leather case buckled behind his saddle, and washed his hands, drily, in sand.

“Not yet.”

“Oh, do see something! We must get a buck of some kind to take home with us.”

“Yes, we ought to get something, or Jack will forsake us because we are starving him; and take away his wife. You’ll have to cook then, little un.”

“Won’t matter, if there’s nothing to cook,” said Dyke sharply. “But, I say, Joe, you do think we are getting on better with the birds? Only two chicks

have died since we took home those eggs.”

“Only two,” said Emson, rather bitterly. “That’s one a week. Easily calculate how long we shall be in getting to the end of our stock.”

“I say, what about your motto? Who’s looking on the black side?”

“Guilty, my lord. Come along; jump up. We will have something or another to take back for a roast.”

Dyke sprang upon his horse, the dog gave a joyful bark, and they cantered off, Dyke placing his rifle on his rein hand, while he rearranged the tusks in his pocket, to keep them from rattling.

“Which way are we going?” he said.

“Let’s try west; we may perhaps see ostriches.”

“Oh, don’t talk about them,” cried Dyke; “I do get so tired of the wretches. I say, that young cock number two showed fight at me this morning, and kicked. He just missed my leg.”

“What? Oh, you must be careful, old chap. I can’t afford to have your leg broken. But, I say, I had a look at the stores this morning before we started.”

“I saw you, and wondered what you were doing.”

“The mealie bag is nearly empty. One of us will have to take the wagon across to old Morgenstein’s and buy stores.”

“Why not both go? It would make a change.”

“I’ll tell you, little un. When we got back, half the birds would be dead, and the other half all over the veldt.”

“Oh, bother those old ostriches! they’re always in the way,” cried Dyke. “All right, Joe; I’ll stop and mind them, only don’t be longer than you can help.”

"I can't see how it can be done in less than ten days, old fellow," said Emson thoughtfully; "and if the old Boer is away, it may take a fortnight."

"All right; I won't mind," said Dyke with a sigh. "I'll take care of the place, and I'm going to try some new plans. There shan't be a single bird die. I say, oughtn't those young birds to be out by now?"

"I've been expecting them every day for a week," said Emson, rather dolefully. "But, look here, little un: if you took Jack with you, do you think you could manage the journey yourself?"

Dyke turned on his horse and looked quite startled.

"There's the driving."

"Jack would drive," said Emson hastily.

"And the inspanning and outspanning."

"Which he could see to."

"And camping out in the wagon alone."

"Yes: you'd want good fires every night; but I can't help it, old fellow. Only one could go, and you'd be happier with the work and excitement than you would be moping at the house, all alone, and watching for me to come back."

"But that would be just as bad for you, Joe; and you'd be thinking that the lions had got me."

"No, I shouldn't; but I should be trembling for the oxen, my boy. There, I've made up my mind to send you, and you'll go."

"Oh, I'll go," said Dyke sturdily; "but why not go to Oom Schlagen? it's twenty miles nearer. He has a much better lot of things and is more civil than Morgenstern."

"Yes, I know all that, little un," said Emson; "but Morgenstern is honest. He charges well for his corn and meal, but he'll give you just measure,

and will deal with you as fairly as he would with me. Old Uncle Schlagen would, as soon as he saw you—a boy—coming alone, set to work to see if he couldn't rob you of a span of oxen, saying they were his, and trick you over the stores in every way he could."

"Then I'll go to old Morningstar's."

"You won't mind going?"

"Oh yes, I shall, because it will be so lonely; but I'll go."

"I don't like sending you, little un; and there's another difficulty."

"Oh, never mind that; it's all difficulties out here."

"True; but some are bigger than others."

"Well, what's the big one now?" said Dyke contemptuously, as if he had grown so hardened that he could face anything.

"Jack," said Emson laconically.

"What! Jack? Yes, he'd better be," cried Dyke. "If he gives me any of his nonsense, he'll have a rap over the head with the barrel of my gun."

"How much of that is honest pluck, old chap, and how much bunkum?" said Emson, speaking very seriously.

"I don't know," cried Dyke, colouring; "I don't think there's any bounce in it, Joe. I meant it honestly."

"But he is a man, and you are a boy."

"Oh yes, he's a man, and he bullies and threatens Tanta Sal, and makes believe that he is going to spear her, and directly she rushes at him, he runs. I don't think I should be afraid of Jack."

"Neither do I, little un," cried Emson warmly. "That will do. I was nervous about this. I felt that he might begin to show off as soon as you two were away from me, and if he fancied that you were afraid of him, he would be

master to the end of the journey.”

“But if it came to a row, Joe, and I was horribly afraid of him, I wouldn’t let him see it. Perhaps I should be, but— Oh no, I wouldn’t let him know.”

“That’ll do, old fellow,” said Emson, looking at his brother proudly. “You shall go, and I’ll take care of the stock and— Here! Look, look!”

This last in a tone of intense excitement, for a herd of zebra seemed suddenly to have risen out of the ground a couple of miles away, where nothing had been visible before, the beautifully striped, pony-like animals frisking and capering about, and pausing from time to time to browse on the shoots of the sparsely spread bushes. There were hundreds of them, and the brothers sat watching them for some minutes.

“Not what I should have chosen for food,” said Emson at last; “but they say they are good eating.”

“There’s something better,” said Dyke, pointing. “I know they are good.”

“Yes, we know they are good,” said Emson softly, as he slipped out of the saddle, Dyke following his example, and both sheltered themselves behind their horses.

“They haven’t noticed us,” said Emson, after a pause. “Mixed us up with the zebras, perhaps.”

“They’re coming nearer. Why, there’s quite a herd of them!” cried Dyke excitedly.

They stood watching a little group of springbok playing about beyond the herd of zebra—light, graceful little creatures, that now came careering down toward them, playfully leaping over each other’s backs, and proving again and again the appropriate nature of their name.

And now, as if quite a migration of animals was taking place across the plain, where for months the brothers had wandered rarely seeing a head, herd after herd appeared of beautiful deer-like creatures. They came into sight from the dim distance—graceful antelopes of different kinds, with straight, curved, or lyre-shaped horns; fierce-looking gnus, with theirs

stumpy and hooked; ugly quaggas; and farthest off of all, but easily seen from their size, great, well-fed elands, ox-like in girth.

"I never saw anything like this, Joe," said Dyke in a whisper.

"Few people ever have in these days, old fellow," said Emson, as he feasted his eyes. "This must be like it used to be in the old times before so much hunting took place. It shows what an enormous tract of unexplored land there must be off to the north-west."

"And will they stay about here now?"

"What for? To starve? Why, Dyke, lad, there is nothing hardly to keep one herd. No; I daresay by this time to-morrow there will hardly be a hoof. They will all have gone off to the north or back to the west. It is quite a migration."

"I suppose they take us for some kind of six-legged horse, or they would not come so near."

"At present. Be ready; they may take flight at any moment, and we must not let our fresh-meat supply get out of range."

"Tisn't in range yet," said Dyke quietly.

"No, but it soon will be."

"What are you going to shoot at?—the springbok, and then mount and gallop after them and shoot again, like the Boers do?"

"What! with big antelope about? No, boy; we want our larder filling up too badly. Look: impalas; and at those grand elands."

"I see them; but they must be a mile away."

"Quite; but they are coming in this direction. Dyke, boy, we must make up our mind to get one of these."

"But we could never get it home. They're bigger than bullocks."

“Let’s shoot one, and then talk of getting it home. What about a span of oxen and a couple of hurdles! We could drag it back, and it would make biltong, and so last us for weeks.”

“Ugh! Leather!” cried Dyke.

“And give us plenty of fresh meat for present eating, and fat to cook for months.”

“Don’t make my mouth water too much, Joe.”

“Hush! Be quiet now; move close up to your horse’s shoulder, rest your gun across it, and then you will be better hidden. Are you loaded all right?”

“Bullet in each barrel.”

“That will do. Now mind, if we do get a chance at one, you will aim just at the shoulder. Try and don’t be flurried.”

“All right.”

“Give him both barrels, so as to make sure. Try and fire when I do.”

Dyke nodded, and they waited for fully two hours, during which time zebras, quaggas, and various kinds of antelopes charged down near them, startled by the sight of the two curious-looking horses, standing so patiently there in the middle of the plain, and after halting nervously, they careered away again, the trampling of their feet sounding like the rush of a storm.

Again and again the hunters had opportunities for bringing down goodly, well-fed antelope, when a herd bounded up, wheeled, halted, and stood at gaze; but there in the background were the great eland, each coming slowly and cautiously on, as if they had also been surprised by the aspect of the horses, and were curious to know what manner of creatures these might be.

Dyke wanted to say “Let’s shoot;” but his lips did not part, and he stood patiently watching at one time, impatiently at another, feeling as he did

that his brother was letting a magnificent chance go by.

Twice over the position was startling, when first a herd of quaggas and then one of gnus charged down upon them, and Dyke felt that the next minute he would be trampled under foot by the many squadrons of wild-eyed, shaggy little creatures. But the horses stood fast, comforted and encouraged by the presence of their masters, while the fierce-looking herds halted, stood, stamped, and tossed their heads, and went off again.

At last, when hundreds upon hundreds of the various antelopes had passed, the elands were still browsing about, nearly half a mile away, and seemed not likely to come any nearer. A herd of smaller antelopes were between them and the hunters, and there appeared to be no likelihood of their firing a shot.

"I'll give them a few minutes longer, Dyke," whispered Emson, "and then we must, if they don't come, go after them."

"Wouldn't it be better to pick off a couple of these?" said Dyke softly.

"No; we must have one of those elands. We shall have to ride one down, and when we get close, leap off and fire. Be ready for when I say 'Mount.'"

Dyke nodded smartly, and waited impatiently for a full quarter of an hour, during which they had chance after chance at small fry; but the elands still held aloof.

All at once Emson's voice was heard in a low whisper: "Do you see that fat young bull with the dark markings on its back and shoulders?"

"Yes."

"That is the one we must ride for.—Ready! Mount, and off."

They sprang into their saddles together, and dashed off to follow the elands, while at their first movements the whole plain was covered with the startled herds, one communicating its panic to the other. There was the rushing noise of a tremendous storm; but Dyke in the excitement saw

nothing, heard nothing, but the elands, which went tearing away in their long, lumbering gallop, the horses gaining upon them steadily, and the herd gradually scattering, till the young bull was all alone, closely followed by the brothers; Emson dexterously riding on the great brute's near side, and edging it off more and more so as to turn its head in the direction of Kopfontein; hunting it homeward, so that, if they were successful at last in shooting it, the poor brute would have been helping to convey itself part of the way, no trifling advantage with so weighty a beast.

On and on at a breakneck gallop, the horses stretching out like greyhounds in the long race; but the eland, long and lumbering as it was, kept ahead. Its companions were far behind, and the plain, which so short a time before had been scattered with herds of various animals, now seemed to have been swept clear once more.

At last the tremendous pace began to tell upon both horses and eland, while the difficulty of driving it in the required direction grew less. But all at once, rendered savage by the persistency of the pursuit, the great antelope turned toward the horses and charged straight at Dyke.

The boy was so much astonished at this sudden and unexpected attack that he would have been overturned, but for the activity of Breezy, who wheeled round, gave one bound, and just carried his rider clear.

It was no light matter, and Dyke wondered that, in the sudden twist given to his loins by the cob's spring round, he had not been unhorsed.

But the eland did not attempt to renew the attack, gathering up its forces and bearing away for the distant herds, with Duke snapping at its flank; and the chase was again renewed, with Emson's horse beginning to lose ground, while Breezy seemed to have been roused to greater effort.

Emson shouted something to Dyke, who was some distance to the left, but what it was the boy did not hear. He had one idea in his mind, and that was to secure the game so necessary to their existence, and to this end he urged his cob on, getting it at last level with the great antelope, which was a few yards to his right.

It was all a chance, he knew, but Emson was beaten, and the antelope

seemed ready to go on for hours; so, waiting his time, he checked his speed a little, and let the animal go on while he rode to the other side and brought it on his left.

There was good reason for the act. He could now let the barrel of his heavy piece rest upon his left arm, as he held it pistol-wise, and at last, when well abreast, he levelled it as well as he could, aiming at the broad shoulder, and fired.

A miss, certainly, and then he galloped on for another hundred yards before he ventured to draw trigger again, this time watchfully, for fear of a sudden turn and charge, and not till he was pretty close and perfectly level.

Breezy was in full stride, and going in the most elastic way in spite of the long run, but the eland was labouring heavily, as Dyke drew trigger, felt the sharp, jerking recoil shoot right up his arm to the shoulder; and then to his astonishment, as he dashed on out of the smoke, he was alone, and the eland lying fifty yards behind, where it had come down with a tremendous crash.



Chapter Nine.

A Queer Predicament.

“Bravo! splendid!” panted Emson, as he and his brother met by the side of the dead eland, upon whose flank Duke had mounted, and stood with his red tongue out, too much run down to bark. “Why, Dyke, lad, how did you manage it? Right through the shoulder. You couldn’t have done better at a stationary target.”

“All chance,” said the boy, panting as heavily as the dog; and lowering himself off his nag, he loosened the girths, and then sank at full length upon the sand.

“Tired?”

“Thirsty,” replied the boy.

“That you must bear, then, till I come back.”

“Where are you going?”

“To fetch Jack and a span of bullocks. I won’t be longer than I can help. Keep Duke with you, but don’t leave the game. One moment: make a fire, and cook yourself a steak.”

“Stop and have some, Joe.”

“No time,” said Emson, and he strode away, leaving his brother alone with the great antelope and his two dumb companions.

“Well, I didn’t reckon upon this,” said Dyke, as he lay upon his side watching his brother’s figure grow slowly more distant, for he was walking beside his horse, which hung its head, and kept giving its tail an uneasy twitch. “Not very cheerful to wait here hours upon hours; and how does he know that I’ve got any matches? Fortunately I have.”

There was a pause during which his cob gave itself a shake which

threatened to send the saddle underneath it, an act which brought Dyke to his feet for the purposes of readjustment.

This done, and feeling not quite so breathless from exertion and excitement, he walked round the great antelope.

“Well, it was all chance,” he said to himself. “The first shot was an awful miss. Good job for us there was so much to shoot at. I could hardly miss hitting that time. What a bit of luck, though. A big bit of luck, for we wanted the fresh meat very badly.”

After scanning the goodly proportions of the animal for some time, it struck the boy that he had not reloaded his rifled gun, and this he proceeded to do, opening the breech, taking out the empty brass cartridges, carefully saving them for refilling, and then putting his hand to the canvas pouch in which the cartridges were packed.

His hand stopped there, and, hot as he was, he felt a shiver pass through him.

There was not a single cartridge left.

Dyke stood there, half-stunned.

Had he forgotten them? No, he had felt them since he started; but where they were now, who could say? All he could think was that they must have been jerked out during the violent exertion of the ride.

How his heart leaped. They were in the leather pouch, which he had slung from his shoulder by a strap, and the excitement had made him forget this. “What a good—”

That pouch was gone. The buckle of the strap had come unfastened, and it was lost, and there was he out in the middle of that plain, with the carcass of the antelope to act as a bait to attract lions or other fierce brutes, and he was without any means of defence but his knife and his faithful dog.

The knife was sharp, so were Duke’s teeth, but—

Dyke turned cold at the thought of his position, and involuntarily began to sweep the plain for signs of danger, knowing, as he did full well, that beasts of prey always hang about the herds of wild creatures in their migrations from feeding ground to feeding ground; the lions to treat the strong as their larder when on their way to water; the hyaenas and jackals to pick up the infirm and tender young. Then the boy's eyes were directed to the distant figure of his brother, and his first thought was to shout to him and ask for ammunition.

But no cry, however piercing, could have reached Emson then, as Dyke well knew, and acting upon sudden impulse, he ran to his horse to tighten the girths of his saddle to gallop off after him.

"And if I do," he said to himself, "the minute I am gone, the sneaking jackals and vultures will appear as if by magic, and begin spoiling the beautiful meat; Joe will laugh at me first for being a coward, and then turn angry because I have left the eland for the animals to maul."

Dyke stood with his forehead puckered up, terribly perplexed. He did not mind the anger, but the thought of Emson thinking that he was too cowardly to stop alone out there in the plain and keep watch for a few hours was too much for him, and he rapidly loosened the girths again.

Then came the thought of a family of lions, which had perhaps been unsuccessful, scenting out the eland, and coming up to find him in that unprotected state.

It was horrible, and, with a shiver, he tightened up the girths, sprang upon the cob, pressed its sides, and went off after Emson at a gallop, followed by Duke, who barked joyously, as if applauding his master's decision.

Dyke felt lighter hearted and as if every stride took him out of danger, and he gave a glance round, saw dots here and there in the sky which he knew were vultures hurrying up to the banquet, and drawing his left rein, he made Breezy swing round, and rode in a semicircle back to the eland with teeth set, a frown on his brow, and determination strong: for he had mastered the feeling of panic that had assailed him, and though he did not grasp the fact himself, he had made a grand stride in those few minutes toward manhood.

“Let ‘em come,” he said bitterly; “I won’t run away like that. Why, I could only have done this if a lion as big as that one we shot were already here.”

In another five minutes, with the dots in different parts around growing plainer, Dyke was back by the eland, and hobbling his horse’s forefeet, he loosened the girths again with almost angry energy; then unstrapping the bit, left the cob to crop such green shoots as it could find.

As the boy performed these acts, he could not help stealing a glance here and there; and then standing on the eland, so as to raise himself a little, he shaded his eyes and carefully swept the plain.

He could see distant patches, which he made out to be herds, gradually growing fainter, and several more dots in the sky, but no sign of danger in the shape of lions; but he derived very little comfort from that, for he knew well enough that the tawny-hided creatures would approach in their crawling, cat-like fashion, and a dozen might be even then hidden behind the bushes, or flattened down in the sand, or dry, shrubby growth, with which their coats so assimilated as to make them invisible to the most practised eye.

Dyke’s teeth were pressed so hard together that they emitted a peculiar grinding sound with the exertion as he leaped down, and the dog looked up in a puzzled way, and uttered an uneasy bark.

Dyke started. The dog must scent danger, he thought, and the next glance was at Breezy, whose instinct would endorse the dog’s knowledge; but the cob was blowing the insects off the tender shoots at every breath, and browsing contentedly enough.

It was fancy. The great, foul birds were coming nearer, but Dyke knew that he could keep a thousand of them away by flourishing his empty gun.

Then a sudden thought occurred to him, and he turned excitedly to the dog, taking off his canvas pouch the while, and shaking it.

“Hi, Duke! Hey there, good old boy! Lost—lost! Seek them! Good dog, then! Seek—seek! Lost!”

The dog barked excitedly, sniffed at the pouch, looked up at his master, whined and barked, sniffed again at the pouch, and finally, in answer to Dyke's shouts and gestures, took another sharp sniff at the canvas, and bounded away, head down, and following the track made by the eland, the horses, and his own feet.

"What an idiot I was not to think of that before!" said the boy to himself. "He'll find it, as sure as sure."

Then he gave another glance round, to stand repentant as he followed the figure of the retiring dog, and felt ready to call it back, for he was increasing the terrible loneliness by sending away his dumb friend, one who would have instantly given him warning of the approach of danger.

Once more Dyke went through a mental battle. He was mastering the strong desire to call back the dog, and forcing himself to take out his knife and use it as a bill-hook to cut a quantity of the dry, short bush, piling it up until he had enough to make a fire. This he started, and felt better, for the flame and smoke would keep off animals, show where he was, and cook his dinner, about which he had begun to think eagerly, as well as of his position.

"I wonder whether other fellows of my age are so ready to take fright at everything. It's so stupid, just because the place is open and lonely. Fancy wanting to keep Duke back when he is pretty well sure to find my cartridge pouch, and bring it here. It's a good job no one knows what we feel sometimes. If any one did, how stupid we should look."

The fire burned briskly, with the white smoke rising steadily up in the still air, as, after trying whether the edge of his sheath-knife had been blunted by cutting the bush wood, he attacked the great antelope to secure a good steak to broil.

"Plenty to cut at," he said with a laugh; and his mouth watered now at the thought of the juicy frizzle he could make on the glowing embers, which would soon be ready for his purpose. But he went to work judiciously. His experience in the lonely, wild country had taught him a little of the hunter's craft, and he knew the value of the magnificent skin which covered the eland; so making certain cuts, he drew back the hide till a

sufficiency of the haunch was bared, and after cutting a pair of skewer-like pieces from a bush, he carved a good juicy steak, inserted his skewers, spread out the meat, and stuck the sharper ends of the pieces of wood in the sand, so that the steak was close to, and well exposed to the glow. Then leaving it to roast, Dyke carefully drew the skin back into its place and set to work washing his hands.

Only a dry wash in the soft reddish sand, but wonderfully cleansing when repeated two or three times, and very delightful as a make-shift, where there is no water.

By the time Dyke's hands were presentable, and he had piled-up some more bush where the fire had burned into a hole, the meat began to sputter, and drops of fat to drip in the hot embers, producing odours so attractive to a hungry lad, to whom fresh meat was a luxury, that Dyke's thoughts were completely diverted from the loneliness of his position, and he thought of nothing but the coming dinner as he took from his pocket a lump of heavy mealie cake which had been brought by way of lunch.

"Wish I'd brought a bit of salt," he said to himself and a few minutes later, as he saw the full pound and a half steak beginning to curl up and shrink on one side, another thought struck him. Wasn't it a pity that he had not cut a bigger slice, for this one shrank seriously in the cooking?

But concluding that it would do for the present, he carefully withdrew the sticks from the sand, and turning them about, replaced them so as to cook the other side, congratulating himself the while upon the fact that the meat tightly embraced the pieces of wood, and there was no fear of the broil falling into the sand.

"Don't want that kind of salt peppered over it," he said in a mixed metaphorical way, and after a look at Breezy, who was browsing away contentedly, Dyke smiled happily enough. Then inhaling the delicious odours of the steak, he knelt there, with the fire glancing upon his face and the sun upon his back, picking up and dropping into places where they were needed to keep up the heat, half-burnt pieces of the short, crisp wood.

It was so pleasant and suggestive an occupation that Dyke forgot all

about danger from wild beasts, or trampling from a startled herd coming back his way. For one moment he thought of Duke, and how long he would be before he came back with the cartridge pouch. He thought of Emson, too, in regard to the steak, wishing he was there to share it, and determining to have the fire glowing and another cut ready to cook.

Then, springing up, he ran to where Breezy raised his head with a pleasant whinny of welcome, took the water-bottle he always carried from where it was strapped to the back of the saddle, and returned to the cooking.

“Done to a turn,” he cried, as he caught up the two pieces of wood which held the steak, bore his dinner away a few yards from the fire, sat down holding the skewers ready, and then placing his cake bread in his lap, he began to cut off pieces of the meat.

“De—licious!” he sighed, “but a trifle hot,” and then everything was resolved into the question of meat—rich, tender, juicy meat—glorious to one whose fare had been dry, leathery, rather tainted biltong for a long while past.

Dyke ate as he had never eaten before, till the last fragment was reached—a peculiarly crisp, brown, tempting-looking piece adhering to one of the skewers. This he held back for a few moments in company with the last piece of mealie cake, wishing the while that he had cooked more, and brought a larger piece of the cake.

“Roast beef’s nothing to it,” he said softly. “Wish old Joe had been here to have a bit while it’s so tender, and poor old Duke, too. Never mind, he shall have double allowance when he does come—triple if he brings my pouch. I wonder whether he has found it. It’s wonderful what he can do in that way.”

He raised his eyes to gaze in the direction taken by the dog as he sat there near the fire, and the huge carcass of the eland behind him, and then he seemed to have been suddenly turned into stone—sitting with the bit of cake in one hand, the skewer in the other, staring, with white rings round his eyes, straight at a full-grown, handsomely maned lion, standing about twenty yards away, gazing at him straight in the face.

Chapter Ten.

The Hunter hunted.

Dyke was completely paralysed in body, but his mind was wonderfully active, and he noted that the horse even had not divined the approach of the great beast, but was puffing away with snorting breath at the insects upon the tender shoots, and browsing contentedly enough, while the lion had stolen softly up nearer and nearer, without a sound, after perhaps following on the track of the antelopes for weeks, and taking toll from time to time, which might have accounted for its sleek condition and glistening hide.

In spite of the feeling of horror which chilled the boy, he could not help admiring the beauty of the magnificent beast before him, with its full flowing mane, and sunny, yellowish eyeballs intently watching him, as the long lithe tail, with its black tuft of long hairs at the tip, swung to and fro, now seen upon the left side, now upon the right, in other respects the great animal being as motionless as the boy.

For many moments Dyke could not even breathe, but at last he uttered a gasp, followed by a sharp, catching sound, as he inspired with a sob, and the lion raised the hair about his ears, as if to frown, and uttered a low, deep, growling noise.

Dyke's heart seemed to stand still as, with his eyes still fixed upon those of the beast, he waited for it to spring upon him, and drive him back. What then?

He shuddered softly, trying hard not to move, and irritate the lion into hastening its aggression at a time when life was so sweet, and every moment was greedily grasped before the end. He was horribly frightened, but this did not trouble him so much, for he felt stunned, and a great deal of what passed was dreamy, and seen as if through a mist. But one thing he knew, and that was that he would have some little warning of the attack, for the lion would crouch and gather its hind-legs well under it before it made its spring.

Then a wave of energy ran through Dyke, who, though still motionless, felt his heart throb with greater vigour as he began to think of self-defence. There was his gun close at hand, so near that he could have reached it; but it was useless. He might make one bold stroke with it; but the stock would only snap. Any blow he could deliver would only irritate the beast. And now a dawning feeling of admiration began to broaden as he gazed at the great, massive head and the huge paws, recalling the while what he had seen since he had been in South Africa—a horse's back broken by one blow, the heads of oxen dragged down and the necks broken by another jerk; and he felt that he would be perfectly helpless when the brute made its first spring.

And still the lion stood, with the tail swinging in that pendulum-like motion; the great eyes gazing heavily at him; while during those painful minutes Dyke's brain grew more and more active. He thought of mice in the power of cats, and felt something of the inert helplessness of the lesser animal, crouching, as if fascinated by the cruel, claw-armed tyrant, waiting to make its spring. And he knew that at any moment this beast might come at him as if discharged from a catapult. But all the same the brain grew more and more acute in its endeavours to find him a way of escape. If he had only had a short bayonet fixed at the end of his gun, that he might hold it ready with the butt upon the ground, and the point at an angle of forty-five degrees, so that the lion might at its first bound alight upon it, and impale itself, just as it had been known to do upon the long, sharp, slightly curved prongs of the black antelope, piercing itself through and through, and meeting the fate intended for its prey.

But then he had no bayonet at the end of his gun, and no weapon whatever, but his strong sheath-knife. He could hold that out before him; but he knew well enough that he could not hold it rigid enough to turn it to advantage against his foe.

It might have been so many seconds only, but it appeared to Dyke a long space of time numbered by minutes, as he waited there, expecting the great animal to crouch and spring, making short work of him before going on to gorge itself upon the carcass of the eland. There was no possibility of help coming, for it must be hours before Emson could return, and then it would be too late.

At last the power to move came back, and Dyke's first thought was to turn and run, but second thoughts suggested that it would be inviting the great active beast to spring upon his back, and he remained firm, never for a moment taking his eyes off those which stared so fixedly into his, although he was longing to look wildly round for the help that could not be at hand.

Then his heart gave one great leap, for he saw a quiver run through the lion, which crouched down, gathering its hind-legs beneath it, and outstretching its fore; but it was some moments before the boy grasped the fact that the brute's movement was not for the purpose of making a tremendous bound, but only to couch, as if it would be easier and more comfortable to gaze at him in a seated position after making a very long stalk.

"He can't be hungry!" came to Dyke's brain on the instant, and then boy and lion sat opposite to each other, gazing hard, till the great cat's head and mane seemed to swell and swell to gigantic proportions before the boy's swimming eyes, and they appeared misty, strange, and distant.

Then came another change, for the animal suddenly threw itself over, stretched, and turned upon its back, patted at the air with its paw, and gazed at the boy in an upside-down position, its lower jaw uppermost, but keeping a watchful eye upon him, as if expecting an attack. A moment or two later it was drawing itself over the sand to where Dyke sat, and made a quick dab at him with one paw, striking up the sand in a shower; and as the boy started away, the brute sprang to its feet, shook itself, and with two or three bounds plumped itself down upon the eland, and buried its teeth in the dead antelope's throat.

Dyke uttered a hoarse sigh of relief, and rested himself by pressing his hands down beside him, breathing heavily the while.

It was a temporary reprieve, but he dared not move for fear of drawing the attention of the lion to him, and clung to the hope that perhaps the great creature might be content to glut itself upon the game.

The beast was well-fed and not savage, that was plain enough, but its action might change at any moment, and, worse still, there was the

prospect of others arriving at any moment to join in the feast.

For a full hour Dyke sat there, watching the great animal, and listening to it as it tore off pieces of the neck from time to time, the crack of a bone every now and then making him start violently, and shudder at the thought of certain possibilities connected with himself. And all this time the beast was in such a position that one eye was toward him, and a gleam therefrom made it apparent that he was carefully watched the whole time. But at last the lion turned itself more away to get at a more meaty portion, and a thrill of excitement ran through Dyke.

Grasping his knife firmly in one hand, his gun in the other, he turned over, and fixing upon one of the low bushes a short distance away, beyond which was other good cover, he began slowly and silently to crawl sidewise away, keeping a watchful eye the while upon the lion, so as to stop short at the slightest movement on the part of the great beast.

It was an exceedingly difficult mode of progression, and it was hard work to keep to it, for with every yard the desire to get up and run toward where Breezy would be grazing increased. Once he could reach the cob, take off the hobbles which confined its forefeet, tighten the girths, and slip the bit between its teeth, he did not care. But there was a great deal to do, he knew, before he could achieve this.

Yard by yard he crept on, the sand hushing every sound, and he had nearly reached the low bush cropped short all over the top by the horse or some passing animal, when there was a quick movement and a low growl which made him feel that all was over.

But a sharp *crick, crack* of a broken bone nipped in the powerful jaws reassured him, and after waiting a few minutes, he crept sidewise again a little farther, and he was behind the bush, which shut out all view of the lion and smouldering fire, and of course hid him from his enemy.

He could now make better progress, for if the lion turned, he would be invisible; and taking advantage of this, he crept on from bush to bush, till he was quite a hundred yards away. And now the longing was intense to stand erect and look out for Breezy, but the bushy growth had been so closely cropped that it was nowhere a yard in height, and to stand up

might have meant to bring him full in his enemy's sight.

There was nothing to be done, then, but to crawl on to a more open spot, and as he was going in the direction taken by the horse in feeding the last time he saw it, the boy felt not the slightest uneasiness, being sure that he should come in sight of it directly.

Still the minutes glided on as he made for the more open part where the sand lay bare, and he began now to grow uneasy at not seeing the cob, and at last, like a crushing disaster, he saw that the poor animal must have scented the lion, or been alarmed at the cracking of the bones, and, in consequence, it had quietly shuffled as far away as it could in the time. There it was, a couple of miles away, right in the open plain, and though at that distance its movement could not be made out, it was in all probability shuffling its way along to save its life.

Dyke's heart sank in his breast as he knelt there in the sand, feeling as if his case was as hopeless as ever, and for the moment he felt disposed to creep right into the densest place he could find, and lie there till darkness set in, when he would take his bearings as well as he could from the stars, and then try to reach Kopfontein. But at that moment there came to him his brother's words, and the little absurd story about trying till tomorrow morning. A trifling thing; but at that moment enough to make Dyke sling his gun over his back, thrust the knife into its sheaf, mark down the position of the fire by the faint smoke, and then start off crawling on all-fours straight away, not after the horse, but so as to keep the bushes well between him and the lion.

The exertion was great and the heat terrible. Never had the sand seemed so hot before, nor the air so stifling to breathe; but he crept on silently and pretty quickly, till, glancing back over his shoulder, he found that he might move straight at once to where he could see Breezy looking distant and misty through the lowest stratum of the quivering air. For the low bushes hid him no longer; there was the faint smoke of the fire still rising, and just beyond it the big carcass of the eland, made monstrous by the great maned lion, crouching, tearing at the neck.

At the sight of this, Dyke dropped down flat, and lay panting and motionless for a few minutes. Then he began to crawl straight for the

horse, grovelling along upon his breast. But this soon proved to be far too painful and laborious a mode of progression, and he rose to his hands and knees, feeling that it must be that way or nohow, though fast growing desperate enough to rise to his feet and run.

A minute's anxious reflection brought the feeling that this would be a mad act, and might rouse the lion into following him, so he kept steadily getting farther and farther away, and more and more foreshortened, as the artists term it, till he was pretty well end on to the lion, and he felt that he must present a singular aspect to the monster if it looked across the plain.

"I shall never do it," muttered Dyke. "Poor old Breezy! he was frightened. I can't blame him, but I don't get any nearer. He's going on as fast as I am, and I shall be obliged to get up and run."

But he did not. He kept up the uneasy crawling, putting hundred-yard space after hundred-yard space between him and the fire, while, when he did glance back, it was after dropping flat behind some bush and raising his head till he could see the eland lying like a low hummock or patch of bush, and with the lion growing less distinct.

On he went again, refreshed by the trifling rest, but far more by the fact that he was really getting more distant from the great danger. For it was in vain to try to assure himself that as the lion did not molest him before it had fed, it was far less likely to do so now.

As he crawled onward, wishing he could progress like the baboons which haunted some of the stony kopjes in the neighbourhood, he tried to think how long it would be before he overtook the cob, and in spite of the danger and excitement he could not help smiling, for his position reminded him of one of the old problems at school about if A goes so many yards an hour and B so many, for twenty-four hours, how long will it be before B is overtaken by A?

"A fellow can't do that without pen, ink, and paper," he said to himself. "It's too big a sum to do on sand, and, besides, I don't know how fast I am going, nor B for Breezy either. But oh, how hot I am!"

At last he could bear it no longer; he was apparently getting no nearer the

cob, but he certainly must be, he felt, sufficiently far from the lion to make it safe for him to rise and trot after the nag. He had his whistle, and if he could make Breezy hear, the horse would come to him. But he dared not use that yet; besides, he was too far away.

At last he did rise, gazed timorously back, and then started onward at a steady trot—a means of progression which seemed quite restful after the painful crawl, and gaining spirit by the change, he went on with so good effect that he saw that he was certainly gaining on the cob. This infused fresh spirit within him, and congratulating himself on the fact that he must soon get within whistling distance, he had another glance back to see that eland and lion were an indistinct mass, or so it seemed for the moment. Then he turned cold again in spite of the heat, for there, moving slowly over the sand, about a quarter of a mile back, was a tawny, indistinct something which gradually grew clearer to his startled eyes, for unmistakably there was a lion stealthily stalking him, taking advantage of every tuft to approach unseen, and before many minutes had passed he felt that it would be within springing distance, and all would be over in spite of his almost superhuman toil.

There was only one chance for him now, he felt, and that was to run his best.

He did not pause to look, but began to run over the burning sand, his breath coming hot and thick; but he must go on, he knew, for at every affrighted glance behind, there was his enemy keeping up its stealthy approach, and the cob was still so far away.

Chapter Eleven.

Being Stalked.

Those were minutes which would have made the stoutest-hearted man feel that his case was hopeless; and Dyke struggled along, feeling his legs grow weaker, and as if his feet were turned to heavy weights of lead. Still he kept on at what was no longer a good run, for his pace had degenerated into a weary trot, and there were moments when he fancied

that the cob was disappearing in a mist of distance, while at the same time he felt a constant inclination to check his speed, so as to be able to gaze back at his pursuer, which every now and then sent his heart upward with a tremendous throb, as it made a few rapid bounds to gain the shelter of bushes, and disappeared, but, as the boy well knew, to come into sight again much nearer.

The later part of that terrible flight was dreamlike in its strange, wild confusion, and was dominated by a despairing feeling that he had now done all that was possible, and must throw himself down and yield to his fate.

But the instinctive desire for life, the horror of being seized by the monstrous beast, and the thought of Emson and their home, which, shabby and rough as it was, now seemed to be a glorious haven of refuge, kept him struggling on in spite of his exhaustion. Life was so sweet; there was so much to do; and poor Joe would be so lonely and broken-hearted when he found out his brother's fate. It would be, he knew, the last terrible blow of all to the expedition. For himself, he was so stunned by horror and exertion that he could not feel that there would be much pain; all he hoped for was that the seizure would be sudden and the end instantaneous; but still he kept up that slow, steady double over the burning sand, with his heavy gun going jerk, jerk, giving him, as it were, regular blows across the loins to urge him on.

Another wild glance back, and the lion growing bigger; and another weary stare in advance, and the cob still so distant, but clearer now to his vision, though certainly shuffling away.

Again he looked back, to see the savage beast grovelling itself along, with its lower parts almost touching the sand, and seeming more than ever to keep up that stealthy, cat-like approach, so as to get within springing distance.

And now a reaction began to take place, and through his teeth Dyke's hot breath panted out:

"I don't care; I'll die game. He shan't kill me for nothing."

His hand went to his belt, and he snatched out his keen sheath-knife,

determined to hold it with both fists before him, and face the lion when the beast sprang. It would not save his life, he felt; but the brute would suffer, and that was some consolation, even then. Then his left hand went to his throat, to tear open his collar, so that he could breathe more freely; but it did not reach the button, for it struck against the big metal whistle which hung from his neck by a twisted leather thong.

His next act was almost involuntary. He placed the metal to his lips, and blew with all his might a long, trilling whistle, despairing as he blew, but still with a faint hope that the shrill sound would reach through the clear air to where the cob was labouring along with its hobbled feet.

The result sent a thrill through the boy, for to his great joy he saw that the cob had stopped.

No: it was fancy.

No: it was no imagination, no fancy of his disordered brain; for the moment before, the horse was end on to him; now, it had turned broadside, and was gazing back; and in his excitement Dyke whistled again with all the breath he could put into the act.

The horse still stared back. It had heard the familiar call, and Dyke felt another thrill of hope, for on looking back he saw that the whistle had had a double effect: the lion had stopped short, sprung erect, and stood at gaze with bristling mane, staring after him, its head looking double its former size.

But Dyke did not pause; he ran on, dragging his leaden feet, till he saw that the cob was once more moving away, and the lion crawling rapidly along in his track.

Another shrill, trilling whistle with the former effect, and the animals in front and rear stopped again, giving the boy a few yards' gain.

But the reprieve was very short. The lion soon recovered from its surprise at the unwonted sound, one which might mean danger, and resumed its stalk, while the cob again went on.

How long that terrible time lasted Dyke could not tell, but the whistling

was resumed over and over again, always with the same effect, and with the hope growing that perhaps at last he might reach the horse, Dyke toiled on.

Despair came, though, in company with the hope; for at any moment the boy felt that the cob might wildly rush off as soon as it realised how near the lion was behind its master—fear getting the better of the long training which had taught it to obey its master's call. But still Dyke was getting nearer and nearer, and the whistle did not seem to lose its effect, always checking horse and lion as well, till to Dyke's great joy the cob uttered a loud whinnying sound, answered by a deep muttering growl from the lion.

"I can go no farther," panted Dyke at last, and his run degenerated into a weary stumble, as he raised the whistle once more to his lips, blew with all his feeble might, and then began to walk.

Hope once more, for the whinnying sounded loudly now; and in spite of the presence of the lion a couple of hundred yards behind its master, Breezy suddenly came toward where Dyke stood, advancing in a stumbling canter. Dyke tried to call to it, but no words would come; and he glanced back to see the lion gliding over the ground nearer and nearer.

How long would it be before it was near enough to make its bound?

Long before he could get down by the cob's forelegs to loosen the hobbles from its fetlocks, and mount.

Dyke felt that as he staggered to meet the cob, and the beautiful little animal stumbled toward him, whinnying joyfully, seeing for the time nothing but its master, to whom it looked for protection.

"I shall never do it! I shall never do it!" he panted, and he glanced back to see the lion stealing on, with its eyes glaring in the sunshine. And there was no friendly, playful look here, for now Dyke noticed that this was not the lion which he had encountered by the eland, but another, evidently one which had been following the droves of antelopes, and, fierce with hunger, had turned aside after the first object that it had seen.

At that moment Dyke dropped upon his knees, throwing one arm round

the fettered legs of his favourite, which had ceased its whinnying, and began to tremble violently, snorting and starting, and, yielding to its panic at the sight of the approaching enemy, threatened to bound away.

To get the hobbles undone was impossible, for Dyke's hands trembled from weakness and excitement; but spurred again by despair, he made a couple of bold cuts, severed the leather thongs, and sprang to his feet.

But there was much yet to do: the bit to fasten, and how could he get it into the mouth of the horrified beast?—the girths to tighten, while the cob backed away.

Neither was possible, and glancing once over his shoulder, Dyke snatched at the mane, but missed it, for the cob started violently, but stopped a couple of yards away, paralysed with horror at the approach of the great, stealthy beast.

Another clutch at the mane, and the cob started again; but Dyke had seized it fast, and was dragged a few yards before Breezy stopped, trembling in terror; as making one last effort, the boy made a leap and scramble to mount, dragging the saddle half round, but getting his leg over, clinging now with both hands to the mane.

Nothing could have been narrower.

The lion had given up its stealthy, creeping approach, and risen at last to commence a series of bounds, ending with one tremendous leap, which launched it through the air, and would have landed it next upon Dyke and his brave little steed; but horror drove off the trembling, paralytic seizure, and Breezy made also his frantic bound forward, with the result that the lion almost grazed the horse's haunches as it passed, and alighted upon the sand. The beast turned with a savage roar; but, urged by fear, and spurred by its master's hoarse cries, the cob was galloping, with its eyes turned wildly back, and every breath coming with a snort of dread.

Certainly nothing could have been narrower, for, enraged by its failure, the lion was in full pursuit, keeping up bound after bound; but swiftly as it launched itself forward, its speed fell short of the pace at which the brave little cob swept over the sand, spurning it at every effort in a blinding shower right in the lion's face, while Dyke, lying prostrate, clinging with

hand and knee, was in momentary expectation of being thrown off.

The pursuit was not kept up for more than three hundred yards. Then the lion stopped short, and sent forth a series of its thunderous, full-throated roars, every one making Breezy start and plunge frantically forward, with the sweat darkening its satin coat.

But the danger was past, and for the next ten minutes Dyke strove hard to master a hysterical sensation of a desire to sob; and then gaining strength, and beginning to breathe with less effort, he drew himself up erect, and tried by voice and caress to slacken the frightened animal's headlong speed.

"Wo-ho, lad! wo-ho, lad!" he cried, and the speed slackened into a canter.

"My word!" muttered the boy to himself, "I don't know how I managed to stick on!"

Ten minutes later he managed to stop the cob, and sliding off wearily, he stroked and patted its reeking neck, unbuckled and slipped in the bit, attached the reins to the loose side, and arranged them ready for mounting. Then dragging the saddle back into its place, he properly tightened the girths, and gave two or three searching glances backward the while.

But the lion, far or near, was well hidden, and they were well out in one of the barest parts of the plain, which now spread tenantless as far as eye could reach, while the eland was quite out of sight.

And now, as he proceeded to mount, Dyke awoke to the fact that his back was bruised sore by the gun, which had beaten him heavily; he was drenched with perspiration; and it was an effort to lift his foot to the stirrup, his knees being terribly stiff. He was conscious, too, of a strange feeling of weariness of both mind and body, and as he sank into the saddle he uttered a low sigh.

But he recovered a bit directly, and turning the cob's head, began to ride slowly in the direction of Kopfontein, whose granite pile lay like an ant-hill far away, low down on the eastern horizon.

He was too tired to think; but he noted in a dull, half-stunned way that the sun was getting very low, and it struck him that unless he hurried on, darkness would overtake him long before he could get home.

But it did not seem to matter; and though it hurt him a little, there was something very pleasant in the easy, rocking motion of Breezy's cantering stride, while the wind swept, cool and soft, against his cheeks.

Then he began to think about the events of the day—his narrow escape, which seemed to be dreamlike now, and to belong to the past; next he found himself wondering where the dog was, and whether it had found his cartridge pouch. Lastly, he thought of Emson, and his ride back to fetch Jack and the oxen—a long task, for the bullocks were so slow and deliberate at every pace.

But it did not seem to matter, for everything was very restful and pleasant, as the golden sun sent the shadow of himself and horse far away along the plain. He was safe, for the lion could be laughed at by any one well mounted as he was then. At last the pleasant sensation of safety was combined with a dull restfulness that grew and grew, till, moving gently in that canter over the soft sand, which hushed the cob's paces to a dull throb, the glow in the west became paler and paler, and then dark.

Then bright again, for Dyke recovered himself with a jerk, and sat upright, staring.

"I do believe I was dropping off to sleep," he muttered. "That won't do. I shall be off.—Go on, Breezy, old boy. You had a good long rest, and didn't have to crawl on your knees. How far is it now?"

Far enough, for the kopje was only just visible against the sky.

But again it did not seem to matter, for all grew dull again. Dyke had kept on nodding forward, and was jerked up again, but only for him to begin nodding again. Soon after he made a lurch to the left, and Breezy ceased cantering, and gave himself a hitch. Then followed a lurch to the right, and the cob gave himself another hitch to keep his master upon his back, progressing afterwards at a steady walk, balancing his load: for Dyke was fast asleep, with the reins slack and his chin down upon his chest, and

kept in his place by the natural clinging of his knees, and the easy movement of the sagacious beast he rode. But all at once he lurched forward, and instinctively clung to the horse's neck, with the result that Breezy stopped short, and began to crop the shoots of the bushes, only moving a step or two from time to time.

Chapter Twelve.

Dyke is aggrieved.

"Fine chance for a lion," said Emson, as at dusk he left the oxen, being slowly driven by Kaffir Jack, and cantered off to his left to draw rein in front of Dyke, the boy sitting upright with a start.

"Eh?"

"I say a fine chance for a lion," cried Emson again.

"No: couldn't catch,"—*snore*.

"Here! Hi! Little one. Wake up!" cried Emson.

"Yes; all right!—What's the matter?"

"Matter? why, you're asleep, you stupid fellow: a lion might have come upon you in that state."

"Lion? Come upon? Did—did you speak to me?" said Dyke thickly.

"Speak to you? of course. Why, you foolish, careless fellow, what was the matter? Afraid to stay by the game?"

Dyke looked at him drowsily, striving to catch all that had been said, but only partially grasping the meaning.

"Don't know—what you mean," he said thickly.

"I mean it was very cowardly of you to forsake your charge, boy," said Emson sternly. "It's vital for us to save that meat, and I trusted you to

watch it. Now you've come away, and it will be horribly mauled by the jackals; perhaps we shall find half a hundred vultures feeding upon it when we get there. Hang it, Dyke! you might have stayed till I came back."

Dyke was too much confused to make any reply. Utterly exhausted as he had been, his deep sleep seemed to still hold him, and he sat gazing vacantly at his brother, who added in a tone full of contempt:

"There, don't stare at me in that idiotic way. Come along; let's try and save something. Look sharp! One of us must ride on, or we shall not find it before it's dark."

Dyke rode beside him in silence, for Breezy eagerly joined his stable companion, and in a short time they were up to, and then passed Jack with his plodding oxen, which were drawing a rough sledge, something similar to that which a farmer at home uses for the conveyance of a plough from field to field.

The angry look soon passed away from Emson's face, and he turned to Dyke.

"There, look up, old chap," he said; "don't pull a phiz like that."

Dyke was still half stupefied by sleep, but he had grasped his brother's former words, and these were uppermost, rankling still in his mind as he said heavily:

"You talked about the jackals and vultures, Joe."

"Yes, yes; but I was in a pet, little un—vexed at the idea of losing our stock of good fresh meat. That's all over now, so say no more about it. Began to think I was never coming, didn't you? Well, I was long." Emson might just as well have held his tongue, for nothing he now said was grasped by Dyke, who could think of nothing else but the former words, and he repeated himself:

"You talked about the jackals and vultures, Joe."

"Yes, yes, I did; but never mind now, old chap."

“But you didn’t say a word about the lions.”

“What?” cried Emson excitedly. “You have had no lions there, surely?”

“Yes,” said Dyke, bitterly now, for he was waking up, and felt deeply aggrieved. “Two great beasts.”

“But in open day?”

Dyke nodded.

“Then why didn’t you fire? A shot or two would have scared them away.”

“Yes,” continued the boy in the same bitter tone; “but you can’t fire when your gun’s empty, and you have no cartridges.”

“But you had plenty when we started. I filled your pouch.”

“Yes, but it came undone in the ride after the eland. It’s lost. I sent Duke to try and find it, and he didn’t come back.”

“My poor old chap!” cried Emson, leaning forward to grasp his brother’s shoulder. “I did not know of this.”

“No, you couldn’t know of it, but you were precious hard upon me.”

“My dear old chap, I spoke to you like a brute. I ought not to have left you, but I was so delighted with the way in which you had brought down the game, and, as it were, filled our larder, that I thought you ought to have all the honour of keeping guard, while I played drudge and went to fetch the sledge to carry the meat home. But tell me: the lions came?”

“One did,” said Dyke, “and gave me turn enough, and when I got away from him to try and catch Breezy here, another savage brute hunted me and nearly struck me down. Oh, it was horrid!” he cried, as he ended his rough narrative of what he had gone through.

“Dyke, old chap, I shall never forgive myself,” said Emson, grasping his brother’s hand. “I’d do anything to recall my words.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” cried the boy, clinging to the hand that pressed his; “I’m better now. I was so exhausted, Joe, that I suppose I couldn’t keep awake. I say, how was it I didn’t fall off?”

“The cob was standing quite still when I came up, and looked half asleep himself.”

“Poor old Breezy! He had such a fright too. I thought I should never catch up to him. But I did.”

“Can you forgive me, old fellow?”

“Can I what? Oh, I say, Joe! Don’t say any more, please. Here, give me some cartridges to put in my pocket. I’m all right now, and there are sure to be some more lions there. But, I say, I don’t think I should like to shoot at that first one.”

Emson handed a dozen cartridges, and then shouted to Jack to stop, which the Kaffir and his two dumb companions willingly did.

“What are you going to do, Joe?”

“Discretion is the better part of valour,” said Emson quietly. “It would be dark by the time we got there, and on your own showing, the field is in possession of the enemy. Why, Dyke, old fellow, it would be about as mad a thing as we could do to drive a couple of bullocks up to where perhaps half-a-dozen lions are feasting. I ought to have known better, but it did not occur to me. These brutes must have been following the herds. There’s only one thing to do.”

“What’s that? Go near and fire to scare them away?”

“To come back again, after they had left us the mangled remains of the eland. No good, Dyke: we shall be safer in our own beds. It’s only another failure, old chap. Never mind: we may get game to-morrow.”

Dyke tried to oppose this plan of giving up, but it was only in a half-hearted way, and they rode back slowly towards Kopfontein, pausing from time to time for the oxen to catch up, Jack growing more and more uneasy as the night came on, and running after them and leaving the

oxen, if they came to be any distance ahead.

The result was that he was sent on first with the slow-paced bullocks, and Dyke and his brother formed themselves into a rearguard, necessitated from time to time to come to a full stop, so as to keep in the rear.

It was nearly morning when they reached home, and after fastening their cattle safely behind fence and rail, they sought their own beds, where Dyke sank at once into a heavy sleep, waking up when the sun was quite high, with some of the previous evening's confusion left; but the whole of the day's adventure came back in a flash as his eyes lit upon Duke, fast asleep upon a skin, and with the lost cartridge pouch between his paws.

Chapter Thirteen.

Jack behaves himself.

The necessity for providing fresh provisions took the brothers out again next day, but there were no more herds visible, as far as their glass would show, anywhere out upon the plain; but at last they caught sight of half-a-dozen of the graceful little springboks, and after a long gallop got close enough to try a couple of shots, which proved successful; and a little buck was borne home in triumph, a portion cooked, and Dyke sat watching his brother eat that evening, till Emson looked up.

“Why, hullo!” he cried; “not well?”

“Oh yes, I’m quite right,” replied Dyke hastily.

“Then why don’t you eat?”

“Because I wanted you to make up for the past,” said the boy, laughing. “I’m a meal ahead of you. I had such a splendid dinner yesterday off the eland.”

Next morning, upon their visit to the ostrich-pens, Emson’s face brightened, for there was excitement among the birds, the great hen having hatched every egg of those they had brought home in the net; and for the next few days everything possible was done in the way of feeding, so as to help the young brood on into a state of strength.

“Oh, it’s all right, Joe,” said Dyke; “all we’ve got to do is to keep on scouring the plain and finding nests. We shall succeed after all.”

“Yes, but you must scout off after some meal and coffee; we can’t get on without those.”

“And sugar.”

“And sugar. What do you say to starting to-morrow?”

"I'm ready," said Dyke; and after warning Jack, and making the necessary preparations over night, they sought their couches, and rose before daybreak to go and rouse up the Kaffir and his wife.

The latter soon had her fire glowing; Jack grumpily fetched water, and then proceeded to yoke the bullocks to the wagon, after which he settled down to his breakfast; and after feeding his stock, Emson mounted his horse to ride a few miles with his brother, both keeping a sharp lookout for game; while Duke, who was of the party, kept on hunting through the hushes, and now and then starting a bird.

It was getting toward mid-day before anything was shot, and then another little springbok fell to Emson's piece, just as they reached the water where they were to make their first halt.

The buck was divided, part to go back to Kopfontein and some to form part of Dyke's provision, while another portion was cooked at once and eaten.

"There," said Emson at last, "I don't think I need say any more to you, old fellow. Jack knows the way well enough. Set him to drive the bullocks, and you ride beside and drive him. Keep a tight rein, and if he shows his teeth and isn't obedient, tell him you'll shoot him, and take aim at once, or he won't believe you."

"Rather sharp practice, Joe, isn't it?"

"Not with a man like that. He'll be ready to play upon you in every way, and you must let him see that you do not mean to be imposed upon. Sounds harsh, but I know Master Jack by heart."

"You do think he'll take me straight to all the water?"

"I haven't a doubt about it, old fellow," said Emson, smiling. "Jack isn't an ostrich, and must drink at least once a day, so you need not be nervous about that.—There," he continued, mounting; "I must be off. Good-bye."

"Not yet; I'm going to ride a little way back with you," cried Dyke.

"No, you are not, lad. Rest yourself and your horse.—Here! Hi! Jack!"

The Kaffir came from under the wagon, grinning.

“Drive your bullocks carefully, and bring them back in good condition.”

The man smiled and showed his teeth.

“That’s right. Go along and have your sleep.”

The Kaffir went back and crept under the wagon, and Emson clasped his brother’s hand.

“Take your time, but don’t lose any, old fellow,” he said; “for I shall be glad to see you back. Take care of yourself. I wish I were going with you, but I can’t. There, you are man enough to manage everything, so good-bye.”

He urged his horse forward and went back swiftly along the trail, his nag cantering steadily along one of the broad ruts made by the wagon wheels in the sand, while Dyke went and seated himself just under the wagon-tilt, and watched him till he was out of view.

“Six days and nights at the least,” said Dyke to himself with a sigh, “and perhaps a fortnight, before I get back. Never mind; every day will be one less, and I don’t suppose I shall mind its being lonely, after all. Duke’s good company, and so is Breezy, without counting Jack, and it isn’t so very bad after all to go riding through the country with one’s own tent on wheels. Why, some fellows at home would be mad with joy to get such a chance. Ah, look at that. Why, if I’d been ready, I might have got a couple of Guinea-fowl for the larder.”

For a flock of the curious speckled birds came and settled amongst the bushes on the other side of the water pool, but catching sight of visitors, went off with a tremendous outcry.

“Don’t matter,” said Dyke; “there’s plenty of the buck.”

The sun was sinking low in the west, as after a long, toilsome journey from the last water, Dyke, with the great whip held aloft like a large fishing-rod and line, sat on the wagon-box shouting to the weary oxen from time to time. He was apparently quite alone, save that Breezy was tethered by a long leathern rein to the back of the wagon. There was no

Kaffir Jack, no Duke; and the boy, as he sat driving, looked weary, worn out, and disconsolate.

For days past he had been upon a faintly-marked track leading south-west—a track in which hoof-marks and the traces of wagon wheels having passed that way were faintly to be seen, quite sufficient to show him that he was on the right track for civilisation in some form, and he felt pretty certain that sooner or later he would reach Oom Morgenstern's store and farm.

But it had been a terrible task that managing of the team alone, and urging the sluggish animals to drag the wagon when they reached heavy patches of sand. Then, too, there was the outspanning—the unyoking the often vicious animals from the dissel-boom or wagon pole and trek chain, when he halted by water, and let them drink and feed. Then the inspanning, the yoking up of the oxen again, and the start once more.

That huge whip, too, had been such a clumsy thing to handle, but highly necessary, for without it he would never have reached the end of his journey. Then at night there had been the same outspanning to see to; the feeding of the bullocks; the collection of wood and lighting of as big a fire as he could contrive, to cook his food, boil his coffee, and, finally, make up to scare off wild beasts. In addition to this, a thorn protection ought to have been made to keep off danger from Breezy, but that was impossible; and hour after hour Dyke had sat in the darkness, where the cob's rein was made fast to the wagon tail, and, gun in hand, had watched over the trembling beast, keeping him company when the distant roaring of lions was heard on the veldt, and the bullocks grew uneasy.

Little sleep fell to Dyke's lot by night; but in the daytime, when the bullocks were going steadily along the track, which they followed willingly enough for the most part, the boy's head would sink down upon his breast, and he would snatch a few minutes' rest, often enough to start up and find the wagon at a standstill, and the bullocks cropping some patch of grass or the tender shoots of a clump of bushes.

Then on again, with at times the great whip exchanged for the gun, and some bird or another laid low, so as to find him in extra provisions by the

way. Once, too, he managed to hit a little buck.

A long, doleful, and weary journey, without meeting a soul, or being passed. On and on, over the never-ending plain, often despairing, and with the oxen groaning, empty as the wagon was, for the sun flashed and was reflected up with blinding force, and there were moments when Dyke grew giddy, and felt as if he must break down.

But those were only moments. He set his teeth again, and trudged on or rode, thinking of Joe waiting patiently away there in the lonely, corrugated iron building, tending the ostriches, and feeling in perfect confidence that the journey would be achieved, and the necessary stores brought back.

There were moments, though, when Dyke brightened up, and told himself that he would do it if he tried till to-morrow morning; and at such times he laughed—or rather tried to laugh—for it was rather a painful process, his face being sore and the skin ready to peel away.

But at last, after escaping danger after danger by a hair's-breadth, the great weariness of the almost interminable journey was coming to an end, for, far away in the distance, there was a building visible through the clear air. He could see a broad stretch of green, too, looking delightful with waving trees, after the arid wilderness through which he had passed; and now, in spite of his great fatigue, Dyke plucked up courage, for the building must be Oom Morgenstern's farm, and in an hour or so the traveller felt that the first part of his journey was at an end.

Once or twice a feeling of doubt troubled him, but that soon passed off, for reason told him that he could not be wrong—this must be the point for which he had been aiming.

The bullocks began to move more briskly now, for they could see green pasture in the far distance, and there was a moister feeling in the air, suggestive of water not far away.

So Dyke's task grew lighter, and an hour or so later he could see a big, heavy, grey man standing outside an untidy-looking building, littered about with cask and case, and who saluted him as he halted his team:

"Ach! das is goot. How you vas, mein bube?"

“Here, I say,” cried Dyke, as the big German shook hands with him, “who are you calling a booby, Uncle Morgenstern?”

“Hey? You vas bube. Not gall yourself mans, long time ago to gom. Bube ist poy, goot poy. Zo you gom vrom Kopfontein all py youself to puy mealies and dea, and goffee and sugars?”

“Well, not quite all alone; I’ve got our Kaffir with me.”

“Ach! ten: why you not make him drive die pullock? Lazy tog!”

“He’s in the wagon, bad. I’ve had to drive the bullocks, and inspan and outspan all by myself.”

“Ach! wonterful! All py youself. Goot poy. Ant you are hot, und sehr dursty.”

“Oh yes, horribly thirsty.”

“Goot! Die Frau shall make you zom of mein beaudiful goffees. Das is good vor dursdy.—Hi!” he shouted; and a couple of Kaffir boys came from behind a rough shed, to whom he gave instructions to outspan the oxen and drive them to the abundant pasture by the river side.

“Goot! Now led me see der pad mensch. Zo you haf put you Kaffir in you wagon, and give him a pig ride.”

“Yes; I thought he was going to die.”

“Zo? Ah! zom beebles would haf left him oonter a dree, und zay do him: ‘Mein vrient, you had petter make youself guite well as zoon as you gan. I muss nicht shtop. Goot-bye.’ But you did bring him in dem wagon, hey?”

“Oh yes: I could not leave him.”

“You are a goot poy, my young vrient. And how is der big bruder?”

“Quite well,” said Dyke, looking uneasy as the big, frank-faced, fat, German Boer questioned him.

“Why did he not gom too? I like den big bruder.”

“Too busy minding the young ostriches.”

“Ach zo! Of goorse. Ant you make blenty of money—you gut off der vedders, and zend dem to der Gape?”

“Oh no. We’re doing very badly: the young birds die so fast.”

“Zo? Das ist sehr, very bad. You had petter zell mealie und gorn, und dea und sugars. It ist mooch petters as neffer vas, and you not haf to gom five, zigs, zeven days to me. Now let us zee den Kaffirs.”

The old man had approached the back of the wagon as he spoke, and now drew the canvas aside, to be greeted by a low growl which made him start back.

“Tunder!” he cried. “Der Kaffir tog is gone mad!”

“No, no; that is our dog Duke.”

“Ah! Und is he pad too?”

“Yes: a leopard came and seized him one night and carried him off from under the wagon; but I ran out and fired, and I suppose I hit the beast, for there was a lot of snarling and Duke got away; but I thought he would have died.”

“Ach! boor togs den. What you do to him?”

“Bathed the places with water.”

“Goot!”

“And he licked the wounds himself.”

“Besser.”

“And curled himself up, and went to sleep.”

“Das vas der best of all, mein young vrient. Aha! Goot tog, den. You let

me zee how you vas pad. I am your master's vrient; das ist zo."

He advanced his hand to where Duke lay just inside the canvas, and the dog gave the skin on which he lay two thumps with his tail.

"Das ist goot," said the old German trader. "Ach! yaas; you haf been pite on dem pack, und scratch, scratch along bofe your zides; boot you are a prave tog, and zoon be quite well again."

Duke's tail performed quite a fantasia now, and he uttered a low whine and licked at the great, fat, friendly hand which patted his head.

"Und now vere is der poy?"

"Get into the wagon," said Dyke; and the German climbed in, followed by Dyke, and stooped down over the figure of Kaffir Jack, who lay on a blanket, with his head toward the front part of the wagon, through which opening the evening light still streamed.

The Kaffir's head was tied-up with a bandage formed of the sleeve of a shirt cut off at the shoulder, split up lengthwise at the seams, tied together so as to make it long enough, and this was stained with blood, evidently days old.

The Boer gazed down at the Kaffir, and Jack gazed up at him, screwing up his face in the most piteous fashion.

This scrutiny on both sides went on for some time in a silence which was at last broken by the Kaffir uttering a dismal groan which went right to Dyke's heart.

"Ah," said the trader softly, "boor vellow! How you vas?"

Jack uttered a more dismal groan than before.

"Ah, vas it den? Boor mans! you zeem as bad as neffer can be. You doomble off dem vagon, und dread on your vace like dot?"

"Oh!" groaned Jack. "Baas killum."

“Did he den. Der baas kill der boor vellow dead?” Then suddenly changing his tone from one full of soft sympathy to a burst of fierce anger, he roared out: “Dunder und lightning! You get oot of dis, you oogly black, idle tog. You got sore head, und lazy as big bullock. Out you vas!”

He accompanied the fierce words with a sharp kick, and Jack bounded up and sprang clear over the wagon-box, to stand out on the trampled ground, staring wildly.

“Ah, you wait till I gom und get das ’noceros whip, und make you tance, you lazy tog. You go take den pferd to water, or you haf no zopper to-night. Roon!”

Dyke stood staring at the change that had come over the Kaffir, who ran to where the horse was tied, unfastened the rein, and led him off without a word.

The old trader chuckled.

“I know whad is der madder mit dose poy. He is guide well as neffer vas, und lie und shleep and say he gannod vork a leedle pid. How game he do domble und gut den kopf?”

Dyke coloured.

“He did not tumble,” said the boy. “I hit him.”

“Zo? Mit dem shdick?”

“No,” faltered Dyke; “with the barrel of my gun.”

“Ach! das ist not goot. You mide break den gun. Der whip handle is der bess. Why you vas hit him on dem het?”

“He would not see to the bullocks. Almost directly after we had started—I mean the next day—he got at the meat and ate all there was.”

“Ach! yas. He look as if he had den gros shdomach. And zo he eat him all?”

“Yes; everything.”

“Und what den?”

“Then he went to sleep and wasted a whole day, and I had to do everything, and cut wood for the fire, and watch to keep off the wild beasts.”

“Ach! boor vellow! he vas shleepy, after eat himself so vull.”

“Yes.”

“Und der next day?”

“The next day he said it was too soon to start, and that I must go and shoot something for him to eat, while he kept up a good fire.”

“Zo? He is a glever vellow,” said the Boer, nodding his head, and with his eyes twinkling. “Und did you go and shoot zom more meat vor den boor poy?”

“No. I told him he must get up, and help to get the wagon along.”

“Und he said he vould not move?”

“Yes,” said Dyke; “and at last I got angry, and kicked him to make him get up and work.”

“Ah zo; und what den?”

“He jumped up, and threatened to spear me with his assegai.”

“Zo; und what den?”

“I hit him over the head with the gun barrel, and he fell down, and has not been up since. I was afraid I had killed him, for he lay with his eyes shut.”

“Und you goot oop your shirt to die oop his het, und you veed him, und drink him, und waid upon him effer since as neffer vas.”

“Yes; I’ve had to do everything,” said Dyke sadly; “but I ought not to have

hit him so hard.”

“Vot? My goot younger vrient, you should, und hit him more hart as dot. A lazy, pad tog. He is a cheating rascal. A man is neffer bad when he look guide well as dot. I know dot sort o’ poy, und he shall pe ferry sorry when he go pack, or I keep him here. Now you gom und wash, and meine alt voman shall give you blendy do eat und drink, und den you shall haf a creat big shlafen, und wake oop do-morrow morning as guide well as neffer vas. Gom along. Und zo die ozdridge birds go todt?”

“Go how?” said Dyke wonderingly.

“Todt, dead—vall ashleep, and neffer wake oop no more. Ah, vell, I am zorry for den pig bruder. He ist a ver goot mans. He bay for all he puy at mein shdore, und dot is vot die oder beobles do not always do.—Frau,” he continued, as they entered the homely and rather untidy but scrupulously clean house, “dis ist mein younger vrient: you dake him und wash him, und make him a pig evening’s eating, vor he has gom a long way do zee us, und he will shday as long as he like.”

Frau Morgenstern, a big, fat woman, greeted him warmly, and confined her washing to giving him a tin bucket, a lump of coarse yellow soap, and a piece of canvas perfectly clean, but coarse enough to make a sack.

That bucket of water was delicious, and so was the hearty meal which followed, and after being assured by the hearty old German that the cattle were properly tended, and seeing to Breezy himself—an act which brought the old trader’s fat hand down upon his back with “Goot poy: always dake gare of your goot horse youzelf,”—the house was re-entered, the door shut, and the host stood up, closed his eyes, and said a prayer in his native tongue, ending by blessing Dyke in true patriarchal fashion.

That night Dyke slept as he had not slept for weeks, and woke up the next morning wondering that he could feel so fresh and well, and expecting to see Kaffir Jack at the other end of the wagon, curled up in a blanket; but though the dog was in his old quarters, Jack was absent, and Dyke supposed that he was asleep beneath.

Chapter Fourteen.

A Resting-Place.

"You are petter as offer you vas, heh?" cried the old trader, thrusting his face in between the canvas curtains of the wagon end. "Yes, quite well. Good-morning."

"Ach zo. It is a goot mornings. Ant how is der tog? You vill say how to you are to dem alt Oom Morgenstern. He is goot tog ten, and getting himself mended ferry quickly. How vas it he shall pe scratch and pite all ofer hims, heh?"

The old man patted and stroked the dog with his big fat hand, as he spoke in a soft soothing tone, which had the effect of making him the best of friends with Duke, who whined and licked at the hand, and kept up a regular throbbing pat-pat-pat upon the floor of the wagon.

"Ach yes, ten, he is a ferry goot togs, and he shall pe effer zo much petter zoon. Ant zo der pig spotty gat gom und dake him, heh?"

"Yes, poor fellow, one of the great brutes pounced upon him suddenly, and fetched him from right under the wagon," said Dyke. "You were bad, weren't you, Duke, old chap?"

The dog threw up his head and uttered a loud howl, and then began to lick the cuts torn by the leopard's sharp claws.

"Ach! he vas pad, den," said the old man. "But das ist goot vizzick for goots und pites. Der tog's tongue ist as goot as his tooses ist pad. Ant zo you zhoot hims, heh?"

"What!—the leopard?" said Dyke. "Yes, I shot and hit him, I suppose; but I was afraid of hitting the dog. I fired, though, as a last chance."

"It was guide right," said the old man, nodding his head. "You do not shoode—you do noding, and der leopards garry away den hund. You do shoode, und if you shoode him, it is petter than for hims to be eaten oop alife, und you may shoode den leopard. Zo! I am happy das you hafe

zave den tog. He is a goot tog, und a goot tog ist a goot vrient out in der veldt. Now you gom mit me, und die alte voman give us bode zom fruhstuck. You know what ist das?”

Dyke shook his head.

“Das ist goot Deutsch for breakfass, mein young vrient.”

“Oh, I see,” cried Dyke. “I never learnt Dutch.”

“Nein, nein, nein, goot bube. Not Dutch. I did say Deutsch—Sharmans.”

“But you are a Boer, are you not?”

“Nein. I did gom ofer from Sharmany dwenty year ago. Dere ist blendy of Dutch Boer varder on. I am Deutsch.”

“I’ll recollect,” said Dyke eagerly.—“But how is Jack the Kaffir? Is he lying down under the wagon?”

“Nein,” cried the old man sharply. “As zoon as he zee me gom, shoost when it ist morgen, und he zee mein big shdick, he shoomp oop und go und veed den pferd horse, as he know he should. He’s guide well, dank you, now, and work ferry hart, like a goot poy.”

The old man wrinkled up his face, shut his eyes, and indulged in a hearty, silent laugh.

“I am zorry,” he said, suddenly growing serious; “und I veed and nurse a boor mans, und I zay to him: ‘Lie you there und go to sleep dill you are besser.’ Boot Meinheer Jack he ist a pig hoomboogs, and I gan zee all froo him. Dunder and lightning! I gif him der shdick. Now gom und haf den breakfast, und den you shall gom indo mein shdore, und puy die mealies, und gorn, und dea, und goffee, und rice, und zhugars, und bay me den money, und we will load den wagon. Den der vorks is done, und you shall gom und sit und dalk do me about die osdridge birds, while I shmoke mein bibe und you rest yourself, und resht die bullocks for two day. Den you go pack to your pig bruder, who want to see you ferry pad.”

“Yes, I want to get back again,” said Dyke.

“Das ist goot, bud you moost haf a goot long resht, und go guide well again. Und now, my younger vrient, I will dell you zomedings to dell dem bruder. You dell him der osdridge ist no goot. I haf dried, boot dey go zick, und guarrel, und fight, und ghick von anoder und efery bodies, und preak die legs; und die hens lay dere nests vull of pig eggs, und die ghocks gom und shoomp upon 'em, und make der feet all ovaire gustard und shell, und den no jickens gom. You dell dem bruder dot your beebles haf been vinding die diamonds in der veldt, und he had petter go und look vor die brescious shdones, und nod preak hish hart like der gock osdridge preak die eggs his weibs lays.”

“Yes, I'll tell him, Herr Morgenstern. I did want him to come and look for gold.”

“Ach! der golt ist no goot, bube. Effery potty goes to look for den golt. You dell him to go und look for die diamonds.”

“Yes, but where?” said Dyke drily.

“Dunder und lightning! If I know, I should dake two pig wagon to dem place, all vull of mealies und goot dings, und dell die beebles die diamonds vas here; und vhen dey gom to vind, I should zell mein goot dings und go und vetch zom move. You must go und vind die places everyvere all ofers, und dell me. I ken not, bood der are diamonds to be found. Now you shdop dat ruck a dongue of yours, und do not dalk zo motch like an old vool, und gom und hafe zom breakfast, or the old frau vill gom after us mit a shdick.”

He winked comically at Dyke, and led the way to the house, where there was a warm welcome, and a delicious breakfast of bread and milk and coffee waiting, with glorious yellow butter and fried bacon to follow.

Chapter Fifteen.

Oom Morgenstern's Sermon.

Duke was fed directly after the meal, and curled up afterward to “ged himself guide well again as effers.” Soon after Dyke came across Jack,

who was returning from driving the bullocks down to the stream for water, and now carefully saw to their being in the best bit of the old man's pasture for a good feed and rest.

"Ach zo!" cried the old man, "he ist a creat deal potter, mein young vrient. —You Shack, you hafe work well. You gan go to mein haus, und die frau will give you blenty of mealie gake und zom milk. You don't eat doo motch, or you will pe pad again, und want dem shdick. You oontershdant?"

Jack, whose face had been very pitiful and pleading, brightened up at this, and ran toward the house, while old Morgenstern turned and favoured Dyke with one of his winks.

"You zee now, my younger vrient, he ist like a pig shild dot has been oop der shimney. You must hid him hart negs dime. You did hid doo zoft."

"Soft!" cried Dyke. "Why, I thought I had killed him."

"Ach, yes, you dought zo; but der plack man's het is sehr dick. You hid an Englishman, or a Deutschman, or a Boer, and his het ist tin; but a plack man's het is dick. I dink zomdimes ven he ist so shdupid dot it ist all hart bone right froo. But it ist not zo; it is only dot dey are shdupid liddle shildren, und dink of noting bud eat und drink und shleep demselfs as long as ever dey gan; dot is all. You can neffer make a whide man oud of a plack man, if you wash him mid all der zoap in der world. Now den, der tog is right, und der horse, und die pullocks, so you shall gom to my shdore."

He led the way to a barn-like building, where he kept the supplies he dealt in and prospered over, settlers and travellers coming from far to purchase of the old fellow again and again, for he bore the proud title of honest man—a title that is known abroad as soon as that of rogue. And here Dyke produced his list, and corn, meal, bacon, tea, sugar, coffee, and salt were measured and weighed out by the help of a Kaffir boy, and set aside till all was done, when the old man, who had kept account all through with a clean, smooth box-lid and a piece of chalk, seated himself on a cask, added up and presented the wooden bill to Dyke.

"There," he said; "it is a creat teal of money, und I feel ashamed to jarge

so motch; but you dell der pig bruder it gost me as motch as effer vas to get die dings oop to mein haus. I zend dwo wagon all der vays do der down, und dey are gone for months, und die men und die pullocks all haf to cad, und zomdimes die lions ead die oxen, und zomdimes die wheels gom off, und dere is vloods und die wasser, und I lose a creat deal. I gannod jarge any less for mein dings.”

“My brother knows all that, sir,” said Dyke frankly, as he paid the money at once. “He said he would send me to you instead of to Oom Schlagen, because, he said, you would be just.”

“Did your pig bruder say dot?” cried the old man eagerly.

“Yes. He said I should come to you, though it was twenty long miles farther.”

“Ach! den now I shall go und shmoke mein piggest bibe for a dreat. Dot does me goot. Oom Schlagen is a pig fool; zo ist effery man who does not lofe his neighbour and zay his brayers effery night. You oondershtand, mein younger vriend.”

Dyke nodded, feeling at first half amused, then impressed by the simple-hearted old German’s manner.

“Zom men gome out here into die veldt and zay: ‘Ach! it is a pig open blace, und nopody gan zee me here, und I zhall do whad I like,’ und den dey rob und sheat, und kill die plack poys, und drink more as ist goot for demselves, und all pecause they are pig fools. For you haf read for youselfs, mein younger vrient, dot God is effery where und zees effery dings, und you gannot hide youselfs, or what you do. Und dot’s mein sermon, und it is a goot one, hey? Pecause it is zo short. Bud dot’s all. Now den,” he continued, as he took down a great pipe, and began to fill it from a keg of tobacco, “I am going to shmoke mein bibe, pecause I veel as if I vas a goot poy.”

He struck a match, lit up, and as he began to emit great clouds of smoke, he carefully stamped out the last spark from the splint of wood, reseated himself, and chuckled.

“You wait dill I haf finish mein bibe, und we vill all go to vork, und pack

dese dings in dem wagon. Now you look here. I dell you about die diamonds—und der is hartly any potty yet as know—und as zoon as I haf dell you, I zay to myselfs: ‘Ach! Hans Morgenstern, you are not a man: you are chattering old frau, who gannot keep a zecret. You go dell effery potty.’ Und I vas ferry zorry pecause I vas soch an old dumkopf—you know what dot is?”

“Something head,” said Dyke, smiling.

“Yaas, it ist your thick head, poy, shdupid head, und I vas gross mit myzelf, bud now I am glad. Der pig bruder zaid I vas honest mans, und just. I am a magistrate, und I dry to be, und I vall out mit den Boers, und zom oder white men, pecause I zay der Kaffir is a pig shdupid shild, und you must make him do what you want; but you shall not beat und kill him for nodings. Ach! you laugh yourselfs pecause I use den shdick. Neffer mind. I am just, und die Kaffirs know it, und gom und work for den alt man, und gom pack again. I am glad now I did dell you about die diamonds. Your bruder ist a gendlemans, und you dell him not to wasde his dime over die long shanks, and to go for die diamonds, und if he wands shdores, to gom mit his wagon, und get all he wands, und if he gannot bay me, id does not madder. Zom day he will ged das money, und he gan bay me den. Ach! he zaid I vas a honest man, und he is mein vrient, und dot is der zweetest bibe of dobacco I ever shmoke. Now gom und help load den wagon, like a goot poy, and zom day, when you grow a pig man, you may learn to shmoke doo. Boot it ist not goot for poys.”

Chapter Sixteen.

A Dead Check.

Two pleasant, restful days under the green leaves at old Morgenstern’s farm and store, and he was pressed to stay another; but Dyke was anxious to get back to his brother, and with Duke limping about, the horse and bullocks looking quite fresh and well, everything loaded up carefully, and a cask of sweet, pure water slung at the back of the wagon, Dyke stood at early dawn ready to start.

The oxen were yoked and hitched on to the dissel-boom and trek tow, breakfast was over, and all was ready, with Jack flourishing his great long whip of hippopotamus hide, eager to start.

Just then the hospitable old German signed to the Kaffir to come alongside, and a chirrup brought up the dog as well.

“Now, mein vrient,” said the old man, “you gan oondershtand goot Englisch, if you gannot shpeak him zo vel ash me, zo you listen. I am a creat magistrate, und know a lot. I am going to dalk to dot tog, und you are to hear.—Now, my goot tog, you are better as effer you vas, heh?”

Duke barked.

“Das ist goot. Now you are going to Kopfontein.”

The dog barked loudly.

“Das ist good, too. Now I dell you dis: if Kaffir Jack—you know Kaffir Jack—dot is him.”

He clapped his hand on the black’s shoulder, and the dog barked excitedly.

“Yaas, you know him; und I dell you dot if he does not work, you are to bide him.”

The dog’s hair rose up, and Jack made a movement to run, but the big fat hand held him fast.

“Und then, mein goot tog, if you do dot, he vill be ferry pad, und perhaps go mad. I mean, if you bide him, hey?”

The dog barked furiously, and Jack’s blackish face turned of a horrible dirty grey as he stood shivering, having pretty well understood every word.

“Dot is right; und now Kaffir Jack will drive die oxen, und pe a goot poy. Now you go. *Trek!*”

The Kaffir sprang away, whip in hand, the willing oxen began to pull, and the wagon went off through the soft sand, Duke hurrying to his place beneath, just in front of the water cask, while Dyke stood, rein in hand, waiting to shake hands with his host, who laughed softly.

“I dalk all dot nonsense do vrighten him like a shild,” he said. “He vill pe a goot poy now till he begin to forget, und den you must vrighten him doo. Now goot-pye, und der goot God bless you, mein sohn.”

Dyke shook hands warmly with the friendly old man, sprang upon Breezy, and soon overtook the wagon, which was going steadily along the faint track.

He glanced back several times, seeing the old trader standing in front of his house smoking his big pipe, but at last he was invisible, and the boy set himself to achieve his long, slow, five or six days' journey, hopeful, rested, and ready, feeling as if all was going to be right, and more happy in his mind than he had been for days.

As he went on and on, fresh, light-hearted, and bright, every place made familiar by halts as he came, wore a very different aspect, and there were times when he smiled at some of the petty vexations, though others were serious enough. For instance, by this water, where he had had so much difficulty in getting wood, for the day's journey had been very long, and it was growing dark when he halted, and a distant roar told of the possibility of a visit from lions, and perhaps the loss of one of the bullocks. But now all was smooth and pleasant, the evening was glorious, the oxen not too weary, and Jack soon collected enough wood for cooking and keeping up a roaring blaze.

The next day, too, was hot and pleasant. Several guinea-fowl fell to Dyke's gun, and he shot a dangerous viper which raised its head sluggishly from the sandy track, threatening, with gleaming eyes and vibrating tongue, the barking dog, which kept cautiously beyond striking distance. There were lions heard in the night, making the cattle uneasy, but they were not molested.

It was wonderful as a contrast that journey back, and Dyke often asked himself, as he cantered about, sometimes to the side, sometimes letting

the wagon go for some distance forward, whether he had not been of poor heart, and had made too much fuss over his troubles; but second thoughts convinced him that he had had a terrible task, and he almost wondered that he had been able to reach Morgenstern's at all.

Jack was the very perfection of a Kaffir servant now, driving splendidly, and taking the greatest care as to the pasturing and watering of the cattle; his young master never having to find fault with a single thing.

But there was the reason plainly enough; and Dyke smiled to himself as he thought of how easily the black had been impressed by the big old German, though he felt that Jack's guilty conscience had something to do with it.

Oddly enough, the dog's behaviour during the return journey helped to keep Jack in order. For Duke, though his hurts were mending fast, was still very weak. He was ready to bark and make plenty of fuss over his master, but he did not evince the slightest desire to trot after him when he rode away from the wagon. Duke seemed to know his own powers, and went back directly to his place between the two hind wheels of the wagon. There he stayed, keeping step pretty well with the bullocks. But at every halt, when Jack proceeded to gather wood, drive the oxen to water or pasture, the dog followed close at his heels, making no demonstration of friendliness, never barking, but walking with lowered head and surly look, just behind, stopping when the black did, going on or returning, and never leaving him for a moment, and ending by going back to his place under the wagon, and there resting his head upon his paws.

Of course, all this was the sick dog's natural objection to being left alone; but to Jack it meant a great deal more. That dog had always been rather unfriendly, and was evidently a very uncanny kind of beast, which could understand everything that was said to him, and would fully carry out the old German's instructions. Duke followed him about to see that he did his work properly, and as Jack walked on, he often felt the sensation in his calves known as pins and needles, which made him wince and tremble; and on one occasion he uttered a yell of horror, for the dog's cold nose touched one of his bare ankles, and made him bound a couple of yards.

For to him there was no doubt about the matter whatever. Duke was

watching everything he did, and the moment he relaxed his efforts, those white teeth would close upon his leg; and if he had been talked to and argued with for a week, he would never have believed that he would not for a certainty go mad, die, and be thrown out upon the sands to the jackals and vultures which hung about their nightly camps.

The consequence was that, saving a few of the trifling mishaps which befall wagon travellers through the South African deserts, Dyke's return journey was peaceful and enjoyable, even if slow. He would often have liked to gallop forward to get nearer home; but the wagon held him as a magnet does its bar, and he thoroughly fulfilled the trust placed in him by his brother.

At last the morning dawned when a steady day's work would bring them to Kopfontein, and starting at once, they got on a few miles before halting for breakfast. Then went on for three hours; halted again to dine and rest during the hottest part of the day. After which there was the little river to ford a couple of miles farther on, and then twelve miles would bring them home, late in the evening perhaps, but Dyke was determined to finish before he slept.

Hardly had they settled down in the shelter of the wagon for that mid-day halt, than Dyke found that the wagon-tilt would be useful for something else besides keeping off the sun. For some clouds which had been gathering all the morning, centred themselves at last directly overhead; there was a succession of terrific peals of thunder following upon blinding flashes of lightning, which seemed to play all round and about the wagon, making Breezy stand shivering as he pressed close up alongside, and drew the cattle together with their heads inward, as if for mutual protection.

Then down came the rain in a perfect deluge, and for a good hour flash and peal seemed to be engaged in trying to tear up the clouds, from which the great drops of rain poured down.

The storm ceased as quickly as it had come on, and the rain having been sucked up by the thirsty, sandy earth, so that when they started again, save that the wagon-cover was soaked, drawn tight, and streaming, there was no sign for a while of the storm. There were certainly the clouds

fading in the distance, but the sky overhead was of a glorious blue, the little herbage they passed was newly washed and clean, and the drops left sparkled in the brilliant sunshine.

What followed, then, came as a surprise.

They had gone on for some distance before it suddenly recurred to Dyke that they had to cross the little river; and now, for the first time, he became conscious of a low, soft murmur, as of insects swarming, but this, though continuous, did not take his attention much, for he set it down to a cloud of insects, roused from their torpor by the sun, and now busily feeding, perhaps, close at hand, though invisible as he rode gently along, breathing in with delight the sweet, cool air.

But at the end of half an hour the murmur had grown louder, and it sounded louder still as he drew rein by some bushes to let Breezy crop the moist shoots, while he waited for the wagon to come up, it being about half a mile behind.

“How slowly and deliberately those beasts do move,” thought Dyke, as he watched the six sleek oxen, not a bit the worse for their journey, plodding gravely along with the wagon lightly laden, as it was, for six beasts to draw, bumping and swaying every now and then as a stone or two stood up through the sand, he not being there to point them out to the black, who sat on the wagon-box, with his chin upon his breast, rousing himself from time to time to crack his whip and shout out some jargon to the bullocks. These took not the slightest notice of whip-crack or shout, but plodded slowly along, tossing their heads now and then, and bringing their horns in contact with a loud rap.

At last they came up abreast, and Jack turned his dark face, and grinned meaningly.

“What is it?” said Dyke. “Glad you are so near home?”

“No see Tanta Sal night,” he said.

“Oh yes, we will,” replied Dyke. “I mean to be home before we sleep.”

Jack shook his head.

"You'll see, my fine fellow," said Dyke to himself. "If you are going to begin any games just for a finish off on the last day, you'll find you'll be startled. I'll set Duke at him, and scare the beggar," he muttered, as he laughed to himself at the man's genuine belief in, and alarm about, the dog; and in imagination he saw Jack hopping about and yelling, and afraid to come down from the wagon-box in front on account of Duke, who would be barking and dancing about as if trying to drag him off.

He let the wagon go on then for a few yards, and hung back so as to say a few cheery words to the dog, who responded with a sharp bark or two, but did not come from beneath the wagon.

And now the noise grew louder and louder, till at last Dyke began to divine the cause. A short distance farther the open plain was crossed by an erratic line of trees and rocks, forming a green and grey zigzag of some three hundred yards wide, and down in a hollow, hidden till close up, there was the rivulet-like stream at which he had halted on his outward way to let the animals drink.

It was from there, then, that the now rapidly increasing murmur arose, and pressing his nag's sides, he rode rapidly on to reach the side of the tiny bourn, which now proved to be a fierce torrent nearly a hundred yards wide, raging amongst rocks, tossing up beady spray, and putting an end to all his hopes of reaching home that night, for even as he looked he could see that the water was rising still, and any attempt to ford meant certain death to man and beast.

Dyke's heart sank. He knew now the meaning of the Kaffir's grin. It was the first trouble of the homeward way.

Chapter Seventeen.

Out of Patience.

The wagon came slowly up as Dyke stood watching the roaring river, full from side to side with the waters, which resulted from a cloud-burst in the distant mountains, where storms had been raging on the previous day, that which they had encountered a short time before being the remains of

one of the drifts which had passed over the great plain.

As he drove up, Jack sat grinning pleasantly upon the box, and of his own will turned the bullocks into a meadow-like opening, whose fresh herbage, sparkling still with clinging raindrops, set the animals lowing with satisfaction before stooping from time to time to snatch a mouthful of the grass.

Jack evidently thought it would be a splendid place for a camp, and without waiting for orders, shouted to the bullocks to stop, and descending from his seat, after laying aside his whip, began to outspan.

Dyke took in every action, knowing that it was only an endorsement of his own thoughts that the full river meant in all probability a halt for days. There was the possibility of his being able to swim his horse across somewhere higher up or lower down; but after a few minutes' inspection he felt that this was quite hopeless, though, even if it had been practicable, he knew that he could not leave his charge.

So vexatious when so near home!

"Might have known," he said to himself bitterly. "Everything was going on too easily. But the rain might have stopped for another day or two."

He tried hard to be philosophic and to take matters calmly, but it was too hard work, especially, too, when the Kaffir seemed in such high glee, and bustled about the outspanning, as if looking forward to some days of rest, with nothing to do but eat and sleep.

The boy thought hard as he dismounted, hobbled his cob, and let him begin to graze in company with the draught oxen; but he soon gave that up, and went and stood watching the rushing river, knowing full well that he was completely shut away from Kopfontein, and that he could do nothing but wait patiently till the river sank to its old level.

"And that," he said dismally, "will be quite a week."

Things might have been worse. In fact, some people would have been delighted with the position. For the spot was beautiful; the wagon formed a comfortable sleeping tent, provisions and water were plentiful, and

there was ample opportunity for adding to the larder by tying in wait at early morning and late evening for the birds and animals which came from far out in the desert to drink.

In fact, during his dreary wait, Dyke tried to amuse himself by watching the various animals that came down one deeply trampled track, on either side of which the place was thickly bushed and dotted with fine forest trees, well grown, from their nearness to water.

Antelopes of many kinds came down, from tiny gazelles up to the great eland. One morning he was delighted by the coming of a little herd of about a dozen giraffes, and he crouched among the bushes, watching them drink; the towering bull of about eighteen feet in height began by straddling out its forelegs in the most ungraceful way, till it could lower itself enough to reach the water with its lips.

Another time he was startled by the coming of a huge white rhinoceros, which careered through the bushes in a fierce, determined way, displaying its great power and indifference to every other beast of the forest.

Lions, too, came once and pulled down an antelope, making the wagon cattle extremely uneasy, but going away after their banquet, and troubling the camp no more.

But the river remained as full as ever, the waters rushing furiously down, and Dyke grew angry at last against his brother.

"Joe knows I'm overdue," he said, "and he ought to have come to see why I am detained. Why, after that rain he ought to have known that the river would be full. It's too bad. I thought better of him; but perhaps he'll come to-day."

And with this hope the boy climbed one of the biggest rocks to where he could gaze across the river and over the plain on the other side, looking out in expectancy of seeing the big weedy horse his brother rode coming toward the ford, but he watched in vain day after day, while Jack kept the fire going, and cooked and ate and slept without a care, not even seeming to give a thought to the wife waiting at Kopfontein, or, judging from appearances, to anything else but his own desires.

“I should like to kick him—a lazy brute!” Dyke said to himself; “but there’s nothing to kick him for now. He does all there is to do. I suppose I’m out of temper at having to wait so. Here’s a whole week gone, and the river higher than ever.”

Dyke had one other novelty to study—a novelty to him, for previously he had seen but little of them. This novelty was a party of baboons of all sizes, from the big, heavy males down to the young ones, which approached from some distance on the other side, clinging to their mothers’ backs and necks. These strange, dog-like creatures came down from a high clump of rocks or kopje regularly every evening in the same way; and though they had been heard and seen frequently during the daytime, chattering, barking, and gambolling about, chasing one another in and out, and over the stones, as if thoroughly enjoying the sport, toward the time for their visit to the river all would be very silent, and in a cautious, watchful way a big old male, who seemed to be the captain or chief of the clan, would suddenly trot out on to a big block, and stand there carefully scanning the patch of forest and the plain beyond for danger. Then he would change to a nearer natural watch-tower, and have another long scrutiny, examining every spot likely to harbour an enemy, till, apparently satisfied, he would descend, go down to the river and drink, and then trot back to his lookout.

After a few minutes’ watch, he would then give a signal, a quick, short, barking sound, at which the rocks beyond, which the moment before had appeared to be deserted, suddenly became alive with baboons of all sizes, which came running down to the water in perfect confidence that all was well, and that their old chief high up on the rock would give them fair warning of the approach of any of their feline enemies, leopard or lion, with a taste for the semi-human kind.

Upon one occasion Dyke suddenly started up, shouted, and fired his gun, for the sake of seeing what effect it would have.

Instant flight he felt sure; but he was not prepared for all that followed.

At the first sound there was a rush—a regular *sauve qui peut*; but there was a method in it. Mothers caught up their little ones, which fled to them for protection, and one big male made a kind of demonstration to cover

the flight, while the old fellow on the rock sprang about, barking, shouting, and making little charges at the interrupter, not leaving his post till all had reached their sanctuary, when he followed to the kopje, and turned with others to stand, barking hoarsely, and picking up and throwing stones, with every sign of angry defiance, till their persecutor disappeared.

Nine days had passed, and then the river began to shrink rapidly.

Dyke hailed the change with eagerness, for he had been growing terribly anxious, and more and more convinced that something must be wrong, or Emson would have come down to the flooded ford; while at last his thoughts had taken a definite shape, one so full of horror, that he trembled for the task he had to perform—that of going home to put matters to the proof.

He shivered at the idea, for now he could only place this terrible interpretation upon his brother's silence—he must have come to meet him, tried to swim his horse across the river, and have been swept away.

That last night was almost sleepless, for whenever the boy dropped off, with the light of the fire they kept up glancing on the canvas, he started back into wakefulness again, wondering whether the river was still going down, or some fancied sound meant a fresh accession to the flood-waters coming down from the mountains.

The morning broke at last, and leaping out of the wagon, Dyke ran down toward the river, closely followed by the dog, now nearly recovered, scaring away a buck which had been lurking in the covert, the graceful little creature bounding away before him giving pretty good proof of the satisfactory state of the river by dashing over the thick bed of intervening sand and stones, splashing through the water, and bounding up the other side.

The waters were down, leaving a deep bed of sand, and with a place to ford that was evidently not knee-deep.

Dyke ran excitedly back, gave his orders, and to Jack's great disgust he had to inspan, mount on the wagon-box, and shout to the oxen to *trek*, the well-rested beasts willingly dragging the wagon through the heavy loose drift and down into the water, which did not rise to the naves of the

wheels. It took rather a hard pull to get up the other side, but the difficulty was soon mastered, the bullocks following Breezy, as his master led the way, and in half an hour after starting they were at last well on the road to Kopfontein, whose rocky mound stood up clearly in the morning light.

Dyke restrained his impatience a little longer—that is, till the wagon was well on its way over the plain; then touching Breezy's sides he went on ahead at a gallop, the roofing of the house and sheds gradually growing plainer; then there were the ostrich-pens, with a few dimly seen birds stalking about, and object after object coming rapidly into sight. But there was no one visible: there appeared to be no blue thread of smoke rising in the morning air, where Tanta Sal was boiling the kettle; all looked wonderfully still, and had it not been for the ostriches here and there, Dyke would have been disposed to think the place was deserted.

On, still nearer and nearer, but no one appeared, and again still nearer, and his lips parted to utter a loud shout to announce his coming.

But somehow the cry froze in his throat, and he dared not utter it; the place was deserted, he felt sure. Tanta Sal must have gone off to seek her tribe after the terrible catastrophe, for Dyke felt sure now that his surmise was right, and that Emson had been drowned in trying to ford the river and come to meet him.

The boy's spirits sank lower and lower as he checked his horse's pace to a canter, hushing the beat of its feet upon the soft sand as he rode on, seeing no one stirring, and at last, in the deepest despair, feeling as if he dare go no farther. But just at that moment a low crooning sound fell upon his ear, and the reaction was so sudden and so great that Dyke nearly shouted aloud as he pressed on to the door, feeling now that he had been letting his imagination run riot, and that there was nothing whatever the matter. In fact, that was his brother's tall gaunt horse grazing where it had been hidden from his sight by one of the low, shed-like buildings.

"What a lot of stuff one can fancy!" said Dyke to himself. "Why, it's early yet, and poor old Joe hasn't got up. I'll give him such a rouser."

The next minute he had pulled up, thrown his rein over the cob's head, as he dismounted, and ran to the open doorway from whence came the

crooning sound.

“Morning, Tant,” he cried to the woman, who sat crouched together on the floor.

Then as his eyes caught sight of the pallet in the corner of the room, he shouted:

“Joe, old man, what is it? Are you ill?”

“No makee noisy,” cried the woman; “shoo, shoo, shoo. Baas Joe go die.”

Chapter Eighteen.

A Test of Manhood.

Dyke uttered a cry of horror as he ran to the bedside and sank upon his knees, gazing wildly in his brother's dark, thin face, with its wild eyes, in which was no sign of recognition, though Emson kept on muttering in a low voice.

"Joe—Joe, old fellow, don't you know me?" There was no reply, and in his agony of spirit Dyke caught his burning, dry hand, and pressed it.

"Speak to me!" he cried. "How long have you been ill? What is it, Joe? Tell me. What am I to do?"

No answer; but the muttering went on, and Dyke turned to the Kaffir woman. "How long has he been ill?"

"Baas Joe go die," said the woman, nodding her head.

"No, no; he will be better soon. When was he taken ill?"

"Baas Joe go die," said the woman with horrible persistence. "No eat—no drink—no sleep. Go die."

"Go away!" cried Dyke wildly. "You are as bad as one of those horrible birds. Get out!"

The woman smiled, for she did not understand a word. The gesture of pointing to the door was sufficient, and she went out, leaving the brothers alone.

"Joe!" cried Dyke wildly. "Can't you speak to me, old chap? Can't you tell me what to do? I want to help you, but I am so stupid and ignorant. What can I do?"

The muttering went on, and the big erst strong man slowly rolled his head from side to side, staring away into the past, and sending a chill of horror

through the boy.

For a few moments Dyke bowed his head right into his hands, and uttered a low groan of agony, completely overcome by the horror of his position—alone there in that wild place, five or six days' journey from any one, and hundreds of miles from a doctor, even if he had known where to go.

He broke down, and crouched there by the bedside completely prostrate for a few minutes—not for more. Then the terrible emergency stirred him to action, and he sprang up ready to fight the great danger for his brother's sake, and determined to face all.

What to do?

He needed no telling what was wrong; his brother was down with one of the terrible African fevers that swept away so many of the whites who braved the dangers of the land, and Dyke knew that he must act at once if the poor fellow's life was to be saved.

But how? What was he to do?

To get a doctor meant a long, long journey with a wagon. He felt that it would be impossible to make that journey with a horse alone, on account of the necessity for food for himself and steed. But he could not go. If he did, he felt that it would be weeks before he could get back with medical assistance, even if he reached a doctor, and could prevail upon him to come. And in that time Joe, left to the care of this half-savage woman, who had quite made up her mind that her master would die, would be dead indeed.

No: the only chance of saving him was never to leave his side.

Fever! Yes, they had medicine in the house for fever. Quinine—Warburgh drops—and chlorodyne. Which would it be best to give? Dyke hurried to the chest which contained their valuables and odds and ends, and soon routed out the medicines, deciding at once upon quinine, and mixing a strong dose of that at once, according to the instructions given upon the bottle.

That given, the boy seated himself upon a box by the bed's head, asking himself what he ought to do next.

He took Emson's hand again, and felt his pulse, but it only told him what he knew—that there was a terrible fever raging, and the pulsations were quick and heavy through the burning skin.

A sudden thought struck him now. The place was terribly hot, and he hurriedly opened the little window for the breeze to pass through.

There was an alteration in the temperature at once, but he knew that was not enough, and running to the door, he picked up a bucket, and called for Tanta Sal, who came slowly.

“Baas Joe go die.—Jack?”

She pointed away over the plain, and Dyke nodded.

“Yes, Jack is coming. Go, quick! fetch water.”

The woman understood, and taking the bucket, went off at once towards where the cool spring gurgled among the rocks at the kopje.

The feeling of terrible horror and fear attacked Dyke again directly, and he shrank from going to his brother's side, lest he should see him pass away to leave him alone there in the desert; but a sensation of shame came to displace the fear. It was selfish, he felt; and with a new thought coming, he went to the back of the door, took down the great heavy scissors with which he and Emson had often operated upon the ostrich-feathers, cutting them off short, and leaving the quill stumps in the birds' skins, where after a time they withered and fell out, giving place to new plumes. Then kneeling down by the head of the rough bed, he began to shear away the thick close locks of hair from about the sick man's temples, so that the brain might be relieved of some of the terrible heat.

This done, he went to the chest, and got out a couple of handkerchiefs.

His stay in that torrid clime had taught him much, but he had never thought of applying a little physical fact to the purpose he now intended. For he knew that if a bottle or jug of water were surrounded by a wet

cloth and kept saturated, either in a draught or in the sun, the great evaporation which went on would cool the water within the vessel.

“And if it will do this,” Dyke thought, “why will it not cool poor Joe’s head?”

He bent down over him, and spoke softly, then loudly; but Emson was perfectly unconscious, and wandering in his delirium, muttering words constantly, but what they were Dyke could not grasp.

In a few minutes Tanta Sal re-appeared with the bucket of cool spring-water.

“Baas Joe go die,” she said, shaking her head as she set it down; and then, without waiting to be told to go, she went round to the back, and began to pile up fuel and fan the expiring fire, before proceeding to make and bake a cake.

Meanwhile, Dyke had been busy enough. He had soaked one of the handkerchiefs in the bucket, and laid it dripping right across Emson’s brow and temples, leaving it there for a few minutes, while he prepared the other. The minutes were not many when he took off the first to find it quite hot, and he replaced it with the other, which became hot in turn, and was changed; and so he kept on for quite an hour, with the result that his brother’s mutterings grew less rapid and loud, so that now and then the boy was able to catch a word here and a word there. All disconnected, but suggestive of the trouble that was on the sick man’s mind, for they were connected with the birds, and his ill-luck, his voice taking quite a despairing tone as he cried:

“No good. Failure, failure—nothing succeeds. It is of no use.”

And then, in quite a piteous tone:

“Poor Dyke! So hard for him.”

This was too much. The tears welled up in the boy’s eyes, but he mastered his emotion, and kept on laying the saturated bandages upon his brother’s brow, watching by him hour after hour, forgetful of everything, till all at once there was a loud, deep barking, and Duke trotted into the house, to come up to the bedside, raise himself up, and

begin pawing at the friend he had not seen for so long.

"It's no good, Duke, old chap," said Dyke sadly; "he don't know you. Go and lie down, old man. Go away."

The dog dropped down on all-fours at once, and quickly sought his favourite place in one corner of the room, seeming to comprehend that he was not wanted there, and evidently understanding the order to lie down.

The coming of the dog was followed by the approach of the wagon, and the lowing of the bullocks as they drew near to their familiar quarters; the cows answered, and Duke leaped up and growled, uttering a low bark, but returned to his corner as soon as bidden.

At first Dyke had felt stunned by the terrible calamity which had overtaken his brother; but first one and then another thing had been suggested to his mind, and the busy action had seemed to clear his brain.

This cool application had certainly had some effect; and as he changed the handkerchief again, he saw plainly enough what he must do next.

Wiping his hands, he sought for paper and pencil, and wrote in a big round hand:

"I came home and found my brother here, at Kopfontein, bad with fever. He does not know me. Pray send to fetch a doctor."

He folded this, then doubled it small, and tied it up with a piece of string, after directing it to "Herr Hans Morgenstern, at the Store."

This done, he once more changed the wet handkerchiefs, and went out to find Jack outspanning the cattle, and talking in a loud voice to his wife.

"Jack," he said, "the baas is very bad. You must go back to Morgenstern's and take this."

He handed the tied-up paper to the Kaffir, who took it, turned it over, and then handed it back, looking at his young master in the most helplessly stupid way.

Dyke repeated the order, and pointed toward the direction from which they had come, forcing the letter into Jack's hand.

It was returned, though, the next moment.

"Jack bring wagon all alone," he said.

"Yes, I know; but you must go back again. Take plenty of mealies, and go to Morgenstern's and give him that."

"Jack bring wagon all alone," the black said again; and try how Dyke would, he did not seem as if he could make the Kaffir understand.

In despair he turned to Tanta Sal, and in other words bade her tell her husband go back at once; that he might take a horse if he thought he could ride one; if not, he must walk back to Morgenstern's, and carry the letter, and tell him that the baas was bad.

"Baas Joe go die," said the woman, nodding her head.

"No, no; he will live if we help," cried Dyke wildly. "Now, tell Jack he must go back at once, as soon as he has had some mealies."

"Baas Joe go die," reiterated the woman.

"Hold your tongue!" roared Dyke angrily. "You understand what I mean. Jack is to go back.—Do you hear, Jack? Go back, and take that to Morgenstern's."

The Kaffir and his wife stared at him heavily, with their lower jaws dropped, and after several more efforts, Dyke turned back to the house to continue his ministrations.

"They understand me, both of them," he cried bitterly; "but he does not want to go, and Tant wants him to stay. What shall I do? What shall I do?"

He changed the handkerchiefs, and rushed out again, but the Kaffirs were invisible; and going round to the back, he found Jack squatted on his heels, eating the hot cake his wife was baking. But though Dyke tried command and entreaty, the pair only listened to him in a dazed kind of

way, and it was quite evident that unless he tried violence he would not be able to make the Kaffir stir; while even if he did use force, he felt that Jack would only go a short distance and there remain.

“And I can’t leave here! I can’t leave here!” groaned Dyke; “it would be like saying good-bye to poor Joe for ever.”

Clinging to the faint hope that after he had been well-fed and rested, the Kaffir might be made to fulfil the duty required of him, Dyke went on tending his brother, with the satisfactory result of seeing him drop at last into a troubled sleep, from which, two hours after, he started up to call out for Dyke.

“I’m here, Joe, old chap. Can’t you see me?” said the boy piteously.

“No use: tell him no use. Madness to come. All are dying. Poor Dyke! So hard—so hard.”

Dyke felt his breast swell with emotion, and then came a fresh horror: the evening was drawing on, and he would be alone there with the sick man, watching through the darkness, and ignorant of how to act—what to do. And now the thought of his position, alone there in the great desert, seemed more than he could bear; the loneliness so terrible, that once more, in the midst of the stifling heat, he shuddered and turned cold.

Chapter Nineteen.

Sterling Coin.

Dyke Emson sat in the darkness there along. He had seen no more of Jack and Tanta Sal since the evening. The latter had looked in, stared stupidly, said “Baas Joe go die,” once more, and roused the boy into such a pitch of fury that he came nigh to throwing something at her. Then she left the room with her husband, and Dyke was alone.

He felt ready to give up, and throw himself upon his face in his great despair, for hour by hour the feeling strengthened that his brother was indeed dying fast; and as he sat there in the midst of that terrible solitude,

shut in, as it were, by the black darkness, his busy imagination flooded his brain with thoughts of what he would have to do.

The fancy maddened him, for it seemed cruel and horrible to think of such a thing when his brother lay there muttering in the delirium; but the thought would come persistently, and there was the picture vividly standing out before him. For his mind was in such an unnatural state of exaltation that he could not keep it hidden from his mental gaze.

There it all was, over and over again: that place he had selected where it was nearly always shaded—in that rift in the kopje where the soft herbage grew, and climbed and laced overhead, while the low murmur of the water gurgling from the rocks in the next rift fell gently upon his ear. He had selected that spot because it was so calm and peaceful, and drawn poor Joe there upon the little sled. He saw it all—the shallow, dark bed he had dug in the soft earth, where his brother was to rest in peace, with all the suffering at an end. There were big, mossy pieces of granite there, which would cover and protect the poor fellow's resting-place, and a smooth, perpendicular face of rock above, on which he saw himself, chipping out with hammer and cold chisel the one word "Joe."

And then—

Back came the terrible scene, and over and over again, till, setting his teeth hard, Dyke sprang up, and went to another bucket of water which he had made Jack understand he was to fetch before he left him some hours ago, and drank long and deeply before returning to the rough pallet, renewing the cold bandage again, and then sinking upon his knees to bury his face in his hands.

For a full hour Dyke knelt there in the black darkness as if asleep, exhausted by the great mental and bodily fatigue, but hearing every movement—thrilled by the piteous words which came from his brother's lips. Then with a strange feeling of calm rest filling his breast, he raised his head, bent over the sick man, and took the hot, burning hand to hold it to his cheek.

"I won't be such a coward as to break down now, Joe, old chap," he said softly, and as if it were a confidential whisper which his brother heard. "I

was so tired, and I was frightened to see you like this, but I'm going to try and play the man now, and—and I'll stick to you, Joe, to the—”

He was going to say “last,” but he checked it, with something like a sob rising to his lips.

“Till—till you get better, old man, and I can help you to go and sit in my old corner in the shade among the rocks. For you're going to be better soon, old chap; and though you're very bad, and it's dark, and help is so far away, we're not alone, Joe—we're not alone.”

No: not alone!

For as the boy knelt there, holding that burning hand, there came the long, low, yelping wail of the jackals prowling around, as if they scented death in the air; and as the dismal sound swept here and there about the lonely house, coming and going, and at times apparently quite close, Dyke shuddered. But the next moment there arose the deep-toned, fierce roar of a lion, far away possibly, yet in its tremendous power sounding so near that it might have been close at hand.

Then the yelping of the jackals ceased, as if the foul creatures had been scared away by the nobler beast; and after a few uneasy movements among the frightened cattle in the pens, all was still with a great solemnity, which thrilled the boy to his deepest depths.

And then it seemed to Dyke that it was not so dark, and he rose and walked softly to the open door to stand looking out, wondering and awe-stricken at the grandeur of the scene above his head. For it was as if the heavens were marked across the zenith by a clearly cut line—the edge of a black cloud—and on one side all was darkness, on the other a dazzling sheen of stars, glittering and bright as he thought he had never seen them before; while the darkness was being swept away, and fresh stars sprang out from the dense curtain minute by minute, and seemed to rain down myriads of points of light.

He stood there till he heard a low, weary sigh from the rough bed, and turned back in time to hear a few muttered words, and then all was silent once again.

Dyke trembled, and something seemed to hold him fast chained, as if in a troubled dream.

Then with a wild cry he fell upon his knees, and stretched out his trembling hands to touch his brother's brow, and the reaction came, for it was not as he thought. The head was cooler, and there was a faint moisture about the temples, while the muttering was renewed for a few moments, and ended with a sigh.

Dyke's hands were softly passed then to his brother's breast, which rose and fell gently, and when he let his fingers glide along the arm that had been tossed to one side, there the tell-tale pulse beat rapidly still at the wrist, but not—certainly not so heavily and hurried in every throb, for Joe Emson was sleeping as he had not slept for many days.

The hours went on till, as Dyke sat there, the darkness began to pass, and the watcher was conscious of a double dawn. The first in himself, where, as he crouched by the bed, and thought of words that had never impressed him much before, it was as if Hope were rising slowly, and it strengthened in its pale, soft light, and mingled with the faint grey which began to steal in through the narrow window. And this too lengthened and strengthened, till it began to glow. The fowls—the few they had left—told that it was day. Once more he could hear the ostriches chuckling, hissing, and roaring, and the lowing of the cows and bullocks sounded pleasant and welcome, as a fresh, soft air began to play through the door.

The shadows within the room grew paler, till, all at once, they darkened again in the corners, for the full beams of the sun suddenly stole in through the window, and played upon the opposite wall, which glowed in orange and gold.

But Dyke did not see the refulgent hues with which the shabby white-wash and prints were painted, for he was watching his brother's face, all so terribly changed since their last parting. The eyes were sunken, and hollows showed about the temples and cheeks. There was a terrible dry blackness, too, about the skin; while the hands that lay upon the bed were thin and full of starting tendons, all tokens of the fever which had laid the strong man low.

But he was sleeping, and sleep at such a time meant life; while the head, bared now by the rough shearing Dyke had given the previous evening, was hot, but not burning with that terrible fire which scorches out the very life where it has commenced to glow.

“Baas Joe dead?” said a voice at the door, and Dyke started to his feet to seize a short, heavy whip; but Kaffir Jack did not stop to see it seized. He turned and fled, while a low muttering growl roused the boy to the fact that the dog had been there in the corner all the night, and now came forward to thrust a cool nose into his master’s hand.

“Why, Duke, old chap, I’d forgotten you,” said Dyke softly. The dog gave his tail a series of rapid wags, and then came to the bedside, looked at the sick man, whined softly, and then sat and rested his muzzle upon one of the feeble hands, watching the face intently, and as if meaning to keep guard there.

Dyke followed, and laid his hand on the dog’s head; but the faithful animal did not stir.

“No, Duke, old man, Baas Joe is not dead yet,” whispered Dyke, as he gazed at his brother’s face; “and, please God, we’re going to bring him safely back to what he was.”

Duke did not move his head; but he raised his tail once, and brought it down upon the floor with a heavy—*whop!*

Chapter Twenty.

A Sore Strait.

“Stop and watch,” said Dyke; and leaving the dog in charge, he went out into the glorious light of day, feeling strong now, but horribly weak.

A contradiction, but a fact, for though he had drunk of the cool fresh water several times, he had taken nothing since the previous morning, and if he had to nurse Emson back to life, he knew that he must gather force by means of food.

He had to carry on the work of the place still, he felt, as his brother was helpless; and as he walked round to the back of the premises, he began to feel something like wonder at the terrible despair from which he had suffered since his return. For everything looked so bright and cheery and home-like, and the world around him so beautiful, that he felt ready for any new struggle in the great fight for life.

“She’s always squatting over a fire,” said Dyke to himself, as he went round to the back, for there was Tanta Sal down in a wonderfully frog-like attitude, turning herself into a very vigorous natural bellows, to make the fire glow under the kettle.

She looked up and smiled, drawing back her thick lips as the lad approached.

“Baas Joe die?” she said.

“Look here!” roared Dyke fiercely: “don’t you say that to me again. No—No—No—No!”

Tanta Sal stared at him and shook her head.

“Breakfast!” cried Dyke laconically.

That she understood, and Dyke hurried away to take a sharp glance round before going back to his brother’s side.

It was needed. The cows were not milked, and not likely to be; the horses had not been fed, and the ostriches were clamouring for food.

Just then he saw Jack peeping at him from round the corner of one of the sheds; but as soon as he caught sight of his young master, he drew back.

Instead of going on, Dyke darted round to the other side of the building, knowing full well that if he ran after him, Jack would dash off more quickly than he could. So stopping and creeping on over the sand, he peeped round and saw the man before him just about to perform the same act. Consequently Dyke was able to pounce upon the Kaffir, whom he seized by the waist-cloth.

"Here, I want you," he cried sternly, and in a gruff voice which he hardly knew for his own.

"Baas want?"

"Yes: go and begin milking the cows. I'll send Tant to you directly."

The man showed his teeth, and stood shaking his head.

To his utter astonishment Dyke shifted his grasp, and caught him by the throat with one hand, and shook his fist in his face.

"Look here," he said; "you can understand English when you like, and you've got to understand it now. Baas Joe's sick."

"Baas Joe go die," said the man.

"Baas Joe go live," cried Dyke fiercely, "and he'll flog you well if you don't behave yourself. You go and milk those two cows, and then feed the ostriches and horses, or I'll fetch Duke to watch you, so look out."

Jack's jaw dropped at the mention of the dog, and he hurried away; while Dyke, after a glance at the wagon, which stood just where it had been dragged with its load, was about to re-enter the house, when he caught sight of three Kaffirs watching him from beyond one of the ostrich-pens.

"Who are you?" he said to himself. "What do they want?"

He went quickly toward them, but they turned and fled as hard as they could go, assegai in hand, and the boy stopped and watched them for some time, thinking very seriously, for he began to divine what it all meant.

"They have heard from Tant that Joe is dying, and I suppose I'm nobody. They are hanging about to share everything in the place with our two; but —"

Dyke's *but* meant a good deal. The position was growing serious, yet he did not feel dismayed, for, to use his own words, it seemed to stir him up to show fight.

“And I will, too,” he said through his teeth. “I’ll let ’em see.”

He went back into the house to find Emson sleeping, and apparently neither he nor the dog had moved.

“Ah, Duke, that’s right,” said Dyke. “I shall want you. You can keep watch for me when I go away.”

Just then Tanta Sal came in, smiling, to tell him that breakfast was ready, and he began to question her about when his brother was taken ill. But either from obtuseness or obstinacy, he could get nothing from the woman, and he was about to let her go while he ate his breakfast of mealie cake and hot milk; but a sudden thought occurred to him. Had those Kaffirs been about there before?

He asked the woman, but in a moment her smile had gone, and she was staring at him helplessly, apparently quite unable to comprehend the drift of his questions; so he turned from her in a pet, to hurry through his breakfast, thinking the while of what he had better do.

He soon decided upon his first step, and that was to try and get Jack off to Morgenstern’s with his letter; and after attending to Emson and repeating the medicine he had given the previous day, he went out, to find that the animals had been fed, and that Jack was having his own breakfast with his wife.

There was a smile for him directly from both, and he plunged into his business at once; but as he went on, the smiles died out, and all he said was received in a dull, stolid way. Neither Jack nor his wife would understand what he meant—their denseness was impenetrable.

“It’s of no use to threaten him,” said Dyke to himself, as he went back; “he would only run away and take Tant with him, and then I should be ten times worse off than I am now. I must go myself. Yes, I could take two horses, and ride first one and then the other, and so set over the round faster. I could do it in a third of the time.”

But he shook his head wearily as he glanced at where Emson lay.

“I dare not leave him to them. I should never see him again alive.”

It was quite plain: the Kaffirs had marked down the baas for dead, and unless watched, they would not trouble themselves to try to save him by moving a hand.

Dyke shuddered, for if he were absent he felt the possibility of one of the strangers he had seen, helping them so as to share or rob. No: he dared not go.

But could he not have the wagon made comfortable, store it with necessaries, get Emson lifted in, and then drive the oxen himself?

It took no consideration. It would be madness, he felt, to attempt such a thing. It would be fatal at once, he knew; and, besides, he dared not take the sick man on such a journey without being sure that he would be received at the house at the journey's end.

No: that was impossible.

Another thought. It was evident that Jack was determined not to go back alone to Morgenstern's, but would it be possible to send a more faithful messenger—the dog? He had read of dogs being sent to places with despatches attached to their collars. Why should not Duke go? He knew the way, and once made to understand—

Dyke shook his head. It was too much to expect. The journey was too long. How was the dog to be protected from wild beasts at night, and allowing that he could run the gauntlet of those dangers, how was the poor brute to be fed?

"No, no, no," cried the boy passionately; "it is too much to think. It is fate, and I must see Joe through it myself. He is better, I am sure."

There was every reason for thinking so, and nurturing the hope that his brother had taken the turn, Dyke determined to set to work and go on as if all was well—just as if Emson were about and seeing to things himself.

"You know I wouldn't neglect you, old chap," he said affectionately, as he bent over the couch and gazed in the sunken features; "I shall be close by, and will keep on coming in."

Then a thought struck him, and he called the watchful dog away and fed him, before sending him back to the bedside, and going out to examine the ostriches more closely.

Dyke's heart sank as he visited pen after pen. Either from neglect or disease, several of the birds had died, and were lying about the place, partly eaten by jackals; while of the young ones hatched from the nest of eggs brought home with such high hopes, not one was left.

"Poor Joe!" sighed Dyke, as he looked round despondently, and thought of his brother's words, which, broken and incoherent as they were, told of the disappointment and bitterness which had followed the long, weary trial of his experiment.

And now, with the poor fellow broken down and completely helpless, the miserable dead birds, the wretched look of those still living, and the general neglect, made Dyke feel ready to turn away in despair.

But he set his teeth hard and went about with a fierce energy rearranging the birds in their pens, and generally working as if this were all a mere accident that only wanted putting straight, for everything to go on prosperously in the future.

It was hard work, feeling, as Dyke did, that it was a hopeless task, and that a complete change—a thorough new beginning—must be made for there to be the slightest chance for success. But he kept on, the task becoming quite exciting when the great birds turned restive or showed fight, and a disposition to go everywhere but where they were wanted.

Then he fetched Jack, who came unwillingly, acting as if he believed some new scheme was about to be tried to send him off to the old trader's. But he worked better when he found that he was only to drag away the remains of one or two dead birds, and to fetch water and do a little more cleaning.

Dyke divided his time between seeing that the work was done, and going to and fro to his brother's couch, now feeling hopeful as he fancied that he was sleeping more easily. At the second visit, too, his hopes grew more strong; but at the third they went down to zero, for to his horror the heat flush and violent chill returned with terrible delirium, and the boy

began to blame himself for not doing something more about getting a doctor, for Emson seemed to be worse than he was at his return.

By degrees, though, it dawned upon him that this might not be a sign of going back, only a peculiarity of malarial fever, in some forms of which he knew that the sufferer had regular daily fits, which lasted for a certain time and then passed away, leaving the patient exhausted, but better.

This might be one of these attacks, he felt, and he sat watching and trying to give relief; but in vain, for the delirium increased, and the symptoms looked as bad as they could be, for a man to live.

And now once more the utter helplessness of his position came upon Dyke, and he sat there listening to his brother's wild words, trying to fit them together and grasp his meaning, but in vain. He bathed the burning head and applied the wet bandages, but they seemed to afford no relief whatever; and at last growing more despondent than ever, he felt that he could not bear it, and just at dusk he went outside the door to try to think, though really to get away for a few minutes from the terrible scene.

Then his conscience smote him for what he told himself was an act of cowardice, and he hurried back to the bedside, to find that, short as had been his absence, it had been long enough for a great change to take place.

In fact, the paroxysm had passed, and the poor fellow's brow was covered with a fine perspiration, his breathing easier, and he was evidently sinking into a restful sleep.

Dyke stood watching and holding his brother's hand till he could thoroughly believe that this was the case, and then tottered out once more into the comparatively cool evening air, to find Jack or his wife, and tell them to bring something for him and the dog to eat, for he had seen nothing of either of them for many hours.

He walked round to the back, but there was no fire smouldering, and no one in the narrow, yard-like place; so he went on to the shed in which the servants slept, and tapped at the rough door.

But there was no answer, and upon looking in, expecting to see Jack

lying there asleep, neither he nor his wife was visible.

How was that? Gone to fetch in fuel from where it was piled-up in a stack? No: for there was plenty against the side of one of the sheds.

What then—water? Yes, that would be it. Jack and Tanta Sal had gone together to the kopje for company's sake to fetch three or four buckets from the cool fresh spring, of whose use he had been so lavish during the past day. They had gone evidently before it was quite dark; and, feeling hungry and exhausted now, he walked round to where the wagon stood, recalling that there was some dry cake left in the locker, and meaning to eat of this to relieve the painfully faint sensation.

He climbed up into the wagon, and lifted the lid of the chest, but there was no mealie cake there; Jack or Tant must have taken it out. So going back to the house where Emson was sleeping quietly, the boy dipped a pannikin into the bucket standing there, and drank thirstily before going outside again to watch for the Kaffir servants' return, feeling impatient now, and annoyed that they should have neglected him for so long.

But there was no sign of their approach. The night was coming on fast, and a faint star or two became visible, while the granite kopje rose up, softly rounded in the evening light, with a faint glow appearing from behind it, just as if the moon were beginning to rise there.

He waited and waited till it was perfectly plain that the man could not be coming from fetching water, and, startled at this, he shouted, and then hurriedly looked about in the various buildings, but only to find them empty.

Startled now, more than he cared to own to himself, Dyke ran back to the Kaffir's lodge, and looked in again. There were no assegais leaning against the wall, nothing visible there whatever, and half-stunned by the thought which had come upon him with terrible violence, the boy went slowly back to the house, and sat down by where Duke was watching the sleeping man.

"Alone! alone!" muttered Dyke with a groan; "they have gone and left us. Joe, Joe, old man, can't you speak to me? We are forsaken. Speak to me, for I cannot even think now. What shall I do?"

Chapter Twenty One.

Dyke sets his Teeth.

No answer came from the couch where Emson lay exhausted by his last periodical paroxysm of fever. The dog whined softly, and in his way unintentionally comforted his master by comforting himself. That is to say, eager for human company, he crept closer, so that he could nestle his head against him, and be in touch.

That touch was pleasant, and it made Dyke pass his arm round the dog's neck and draw him nearer, Duke responding with a whine of satisfaction, followed by a sound strongly resembling a grunt, as he settled himself down, just as the answer came to the lad's question, "What shall I do!"

It was Nature who answered in her grand, wise way, and it was as if she said:

"There is only one thing you can do, my poor, heartsore, weary one: sleep. Rest, and gain strength for the fight to come."

And in the silence and gathering darkness a calm, sweet insensibility to all his troubles stole over Dyke; he sank lower and lower till his head rested against the skins, and the coarse, sack-like pillow, formed of rough, unsaleable ostrich-feathers; and it was not until twelve hours after that he moved, or felt that there was a world in which he occupied a place, with stern work cut out for him to achieve.

It was the touch of something cold upon his cheek that roused the sleeper, and that something cold was the dog's nose.

Dyke did not start; he merely opened his eyes quietly, and looked up at those gazing at him, and, thoroughly comforted and rested, he smiled in the dog's face.

"Get out, you old rascal," he said. "You know you've no business to do that."

Duke uttered a satisfied bark, and then began to caper about the room to show his delight at the solemn silence of the place being broken; but stopped directly, and made for the door in alarm, so sudden was the spring his master made to his feet—so wild and angry the cry the boy uttered as he bent over the bed.

For full consciousness had returned like a flash, and as he cried, “I’ve been asleep! I’ve been asleep!” he gazed down at his brother, horrified at the thought of what might have happened, and full of self-reproach for what he felt to have been his cruel neglect.

But Emson was just as he had seen him last—even his hands were exactly as they had lain in the darkness the previous night—and when Dyke placed his hand upon the poor fellow’s head, it felt fairly cool and moist.

Dyke’s spirits rose a little at this, but his self-reproach was as great as ever.

“Oh!” he muttered angrily, “and I pretend to care for him, and promise him that I will not leave him, and go right off to sleep like that. Why, he might have died, and I never have moved.—Here, Duke!”

The dog sprang to him with a bound, raised himself, and placed his paws upon his master’s breast, threw back his head, opened his wide jaws, lolled out his tongue, and panted as if after a long run.

“Here, look at me, old chap, and see what a lazy, thoughtless brute I am.”

But Duke only shook his head from side to side, and uttered a low whine, followed by a bark.

“There: down! Oh, how could I sleep like that?”

But by degrees it was forced upon him that Emson had evidently passed a perfectly calm night, and looked certainly better, and he knew that it was utterly impossible to live without rest.

He awoke, too, now to the fact that he was ravenously hungry, while the way in which the dog smelt about the place, snuffing at the tin in which

his master's last mess of bread and milk had been served, and then ran whining to lap at the water at the bottom of a bucket, spoke plainly enough of the fact that he was suffering from the same complaint.

At the same time, Dyke was trying to get a firm grasp of his position, and felt half annoyed with himself at the calm way in which he treated it. For after that long, calm, restful sleep, things did not look half so bad; the depression of spirit had passed away, his thoughts were disposed to run cheerfully, and his tendency of feeling was toward making the best of things.

"Well," he found himself saying, as he ran over his last night's discovery, "they're only savages! What could one expect? Let them go. And as to its being lonely, why old Robinson Crusoe was a hundred times worse off; somebody is sure to come along one of those days. I don't care: old Joe's better—I'm sure he's better—and if Doctor Dyke don't pull him through, he's a Dutchman, and well christened Van."

He had one good long look in his patient's face, felt his pulse, and then his heart beatings; and at last, as if addressing some one who had spoken depreciatingly of his condition:

"Why, he is better, I'm sure.—Here, Duke: hungry? Come along, old man."

The dog shot out of the door, giving one deep-toned bark, and Dyke hurried to the wagon, opened a sack of meal, poured some into the bottom of a bucket, carried it back to the house, with the dog sniffing about him, his mouth watering. Then adding some water to the meal, he beat it into a stiff paste, and placed about half on a plate, giving the bucket with the rest to the dog, which attacked it ravenously, and not hesitating about eating a few bits of the cold, sticky stuff himself.

He gave a glance at Emson, and then went to the back, scraped a little fuel together, lit it, and blew it till it began to glow, hung the kettle over it for the water to boil, and then, closely followed by Duke, ran to feed the horses, just as a low, deep lowing warned him that the cows wanted attention.

Fortunately only one was giving much milk, for Dyke's practice in that

way had been very small: it was a work of necessity, though, to relieve the poor beasts, which followed him as he hurried back for a pail, one that soon after stood half full of warm, new milk, while the soft-eyed, patient beasts went afterwards calmly away to graze.

“Here, who’s going to starve?” cried Dyke aloud, with a laugh that was, however, not very mirthful; and then going back to the fire he kneaded up his cake, placed it upon a hot slab of stone, covered it with an earthen pot, swept the embers and fire over the whole, and left it to bake.

His next proceeding was to get the kettle to boil and make some tea, a task necessitating another visit to the wagon stores he had brought from Morgenstern’s, when, for the first time, he noticed that a little sack of meal was missing.

At first he was doubtful, then he felt sure, and jumped at once to the reason. Jack and Tanta Sal must have gone off to join the blacks he had seen watching, and not gone empty handed.

Dyke’s brow wrinkled up for a few moments. Then his face cleared, for an antidote for the disease had suggested itself, one which he felt would come on in periodical fits.

“Here, Duke,” he cried. “Up!”

The dog sprang in at the back of the wagon, and looked inquiringly at him.

“Lie down: watch!”

Duke settled himself upon the wagon floor, laid his outstretched head upon his paws, and stayed there when his master left to go back to the house, fetch in the boiling kettle, make tea, and after sweetening half a basinful and adding a little milk, he took it to his patient’s side, raised his head, held it to his lips, and all unconscious though he was, found him ready to drink with avidity, and then sink back with a weary sigh.

“There, old chap,” cried Dyke, ignoring the fact that he had not tried, “you couldn’t have tipped off a lot of tea like that yesterday. It’s all right: going to get better fast, and give Master Jack such a licking as he never had

before.”

Trying to believe this himself, he now thought of his own breakfast, fetched in the hot cake and a tin pannikin of milk, and sat down to this and some tea.

The first mouthfuls felt as if they would choke him, but the sensation of distaste passed off, and he was soon eating ravenously, ending by taking Duke a tin of milk for his share, and a piece of the hot bread.

That was a weary morning, what with his patient and the animals about the place. But he had set his teeth hard, and feeling that he must depend fully upon himself and succeed, he took a sensible view of his proceedings, and did what he could to lighten his responsibility, so as to leave him plenty of time for nursing and attending to his invalid.

The first thing was to do something about the horses and cattle; and, feeling that he could not do everything by himself, he at once let all loose to shift for themselves, hoping that they would keep about the little desert farm, and not stray away into danger. Horses then and cattle were loosened, to go where they pleased, and the openings connecting the ostrich-pens were thrown open to give the great birds as much limit for feeding themselves as he could. Then he fetched water in abundance for the house, and loaded and laid ready the three guns and the rifles, with plenty of cartridges by their sides, but more from a hope that the sight of his armament would have the effect of frightening Kaffirs away when seen, than from any thought of using them as lethal weapons, and destroying life.

Then he was face to face with the difficulty about the wagon. These stores ought not to be left where they were, and he felt that he was too much worn out to attempt to carry them into the rough-boarded room that served as store. He was too much exhausted, and the rest of that day he felt belonged to his patient.

But a thought struck him, and fetching up a yoke of the oxen which were browsing contentedly a half-mile away, Dyke hitched them on to the dissel-boom, and, after some difficulty, managed to get the wagon drawn close up to the fence, and within a few yards of the door.

“Duke will be there, and I should hear any one who came,” he said to himself, and once more set the oxen free to go lowing back to their poor pasture with the rest of the team, which he had had hard work to keep from following him at the first.

And now, tired out with his exertions at a time when the hot sun was blazing on high, and beginning to feel a bit dispirited, he entered the house again, to be cast down as low as ever, for once more Emson was suffering terribly from the fit, which seemed to come on as nearly as could be at the same time daily. Dyke knew that he ought to have been prepared for it, but he was not, for it again took him by surprise, and the medicine which he administered, and his brother took automatically, seemed to have no effect whatever.

He bathed and applied evaporating bandages to the poor fellow's temples, but the fever had the mastery, and kept it for hours, while Dyke could at last do nothing but hold the burning hand in his, with despair coming over him, just as the gloom succeeded the setting of the sun.

Then, just as the boy was thinking that no fit had been so long as this, and that Emson was growing far weaker, the heat and alternate shivering suddenly ceased, and with a deep sigh he dropped off to sleep.

Dyke sat watching for a time, and then, finding that Emson was getting cooler and cooler, and the sleep apparently more natural and right, he began to think of his plans for the evening. He was determined to keep awake this time, and to do this he felt that he must have company. The Kaffirs were hardly likely to come by night, he felt, and so he would not leave the dog to watch, but going out, called him down out of the wagon, tied down the canvas curtains back and front, fed the dog well, and stood at the door waiting until the faithful beast had finished, watching the while. Then once more he noticed the peculiar light at the back of the kopje, looking as if the moon were rising, though that could not be, for there was no moon visible till long after midnight.

But Dyke was too weary to study a question of light or shadow, and as soon as Duke had finished he called the dog in, closed the door, did what he could to make poor Emson comfortable, and sat down to pass the night watching.

But nature said again that he should pass it sleeping, and in a few minutes, after fighting hard against the sensation of intense drowsiness, he dropped off fast as on the previous night, but started into wakefulness in the intense darkness, and sat up listening to the low growling of the dog, and a terrible bellowing which came from the pens, where the cattle should be, if they had returned after their many hours' liberty.

Returned they had for certain, and one of the great, placid beasts was evidently in a state of agony and fear, while a rushing sound of hoofs close to where the wagon stood, suggested that the horses and bullocks had taken flight.

The reason was not very far off from the seeker, for all at once, just as the piteous bellowings were at their height, there came the terrific roaring of a lion, evidently close at hand, and this was answered by a deep growling by the cattle-pens, telling that one lion had struck down a bullock, and was being interrupted in his banquet by another approaching near.

Dyke rose, and went to the corner of the room where the loaded rifles stood, then walked softly toward the door to stand peering out, but not a sign of any living creature was visible. In fact, a lion could not have been seen a couple of yards away, but, all the same, the loud muttered growlings told plainly enough that both the fierce beasts were close at hand.

Chapter Twenty Two.

A Bit of Nature.

There seems plenty of reason in supposing that the tremendously loud, full-throated roar of the lion at night is intended to scare the great brute's prey into betraying its whereabouts at times, at others to paralyse it with fright and render it easy of capture. Much has been written about the fascinating power of the snake, but this fascination, from quiet observation, appears to be nothing more nor less than the paralysis caused by fear, and suffered by plenty of objects in the animal world. One

might begin with man himself, and the many instances where, in the face of a terrible danger, he becomes perfectly weak and helpless. He is on a railway track, and a fast train is coming. One spring, and he would be safe; but how often it happens that he never makes that spring.

Take another instance. There is a fire at some works. It is spreading fast, and the cry arises, "Save the horses in the stables!" Men rush and fling open the doors; the halters are cast loose, but too often the poor brutes will not stir even for blows: fascinated by the danger, they stay in the stable and are burned.

Go into the woods on some pleasant summer day, in one of the pleasant sandy districts, where the sweet, lemony odour of the pine-trees floats through the sunny air, and the woodland slope is dotted with holes, and freshly scratched out patches of yellowish sand abound. Sit down and don't move, and in a short time, quite unexpectedly, you will see rabbits seated in front of these holes. You have not seen them come out, for they seem to arrive there instantaneously—first one or two, then several; and if there is neither movement nor noise, more and more will appear, to begin nibbling the grass at the edge of the wood, or playing about, racing after each other, almost as full of pranks as kittens. Now and then one will raise itself upon its hind-legs like a dog begging, ears erect and quivering, now turned in one direction, now in another. Then, all at once, *rap, rap!*—that sharp alarm stamp given by the foot—there is a wild race, and dozens of white cottony tails are seen disappearing at the mouths of holes, and in another instant not a rabbit is to be seen.

What was it? You listen, but all seems still. You can hear the twittering of birds, perhaps the harsh call of a jay, or the laughing chatter of a magpie, but those familiar sounds would not have startled the rabbits; and if you are new to such woodland matters, you will conclude that some one of the nearest fur-coated fellows must have caught sight of you, called out danger, and sent the colony flying. But if you are accustomed to the woods and the animal nature there, you will listen, and in a short time hear that which startled the little animals, the cry reaching their sensitive ears long before it penetrated your duller organs.

There it is again—a fine-drawn, shrill, piercing cry as of some animal in trouble. This is repeated at intervals till it comes nearer and nearer, and

develops into a querulous, frightened scream uttered by some little creature in fear or pain.

Both, say; for in another moment a fine grey rabbit comes into sight running slowly, and looking in nowise distressed by over-exertion as it passes on in front of where you sit, going in and out among the tree trunks and ferns, paying no heed to the many burrows, each of which would make a harbour of refuge and perhaps save its life, though that is very doubtful. It might, too, you think, save itself by rushing off at full speed, as it would if it caught sight of you, or a dog chased it. But no, it goes on running slowly, uttering at times its terrified scream, which you hear again and again long after the rabbit has disappeared—a cry which seems to say: “It’s all over; I am marked down, and though I keep on running, I can never get away. It will catch me soon.”

And it is so, for poor bunny is doomed. He is being hunted down by a remorseless enemy who is on his scent, and now comes into sight in turn, running in a leisurely way exactly along the track taken by the rabbit, though this is out of sight. There seems to be no hurry on the part of the little, slight, snaky-looking, brownish-grey animal, with its piercing eyes, rounded ears, creamy-white breast, and black-tipped tail.

The weasel—for that it is—does not seem above an eighth of the size of the rabbit, a kick from whose powerful hind-leg could send it flying disabled for far enough. But the little, keen, perky-looking creature knows that this will not be its fate, and comes loping along upon its leisurely hunt, pausing now and then to look sharply around for danger, and then gliding in and out among the undergrowth, leaping over prostrate pieces of branch, and passing on in front just as the rabbit did a few minutes before, and then disappearing among the ferns; its keen-scented nostrils telling it plainly enough the direction in which the rabbit has gone, though the screams might have deceived the ear.

Not long since I was witness of an instance of so-called fascination in the homely cases of cat and mouse. Not the ordinary domestic mouse, for the little animal was one of the large, full-eyed, long-tailed garden mice, and my attention was directed to it by seeing the cat making what sporting people call “a point” at something. Puss was standing motionless, watching intently, ready to spring at any moment, and upon

looking to see what took her attention, there at the foot of an old tree-stump stood the very large mouse, not three feet from its enemy, and so paralysed or fascinated by fear, that it paid no heed to my approaching so closely that I could have picked it up. It was perfectly unable to stir till I gave puss a cuff and sent her flying without her natural prey, when the mouse darted out of sight.

The roaring of the lions seemed to exercise this fascination even upon Dyke, who made no movement to fire, while he could hear the other bullocks, evidently huddling together in mortal fear—a fear which attacked him now, as the bellowings of the unfortunate bullock became more agonised, then grew fainter, and died off in a piteous sigh.

Then, and then only, did Dyke seem to start back into the full possession of his faculties; and raising the gun, he stood listening, so as to judge as nearly as possible whereabouts to fire.

A sharp crack, as of a bone breaking, told him pretty nearly where the spot must be, not fifty yards from where he stood; and, taking a guess aim—for he could not see the sight at the end of the barrel—he was about to draw trigger, when, at almost one and the same moment, Duke uttered a frightened snarl: there was a rush, and the boy fired now at random, fully aware of the fact that a lion must have crept up within a few yards, and been about to spring either at him or the dog, when the fierce, snarling growls made it alter its intention.

They say that discretion is the better part of valour, and it would be hard to set Dyke's movement in retreat down to cowardice, especially when it is considered that he was almost blind in the darkness, while his enemy was provided by nature with optics which were at their best in the gloom of night.

Dyke moved back into the house, where, partly sheltered, and with the dog close to his feet, watchful as he was himself, and ready to give warning of danger, he waited, listening for the next sound.

This was long in coming, for the lions seemed to have been scared away by the report of the piece—it was too much to believe that the beast which had charged was hit—but at last *crick, crack*, and a tearing noise

came from out of the darkness toward the stables, and taking another guess aim, the boy fired and listened intently as he reloaded his piece.

Once more there was silence till a distant roar was heard, and Dyke felt hopeful that he had scared away his enemy; but hardly had he thought that, when the cracking and tearing noise arose once more, telling plainly enough that if the beast had been scared away, it had only been for a short distance, and it had now returned to feed.

Dyke's piece rang out again, as he fired in the direction of the sounds, all feeling of dread now being carried away by the excitement, and a sense of rage that, in all probability, one of the best draught oxen had been pulled down and was being eaten only a few yards from where he stood.

Crack went a bone once more, as the noise of the piece died out, showing that the lion had ceased to pay attention to the report.

And now Dyke fired again, and backed right into the house, startled by the result, for this time his bullet had evidently told—the lion uttering a savage, snarling roar, which was followed by a crash, as if caused by the monster leaping against one of the fences in an effort to escape.

Then once more all was still. The tearing and rending had ceased, and though the boy listened patiently for quite an hour, no animal returned to the savage banquet.

At last, tired out, Dyke closed and secured the door, to sit down and wait for day, no disposition to sleep troubling him through the rest of the night. Once or twice he struck a match to hold it near his brother's face, but only to find him lying sleeping peacefully, the reports of the gun having had no effect whatever; while as the light flashed up, Dyke caught a glimpse of the dog crouching at the door, with head low, watching and listening for the approach of a foe.

But no enemy came, and at the first flush of dawn Dyke opened the door cautiously, to look out and see one of the cows, all torn and bloody, lying half-a-dozen yards from its shed; and just within the first fence, where a gap had been broken through, crouched a full-grown lioness, apparently gathering itself up for a spring.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Daylight.

Dyke's first movement was back into the house, and to put up the bar across the closed door, his heart beating violently; his next, to watch the little window, and stand there with his double gun, ready to send a couple of shots at the brute's muzzle, when it tried to get in, as he felt sure that it would.

A minute—two minutes—passed, but he heard nothing, though he did not feel surprised at this, for he knew from experience the soft velvety way in which the animals would creep up after their prey. At any moment he felt that the great, cat-like head and paws would appear at the opening, which would just be big enough for creeping through; and unless his two shots killed or wounded desperately, he knew that his fate was sealed.

"I must be firm, and not nervous, or I shall miss," he said to himself; but how was he to be firm when gazing wildly at that narrow opening, momentarily expecting to feel the puff of hot breath from the savage brute's jaws, and be face to face with the terrible danger?

He knew he must be firm, and not lose his nerve; but how could he master his senses at a time when he was watching that grey opening, with his eyes beginning to swim, and the cold perspiration gathering upon his forehead?

All at once there was a sound behind him, and he swung round, fully believing that the stealthy creature had bounded on to the roof, and was about to try to obtain entrance down through the big, low, granite-built chimney, which had been made for cooking purposes, but never used.

"You wretch! how you startled me," muttered Dyke, as he saw that the dog had caused his alarm by making a bound toward the door, with the thick hair about its neck standing up in a bristling way, as it snuffled about the bottom of the entry, and then uttered a low whine, and looked up at its master, who felt that the lioness must be there.

Dyke turned to the window again, annoyed with his want of firmness, feeling now that if the enemy had tried to take him in the rear like that, he must have heard the bound up on to the iron roof.

Resuming his watchful position by the window, he waited again, and now as he stood, with every nerve on the strain, he began to feel that the inaction and suspense were more painful than trying to attack; so taking a long, deep breath, he advanced closer to the window, with finger on trigger, ready to fire on the instant.

Closer and closer, and now resting the barrels on the sill, gradually protruding the gun muzzle a little, till he could look out between the open wooden bars, unglazed for the sake of coolness, a small shutter standing against the side below.

It was a cautious piece of reconnoitring, but from his position he could see very little. There was the kopje, and the sky beginning to flame golden; but there was plenty of room for the lioness to be crouching beneath the window unseen, or on either side close up to the wall, where he could not get a view without thrusting out head and shoulders, and so placing himself in position for the enemy to make one lightning-like dab at him with the claw-armed paw, and drag him out as a cat would a mouse.

Dyke drew back a little, and waited, listening to the neighing of one of the horses, which started the remaining cows into a long, protesting bellow, as the poor beasts asked to be relieved of their load of milk.

Then the boy's heart started beating again violently, for he felt that the moment for action was fast approaching, if not at hand. He started round listening, and as he did, he saw that the place was fairly lit up now, and Emson's face stood out clearly as he lay peacefully asleep.

Duke snuffled at the crack at the bottom of the door, and uttered an uneasy growl; while, plainly enough to be heard now, there was a stealthy step, passing along beside the building, and making for the back.

"Safe there!" thought Dyke; and the dog uttered his uneasy growl, while his master listened intently for the creature's return.

And now that the peril seemed to be so close, Dyke's nerve grew firmer,

and ready to fire as soon as the lioness came round the other way, as he felt sure she would, he encouraged himself with the thought that if he were only steady, he could not miss.

He was not long kept waiting. There was the stealthy, soft step again, and the sound of the animal's side brushing lightly against the corrugated iron wall. But, to the overturning of the boy's expectations, the sounds were not continued round from the back toward the window, but in the same direction as that in which they had previously been heard.

Duke uttered a low, muttering growl, and glanced round at his master, thrusting his nose again to the bottom of the door, where the stealthy pace ceased, and there was the sound as of the beast passing its muzzle over the door.

The dog uttered a loud bark, and Dyke presented the muzzle of the gun, half prepared to fire through the boards, but raised it, with his face wrinkling up from a mingling of annoyance, surprise, and amusement, for in answer to the dog's sharp bark, came:

"Ah-ah-ah-ah! Wanter bucket: milk."

"Tant!" cried Dyke, laying his hand on the bar. "Mind! there is a lion," he said, as he opened the door cautiously.

"Eh? Eat a lot. Eat cow."

The woman, who seemed to have suddenly remembered a great deal of English, smiled blandly, and took hold of the dog's muzzle, as Duke raised himself on his hind-legs and placed his paws on her chest.

"Did you see the lion?"

"Yes; no hurt," said Tanta pleasantly. "Too much eat. Baas Joe die?"

"No!" cried Dyke, angrily, annoyed with the woman, and against himself for his unnecessary fear. "But what do you want?"

"Milk cow—say moo-ooo!"

She produced a capital imitation of the animal's lowing, and laughed merrily as it was answered from the shed.

"Only one cow. Lion eat much."

"Oh yes, I know all about that," cried Dyke; "but I thought you had gone."

"Jack take away. No top. Jack tief."

"Yes, I know that; but do you mean Jack made you go away?"

The woman nodded.

"No top. Come back along, baas. Make fire, make cake, make milk."

"Make yourself useful, eh?" cried Dyke, to whom the woman's presence was a wonderful relief.

"Come top baas."

Tanta Sal picked up one of the buckets standing just inside the door, and nodded as she turned to go.

"Look here!" cried Dyke; "you can stay, but I'm not going to have Jack back."

"No! no!" cried the woman fiercely; and banging down the bucket, she went through a pantomime, in which she took Dyke's hand and placed it upon the back of her woolly head, so that he might feel an enormous lump in one place, a cut in another; and then with wondrous activity went through a scene in which she appeared to have a struggle with some personage, and ended by getting whoever it was down, kneeling upon his chest, and punching his head in the most furious way.

"Jack tief!" she cried, as she rose panting, and took up the pail.

"Yes, I understand," said Dyke; "but you must not go near the cow. That lioness is there."

The woman laughed.

“Baas shoot gun,” she said.

Dyke carefully took out and examined the cartridges in his piece, replaced them, and went forth with the woman, the dog bounding before them, but only to be ordered to heel, growling ominously, as they came in sight of the lioness, crouching in precisely the same position, and beginning now fiercely to show her teeth. Then, as Dyke presented his piece, she made an effort to rise, but sank down again, and dragged herself slowly toward them, snarling savagely.

And now Dyke saw what was wrong. His bullet, which he had fired in the night, had taken terrible effect. The brute had made one bound after being struck, and crashed through the fence, to lie afterwards completely paralysed in the hind-quarters, so that a carefully-directed shot now quite ended her mischievous career, for she uttered one furious snarl, clawing a little with her forepaws, and then rolled over dead, close to the unfortunate cow she had dragged down and torn in the most horrible way.

Tanta ran up and kicked the dead lioness, and then burst out with a torrent of evidently insulting language in her own tongue; after which she went, as if nothing had happened, to where the remaining cow stood lowing impatiently, and proceeded to milk her in the coolest way.

Dyke examined the dead beast, and thought he should like the skin, which was in beautiful condition; but he had plenty of other things to think of, and hurried back to the house, followed by Duke, to see how his brother was.

There was no change: Emson was sleeping; and, reloading his piece, the boy went out once more to see to the ostriches, which seemed in a sorry condition, and as he fed them, he felt as if he would like to set the melancholy-looking creatures free.

“But Joe wouldn’t like it when he gets better,” thought Dyke; and at last he returned to the house to find a pail half full of milk standing at the door, while the smoke rising from behind the building showed that Tanta had lit a fire.

The boy’s spirits rose, for the misery and solitude of his position did not

seem so bad now, and on walking round to the front of the shed-like lodge, he found the woman ready to look up laughingly, as she kneaded up some meal for a cake.

“Where did you get that?” cried Dyke.

“Wagon,” said the woman promptly. “Jack get mealie wagon. Jack tief. Tanta Sal get mealie for baas.”

“Yes, that’s right; but you should ask me. But, look here, Tant, Jack shan’t come here. You understand?”

“Jack tief,” cried the woman angrily, and jumping up from her knees she ran into the lodge, and came back with an old wagon wheel spoke in her floury hands, flourished it about, and made some fierce blows.

“Dat for Jack,” she said, laughing, nodding, and then putting the stout cudgel back again, and returning to go on preparing the cake for breakfast, the kettle being already hanging in its place.

Dyke nodded and went away, and in an hour’s time he was seated at a meal at which there was hot bread and milk, fried bacon and eggs, and a glorious feeling of hope in his breast; for poor Emson, as he lay there, had eaten and drunk all that was given him, and was sleeping once more.

“Bother the old ostriches!” cried Dyke, as he looked down eagerly at the sick man. “We can soon get some more, or do something else. We shan’t starve. You’re mending fast, Joe, or you couldn’t have eaten like that; and if you get well, what does it matter about anything else? Only you might look at a fellow as if you knew him, and just say a few words.”

Emson made no sign; but his brother was in the best of spirits, and found himself whistling while he was feeding the ostriches, starting up, though, in alarm as a shadow fell upon the ground beside him.

But it was only Tanta Sal, who looked at him, smiling the while.

“Jack tief,” she said; “teal mealie.”

“Yes, I know,” cried Dyke, nodding.

“Jack tief,” said Tanta again. “Kill, hit stritch.”

“What!” cried Dyke.

“Tant feed. Jack knock kopf.”

“What! Jack knock the young ostriches on the head?”

“Ooomps!” grunted the woman, and picking up a stone, she took hold of the neck of an imaginary young ostrich, and gave it a thump on the head with the stone, then looked up at Dyke and laughed.

“The beast!” he cried indignantly.

“Ooomps! Jack tief.”

Tanta looked sharply round, then ran to where some ostrich bones lay, picked clean by the ants, and stooping down, took something from the ground, and ran back to hand Dyke the skull of a young bird, pointing with one black finger at a dint in the bone.

“Jack,” she said laconically—“Jack no want stritch.”

“No wonder our young birds didn’t live,” thought Dyke. Then to the woman, as he pointed to the skull: “Find another one!”

Tanta nodded, showed her white teeth, ran off, and returned in a few minutes with two, Dyke having in the meantime found a skull with the same mark upon it, the bone dented in as if by a round stone.

Both of those the woman brought were in the same condition, and she picked up a good-sized pebble and tapped it against the depression, showing that the injury must have been done in that way.

“Yes, that’s it, sure enough,” said Dyke thoughtfully; “and we knew no better, but fancied that it was disease.”

He looked glum and disappointed for a few moments, and then

brightened as he took the gun from where he had stood it against a fence.

“Look,” he said, tapping it. “If Jack comes, I’ll shoot;” and he added to himself: “I will too. I’ll pepper him with the smallest shot I’ve got.”

“Yes; ooomps,” said the woman, nodding her head approvingly; “Jack say Baas Joe die. Have all mealie, all cow, all bull-bull, all everyting.—Baas Joe not go die?”

“No.”

“No,” assented the woman, smiling. “Tanta top. Tant don’t want um any more. Tief. Shoot Jack. No kill.”

“Oh no! I won’t kill him; but don’t let him come here again.”

Dyke went back to the house in the highest of spirits.

“It’s all right,” he said to himself. “We know now why the ostriches didn’t get on. Nice sort of disease that. Oh! I do wish I had caught the nigger at it. But never mind, Joe’s getting on; and as soon as I can leave him, I’ll hunt out some more nests, and we’ll begin all over again, and—”

The boy stopped just inside the door, trembling, for as he appeared, the very ghost of a voice whispered feebly:

“That you, little un? How long you have been.” The next moment Dyke was on his knees by the rough couch, holding one of the thin hands in his and trying to speak; but it was as if something had seized him by the throat, for not a word would come.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Black Shadows.

“What has been the matter, young un?” piped Emson feebly. “I say, don’t look like that. Have I had a fall from my horse? I can’t lift my hand.”

Dyke told him at last as he clung to that hand, and Emson's face grew more and more troubled.

"Don't," he whispered excitedly—"don't stop. You—you may catch—the fever—too."

"What!" cried Dyke, with a forced laugh, "me catch the fever! Well, who cares? I don't. Bother! Who's going to catch it, old chap? Why, I should have caught it a hundred times before now."

"You—you've been—nursing me?"

"I've been here, but it hasn't been much of nursing," cried Dyke, laughing in a half-choking way, as his breast swelled with joy. "I've fed you with a spoon and washed your face. Oh Joe, old man, you've been just like a big, stupid old baby."

"And have I been ill long?"

"Yes, ever so long. I was a terrible while before I got back, because the little river out yonder was flooded, and when I did come, I—I—I—oh Joe, old chap, I do feel so happy once more."

It was a wise addition to his speech, for Dyke never looked much more miserable in his life; but there was enough in his aspect to make Emson smile faintly, and then close his eyes.

That brought back Dyke to the responsibilities of his position, and he sprang up.

"Here! I've been letting you talk too much while you're so weak," he cried excitedly.

Emson's lips parted to speak, but his brother laid a hand upon them.

"No," he said, "you mustn't: you'll have to get stronger first; and I've got to feed you up, old chap."

Just at that moment a dark shadow crossed the doorway, and Tanta Sal's black face appeared looking in.

“Baas no go die,” she said. “Jack tief. Baas Joe go get well. Look!”

She held out a rough basket, in which were half-a-dozen new-laid eggs.

“Jack find eggs,” said Tanta. “Do so.”

She took one egg, gave it a tap, deftly broke the shell in two halves, let the white run out, and swallowed the yolk like an oyster.

“Here, hold hard!” cried Dyke angrily. “You mustn’t do that.”

“No. Tant mussen. Jack find eggs, do so. Jack tief.”

“Well, I’m glad I know where the eggs went,” said Dyke, taking the remainder. “I thought our hens ought to lay some. But why didn’t you tell us before?”

“Jack say killum,” replied the woman. “Baas Joe hungry?”

“Not yet; I’ll see to him,” said Dyke, dismissing the woman, and he turned now to his brother with a strange dread creeping over him, for Emson lay back with his eyes closed, looking utterly exhausted, and as if the awakening from the long stage of delirium were only the flickering of the light of life in its socket. But by degrees Dyke realised that it was the fever that had burned out, and Emson had only fallen asleep—a restfully, calm sleep, from which he did not awaken till toward evening, when Dyke shivered with apprehension of the terrible attack that would come on about that time.

But there was no attack, and after talking feebly in a whisper, the invalid partook of a little food, then lay watching the glow in the west, and soon went off to sleep again as calmly as an infant. “It’s all right,” cried Dyke excitedly; “all I ought to do now is to keep on feeding him up with good, strengthening things, given a little at a time. I believe I was cut out for a doctor after all.”

He stood watching the sleeper for a few minutes, thinking of how perfectly helpless the strong man had become, and then a thought occurred to him. In an hour’s time the guinea-fowl would be coming to roost in the trees beyond the kopje, and a couple of these stewed down

by Tanta Sal would make a delicious kind of broth, the very thing for the sick man. Going out, he called to the Kaffir woman, and sent her to watch over Emson; while, gun in hand, he prepared to start for the kopje, so as to get into a good hiding-place before the guinea-fowl came home to roost.

His first act was to whistle for Duke, but the dog did not appear, and this set the lad wondering, for he remembered now that he had not seen it for hours.

But he was too intent upon the task he had in hand to think more of the dog just then, and hurried on past the kopje, and into the patch of forest growth which nourished consequent upon the springs which trickled from the granite blocks that sheltered the spring and fertilised a few dozen acres of land, before sinking right down among the sand and dying away.

Dyke felt as if a complete change had come over his life during the past few hours. The golden light of evening had transformed the desert veldt, and everything looked glorious, while his spirits rose so, that had he not wanted the birds, he would have burst out shouting and singing in the exuberance of his joy.

“Who says Kopfontein isn’t a beautiful place?” he said softly. “I did, and didn’t know any better. Why, it’s lovely, and Joe and I will do well yet.”

A cloud came over his brow as he made for the patch of trees. His memory was busy, and he began to recall the past—his discontent, and how trying he must have been to his big, amiable, patient brother.

“But never again!” he said to himself. “I didn’t know any better then: I do now;” and, forgetting the dangers and troubles, or setting them aside as something of no consequence at all, Dyke passed on, and at last entered the trees just as there was a glint of something bright from which the sunset rays flashed.

But Dyke did not see the glint, neither did he hear the bushes being parted as something glided through the low growth, and another something, and then another, and again another—four dark, shadowy figures, which glided softly away, and then seemed to drop down flat and remain silent, as if watching.

Dyke saw nothing and thought of nothing now but the broth for his invalid, but picking out a good hiding-place, he cocked his piece and waited for the birds; while at the *click, click* of the gun-locks, something bright was raised about fifty yards from where he was hidden, and the bright thing quivered above the bushes for a few moments before it disappeared again.

That bright object, which was gilded by the sun's rays now flashing horizontally through the trees, was the head of an assegai, sharp and cruelly dangerous; but Dyke's eyes were gazing straight away, over the desert veldt, while he felt as if he should like to whistle.

At last there was a distant metallic clangour; then came the rushing of wings, the alighting of a noisy flock of birds which began to cry "*Come back! Come back! Come back!*" and Dyke's gun spoke out twice, bringing down twice as many birds.

"Now, if I had old Duke here, he might have retrieved those for me," thought the boy, rising to take a step or two toward the spot where his birds had fallen, the rest of the flock having departed with a wild outcry, and as he moved, four assegais were raised into a horizontal position. But, taught caution by the wild life he had been accustomed to, he stopped to recharge his gun.

Before he had quite finished, there was a loud barking at a little distance.

"Why, there he is, tracking me out," cried Dyke; and, whistling sharply, the barking came again more loudly, a shout bringing Duke to his side, while, as soon as the dog understood what was wanted, he darted off after the fallen birds, bringing in two directly from close to where the assegais had been poised.

"Good dog! Two more! Seek!" cried Dyke. "Off with you!"

The dog bounded away again, and Dyke stood whistling softly to himself as he examined his prizes, and admired their clean-looking, speckled plumage.

Duke was back directly, gave up the birds, coughed his teeth clear of fluffy feathers, and then turned and stood looking in the direction from

whence he had fetched the guinea-fowls.

“Oh yes,” said his master, “there’ll be plenty more soon, but we’ve got enough; so come along.”

Dyke shouldered his gun, carried the speckled birds in a bunch by their legs, and walked away toward the edge of the forest patch, the dog looking back from time to time, and barking uneasily. But the master could not read the dog’s warning; he attributed it to the guinea-fowl coming to roost, though black-faced lurkers, armed with assegais, were on the dog’s trail till they were safely out of the forest, at whose edge the four Kaffirs paused to watch, while Dyke went on toward home.

And now the dog forgot that which he had seen in the wood. The open veldt, with the kopje on their left, made him recall something else, and he began barking and trying to lead his master away beyond the ostrich-pens, Dyke understanding him well enough; but with his game in hand, and the purpose for which it was intended in mind, for a long time he refused to go.

At last, though, he yielded to the dog’s importunity, feeling sure that a portion of their stock must be in trouble, and that Duke had been watching it for some time past, till he heard the reports of the gun.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Duke’s Find.

Dyke had not far to go—the dog running on and looking back from time to time to see if it was followed, and then going on again. “He has found a snake, perhaps,” thought Dyke, as he looked in every direction, but could see no sign of the bullocks. Duke went on.

“Here! I want to get back with these birds, old fellow,” cried Dyke at last. “Come along back.”

But the dog stood fast, and began to bark; then plunged in amongst some milk-bush, and barked louder than ever.

“Well, I must see what he has found,” thought Dyke, and just as it was getting dark, he ran on the hundred yards which separated him from the dog, and found him in a state of great excitement.

“Now then, stupid, what is it?” cried Dyke. “I shan’t go any farther, mind. —Why, hullo! old chap, what have you got? Why, they’re lion cubs!”

Sure enough they were; a pair of big, chubby, whimpering cubs, that in their heavy way resembled puppies more than creatures of the cat family.

“Here, come away,” cried Dyke, after kneeling down to examine the stupid-looking, tawny things, “We shall make the mother feel as fierce as can be, and there’ll be no mercy for us then, old chap. But how in the world did they come to be here? Their mother must be prowling about the place, and— Oh, I see,” he cried, as the light came. “It was their mother I shot, and the poor little creatures are starving. It would be a mercy to kill them.”

But the cubs whimpered and whined, and seemed so amiable, that Dyke felt as if he could not be merciful in that way.

“Seems stupid,” he muttered, “but I can’t go murdering things without there’s a good reason for it.”

Slinging his gun over his back, he took a piece of leathern thong from his pocket and tied the legs of his birds together, noticing that, as he did so, Duke was poking the young lions about with his nose, and the fat little creatures, which were about a third of his size, were snuggling up to him for comfort, whining like puppies the while.

“Here, Duke!” he cried; “carry.”

He slung the birds on either side of the dog’s neck, and then stooping down, picked up the fat, heavy cubs, tucked one under each arm, where they nestled to him, and then started for home.

“Nice position for me if I’m wrong,” he muttered. “Suppose their mother isn’t dead, and she finds me stealing her young ones. Ugh!”

But he was not wrong, and soon after entered the house with his prizes,

to find Emson awake and watching him; while Tanta Sal crouched on the floor, gazing at the lamp which she had lit and seemed to admire intensely.

“How are you?” was Dyke’s first question, and on being assured in a faint echo of a voice that his brother was better, he handed two of the birds to the woman to take and stew down at once.

“Take lion’s babies too?” she said, shaking her head severely. “Not good eat.”

“Who wants to eat them?” said Dyke. “No: I’m going to keep them. Come, make haste. I want to see those birds cooking into soup.”

“Soup? Ooomps. Tant know make tea—coffee—dinner.”

“No, no; soup.”

“Ooomps; make bird tea, coffee? Baas Joe drink in spoon.”

“Yes, that’s right; you understand,” cried Dyke, and the woman hurried out with the birds, the dog following her, his instinct teaching him that there would be the heads and possibly other odds and ends to fall to his share. But before going, he went and poked at the two cubs and uttered a low bark.

“What do you think of these, Joe?” said Dyke, picking up his prizes, and placing them on the bed.

“Dangerous, little un,” said Emson feebly. “The mother will scent them out.”

“No: I feel sure it was their mother I shot last night. She lies out yonder where Tant and I dragged her.”

“Ah!” said Emson softly, “it was her skin Tant brought in to show me. She stripped it off to-night.”

“She did? Bravo! well done, Tant! But look here, Joe: couldn’t I bring these cubs up?”

“Yes, for a time; but they would grow dangerous. Try.”

That night, after finding very little difficulty in getting the cubs to suck a couple of pieces of rag soaked in milk, Dyke dropped asleep, to dream that the lioness had come to life again, and was waiting at the door for her cubs; but it proved to be only Tanta Sal once more, just at daybreak, with a tin of the bird soup, which she had set to stew overnight, and woke up early to get ready for the baas. Of this Emson partook with avidity as soon as he woke, his brother laughing merrily as he fed him with a wooden spoon, while Tant grinned with delight.

“Jack say Baas Joe go die,” she cried, clapping her legs with her hands. “Jack tief.”

Dyke endorsed the words that morning when he visited the still unladen wagon, for a bag of sugar and some more meal had disappeared.

He stood rubbing his ear viciously.

“It’s my fault for not taking the things indoors,” he said in a vexed tone of voice; “but I can’t do everything, and feeding those cubs last night made me forget to set Duke to watch.”

Then a thought struck him, and he put his head outside the tilt and shouted for Tant, who came running up, and at once climbed into the wagon.

“Did you fetch some mealies from here last night?” asked Dyke.

“No: Jack,” cried the woman excitedly—“Jack tief.”

“Yes; I thought so,” said Dyke thoughtfully. “There, that will do;” and making up his mind to watch that night, he went back to the house, had a few words with his brother, and then went round to see that all was right, coming back to breakfast after Tanta had shown him the lioness’s skin pegged out to dry.

Dyke watched that night, but in vain; Duke watched the next night also in vain, for there had been too much to do for the wagon to be emptied and the stores brought in.

For Emson required, in his weak state, an enormous deal of attention, which, however, was a delight to his brother, who had the satisfaction day by day of seeing him grow slightly better; while the Kaffir woman was indefatigable, and never seemed to sleep, Dyke's difficulty being to keep her from making the patient travel in a retrograde path by giving him too much to eat.

"Baas Joe muss plenty meat, tea, coffee," she said. "No eat, Baas Joe die."

Hence Dyke had hard work to keep the larder supplied. Fortunately, however, the guinea-fowls' roosting place proved to be almost inexhaustible, and twice over a little buck fell to the boy's gun.

Then there was an ample supply of milk, some eggs, and dried meat to stew down, so that the patient did not fare so badly, as his returning strength showed.

But progress with the ostrich-farm was at a standstill, and Dyke used to look at the great stilt-stalking birds with a sorrowful air, and wish they were all running wild.

"But you are getting better fast, Joe," he said one evening as he sat by the couch.

"Getting better slowly, not fast, little un," replied Emson sadly. "Heaven knows how I pray for strength, so as to relieve you, boy."

"Who wants to be relieved?" cried Dyke roughly. "All I mind is not getting on better with the work, because now I have not Jack to help. I get on so slowly."

"I know, Dyke," said Emson sadly, as he lay there propped up on his bed.

"Hullo! What's the matter? What have I done?"

"Nothing but what is patient and persevering."

"Oh, no! don't say that," cried the boy. "I've always been a discontented grumbler ever since I've been here, Joe. But, I say, don't call me Dyke. It

sounds as if you were getting formal with me, and as if we were not as we used to be before you were taken bad."

"But we are, old chap. Better and more brotherly than ever. I never knew till now how brave, and true, and manly— Ha! he's gone," sighed Emson sadly; for Dyke had made a sudden bound, and dashed out of the place, keeping away for fully half an hour, before he thrust in his head once more.

"Ah, there you are," said Emson. "Come and sit down. I want to speak to you."

"Look here, Joe," cried Dyke. "I'm baas now, and I shall do as I like. Are you going to talk any more of that nonsense? I am going if you are."

"I shall not talk nonsense. I only said—"

"You stop, sir. Don't you get only saiding again, for I won't have it. It's weak, and sickly, and sentimental. Who wants to be told that he helped his brother when he was ill? Such rot! Why, wouldn't you have fed me and washed my face if I'd grown as stupid and weak as you? There, shake hands. I'll forgive you this time; but if ever—Hooray-y-y-y! He's getting some muscle in his arm again. You can feel him grip! Why, a fortnight ago it was like shaking hands with a dead chicken. I say, Joe, old man, you are heaps better."

"Yes, I'm getting better. I feel as if I shall live now."

"Live? Now there's a jolly old stupid. Just as if you were ever going to feel anything else. Look here, Joe: I shall have to make an alteration. I've been spoiling you, giving you too many good things. And to begin with, I think I'll cut your hair."

"Isn't it short enough?" said Emson rather piteously, as he feebly raised his hand to his temples.

"Yes, there: it looks nice and fashionable. But all down at the back it's like Breezy's mane."

"Then you shall cut it, Dyke."

“Ah-h-h!”

“Well then, young un. But how is poor Breezy?”

“Getting wild for want of riding. I went toward her yesterday, and she began dancing a *pas-de-deux*-legs on her fore-hoofs, and sparred at the sky with her hind. Wait a bit, and you and I’ll take some of the steam out of her and Longshanks. We’ll hunt out no end of ostriches’ nests in the farther-off part of the veldt. Here, what are you shaking your jolly old head for? It’s been quite shaky enough, hasn’t it?”

“I was thinking of the ostrich-farming, little un,” said Emson sadly. “No, my lad, no more time wasted over that. Two hundred years hence they may have got a more manageable strain of domesticated birds that will live well in confinement. We’ve had our try, and failed.”

“Bah! Not half tried. I haven’t. No, Joe, we won’t give up. We’ll do it yet. Why, it was that black scoundrel Jack who caused half the mischief. Oh, Joe, if I could only have caught him when he was knocking those poor young birds on the head, and had my gun with me.”

“What! would you have shot at him, young un?”

“If I’d had small shot in one of the barrels. They’d have just gone through, and peppered his hide nicely. I say, Joe, his clothes wouldn’t have stopped the shot corns.”

“No,” said Emson, smiling; “his clothes wouldn’t have stopped them.”

“Hooray-y-y-y!” shouted Dyke again, and the two lion cubs looked over the packing-case in which they were confined, wonderingly.

“Look at him! A regular half laugh. We shall have the whole laugh soon. But there, I mustn’t stop, wasting time here.”

“Yes; stay a little longer, little un. I want to talk to you,” said Emson.

“About my being such a nice, good boy—so brave and so noodley? No, you don’t. I’m off!”

“No, no; I will not say a word about that. I want to talk to you.”

“But the ostriches want feeding.”

“They must wait,” said Emson sadly. “They’ve made us wait for profit. Look here, little un; sit down.”

“Well, if you want it. But, honour bright: no buttering me.”

“I want to talk about our future.”

“Well, I can tell you that, Joe. We’re going to make a big success of the farm.”

“No, boy; we are going to give it up.”

“What! Sell it?”

“No; I should be ashamed to take money off a man for so worthless a bargain. We are going to scrape together what skins and feathers are ours, so as to pay our way, and going home.”

“What! empty?” cried Dyke. “That we won’t.”

“We must, boy. I shall never be myself till I have been under a good doctor.”

“What nonsense, Joe. There, let’s talk about something else.—I say, how playful the cubs get; but they’re more like big Saint Bernard pups than kittens.”

“Let us talk about our future, boy,” said Emson rather sternly. “I was thinking bitterly of our prospects when I was sickening for this fever, and I have thought more about them since I have been lying here helpless; and as soon as I can get about, we must prepare for going home.”

“Beaten! Go home, and say: ‘It’s of no use, father; we’re a poor, helpless pair.’”

“We must accept the inevitable, little un.”

“There isn’t any inevitable when you’re my age, Joe. One always used to feel on a bad day that sooner or later the fish would begin to bite.”

“Yes, but we used to change to another place.”

“Sometimes. Well, let’s change to another place, then. But it would be a pity. We’ve got never-failing water here, and even if the lions and baboons do come sometimes, it’s a capital place. I say, Joe, have another try.”

“You’ve quite changed your tune, old fellow,” said Emson mournfully. “Do you remember?”

“Why, of course. What fellow doesn’t remember what a donkey he has been? I’ve often thought of it while you were ill, Joe, and of what a nuisance I must have been while you were so patient. And I said to myself— There, never mind that—I say, Joe, do you really mean for us to go back beaten?”

“Yes.”

“Not have one more try!”

“No: I am too much broken down.”

“But I’m not. I’m getting full of pluck and work now, and I’ll do anything to keep things going till you come round.”

Emson shook his head sadly.

“I say it is of no use, my lad; we are trying an impossibility.”

“Then let’s try something else. What do you think old Morgenstern said?”

“That we were wasting time over the ostriches.”

“Well, yes, he did say that. But he said something else.”

“Yes? What?”

“That he heard they were finding diamonds out on the veldt, and that he

should advise you to have a good try.”

“Moonshine, boy. The other day it was gold. Do you think we should be wise in spending our days hunting for diamonds?”

Dyke scratched his ear, glanced at his brother, and then shook his head.

“Come, you are wise in that. Old Morgenstern is a good, honest, old fellow, but it does not do to take anybody’s advice on your own affairs, about which you know best yourself. There, I must not talk any more; but don’t go dreaming about diamonds, little un. You and I did not come out here to make a fortune, but to get a straightforward, honest living.”

Emson closed his eyes, and Dyke sat watching him till his regular breathing told that he was fast asleep, and then the lad went out to go and busy himself about the place, meaning to take his gun that evening and make for the patch of forest beyond the kopje, so as to shoot a couple or so of the guinea-fowl; but a sharp storm came on and prevented him, though at bed-time, when he looked out, after seeing that the lion cubs and dog were curled up happily enough together, the stars were shining brilliantly, and a dull, soft light in the east told that the full moon would soon be up.

Five minutes later he was in his corner, feeling very drowsy, and a little troubled in his mind about his brother’s determination.

“But Joe’ll think differently when he gets better,” Dyke said to himself; and then began to think whether he ought not to have watched the wagon.

“One can’t work and watch, too,” he thought as he yawned, “but I might have made Duke sleep in the wagon, and I will.”

But he was so utterly wearied out that he kept putting off the getting up from minute to minute, till he forgot all about it in sleep, plunging at once into a troubled dream, in which he saw his brother standing, angry and threatening with a big stick in his hand, and about to bring it down upon him with a heavy thud for neglecting their valuable stores, when he awoke to find that there was some substance in that dream.



Chapter Twenty Six.

The Night Attack.

For a few moments Dyke could not collect himself sufficiently to speak, but stared at the black figure leaning over him, with what seemed to be a heavy club, while the shadow cast by the feeble lamp upon the wall to his left looked prodigious.

"Get up! Come!" was whispered in his ear, and he felt the stout cudgel pressed upon his legs. "You, Tant?" he faltered. "Oomps. Jump. Jack come. Jack tief."

"What!" cried Dyke springing up, half-dressed, as he had lain down.

"Shoo!" whispered the woman. "Bring gun, shoot."

"You want me to shoot Jack?"

"Oomps. Wagon. Kaffirs take all mealies."

"You're a pretty sort of a wife," thought Dyke, as he caught up his loaded gun from the corner, and wondered that the dog had not stirred.

Just then Tanta Sal touched his arm, pointed to the light, and made a puffing sound with her lips.

"Put it out?" he whispered.

She nodded, and Dyke turned down the wick, so that the place was only lit up by the pale rays of the moon.

"Where are they?" whispered Dyke. "At the wagon?"

"No, not come; Jack come say Tant Sal go 'way to-night 'long o' Jack. Gone fetch Kaffir, carry mealies. Come."

She took his arm tightly and led him to the door, which he found ajar, and as soon as they were outside she closed it after them.

“Stop a moment. Let’s have the dog.”

“No: dog make noise, and Jack top. Come.”

The woman led him to the wagon, and mounting on to the box, opened the canvas and crept in silently, while the boy hesitated to follow.

Suppose it was a trap, and Tanta had her husband and two or three men in waiting there.

“Absurd!” he thought the next moment. “Why should they hurt me? They could have robbed the wagon without.”

Mounting then quickly, he felt his arm seized, and he was half drawn into the wagon, where all was black on one side, while the canvas tilt showed faintly in the moonlight on the other.

Dyke was just able to make out that the woman was watching by the canvas, which hung over the front; then she reached back to him.

“Jack say try kill Baas Dyke, but dog come. Kill Baas Dyke some day.”

“That’s nice,” whispered the boy. “What for?”

“Jack tief. Want wagon, want horse, want all.”

“Then it’s war,” said Dyke, “and he shan’t have them.”

“Shoo!” whispered the woman, and she leaned forward with her head half out of the opening. Then turned quickly.

“Jack come, Jack one, Jack one, Jack one.”

“Four of them?” whispered Dyke.

“Oomps. Baas Dyke shoot.”

The boy pressed the triggers as he drew up the cocks of his piece, so that the clicking made was extremely faint, and then stood ready and expectant. But he had not long to wait. For almost directly there was a dull sound as of footsteps; a heavy breathing, and hands tugged at the

tightly fastened canvas at the back of the wagon. Then there was a low whispering. Whoever it was passed along to the front of the wagon, and then there was a heavy breathing as the visitors swung themselves up on to the wagon-box, Dyke judging from the sounds that either three or four people had climbed up. Then the canvas was dragged back, and as Dyke pointed his gun, hesitating about firing, and then deciding to shoot overhead to startle the marauders, one crept in.

At that moment there was a whizz and the sound of a tremendous blow, followed by a loud yell of pain and a perfect shower of blows delivered with wonderful rapidity upon the attacking party, who sprang out and fell from the wagon front.

It was all almost momentary, and then Dyke was leaning out through the canvas, and fired twice at random.

"It won't hit, only frighten them," he thought; and then he turned cold, for at the second report there was a yell, the sound of a fall, a scuffling noise, and a series of cries almost such as would be uttered by a dog, and growing more and more distant, as the boy listened, feeling convinced that he had shot Duke.

Tanta Sal was of a different opinion.

"Dat Jack," she said, laughing softly. "Jack tief. No come kill Tant now."

Dyke was silent for a few moments. He was thinking about what cartridges he had placed in his gun, and remembered that they were Number 6, which he had intended for the guinea-fowl.

"Those wouldn't kill him," he muttered, "and he was a long way off."

"No get mealies now," said the woman, interrupting the boy's musings. "Baas Dyke go bed?"

"Stop! suppose they are waiting?" whispered Dyke.

"Wait? What for?" she replied. "No. All run away. No come now."

She climbed out on to the box and held the canvas aside for Dyke to

follow, which he did, and then tied the opening up again, and leaped down to stand listening to the dog's barking within the house.

"Tant go sleep," said the woman; and she hurried off, while Dyke opened the door for the dog to bound out growling, and ready to rush off at a word, but Dyke called him in and shut the door, fastening it now; the fact of the dog sleeping inside being, he thought, sufficient protection—the coming of the woman not being noticed by Duke, who, of course, set her down as a friend.

But Dyke did not lie down for some time after assuring himself that the noise had not roused his brother from his heavy sleep. The boy was uneasy about the woman. She had told him that Jack had threatened to kill her. Suppose he came back now with his companions to take revenge upon her for betraying their plans.

"She wouldn't know," he said to himself, after carefully weighing the matter over in his mind, to decide that they would be afraid to come again after such a reception.

So, concluding at last that the woman would be quite safe, Dyke reloaded his gun, placed it ready, and lay down once more, conscious of the fact now that the dog was awake and watchful.

Five minutes after he was asleep, and did not wake till the Kaffir woman came and tapped at the door, to show him, with a look of triumph, four assegais left behind by the visitors of the past night.

"Dat Jack," she said, holding up one. "Dose oder fellow."

"Will they come for them?"

"No. Jack no come again. Get other wife. Tant Sal don't want any more."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Oom startles his Friends.

The days glided peacefully by, with Dyke kept busy enough supplying the larder, especially for his brother's benefit, and under his treatment the poor fellow grew better.

But so slowly; and he was the mere ghost of his former self when he began to crawl out of the house by the help of a stick, to sit in the shade and watch Dyke as he was busy about the place.

There was very little to vary the monotony of their life. A lion came one night, but did not molest horse or bullock. They had visits, too, from the jackals, but Tanta Sal was right—Jack came no more, and they saw nothing of the Kaffirs who had been his companions, though Dyke found a rough hut and traces of a fire in the patch of forest close to where he went to shoot the guinea-fowl, showing that he must often have been pretty near the Kaffirs' hiding-place.

In fact, Jack had had a very severe peppering, and felt not the slightest inclination to risk receiving another.

The subject of giving up Kopfontein was often discussed, but even if it were done, it seemed evident that many months must elapse before Emson would be fit to travel; so the subject was talked of less often, though one thing was evident both to Dyke and his brother—their scheme of ostrich-farming had completely broken down, and unless a bold attempt were made to start afresh, they would gradually become poorer and poorer, for alone, all Dyke's efforts to collect valuable skins were disposed to be rather unfruitful, try hard as he would.

Months had passed, and they had had no more black visitors, but one day Tanta Sal rushed into the house where the brothers were seated at dinner, with such a look of excitement upon her features, that Dyke sprang up, seized one of the guns and handed another to his brother, who stood up, looking weak, but determined to help if danger were at hand.

But Tanta gesticulated, pushed the guns away, and signed to Dyke to follow.

The cause of the woman's excitement was evident directly, for there, a mile away, was a wagon drawn by a long team of oxen, and it was

evident that they were to have visitors at the farm.

“Some poor wretch going up in the wilds to seek his fortune,” said Emson rather sadly. “I wish him better luck than ours, young un.”

“Oh, I say, Joe, don’t talk in that doleful way,” cried Dyke excitedly. “This is so jolly. It’s like being Robinson Crusoe and seeing a sail. Here, wait while I fetch the glass.”

Dyke returned the next minute with his hands trembling so that he could hardly focus and steady the “optic tube.” Then he shouted in his excitement, and handed the telescope to his brother.

“Why, it’s that fat old Dutchman, Morgenstern! Who’d have thought of seeing him?”

Sure enough it was the old trader, seated like the Great Mogul in the old woodcuts. He was upon the wagon-box, holding up an enormously long whip, and two black servants were with him—one at the head of the long team of twelve oxen, the other about the middle of the double line of six, as the heavy wagon came slowly along, the bullocks seeming to crawl.

“I am glad,” cried Dyke. “I say, Joe, see his great whip? He looked in the glass as if he were fishing.”

“Tant make fine big cake—kettle boil—biltong tea?” asked the Kaffir woman hospitably.

“Yes,” said Emson quietly. “But,” he continued, as Tanta Sal ran off to the back of the house, “it may not be Morgenstern, young un. Fat Germans look very much alike.”

“Oh, but I feel sure this is the old chap.—I say, what’s the German for fat old man?”

“I don’t know. My German has grown rusty out here. Dicker alte Mann, perhaps. Why?”

“Because I mean to call him that. He always called me booby.”

“No, bube:—boy,” said Emson, smiling.

They stood watching the wagon creeping nearer and nearer for a minute or two, Dyke longing to run to meet the visitors; but he suddenly recalled the orderly look at Morgenstern’s, and rushed back into the house to try to make their rough board a little more presentable; and he was still in the midst of this task, when, with a good deal of shouting from the Kaffir servants, and sundry loud cracks of the great whip, the wagon, creaking and groaning, stopped at the fence in front of the house, and the old German shouted:

“Ach! mein goot vrient Emzon, how you vas to-day? Vere is der bube?”

“Dicker alte Mann!” said Dyke between his teeth, and hurriedly brushing away some crumbs, and throwing a skin over the chest in which various odds and ends were kept, he listened to the big bluff voice outside as Morgenstern descended.

“It is goot to shack hant mit an Englander. Bood you look tin, mein vrient. You haf been down mit dem vever?”

“Yes, I’ve been very ill.”

“That is nod goot. Bood you ged besser now. Ach, here is der poy! Ach! mein goot liddle bube, ant how you vas?”

Dyke’s hands were seized, and to his horror the visitor hugged him to his broad chest, and kissed him loudly on each cheek.

“Oh, I’m quite well,” said Dyke rather ungraciously, as soon as he could get free.

“Ov goorse you vas. Grade, pig, oogly, shtrong poy. I am clad to zee you again. You did got home guite zave?”

“Eh? Oh yes. But that’s ever so long ago.”

“Zo? Ach! I haf been zo busy as neffer vas. Now you led mein two poy outspan, eh?”

“Of course,” said Emson warmly.—“Show them where the best pasture is, toward the water, Dyke.—Come in, Herr. You look hot and tired.”

“Ja, zo. I am sehr hot, and you give me zomeden to drink. I haf zom peaudivul dea in dem vagons. I give you zom to make.”

An hour later, with the visitor and his men refreshed, Morgenstern smiled at Dyke, and winked both his eyes. “You know vad I vants?” he said.

“Yes; your pipe.”

“Ja, I wand mein bibe. You gom mit me do god mein bibe und mein dobacco din; und den I light oop, und shmoke und dalk do you, und you go all round, und zhow me den ostridge-bird varm.”

They all went out together, the visitor noticing everything; and laying his hand upon Emson’s shoulder, he said: “You muss god besser, mein vrient. You are nod enough dick—doo tin.”

“Oh, I’m mending fast,” said Emson hastily, and then they stopped by the wagon, with Morgenstern’s eyes twinkling as he turned to Dyke.

“You haf been zo goot,” he said; “you make me ead und trinken zo mooch, dat I gannod shoomp into den vagon. I am zo dick. Good! You shoomp in, and get me mein bibe und dobacco din.”

Dyke showed him that he could; fetched it out, and after the old man had filled, lit up, and begun to form smoke-clouds, he said: “You dake me now do see if mein pullocks and my poys is ead und trink.”

“Oh, they’re all right,” cried Dyke.

“Ja. Bood I always like do zee for meinzelf. Zom beobles ist nod as goot as you vas, mein vrient. A good draveller ist kind do his beast und his plack poy.”

The visitor was soon satisfied, for he was taken round to where Tanta Sal was smiling at her two guests, who, after making a tremendous meal, had lain down and gone to sleep, while the oxen could be seen at a distance contentedly grazing in a patch of rich grass.

“You haf no lions apout here,” said the old man, “to gom und shdeal mein gattle?—Ah, vot ist das?” he cried, turning pale as he heard a peculiar noise from somewhere close at hand. Quigg! “You ged der goon und shoot, or der lion gom und break von of der oxen’s pack.”

“It’s all right,” cried Dyke, laughing. “Come and look here.”

The old man looked rather wild and strange, for, as Dyke threw open a rough door in the side of one of the sheds, the two lion cubs, now growing fast towards the size of a retriever dog, came bounding out.

“Ach! shdop. Do not led them ead der poor alter pecause he is zo nice und vat. Eh, dey will not hurt me?”

“No!” cried Dyke; “look here: they are as tame and playful as kittens.”

Dyke proved it by dropping on his knees and rolling the clumsy, heavy cubs over, letting them charge him and roll him over in turn.

“Ach! id is vonterful,” said the old man, wiping the perspiration from his face. “I did tought dey vas go to eat den alt man. You make dem dame like dot mit dem jambok.”

“With a whip? No,” cried Dyke; “with kindness. Look here: pat them and pull their ears. They never try to bite. You should see them play about with the dog.”

“Boor liddle vellows den,” said the old man, putting out his hand nervously. “Ach, no; id is doo bat, you liddle lion. Vot you mean py schmell me all over? I am nod for you do ead.”

Dyke laughed, for the cubs turned away and sneezed. They did not approve of the tobacco.

“There, come along,” he cried; and the cubs bounded to him. “I’ll shut them up for fear they should frighten your oxen.”

“Das is goot,” said the old man with a sigh of satisfaction, as he saw the door closed upon the two great playful cats. “Bood you zhall mind, or zom day I zhall gom ant zee you, but vind you are not ad home, vor die young

lion haf grow pig und ead you all oop.”

“Yes,” said Emson; “we shall have to get rid of them before very long. They may grow dangerous some day.”

“Ach! I dell you vot, mein vrient Emzon, I puy dose lion ov you, or you led me shell dem, to go do Angland or do Sharmany.”

“Do you think you could?”

“Do I dink I good? Ja, I do drade in effery dings. I gom now to puy iffory und vedders. You shell me all you vedders, und I gif you good brice.”

“I have a very poor lot, Morgenstern, but I’ll sell them to you. Dyke and I have done very badly.”

“Zo? Bood you will zell do me. I zaid do myself I vould go und zee mein vrient Emzon und den bube. He zay I am honest man.—You droost me?”

“Of course,” said Emson frankly. “I know you for what you are, Morgenstern.”

The old man lowered his pipe, and held out his fat hand.

“I dank you, Herr Emzon,” he said, shaking his host’s hand warmly. “Id is goot do veel dot von has a vrient oud here in der desert land. Bood I am gonzern apout you, mein vrient. You haf been very pad. You do look sehr krank; unt you zay you haf tone padly. I am moch gonzern.”

“We’ve been very unlucky,” said Emson, as the old man seated himself upon a block of granite, close to one of the ostrich-pens, while an old cock bird reached over and began inspecting his straw-hat.

“Zo I am zorry. Bood vy do you not dry somedings else? Hund vor skins or vor iffory? I puy dem all. Und not dry do keep den ostridge-bird in dem gage, bood go und zhoot him, und zell die vedders do me. Or der is anodder dings. Hi! You bube: did you dell den bruders apout den diamonts?”

“Oh yes, I told him,” said Dyke sadly; “but he has been so ill. I thought

once he was going to die.”

“Zo! Den tunder! what vor you no gom und vetch me und mine old vomans? Die frau gom und vrighten away das vever. She is vonterful old vomans. She make you like to be ill.”

“I was all alone, and couldn’t leave him,” said Dyke. “I was afraid he would die if I did.”

“Ja, zo. You vas quite right, mein young vrient Van Dyke. You are a goot poy, unt I loaf you. Zhake mein hant.”

The process was gone through, Dyke shrinking a little for fear he would be kissed.

“Und zo die pirts do nod get on?” said Morgenstern after a pause, during which he sat smoking.

“No, in spite of all our care,” said Emson.

“Ach! vot ist das?” cried the old man, looking sharply round, as his hat was snatched off by the long-necked bird which had been inspecting it. “You vill gif dot pack to me, shdupit. Id ist nod goot do eat, und I am sure id vould not vid your shdupid liddle het.—Dank you, bube,” he continued, as Duke rescued and returned the hat. “Eh? you dink it goot. Vell, it vas a goot hat; bud you go away und schvallow shdones, und make vedders for me to puy. Ach! dey are vonny pirts, Van Dyke. Und zo dey all go die?”

“We lost a great many through the Kaffir boy we had,” said Dyke, as they walked slowly back to the house.

“Zo? He did not give them do eat?”

“We saw that the birds had enough to eat,” said Dyke; “but he used to knock their heads with a stone.”

“Zo? Dot vas nod goot. Shdones are goot for die pirts to schvallow, bud nod for outside den het. I dink, mein younger vrient, I should haf knog dot shentleman’s het outside mit a shdone, und zay do him, ‘You go away, und neffer gom here again, or I zhall bepper your black shkin mid small

shot.”

“That’s what Dyke did do,” said Emson, smiling.

“Zo? Ach! he is a vine poy.”

“Hah!” sighed the old man as he sank upon a stool in the house. “Now I zhall shmoke mein bibe, und den go do mein wagon und haf a big long schleep, vor I am dire.”

He refilled his pipe, and smoked in silence for a few minutes, and then said thoughtfully:

“Emzon, mein vrient, I am zorry to zee you veak und krank, und I am zorry do zee your varm, und I should not be a goot vrient if I did not dell you die truth.”

“Of course not,” said Emson; and Dyke listened.

“All dese has been a misdake. You dake goot advice, mein vrient. You led die long-legged pirts roon vere dey like, und you go ant look for diamonts.”

Emson shook his head.

“No,” he said, “I am no diamond hunter. It would not be fair for my brother, either. I have made up my mind what to do. I am weak and ill, and I shall clear off and go back home.”

“Nein, nein. Dot is pecause you are krank. Bube, you make your bruder quite vell und dry again. Dot is der vay. You shall nod go home to your alt beobles und say, ‘Ve are gom pack like die pad shillings. No goot ad all.’”

“That’s what I say,” cried Dyke eagerly. “I want to hunt for diamonds, and collect feathers, and skins, and ivory.”

“Goot! Und gom und shell all to alt Oom Morgenstern.”

“Yes,” cried Dyke. “I say: help me to make my brother think as I do.”

“Of goorse I will, bube; I know,” said the old man, winking his eyes. “It ist because he has got das veveres in his pones; bud I haf in mein wagon zix boddles of vizzick to vrighten away all dot. I zhall give him all die boddles, und I shall bud indo each zom quines. Id ist pord wein, und he vill dake two glass, effery day, und fery zoon he vill laugh ad dem veveres und zay: ‘Hi! Van Dyke, get on your horse and go mit me to get istory, und vedders, und skins, und diamonts, till we haf got a load, und den we vill go und shell dem to alt Oom Morgenstern—do dem alt ooncle, as you gall him.’—Vot haf you got dere, bube?”

“Two or three of the ostrich skulls that I found with the marks made in them by the Kaffir with a stone,” said Dyke, who had just been and opened the door of his case of curiosities.

“Zo!” said the old man. “Ah, und negs time you see dot Kaffir poy you make zome blace like dot upon der dop of his het. Und vot else have you there?—any dings to zell me?”

“Oh no; only a few curiosities I picked up. Look! I took these all out of the gizzard of an old cock ostrich we were obliged to kill, because he broke his leg.”

Dyke handed a rough little wooden bowl to the old man.

“Ach! Mein cracious!” he cried.

“You wouldn’t have thought it. And here’s a great piece of rusty iron that he had swallowed too; I picked it out when I had lost a knife, and thought he had swallowed it.”

“Mein cracious!” cried the old man again, and he let his pipe fall and break on the rough table.

Dyke laughed as the visitor turned over the stones and the bit of rusty iron.

“One would have thought it would kill them to swallow things like that, but they’re rare birds, Herr Morgenstern; they’ll try and swallow anything, even straw-hats.”

“Mein cracious, yes!” cried the old man again. “Und so, bube, you did vind all dose—dose dings in dem gizzard ov dot pirt?”

“Yes, all of them. I’ve got another bowlful that I picked up myself. There are a good many about here.”

“You vill let me loog ad dem, mein younger vrient?”

“Of course,” said Dyke, and he fetched from the case another rough little bowl that he had obtained from one of the Kaffirs.

There were about ten times as many of the stones, and with them pieces of quartz, shining with metallic traces, and some curious seeds.

Morgenstern turned them over again and again, and glanced at Emson, who looked low-spirited and dejected.

“Ach, zo! Mein cracious!” cried the old man; then, with his voice trembling: “Und zo there are blendy of dose shdones apout here?”

“Yes; I’ve often seen the ostriches pick them up and swallow them. I suppose it’s because they are bright.”

“Yes, I suppose it ist pecause they are zo bright,” said the old man, pouring out a handful of the stones into his hand, and reverently pouring them back into the rough wooden bowl. Then rising, he shook hands silently with Dyke.

“Going to bed?”

“No, mein younger vrient, nod yed. I haf somedings to zay to your bruder,” and turning to Emson, who rose to say good-night to him, he took both his hands in his own, and pumped them up and down.

“Yoseph Emzon,” he said, in a deeply moved voice, “I like you when you virst game into dese barts, und I zay dot man is a shentleman; I loaf him, unt den bube, his bruder. Now I gom here und vind you ill, my heart ist zore. I remember, doo, you zay I vas honest man, ant I dank den Lord I am, und dot I feel dot I am, und can say do you, mein young vrient, zom beobles who know what I know now would sheat und rob you, but I would

not. I vont zom days to die, und go ver der Lord vill say, ‘Vell done, goot und vaithful zervant.’ Yoseph Emzon, I am honest man, und I zay do you, all your droubles are over. You haf been zick, but you vill zoon be quide vell und shdrong, vor you vill not haf das sore heart, und de droubles which make do hair drop out of your het.”

“Thank you, Morgenstern. I hope I shall soon be well enough to go,” said Emson, sadly.

“Bood you vill not go, mein vrient,” cried the old man. “You vill not leave here—mein cracious, no! You vill shdop und get all die ostridge you gan, und shend dem out effery day to big oop zom shdones, und den you vill dig oop der earth vor die pirts to vind more shdones, und when dey haf shvalloved all dey gan, you und der bube here vill kill dem, und empty die gizzards into die powls of water to vash dem.”

“No, no, no: what nonsense!” cried Emson, while Dyke suddenly dashed to the table, seized one bowl, looked at its contents, and banged them down again.

“Hurrray!” he yelled. “Oh! Herr Morgenstern, is it real?” For like a light shot from one of the crystals, he saw the truth.

“Nonsense, Yoseph Emzon?” cried the old man. “Id is drue wisdom, as goot as der great Zolomon’s. Yoseph Emzon, I gongradulade you. You haf had a hart shdruggle, but it is ofer now. Die ostridge pirts haf made you a ferry rich man, und I know dot it is right, for you vill always do goot.”

“But—but—do I understand? Are those—those—”

“Yes, Joe,” roared Dyke, springing at his brother. “There is no more room for despair now, old chap, for you are rich; and to think we never thought of it being so when you were so unhappy, and—and—Oh, I can’t speak now. I don’t care for them—only for the good they’ll do to you, for they’re diamonds, Joe, and there’s plenty more diamonds, and all your own.”

“Yes, und pig vons, too,” said the old trader, with a look of triumph; “und now I must haf somedings to trink. I haf dalk so much, I veel as I shall shoke. Here, bube, you go und shoomp indo dem vagon, und bring one of die plack poddles out of mein box py vere I shleep. Id is der bruder’s

vizzick, bud ve vill trink a trop to-night do gongradulade him, und you dwo shall trink do der health of dis honesd alt manns.”

The bottle of port was fetched, a portion carefully medicated with quinine, and Morgenstern handed it to the invalid.

“Mein vrient,” he said, “das is wein dot maketh glad das heart of man. I trink do your goot health.”

A few minutes later the old trader said softly:

“I go now to say mein brayer und get mein schleep. Goot-night, mein vrients, und Gott pless you both.”

It was about an hour later, when the faint yelping of the jackals was heard in the distance, that Emson said softly:

“Asleep, young un?”

“No, Joe; I can’t get off nohow. I say, am I dreaming, or is all this true?”

“It is true, lad, quite true; and I suppose that you and I are going to be rich men.”

“Rich man and boy, Joe. I say: are you pleased?”

“More thankful than pleased, Dyke, for now, when we like, we can start for home.”

“Without feeling shamefaced and beaten, eh, Joe? Then I *am* glad. I didn’t quite know before, but I do know now; and we can make the old people at home happy, too, Joe.”

“As far as money can make them so, little un.”

“Hullo!” cried Dyke; “you are a bit happy after all, Joe.”

“What makes you say that?”

“You called me ‘little un’ just in your old way, and I can feel that, with all the worry and disappointment gone now, you’ll be able to get well.”

Emson was silent for a few minutes, and then he said softly:

“Yes: I feel as if I can get better now; not that I care for the riches for riches’ sake, Dyke, but because— Are you listening, little un?”

Dyke was fast asleep, and a few minutes later Emson was sleeping too, and dreaming of faces at home in the old country welcoming him back, not for the sake of the wealth he brought, but because he was once more a hale, strong man.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

The Change that came.

"It's to-morrow morning, little un."

Dyke did not stir, but he seemed to hear the words.

"Do you hear, little un? Tumble up and bustle. Let's have a comfortable meal when he joins us. Do you hear, sir? Are you going to sleep all day?"

Certainly he was not, for Dyke had sprung up, and was staring across the place at where, half-turned from him, Emson lay gazing at the golden east, where the sun was about to rise.

"Little un: are you going to get up?"

Dyke sprang from his bed, darted to his brother, caught him by the shoulder and pulled him round so as to look him in the face.

"What's the matter, sleepy head?" said Emson, smiling.

"Why, it's himself again," cried Dyke excitedly. "Oh Joe, old man, you are better and no mistake. I haven't heard you speak like that since I went to old Morgenstern's.—Oh!"

"What is it?" cried Emson.

"I'm not quite awake yet. Yes I am, but I forgot that he was here, and about the diamonds; and—Joe, Joe, old chap, I don't believe precious stones ever did so much good before."

"Don't talk about them, boy," said Emson, holding his brother's hand tightly in his. "But I do seem as if a terrible load had been taken off body and brain. I feel this morning that I shall see home again; and I have talked about going, but never felt that I should see it till now."

"Then hooray for being rich! But, I say!"

“What?”

“Suppose any one one should come and rob us now.”

Emson laughed aloud.

“The first trouble that attends wealth, little un. There, we’ve borne sorrow and disappointment like men.”

“Man and boy, Joe.”

“Like men, Dyke, for you have been a better man than I. Now then, we’ll bear prosperity, please God, as patiently and well.”

“Why, of course,” cried Dyke; “but what did you do with the jolly old stones?”

“Put them in your bowl, and then in the case. Now see that the breakfast is got ready. I’m far better, but I feel too weak to help.”

“Ah, but you won’t long, if you go on like this,” cried Dyke, dressing hurriedly, and beginning to have his morning wash in the bucket. “I say Joe, though, let’s have some luxuries, now, as soon as we can. What do you say to a wash-hand basin?”

“Oh yes, we’ll have that.”

“And a sponge? Here, I say: I wonder whether old Morningstar has got any sponges: we’ll buy one. New boots, too: mine are getting like Paddy’s ride in the sedan-chair; I’m on the ground.”

“All in good time, little un; all in good time: the first thing now is breakfast for our good old visitor.”

“Ah, we’ll have another spoonful of coffee in the pot this morning, Joe.”

The old trader met them at breakfast and smiled as he shook hands.

“Ach ten!” he cried, “but you haf geschlafen wohl, mein vrient. Der beace of mind is a goot ding. You are besser. You need not speak, for your eyes

are delling me all der dime what dey dink, bube.”

“I’m sure he’s better,” said Dyke eagerly.

“Und he vill zoon be guite himselfs again. I zee you half been do mein oxen, Van Dyke.”

“Oh yes, I had a look at them; they were feeding well.”

“Ja; die poys dell me zo. Now I go do ask you do let me shday dill do-morrow, und den die peasts vill pe rested, und I go on again.”

“Don’t hurry, Herr Morgenstern,” said Emson. “You and I must have a long talk about—about—”

“Die shdones? Nein, mein good vrient, you go do zay you must share zom mid me, but I zhall dake none. Look at me: I am zeventy jahrs alt, und I have blenty do leave my old vomans ven I die, zo should I dake what vill do you zo much good?”

“But we owe everything to you.”

“Nein. It ist not zo. You have work hart, und you have got your goot dimes ad last. You keep vot you haf found. I zhall dake noding bood die hant of mein vrients.”

“Oh, but you ought to have a good share, Herr Morgenstern,” cried Dyke.

“Ach ten! what for you go shpeak like dot, you bube. You wand to make me gross, und get in a big passion. Tunder! No, I vill dot dake von shingle shdone. You shpeak again, I go away in a gross anger. Aha! you see, mein vrient Yoseph, I zoon zed die dot imbudend bube, who go to shpoil my breakfass. I do not wand my breakfass shpoil. You oondershtan. You say diamont again, I gall my poys, und inspan und go away.”

He frowned, as if he meant all he said, went on eating fiercely for a few moments, and then with his mouth full:

“I have blenty,” he cried, “und I am glad you have blendy, doo. Now, von vort, von leedle vort, und I haf done. You dake a long shdocking und pud

die shdones in, and den you vind all you gan. You make mooch as you gan before die beoble gom. It is got to be know dot dere are blenty diamonts in der veldt, und tousands und tousands gom to vind. Vell, you are virst; you pick oop all you gan pefore dey gom, und nopody know, for you shoot oop your mouth and hold your dongue. Wise man don't cry 'Look here!' when he vind. He go und vind again, eh? Dot is all, und I have enshoy der bess breakfass I effer vas haf."

"But, really, Morgenstern."

"Oof! I am going to get in soch a big passion!" roared the old man furiously. "I gom here und vind you all down in die doomps. I gif you vizzick do make you shdrong, und I dell you you are ridge mans; und now you vill not led me haf any beace. I haf not mooch hair left upon mein het: do you vant me to deare it all oud; zo as mein old vomans zhall nod know me when I go pack?"

"No, no, no; but—"

"Nod anoder vort. I am going to shmoke mein bibe.—Ah, you bube, Van Dyke, you laugh pecause I preak him last night! You dink I haf nod god anoder? Ha, ha! I haf god zigs, und one made of wood zo as he gannod preak.—Now, mein tear vrient Yoseph Emzon, led me rest und enshoy myself.—You bube, go und dell dot plack vomans do gook me a goot tinner. I zhall go und shmoke mein bibe und shdudy close long, shdupid-looking pirts, und you gan both gom und dalk do me."

Old Morgenstern had his own way, sitting about in different parts of the farm where there were suitable resting-places, and longest in the chasm of the granite by the water spring in the kopje.

"So dis vas a vavoride blace of yours, eh, bube?" he said, as he sat and smoked in the shade.

"Yes; it is so nice, and moist, and cool."

"Ja, zo. You are nod a shtupid poy at all. Bood look here, dot vos a goot tinner: und I enshoy him mooch pecause I shall nod ged anoder dill I go pack to mein old vomans. Now I do nod dink you and der pig bruder vill shdop ferry long at Kopfontein. You will go pack to Angleland."

“Oh yes, some day, of course,” said Dyke.

“Ja, zo. When you haf vound blenty of shdones. When you go pack, you vill nod dake dot voman?”

“Oh no! Poor old Tanta Sal; we shall be sorry to leave her behind.”

“Den you do nod go to leave her behind. You shall gom py me to go home.—Ah, heim! mein vaterland! I zhall neffer go pack to her, bube: I am doo alt und dick. I shall go vrom here do der great vaterland—do Himmel, I hope. Bood you shall bring Tanta Sal to alt Oom Morgenstern. My alt vomans shall pe fery goot to her, und she shall gook tinnern, und help. Bood she vill haf to veer more clothes. Mein alt voman vill nod led her go about like dot.”

The next morning that plan regarding Tanta Sal’s future was ratified, subject to the woman’s agreement, and Emson thought that as they would go very slowly, he might be able to sit upon his horse, and ride with old Morgenstern for a few miles on his long round.

The old man beamed with satisfaction, and Emson and Dyke mounted, and walked their horses, one on each side of the wagon-box, where the old fellow sat holding his big whip.

They went to the first water, where the oxen were refreshed, a good six miles from Kopfontein, and then departed, the old man blessing them both in patriarchal manner, ending by kissing Dyke on each cheek.

“Dill we meed again, mein sohn,” he said, and the great team of oxen slowly moved away, guided by the two Kaffir boys.

Emson and Dyke sat watching the wagon for some time, but the old man did not look back, and as Dyke sat gazing, he said to himself:

“I suppose it is the German custom. It seems queer to me, but I don’t think I minded it so much just then.”

“What are you thinking about, little un?” said Emson huskily.

“That old Morgenstern must be a very good old man. I wish he wouldn’t

kiss me, all the same, and make me laugh at his ways.”

“It is only at his words and looks, Dyke. God bless him! We neither of us smile at him in our hearts.”

The sun was setting as they walked their horses up toward the shabby-looking corrugated iron buildings; but now, in the evening light, everything seemed glorified, and they drew rein to look around, neither speaking for some time.

It was Dyke who broke the silence.

“You are tired out and done up, Joe,” he said. “Let’s get in, so that you can have some tea, and lie down and rest.”

Emson started from his reverie, and there was a bright light in his eyes, a smile upon his lip, which made Dyke’s heart leap with pleasure, while, when he spoke, his words sounded almost as they did of old.

“Tired, little un,” he said, “and so stiff that you’ll have to help me off the horse; but it is the good, honest weariness that makes rest one of the greatest pleasures of life. Look here, old chap, I feel as if I am going to be a man again.”

He held out his hand, which Dyke caught and gripped without a word, listening as his brother went on.

“We’ve found wealth, little un, and I suppose that is good, but it seems to me like nothing compared to health and strength. One wants to have been pulled down very low to know what he is worth.”

Dyke said nothing, but sat looking round him still at the wide veldt, and skies one scene of glory, as the sun illumined the great granite kopje, and seemed to crown it with rays of gold.

“Joe, old chap,” he said at last, “I used to sit over there and sulk, and hate the hot old place and everything here, but—I don’t think I shall like to leave it after all.”

“The time for leaving has not come yet, boy,” said Emson quietly. “We

shall see. At present it is home.”

It was three years later when they rode away, with their wagon lightly laden with the curiosities they wished to take back. The stones they had collected were safely there before, sent home from time to time.

For old Morgenstern had prophesied correctly. The news had spread fast enough, and by degrees the country was overrun, and a busy city sprang up not many miles away. They saw it with sorrow, certainly not from sordid motives—for within three months of the night when the old man visited Kopfontein, Dyke and his brother had picked up here and there all they cared to seek—but from a liking for the quiet life and their home on the veldt.

But as it grew more and more changed, the time seemed to draw nearer for saying good-bye to the little farm, where, from old associations, they still bred ostriches, and with far better fortune, leading a simple life, tended by Tanta Sal and a Kaffir whom they found that they could trust.

At last the time came.

“Home, little un?” said Emson laconically.

“Yes: Old England now,” said the great strapping fellow six feet high. “Everything has changed, and I don’t like the people who come always hanging about.”

So they rode away one day, with Duke and the Kaffir at the head of the team, and Tanta Sal seated in the wagon-box behind, smiling and happy at the thought of the change, and giving the two young lions in their cage a scrap from time to time.

The homeward-bound pilgrims reached old Morgenstern’s farm, where they were warmly welcomed, Tanta Sal arriving just at the right time.

“Vor you see we are gedding ferry old beobles now, mein sohn,” said Morgenstern; “und as I am a ridge man, I do not like to zee mein old vomans vork zo hart.—Aha! und zo yo dake die gubs mit you?”

“Yes,” said Dyke, “we are going to try and get them to England as a

present for the Zoo.”

“Zo!” said the old man.

Tanta Sal smiled contentedly when they rode off, a week later. She had no compunction about staying, while the Kaffir man was to come back with the empty wagon and team when the pilgrims reached the big town, from whence travelling was easy to the Cape.

And as the brothers mounted to go, Emson said:

“This is cutting the last string, little un?”

The stalwart “little un” nodded his head gravely.

“Yes, old chap,” he said, “but the Kopfontein of the past is gone. It only lives in one’s memory now.”

They turned to look back—their wagon slowly crawling on in front, with the patient oxen, fat and sleek, following the black vorloper—homeward-bound; and as they sat in their saddles they could see the old German standing by the place with his wife, waving their hands, and Dyke almost fancied he could hear the old man saying, as he had said at parting:

“You are young und shdrong, und you haf die vorlt pefore you. Mein alt vomans und I are goming nearly do der endt. I do not zay dry und do goot mit vot you dake away, vor I know you vill. Vonce more, mein sohns—goot-pye.”

Just then Duke gave a sharp bark, as if to say, “Come on!”

“Right, old dog,” cried Dyke. “Now, then, for home!”

The End.

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