

КОЛЛЕКТИВ АВТОРОВ

STORIES BY ENGLISH
AUTHORS: AFRICA
(SELECTED BY
SCRIBNERS)

Коллектив авторов
Stories by English Authors:
Africa (Selected by Scribners)

*http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25091588
Stories by English Authors: Africa (Selected by Scribners):*

Содержание

THE MYSTERY OF SASASSA VALLEY, By A. Conan Doyle	4
LONG ODDS, By H. Rider Haggard	22
KING BEMBA'S POINT, A WEST AFRICAN STORY, By J. Landers	43
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	49

Stories by English Authors: Africa (Selected by Scribners)

THE MYSTERY OF SASASSA VALLEY, By A. Conan Doyle

Do I know why Tom Donahue is called “Lucky Tom”? Yes, I do; and that is more than one in ten of those who call him so can say. I have knocked about a deal in my time, and seen some strange sights, but none stranger than the way in which Tom gained that sobriquet, and his fortune with it. For I was with him at the time. Tell it? Oh, certainly; but it is a longish story and a very strange one; so fill up your glass again, and light another cigar, while I try to reel it off. Yes, a very strange one; beats some fairy stories I have heard; but it’s true, sir, every word of it. There are men alive at Cape Colony now who’ll remember it and confirm what I say. Many a time has the tale been told round the fire in Boers’ cabins from Orange state to Griqualand; yes, and out in the bush and at the diamond-fields too.

I’m roughish now, sir; but I was entered at the Middle Temple once, and studied for the bar. Tom – worse luck! – was one

of my fellow-students; and a wildish time we had of it, until at last our finances ran short, and we were compelled to give up our so-called studies, and look about for some part of the world where two young fellows with strong arms and sound constitutions might make their mark. In those days the tide of emigration had scarcely begun to set in toward Africa, and so we thought our best chance would be down at Cape Colony. Well, – to make a long story short, – we set sail, and were deposited in Cape Town with less than five pounds in our pockets; and there we parted. We each tried our hands at many things, and had ups and downs; but when, at the end of three years, chance led each of us up-country and we met again, we were, I regret to say, in almost as bad a plight as when we started.

Well, this was not much of a commencement; and very disheartened we were, so disheartened that Tom spoke of going back to England and getting a clerkship. For you see we didn't know that we had played out all our small cards, and that the trumps were going to turn up. No; we thought our "hands" were bad all through. It was a very lonely part of the country that we were in, inhabited by a few scattered farms, whose houses were stockaded and fenced in to defend them against the Kaffirs. Tom Donahue and I had a little hut right out in the bush; but we were known to possess nothing, and to be handy with our revolvers, so we had little to fear. There we waited, doing odd jobs, and hoping that something would turn up. Well, after we had been there about a month something did turn up upon a certain night,

something which was the making of both of us; and it's about that night, sir, that I'm going to tell you. I remember it well. The wind was howling past our cabin, and the rain threatened to burst in our rude window. We had a great wood fire crackling and sputtering on the hearth, by which I was sitting mending a whip, while Tom was lying in his bunk groaning disconsolately at the chance which had led him to such a place.

"Cheer up, Tom – cheer up," said I. "No man ever knows what may be awaiting him."

"Ill luck, ill luck, Jack," he answered. "I always was an unlucky dog. Here have I been three years in this abominable country; and I see lads fresh from England jingling the money in their pockets, while I am as poor as when I landed. Ah, Jack, if you want to keep your head above water, old friend, you must try your fortune away from me."

"Nonsense, Tom; you're down in your luck to-night. But hark! Here's some one coming outside. Dick Wharton, by the tread; he'll rouse you, if any man can."

Even as I spoke the door was flung open, and honest Dick Wharton, with the water pouring from him, stepped in, his hearty red face looming through the haze like a harvest-moon. He shook himself, and after greeting us sat down by the fire to warm himself.

"Where away, Dick, on such a night as this?" said I. "You'll find the rheumatism a worse foe than the Kaffirs, unless you keep more regular hours."

Dick was looking unusually serious, almost frightened, one would say, if one did not know the man. "Had to go," he replied – "had to go. One of Madison's cattle was seen straying down Sasassa Valley, and of course none of our blacks would go down *that* valley at night; and if we had waited till morning, the brute would have been in Kaffirland."

"Why wouldn't they go down Sasassa Valley at night?" asked Tom.

"Kaffirs, I suppose," said I.

"Ghosts," said Dick.

We both laughed.

"I suppose they didn't give such a matter-of-fact fellow as you a sight of their charms?" said Tom, from the bunk.

"Yes," said Dick, seriously, "yes; I saw what the niggers talk about; and I promise you, lads, I don't want ever to see it again."

Tom sat up in his bed. "Nonsense, Dick; you're joking, man! Come, tell us all about it; the legend first, and your own experience afterward. Pass him over the bottle, Jack."

"Well, as to the legend," began Dick. "It seems that the niggers have had it handed down to them that Sasassa Valley is haunted by a frightful fiend. Hunters and wanderers passing down the defile have seen its glowing eyes under the shadows of the cliff; and the story goes that whoever has chanced to encounter that baleful glare has had his after-life blighted by the malignant power of this creature. Whether that be true or not," continued Dick, ruefully, "I may have an opportunity of judging

for myself.”

“Go on, Dick – go on,” cried Tom. “Let’s hear about what you saw.”

“Well, I was groping down the valley, looking for that cow of Madison’s, and I had, I suppose, got half-way down, where a black craggy cliff juts into the ravine on the right, when I halted to have a pull at my flask. I had my eye fixed at the time upon the projecting cliff I have mentioned, and noticed nothing unusual about it. I then put up my flask and took a step or two forward, when in a moment there burst, apparently from the base of the rock, about eight feet from the ground and a hundred yards from me, a strange, lurid glare, flickering and oscillating, gradually dying away and then reappearing again. No, no; I’ve seen many a glow-worm and firefly – nothing of that sort. There it was, burning away, and I suppose I gazed at it, trembling in every limb, for fully ten minutes. Then I took a step forward, when instantly it vanished, vanished like a candle blown out. I stepped back again; but it was some time before I could find the exact spot and position from which it was visible. At last, there it was, the weird reddish light, flickering away as before. Then I screwed up my courage, and made for the rock; but the ground was so uneven that it was impossible to steer straight; and though I walked along the whole base of the cliff, I could see nothing. Then I made tracks for home; and I can tell you, boys, that, until you remarked it, I never knew it was raining, the whole way along. But hollo! what’s the matter with Tom?”

What indeed? Tom was now sitting with his legs over the side of the bunk, and his whole face betraying excitement so intense as to be almost painful. "The fiend would have two eyes. How many lights did you see, Dick? Speak out!"

"Only one."

"Hurrah!" cried Tom, "that's better." Whereupon he kicked the blankets into the middle of the room, and began pacing up and down with long feverish strides. Suddenly he stopped opposite Dick, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. "I say, Dick, could we get to Sasassa Valley before sunrise?"

"Scarcely," said Dick.

"Well, look here; we are old friends, Dick Wharton, you and I. Now don't you tell any other man what you have told us, for a week. You'll promise that, won't you?"

I could see by the look on Dick's face as he acquiesced that he considered poor Tom to be mad; and indeed I was myself completely mystified by his conduct. I had, however, seen so many proofs of my friend's good sense and quickness of apprehension that I thought it quite possible that Wharton's story had had a meaning in his eyes which I was too obtuse to take in.

All night Tom Donahue was greatly excited, and when Wharton left he begged him to remember his promise, and also elicited from him a description of the exact spot at which he had seen the apparition, as well as the hour at which it appeared. After his departure, which must have been about four in the morning, I turned into my bunk and watched Tom sitting by the fire splicing

two sticks together, until I fell asleep. I suppose I must have slept about two hours; but when I awoke Tom was still sitting working away in almost the same position. He had fixed the one stick across the top of the other so as to form a rough T, and was now busy in fitting a smaller stick into the angle between them, by manipulating which, the cross one could be either cocked up or depressed to any extent. He had cut notches, too, in the perpendicular stick, so that, by the aid of the small prop, the cross one could be kept in any position for an indefinite time.

“Look here, Jack!” he cried, when he saw that I was awake. “Come and give me your opinion. Suppose I put this cross-stick pointing straight at a thing, and arranged this small one so as to keep it so, and left it, I could find that thing again if I wanted it – don’t you think I could, Jack – don’t you think so?” he continued, nervously, clutching me by the arm.

“Well,” I answered, “it would depend on how far off the thing was, and how accurately it was pointed. If it were any distance, I’d cut sights on your cross-stick; then a string tied to the end of it, and held in a plumb-line forward, would lend you pretty near what you wanted. But surely, Tom, you don’t intend to localise the ghost in that way?”

“You’ll see to-night, old friend – you’ll see to-night. I’ll carry this to the Sasassa Valley. You get the loan of Madison’s crowbar, and come with me; but mind you tell no man where you are going, or what you want it for.”

All day Tom was walking up and down the room, or working

hard at the apparatus. His eyes were glistening, his cheeks hectic, and he had all the symptoms of high fever. "Heaven grant that Dick's diagnosis be not correct!" I thought, as I returned with the crowbar; and yet, as evening drew near, I found myself imperceptibly sharing the excitement.

About six o'clock Tom sprang to his feet and seized his sticks. "I can stand it no longer, Jack," he cried; "up with your crowbar, and hey for Sasassa Valley! To-night's work, my lad, will either make us or mar us! Take your six-shooter, in case we meet the Kaffirs. I daren't take mine, Jack," he continued, putting his hands upon my shoulders – "I daren't take mine; for if my ill luck sticks to me to-night, I don't know what I might not do with it."

Well, having filled our pockets with provisions, we set out, and, as we took our wearisome way toward the Sasassa Valley, I frequently attempted to elicit from my companion some clue as to his intentions. But his only answer was: "Let us hurry on, Jack. Who knows how many have heard of Wharton's adventure by this time! Let us hurry on, or we may not be first in the field!"

Well, sir, we struggled on through the hills for a matter of ten miles; till at last, after descending a crag, we saw opening out in front of us a ravine so sombre and dark that it might have been the gate of Hades itself; cliffs many hundred feet shut in on every side the gloomy boulder-studded passage which led through the haunted defile into Kaffirland. The moon, rising above the crags, threw into strong relief the rough, irregular pinnacles of rock by which they were topped, while all below was dark as Erebus.

“The Sasassa Valley?” said I.

“Yes,” said Tom.

I looked at him. He was calm now; the flush and feverishness had passed away; his actions were deliberate and slow. Yet there was a certain rigidity in his face and glitter in his eye which showed that a crisis had come.

We entered the pass, stumbling along amid the great boulders. Suddenly I heard a short, quick exclamation from Tom. “That’s the crag!” he cried, pointing to a great mass looming before us in the darkness. “Now, Jack, for any favour use your eyes! We’re about a hundred yards from that cliff, I take it; so you move slowly toward one side and I’ll do the same toward the other. When you see anything, stop and call out. Don’t take more than twelve inches in a step, and keep your eye fixed on the cliff about eight feet from the ground. Are you ready?”

“Yes.” I was even more excited than Tom by this time. What his intention or object was I could not conjecture, beyond that he wanted to examine by daylight the part of the cliff from which the light came. Yet the influence of the romantic situation and my companion’s suppressed excitement was so great that I could feel the blood coursing through my veins and count the pulses throbbing at my temples.

“Start!” cried Tom; and we moved off, he to the right, I to the left, each with our eyes fixed intently on the base of the crag. I had moved perhaps twenty feet, when in a moment it burst upon me. Through the growing darkness there shone a small,

ruddy, glowing point, the light from which waned and increased, flickered and oscillated, each change producing a more weird effect than the last. The old Kaffir superstition came into my mind, and I felt a cold shudder pass over me. In my excitement I stepped a pace backward, when instantly the light went out, leaving utter darkness in its place; but when I advanced again, there was the ruddy glare glowing from the base of the cliff. "Tom, Tom!" I cried.

"Ay, ay!" I heard him exclaim, as he hurried over toward me.

"There it is – there, up against the cliff!"

Tom was at my elbow. "I see nothing," said he.

"Why, there, there, man, in front of you!" I stepped to the right as I spoke, when the light instantly vanished from my eyes.

But from Tom's ejaculations of delight it was clear that from my former position it was visible to him also. "Jack," he cried, as he turned and wrung my hand – "Jack, you and I can never complain of our luck again. Now heap up a few stones where we are standing. That's right. Now we must fix my sign-post firmly in at the top. There! It would take a strong wind to blow that down; and we only need it to hold out till morning. O Jack, my boy, to think that only yesterday we were talking of becoming clerks, and you saying that no man knew what was awaiting him, too! By Jove, Jack, it would make a good story!"

By this time we had firmly fixed the perpendicular stick in between the two large stones; and Tom bent down and peered along the horizontal one. For fully a quarter of an hour he was

alternately raising and depressing it, until at last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he fixed the prop into the angle, and stood up. "Look along, Jack," he said. "You have as straight an eye to take a sight as any man I know of."

I looked along. There beyond the farther sight was the ruddy, scintillating speck, apparently at the end of the stick itself, so accurately had it been adjusted.

"And now, my boy," said Tom, "let's have some supper and a sleep. There's nothing more to be done to-night; but we'll need all our wits and strength to-morrow. Get some sticks and kindle a fire here, and then we'll be able to keep an eye on our signal-post, and see that nothing happens to it during the night."

Well, sir, we kindled a fire, and had supper with the Sasassa demon's eye rolling and glowing in front of us the whole night through. Not always in the same place, though; for after supper, when I glanced along the sights to have another look at it, it was nowhere to be seen. The information did not, however, seem to disturb Tom in any way. He merely remarked, "It's the moon, not the thing, that has shifted;" and coiling himself up, went to sleep.

By early dawn we were both up, and gazing along our pointer at the cliff; but we could make out nothing save the one dead, monotonous, slaty surface, rougher perhaps at the part we were examining than elsewhere, but otherwise presenting nothing remarkable.

"Now for your idea, Jack!" said Tom Donahue, unwinding a long thin cord from round his waist. "You fasten it, and guide

me while I take the other end.” So saying, he walked off to the base of the cliff, holding one end of the cord, while I drew the other taut, and wound it round the middle of the horizontal stick, passing it through the sight at the end. By this means I could direct Tom to the right or left, until we had our string stretching from the point of attachment, through the sight, and on to the rock, which it struck about eight feet from the ground. Tom drew a chalk circle of about three feet diameter round the spot, and then called to me to come and join him. “We’ve managed this business together, Jack,” he said, “and we’ll find what we are to find, together.” The circle he had drawn embraced a part of the rock smoother than the rest, save that about the centre there were a few rough protuberances or knobs. One of these Tom pointed to with a cry of delight. It was a roughish, brownish mass about the size of a man’s closed fist, and looking like a bit of dirty glass let into the wall of the cliff. “That’s it!” he cried – “that’s it!”

“That’s what?”

“Why, man, *a diamond*, and such a one as there isn’t a monarch in Europe but would envy Tom Donahue the possession of. Up with your crowbar, and we’ll soon exorcise the demon of Sasassa Valley!”

I was so astounded that for a moment I stood speechless with surprise, gazing at the treasure which had so unexpectedly fallen into our hands.

“Here, hand me the crowbar,” said Tom. “Now, by using this little round knob which projects from the cliff here as a fulcrum,

we may be able to lever it off. Yes; there it goes. I never thought it could have come so easily. Now, Jack, the sooner we get back to our hut and then down to Cape Town, the better.”

We wrapped up our treasure, and made our way across the hills toward home. On the way, Tom told me how, while a law student in the Middle Temple, he had come upon a dusty pamphlet in the library, by one Jans van Hounym, which told of an experience very similar to ours, which had befallen that worthy Dutchman in the latter part of the seventeenth century, and which resulted in the discovery of a luminous diamond. This tale it was which had come into Tom’s head as he listened to honest Dick Wharton’s ghost-story, while the means which he had adopted to verify his supposition sprang from his own fertile Irish brain.

“We’ll take it down to Cape Town,” continued Tom, “and if we can’t dispose of it with advantage there, it will be worth our while to ship for London with it. Let us go along to Madison’s first, though; he knows something of these things, and can perhaps give us some idea of what we may consider a fair price for our treasure.”

We turned off from the track accordingly, before reaching our hut, and kept along the narrow path leading to Madison’s farm. He was at lunch when we entered; and in a minute we were seated at each side of him, enjoying South African hospitality.

“Well,” he said, after the servants were gone, “what’s in the wind now? I see you have something to say to me. What is it?”

Tom produced his packet, and solemnly untied the handkerchiefs which enveloped it. "There!" he said, putting his crystal on the table; "what would you say was a fair price for that?"

Madison took it up and examined it critically. "Well," he said, laying it down again, "in its crude state about twelve shillings per ton."

"Twelve shillings!" cried Tom, starting to his feet. "Don't you see what it is?"

"Rock-salt!"

"Rock-salt be d – d! a diamond."

"Taste it!" said Madison.

Tom put it to his lips, dashed it down with a dreadful exclamation, and rushed out of the room.

I felt sad and disappointed enough myself; but presently, remembering what Tom had said about the pistol, I, too left the house, and made for the hut, leaving Madison open-mouthed with astonishment. When I got in, I found Tom lying in his bunk with his face to the wall, too dispirited apparently to answer my consolations. Anathematising Dick and Madison, the Sasassa demon, and everything else, I strolled out of the hut, and refreshed myself with a pipe after our wearisome adventure. I was about fifty yards from the hut, when I heard issuing from it the sound which of all others I least expected to hear. Had it been a groan or an oath, I should have taken it as a matter of course; but the sound which caused me to stop and take the pipe

out of my mouth was a hearty roar of laughter! Next moment Tom himself emerged from the door, his whole face radiant with delight. "Game for another ten-mile walk, old fellow?"

"What! for another lump of rock-salt, at twelve shillings a ton?"

"No more of that, Hal, an you love me," grinned Tom. "Now look here, Jack. What blessed fools we are to be so floored by a trifle! Just sit on this stump for five minutes, and I'll make it as clear as daylight. You've seen many a lump of rock-salt stuck in a crag, and so have I, though we did make such a mull of this one. Now, Jack, did any of the pieces you have ever seen shine in the darkness brighter than any fire-fly?"

"Well, I can't say they ever did."

"I'd venture to prophesy that if we waited until night, which we won't do, we would see that light still glimmering among the rocks. Therefore, Jack, when we took away this worthless salt, we took the wrong crystal. It is no very strange thing in these hills that a piece of rock-salt should be lying within a foot of a diamond. It caught our eyes, and we were excited, and so we made fools of ourselves, and *left the real stone behind*. Depend upon it, Jack, the Sasassa gem is lying within that magic circle of chalk upon the face of yonder cliff. Come, old fellow, light your pipe and stow your revolver, and we'll be off before that fellow Madison has time to put two and two together."

I don't know that I was very sanguine this time. I had begun, in fact, to look upon the diamond as a most unmitigated nuisance.

However, rather than throw a damper on Tom's expectations, I announced myself eager to start. What a walk it was! Tom was always a good mountaineer, but his excitement seemed to lend him wings that day, while I scrambled along after him as best I could.

When we got within half a mile he broke into the "double," and never pulled up until he reached the round white circle upon the cliff. Poor old Tom! when I came up, his mood had changed, and he was standing with his hands in his pockets, gazing vacantly before him with a rueful countenance.

"Look!" he said, "look!" and he pointed at the cliff. Not a sign of anything in the least resembling a diamond there. The circle included nothing but a flat slate-coloured stone, with one large hole, where we had extracted the rock-salt, and one or two smaller depressions. No sign of the gem.

"I've been over every inch of it," said poor Tom. "It's not there. Some one has been here and noticed the chalk, and taken it. Come home, Jack; I feel sick and tired. Oh, had any man ever luck like mine!"

I turned to go, but took one last look at the cliff first. Tom was already ten paces off.

"Hollo!" I cried, "don't you see any change in that circle since yesterday?"

"What d' ye mean?" said Tom.

"Don't you miss a thing that was there before?"

"The rock-salt?" said Tom.

“No; but the little round knob that we used for a fulcrum. I suppose we must have wrenched it off in using the lever. Let’s have a look at what it’s made of.”

Accordingly, at the foot of the cliff we searched about among the loose stones.

“Here you are, Jack! We’ve done it at last! We’re made men!”

I turned round, and there was Tom radiant with delight, and with the little corner of black rock in his hand. At first sight it seemed to be merely a chip from the cliff; but near the base there was projecting from it an object which Tom was now exultingly pointing out. It looked at first something like a glass eye; but there was a depth and brilliancy about it such as glass never exhibited. There was no mistake this time; we had certainly got possession of a jewel of great value; and with light hearts we turned from the valley, bearing away with us the “fiend” which had so long reigned there.

There, sir; I’ve spun my story out too long, and tired you perhaps. You see, when I get talking of those rough old days, I kind of see the little cabin again, and the brook beside it, and the bush around, and seem to hear Tom’s honest voice once more. There’s little for me to say now. We prospered on the gem. Tom Donahue, as you know, has set up here, and is well known about town. I have done well, farming and ostrich-raising in Africa. We set old Dick Wharton up in business, and he is one of our nearest neighbours. If you should ever be coming up our way, sir, you’ll not forget to ask for Jack Turnbull – Jack Turnbull of Sasassa

Farm.

LONG ODDS, By H. Rider Haggard

The story which is narrated in the following pages came to me from the lips of my old friend Allan Quatermain, or Hunter Quatermain, as we used to call him in South Africa. He told it to me one evening when I was stopping with him at the place he bought in Yorkshire. Shortly after that, the death of his only son so unsettled him that he immediately left England, accompanied by two companions, his old fellow-voyagers, Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good, and has now utterly vanished into the dark heart of Africa. He is persuaded that a white people, of which he has heard rumours all his life, exists somewhere on the highlands in the vast, still unexplored interior, and his great ambition is to find them before he dies. This is the wild quest upon which he and his companions have departed, and from which I shrewdly suspect they never will return. One letter only have I received from the old gentleman, dated from a mission station high up the Tana, a river on the east coast, about three hundred miles north of Zanzibar; in it he says that they have gone through many hardships and adventures, but are alive and well, and have found traces which go far toward making him hope that the results of their wild quest may be a "magnificent and unexampled discovery." I greatly fear, however, that all he has discovered is death; for this letter came a long while ago, and nobody has heard a single word of the party since. They have totally vanished.

It was on the last evening of my stay at his house that he told the ensuing story to me and Captain Good, who was dining with him. He had eaten his dinner and drunk two or three glasses of old port, just to help Good and myself to the end of the second bottle. It was an unusual thing for him to do, for he was a most abstemious man, having conceived, as he used to say, a great horror of drink from observing its effects upon the class of colonists – hunters, transport-riders and others – amongst whom he had passed so many years of his life. Consequently the good wine took more effect on him than it would have done on most men, sending a little flush into his wrinkled cheeks, and making him talk more freely than usual.

Dear old man! I can see him now, as he went limping up and down the vestibule, with his gray hair sticking up in scrubbing-brush fashion, his shrivelled yellow face, and his large dark eyes, that were as keen as any hawk's, and yet soft as a buck's. The whole room was hung with trophies of his numerous hunting expeditions, and he had some story about every one of them, if only he could be got to tell it. Generally he would not, for he was not very fond of narrating his own adventures, but to-night the port wine made him more communicative.

“Ah, you brute!” he said, stopping beneath an unusually large skull of a lion, which was fixed just over the mantelpiece, beneath a long row of guns, its jaws distended to their utmost width. “Ah, you brute! you have given me a lot of trouble for the last dozen years, and will, I suppose to my dying day.”

“Tell us the yarn, Quatermain,” said Good. “You have often promised to tell me, and you never have.”

“You had better not ask me to,” he answered, “for it is a longish one.”

“All right,” I said, “the evening is young, and there is some more port.”

Thus adjured, he filled his pipe from a jar of coarse-cut Boer tobacco that was always standing on the mantelpiece, and still walking up and down the room, began:

“It was, I think, in the March of ‘69 that I was up in Sikukuni’s country. It was just after old Sequati’s time, and Sikukuni had got into power – I forget how. Anyway, I was there. I had heard that the Bapedi people had brought down an enormous quantity of ivory from the interior, and so I started with a waggon-load of goods, and came straight away from Middelburg to try and trade some of it. It was a risky thing to go into the country so early, on account of the fever; but I knew that there were one or two others after that lot of ivory, so I determined to have a try for it, and take my chance of fever. I had become so tough from continual knocking about that I did not set it down at much. Well, I got on all right for a while. It is a wonderfully beautiful piece of bush veldt, with great ranges of mountains running through it, and round granite koppies starting up here and there, looking out like sentinels over the rolling waste of bush. But it is very hot, – hot as a stew-pan, – and when I was there that March, which, of course, is autumn in this part of Africa, the whole place reeked

of fever. Every morning, as I trekked along down by the Oliphant River, I used to creep from the waggon at dawn and look out. But there was no river to be seen – only a long line of billows of what looked like the finest cotton-wool tossed up lightly with a pitchfork. It was the fever mist. Out from among the scrub, too, came little spirals of vapour, as though there were hundreds of tiny fires alight in it – reek rising from thousands of tons of rotting vegetation. It was a beautiful place, but the beauty was the beauty of death; and all those lines and blots of vapour wrote one great word across the surface of the country, and that word was ‘fever.’

“It was a dreadful year of illness that. I came, I remember, to one little kraal of knobnoses, and went up to it to see if I could get some *maas* (curdled butter-milk) and a few mealies. As I got near I was struck with the silence of the place. No children began to chatter, and no dogs barked. Nor could I see any native sheep or cattle. The place, though it had evidently been recently inhabited, was as still as the bush round it, and some guinea-fowl got up out of the prickly pear bushes right at the kraal gate. I remember that I hesitated a little before going in, there was such an air of desolation about the spot. Nature never looks desolate when man has not yet laid his hand upon her breast; she is only lovely. But when man has been, and has passed away, then she looks desolate.

“Well, I passed into the kraal, and went up to the principal hut. In front of the hut was something with an old sheepskin *kaross*

(rug) thrown over it. I stooped down and drew off the rug, and then shrank back amazed, for under it was the body of a young woman recently dead. For a moment I thought of turning back, but my curiosity overcame me; so going past the dead woman, I went down on my hands and knees and crept into the hut. It was so dark that I could not see anything, though I could smell a great deal, so I lit a match. It was a 'tandstickor' match, and burnt slowly and dimly, and as the light gradually increased I made out what I took to be a family of people, men, women, and children, fast asleep. Presently it burnt up brightly, and I saw that they too, five of them altogether, were quite dead. One was a baby. I dropped the match in a hurry, and was making my way out of the hut as hard as I could go, when I caught sight of two bright eyes staring out of a corner. Thinking it was a wild cat, or some such animal, I redoubled my haste, when suddenly a voice near the eyes began first to mutter, and then to send up a succession of awful yells. Hastily I lit another match, and perceived that the eyes belonged to an old woman, wrapped up in a greasy leather garment. Taking her by the arm, I dragged her out, for she could not, or would not, come by herself, and the stench was overpowering me. Such a sight as she was – a bag of bones, covered over with black, shrivelled parchment. The only white thing about her was her wool, and she seemed to be pretty well dead except for her eyes and her voice. She thought that I was a devil come to take her, and that is why she yelled so. Well, I got her down to the waggon, and gave her a 'tot' of Cape smoke, and then, as soon as it was ready,

poured about a pint of beef-tea down her throat, made from the flesh of a blue vilder-beeste I had killed the day before, and after that she brightened up wonderfully. She could talk Zulu, – indeed, it turned out that she had run away from Zululand in T’Chaka’s time, – and she told me that all the people whom I had seen had died of fever. When they had died the other inhabitants of the kraal had taken the cattle and gone away, leaving the poor old woman, who was helpless from age and infirmity, to perish of starvation or disease, as the case might be. She had been sitting there for three days among the bodies when I found her. I took her on to the next kraal, and gave the headman a blanket to look after her, promising him another if I found her well when I came back. I remember that he was much astonished at my parting with two blankets for the sake of such a worthless old creature. ‘Why did I not leave her in the bush?’ he asked. Those people carry the doctrine of the survival of the fittest to its extreme, you see.

“It was the night after I had got rid of the old woman that I made my first acquaintance with my friend yonder,” and he nodded toward the skull that seemed to be grinning down at us in the shadow of the wide mantel-shelf. “I had trekked from dawn till eleven o’clock, – a long trek, – but I wanted to get on; and then had turned the oxen out to graze, sending the voorlooper to look after them, meaning to inspan again about six o’clock, and trek with the moon till ten. Then I got into the waggon and had a good sleep till half-past two or so in the afternoon, when I rose and cooked some meat, and had my dinner, washing it down with a

pannikin of black coffee; for it was difficult to get preserved milk in those days. Just as I had finished, and the driver, a man called Tom, was washing up the things, in comes the young scoundrel of a voorlooper driving one ox before him.

“Where are the other oxen?” I asked.

“Koos!’ he said, ‘Koos! (chief) the other oxen have gone away. I turned my back for a minute, and when I looked round again they were all gone except Kaptein, here, who was rubbing his back against a tree.’

“You mean that you have been asleep, and let them stray, you villain. I will rub your back against a stick,’ I answered, feeling very angry, for it was not a pleasant prospect to be stuck up in that fever-trap for a week or so while we were hunting for the oxen. ‘Off you go, and you too, Tom, and mind you don’t come back till you have found them. They have trekked back along the Middelburg Road, and are a dozen miles off by now, I’ll be bound. Now, no words; go, both of you.’

“Tom, the driver, swore and caught the lad a hearty kick, which he richly deserved, and then, having tied old Kaptein up to the disselboom with a riem, they took their assegais and sticks, and started. I would have gone too, only I knew that somebody must look after the waggon, and I did not like to leave either of the boys with it at night. I was in a very bad temper, indeed, although I was pretty well used to these sort of occurrences, and soothed myself by taking a rifle and going to kill something. For a couple of hours I poked about without seeing anything that I

could get a shot at, but at last, just as I was again within seventy yards of the waggon, I put up an old Impala ram from behind a mimosa-thorn. He ran straight for the waggon, and it was not till he was passing within a few feet of it that I could get a decent shot at him. Then I pulled, and caught him half-way down the spine; over he went, dead as a door-nail, and a pretty shot it was, though I ought not to say it. This little incident put me into rather a better temper, especially as the buck had rolled right against the after part of the waggon, so I had only to gut him, fix a riem round his legs, and haul him up. By the time I had done this the sun was down, and the full moon was up, and a beautiful moon it was. And then there came that wonderful hush which sometimes falls over the African bush in the early hours of the night. No beast was moving, and no bird called. Not a breath of air stirred the quiet trees, and the shadows did not even quiver, they only grew. It was very oppressive and very lonely, for there was not a sign of the cattle or the boys. I was quite thankful for the society of old Kaptein, who was lying down contentedly against the disselboom, chewing the cud with a good conscience.

“Presently, however, Kaptein began to get restless. First he snorted, then he got up and snorted again. I could not make it out, so like a fool I got down off the waggon-box to have a look round, thinking it might be the lost oxen coming.

“Next instant I regretted it, for all of a sudden I heard a roar and saw something yellow flash past me and light on poor Kaptein. Then came a bellow of agony from the ox, and a crunch

as the lion put his teeth through the poor brute's neck, and I began to understand what had happened. My rifle was in the waggon, and my first thought was to get hold of it, and I turned and made a bolt for it. I got my foot on the wheel and flung my body forward on to the waggon, and there I stopped as if I were frozen, and no wonder, for as I was about to spring up I heard the lion behind me, and next second I felt the brute, ay, as plainly as I can feel this table. I felt him, I say, sniffing at my left leg that was hanging down.

“My word! I did feel queer; I don't think that I ever felt so queer before. I dared not move for the life of me, and the odd thing was that I seemed to lose power over my leg, which developed an insane sort of inclination to kick out of its own mere motion – just as hysterical people want to laugh when they ought to be particularly solemn. Well, the lion sniffed and sniffed, beginning at my ankle and slowly nosing away up to my thigh. I thought that he was going to get hold then, but he did not. He only growled softly, and went back to the ox. Shifting my head a little I got a full view of him. He was about the biggest lion I ever saw, – and I have seen a great many, and he had a most tremendous black mane. What his teeth were like you can see – look there, pretty big ones, ain't they? Altogether he was a magnificent animal, and as I lay sprawling on the fore tongue of the waggon, it occurred to me that he would look uncommonly well in a cage. He stood there by the carcass of poor Kaptein, and deliberately disembowelled him as neatly as a butcher could have

done. All this while I dared not move, for he kept lifting his head and keeping an eye on me as he licked his bloody chops. When he had cleaned Kaptein out he opened his mouth and roared, and I am not exaggerating when I say that the sound shook the waggon. Instantly there came back an answering roar.

“Heavens!’ I thought, ‘there is his mate.’

“Hardly was the thought out of my head when I caught sight in the moonlight of the lioness bounding along through the long grass, and after her a couple of cubs about the size of mastiffs. She stopped within a few feet of my head, and stood, and waved her tail, and fixed me with her glowing yellow eyes; but just as I thought that it was all over she turned and began to feed on Kaptein, and so did the cubs. There were the four of them within eight feet of me, growling and quarrelling, rending and tearing, and crunching poor Kaptein’s bones; and there I lay shaking with terror, and the cold perspiration pouring out of me, feeling like another Daniel come to judgment in a new sense of the phrase. Presently the cubs had eaten their fill, and began to get restless. One went round to the back of the waggon and pulled at the Impala buck that hung there, and the other came round my way and commenced the sniffing game at my leg. Indeed, he did more than that, for, my trouser being hitched up a little, he began to lick the bare skin with his rough tongue. The more he licked the more he liked it, to judge from his increased vigour and the loud purring noise he made. Then I knew that the end had come, for in another second his file-like tongue would have rasped through

the skin of my leg – which was luckily pretty tough – and have drawn the blood, and then there would be no chance for me. So I just lay there and thought of my sins, and prayed to the Almighty, and thought that, after all, life was a very enjoyable thing.

“And then all of a sudden I heard a crashing of bushes and the shouting and whistling of men, and there were the two boys coming back with the cattle, which they had found trekking along all together. The lions lifted their heads and listened, then without a sound bounded off – and I fainted.

“The lions came back no more that night, and by the next morning my nerves had got pretty straight again; but I was full of wrath when I thought of all that I had gone through at the hands, or rather noses, of those four lions, and of the fate of my after-ox Kaptein. He was a splendid ox, and I was very fond of him. So wroth was I that, like a fool, I determined to attack the whole family of them. It was worthy of a greenhorn out on his first hunting-trip; but I did it nevertheless. Accordingly after breakfast, having rubbed some oil upon my leg, which was very sore from the cub’s tongue, I took the driver, Tom, who did not half like the job, and having armed myself with an ordinary double No. 12 smooth-bore, the first breech-loader I ever had, I started. I took the smooth-bore because it shot a bullet very well; and my experience has been that a round ball from a smooth-bore is quite as effective against a lion as an express bullet. The lion is soft, and not a difficult animal to finish if you hit him anywhere in the body. A buck takes far more killing.

“Well, I started, and the first thing I set to work to do was to try to make out whereabouts the brutes lay up for the day. About three hundred yards from the waggon was the crest of a rise covered with single mimosa-trees, dotted about in a park-like fashion, and beyond this was a stretch of open plain running down to a dry pan, or water-hole, which covered about an acre of ground, and was densely clothed with reeds, now in the sear and yellow leaf. From the farther edge of this pan the ground sloped up again to a great cleft, or nullah, which had been cut out by the action of the water, and was pretty thickly sprinkled with bush, among which grew some large trees, I forget of what sort.

“It at once struck me that the dry pan would be a likely place to find my friends in, as there is nothing a lion is fonder of than lying up in reeds, through which he can see things without being seen himself. Accordingly thither I went and prospected. Before I had got half-way round the pan I found the remains of a blue vilder-beeste that had evidently been killed within the last three or four days and partially devoured by lions; and from other indications about I was soon assured that if the family were not in the pan that day they spent a good deal of their spare time there. But if there, the question was how to get them out; for it was clearly impossible to think of going in after them unless one was quite determined to commit suicide. Now there was a strong wind blowing from the direction of the waggon, across the reedy pan toward the bush-clad kloof or donga, and this first gave me the idea of firing the reeds, which, as I think I told you,

were pretty dry. Accordingly Tom took some matches and began starting little fires to the left, and I did the same to the right. But the reeds were still green at the bottom, and we should never have got them well alight had it not been for the wind, which grew stronger and stronger as the sun climbed higher, and forced the fire into them. At last, after half an hour's trouble, the flames got a hold, and began to spread out like a fan, whereupon I went round to the farther side of the pan to wait for the lions, standing well out in the open, as we stood at the copse to-day where you shot the woodcock. It was a rather risky thing to do, but I used to be so sure of my shooting in those days that I did not so much mind the risk. Scarcely had I got round when I heard the reeds parting before the onward rush of some animal. 'Now for it,' said I. On it came. I could see that it was yellow, and prepared for action, when instead of a lion out bounded a beautiful rietbok which had been lying in the shelter of the pan. It must, by the way, have been a rietbok of a peculiarly confiding nature to lay itself down with the lion, like the lamb of prophecy, but I suppose the reeds were thick, and that it kept a long way off.

"Well, I let the rietbok go, and it went like the wind, and kept my eyes fixed upon the reeds. The fire was burning like a furnace now; the flames crackling and roaring as they bit into the reeds, sending spouts of fire twenty feet and more into the air, and making the hot air dance above it in a way that was perfectly dazzling. But the reeds were still half green, and created an enormous quantity of smoke, which came rolling toward me like

a curtain, lying very low on account of the wind. Presently, above the crackling of the fire, I heard a startled roar, then another and another. So the lions were at home.

“I was beginning to get excited now, for, as you fellows know, there is nothing in experience to warm up your nerves like a lion at close quarters, unless it is a wounded buffalo; and I got still more so when I made out through the smoke that the lions were all moving about on the extreme edge of the reeds. Occasionally they would pop their heads out like rabbits from a burrow, and then, catching sight of me standing about fifty yards out, draw them back again. I knew that it must be getting pretty warm behind them, and that they could not keep the game up for long; and I was not mistaken, for suddenly all four of them broke cover together, the old black-maned lion leading by a few yards. I never saw a more splendid sight in all my hunting experience than those four lions bounding across the veldt, overshadowed by the dense pall of smoke and backed by the fiery furnace of the burning reeds.

“I reckoned that they would pass, on their road to the bushy kloof, within about five and twenty yards of me; so, taking a long breath, I got my gun well on to the lion’s shoulder – the black-maned one – so as to allow for an inch or two of motion, and catch him through the heart. I was on, dead on, and my finger was just beginning to tighten on the trigger, when suddenly I went blind – a bit of reed-ash had drifted into my right eye. I danced and rubbed, and succeeded in clearing it more or less just in time

to see the tail of the last lion vanishing round the bushes up the kloof.

“If ever a man was mad I was that man. It was too bad; and such a shot in the open, too! However, I was not going to be beaten, so I just turned and marched for the kloof. Tom, the driver, begged and implored me not to go; but though as a general rule I never pretend to be very brave (which I am not), I was determined that I would either kill those lions or they should kill me. So I told Tom that he need not come unless he liked, but I was going; and being a plucky fellow, a Swazi by birth, he shrugged his shoulders, muttered that I was mad or bewitched, and followed doggedly in my tracks.

“We soon got to the kloof, which was about three hundred yards in length and but sparsely wooded, and then the real fun began. There might be a lion behind every bush – there certainly were four lions somewhere; the delicate question was, where. I peeped and poked and looked in every possible direction, with my heart in my mouth, and was at last rewarded by catching a glimpse of something yellow moving behind a bush. At the same moment, from another bush opposite me out burst one of the cubs and galloped back toward the burned-out pan. I whipped round and let drive a snap-shot that tipped him head over heels, breaking his back within two inches of the root of the tail, and there he lay helpless but glaring. Tom afterward killed him with his assegai. I opened the breech of the gun and hurriedly pulled out the old case, which, to judge from what ensued, must, I

suppose, have burst and left a portion of its fabric sticking to the barrel. At any rate, when I tried to get in the new case it would only enter half-way; and – would you believe it? – this was the moment that the lioness, attracted no doubt by the outcry of her cub, chose to put in an appearance. There she stood, twenty paces or so from me, lashing her tail and looking just as wicked as it is possible to conceive. Slowly I stepped backward, trying to push in the new case, and as I did so she moved on in little runs, dropping down after each run. The danger was imminent, and the case would not go in. At the moment I oddly enough thought of the cartridge-maker, whose name I will not mention, and earnestly hoped that if the lion got me some condign punishment would overtake him. It would not go in, so I tried to pull it out. It would not come out either, and my gun was useless if I could not shut it to use the other barrel. I might as well have had no gun. Meanwhile I was walking backward, keeping my eye on the lioness, who was creeping forward on her belly without a sound, but lashing her tail and keeping her eye on me; and in it I saw that she was coming in a few seconds more. I dashed my wrist and the palm of my hand against the brass rim of the cartridge till the blood poured from them – look, there are the scars of it to this day!”

Here Quatermain held up his right hand to the light and showed us four or five white cicatrices just where the wrist is set into the hand.

“But it was not of the slightest use,” he went on; “the cartridge

would not move. I only hope that no other man will ever be put in such an awful position. The lioness gathered herself together, and I gave myself up for lost, when suddenly Tom shouted out from somewhere in my rear:

“You are walking on to the wounded cub; turn to the right.”

“I had the sense, dazed as I was, to take the hint, and slewing round at right angles, but still keeping my eyes on the lioness, I continued my backward walk.

“To my intense relief, with a low growl she straightened herself, turned, and bounded off farther up the kloof.

“Come on, inkoos,” said Tom, “let’s get back to the waggon.”

“All right, Tom,” I answered. “I will when I have killed those three other lions,” for by this time I was bent on shooting them as I never remember being bent on anything before or since. “You can go if you like, or you can get up a tree.”

“He considered the position a little, and then he very wisely got up a tree. I wish that I had done the same.

“Meanwhile I had found my knife, which had an extractor in it, and succeeded after some difficulty in hauling out the case which had so nearly been the cause of my death, and removing the obstruction in the barrel. It was very little thicker than a postage-stamp; certainly not thicker than a piece of writing-paper. This done, I loaded the gun, bound a handkerchief round my wrist and hand to staunch the flowing of the blood, and started on again.

“I had noticed that the lioness went into a thick green bush, or rather cluster of bushes, growing near the water; for there was

a little stream running down the kloof, about fifty yards higher up and for this I made. When I got there, however, I could see nothing, so I took up a big stone and threw it into the bushes. I believe that it hit the other cub, for out it came with a rush, giving me a broadside shot, of which I promptly availed myself, knocking it over dead. Out, too, came the lioness like a flash of light, but quick as she went I managed to put the other bullet into her ribs, so that she rolled right over three times like a shot rabbit. I instantly got two more cartridges into the gun, and as I did so the lioness rose again and came crawling toward me on her fore paws, roaring and groaning, and with such an expression of diabolical fury on her countenance as I have not often seen. I shot her again through the chest, and she fell over on to her side quite dead.

“That was the first and last time that I ever killed a brace of lions right and left, and, what is more, I never heard of anybody else doing it. Naturally I was considerably pleased with myself, and having again loaded up, I went on to look for the black-maned beauty who had killed Kaptein. Slowly, and with the greatest care, I proceeded up the kloof, searching every bush and tuft of grass as I went. It was wonderfully exciting work, for I never was sure from one moment to another but that he would be on me. I took comfort, however, from the reflection that a lion rarely attacks a man, – rarely, I say; sometimes he does, as you will see, – unless he is cornered or wounded. I must have been nearly an hour hunting after that lion. Once I thought I saw

something move in a clump of tambouki grass, but I could not be sure, and when I trod out the grass I could not find him.

“At last I worked up to the head of the kloof, which made a cul-de-sac. It was formed of a wall of rock about fifty feet high. Down this rock trickled a little waterfall, and in front of it, some seventy feet from its face, was a great piled-up mass of boulders, in the crevices and on the top of which grew ferns, grasses, and stunted bushes. This mass was about twenty-five feet high. The sides of the kloof here were also very steep. Well, I came to the top of the nullah and looked all round. No signs of the lion. Evidently I had either overlooked him farther down or he had escaped right away. It was very vexatious; but still three lions were not a bad bag for one gun before dinner, and I was fain to be content. Accordingly I departed back again, making my way round the isolated pillar of boulders, beginning to feel, as I did so, that I was pretty well done up with excitement and fatigue, and should be more so before I had skinned those three lions. When I had got, as nearly as I could judge, about eighteen yards past the pillar or mass of boulders, I turned to have another look round. I have a pretty sharp eye, but I could see nothing at all.

“Then, on a sudden, I saw something sufficiently alarming. On the top of the mass of boulders, opposite to me, standing out clear against the rock beyond, was the huge black-maned lion. He had been crouching there, and now arose as though by magic. There he stood lashing his tail, just like a living reproduction of the animal on the gateway of Northumberland House that I

have seen a picture of. But he did not stand long. Before I could fire – before I could do more than get the gun to my shoulder – he sprang straight up and out from the rock, and driven by the impetus of that one mighty bound came hurtling through the air toward me.

“Heavens! how grand he looked, and how awful! High into the air he flew, describing a great arch. Just as he touched the highest point of his spring I fired. I did not dare to wait, for I saw that he would clear the whole space and land right upon me. Without a sight, almost without aim, I fired, as one would fire a snap-shot at a snipe. The bullet told, for I distinctly heard its thud above the rushing sound caused by the passage of the lion through the air. Next second I was swept to the ground (luckily I fell into a low, creeper-clad bush, which broke the shock), and the lion was on the top of me, and the next those great white teeth of his had met in my thigh – I heard them grate against the bone. I yelled out in agony, for I did not feel in the least benumbed and happy, like Dr. Livingstone, – whom, by the way, I knew very well, – and gave myself up for dead. But suddenly, at that moment, the lion’s grip on my thigh loosened, and he stood over me, swaying to and fro, his huge mouth, from which the blood was gushing, wide opened. Then he roared, and the sound shook the rocks.

“To and fro he swung, and then the great head dropped on me, knocking all the breath from my body, and he was dead. My bullet had entered in the centre of his chest and passed out on the right side of the spine about half way down the back.

“The pain of my wound kept me from fainting, and as soon as I got my breath I managed to drag myself from under him. Thank heavens, his great teeth had not crushed my thigh-bone; but I was losing a great deal of blood, and had it not been for the timely arrival of Tom, with whose aid I got the handkerchief from my wrist and tied it round my leg, twisting it tight with a stick, I think that I should have bled to death.

“Well, it was a just reward for my folly in trying to tackle a family of lions single-handed. The odds were too long. I have been lame ever since, and shall be to my dying day; in the month of March the wound always troubles me a great deal, and every three years it breaks out raw. I need scarcely add that I never traded the lot of ivory at Sikukuni’s. Another man got it – a German – and made five hundred pounds out of it after paying expenses. I spent the next month on the broad of my back, and was a cripple for six months after that. And now I’ve told you the yarn, so I will have a drop of Hollands and go to bed.”

KING BEMBA'S POINT, A WEST AFRICAN STORY, By J. Landers

We were for the most part a queer lot out on that desolate southwest African coast, in charge of the various trading stations that were scattered along the coast, from the Gaboon River, past the mouth of the mighty Congo, to the Portuguese city of St. Paul de Loanda. A mixture of all sorts, especially bad sorts: broken-down clerks, men who could not succeed anywhere else, sailors, youths, and some whose characters would not have borne any investigation; and we very nearly all drank hard, and those who didn't drink hard took more than was good for them.

I don't know exactly what induced me to go out there. I was young for one thing, the country was unknown, the berth was vacant, and the conditions of it easy.

Imagine a high rocky point or headland, stretching out sideways into the sea, and at its base a small river winding into a country that was seemingly a blank in regard to inhabitants or cultivation; a land continuing for miles and miles, as far as the eye could see, one expanse of long yellow grass, dotted here and there with groups of bastard palms. In front of the headland rolled the lonely South Atlantic; and, as if such conditions were not dispiriting enough to existence upon the Point, there was yet another feature which at times gave the place a still more ghastly

look. A long way off the shore, the heaving surface of the ocean began, in anything like bad weather, to break upon the shoals of the coast. Viewed from the top of the rock, the sea at such times looked, for at least two miles out, as if it were scored over with lines of white foam; but lower down, near the beach, each roller could be distinctly seen, and each roller had a curve of many feet, and was an enormous mass of water that hurled itself shoreward until it curled and broke.

When I first arrived on the Point there was, I may say, only one house upon it, and that belonged to Messrs. Flint Brothers, of Liverpool. It was occupied by one solitary man named Jackson; he had had an assistant, but the assistant had died of fever, and I was sent to replace him. Jackson was a man of fifty at least, who had been a sailor before he had become an African trader. His face bore testimony to the winds and weather it had encountered, and wore habitually a grave, if not melancholy, expression. He was rough but kind to me, and though strict was just, which was no common feature in an old African hand to one who had just arrived on the coast.

He kept the factory – we called all houses on the coast factories – as neat and clean as if it had been a ship. He had the floor of the portion we dwelt in holystoned every week; and numberless little racks and shelves were fitted up all over the house. The outside walls glittered with paint, and the yard was swept clean every morning; and every Sunday, at eight o'clock and sunset, the ensign was hoisted and lowered, and an old cannon fired at the

word of command. Order and rule were with Jackson observed from habit, and were strictly enforced by him on all the natives employed in the factory.

Although I have said the country looked as if uninhabited, there were numerous villages hidden away in the long grass and brushwood, invisible at a distance, being huts of thatch or mud, and not so high as the grass among which they were placed. From these villages came most of our servants, and also the middlemen, who acted as brokers between us, the white men, and the negroes who brought ivory and gum and india-rubber from the far interior for sale. Our trade was principally in ivory, and when an unusually large number of elephants' tusks arrived upon the Point for sale, it would be crowded with Bushmen, strange and uncouth, and hideously ugly, and armed, and then we would be very busy; for sometimes as many as two hundred tusks would be brought to us at the same time, and each of these had to be bargained for and paid for by exchange of cotton cloths, guns, knives, powder, and a host of small wares.

For some time after my arrival our factory, along with the others on the coast belonging to Messrs. Flint Brothers, was very well supplied by them with goods for the trade; but by degrees their shipments became less frequent, and small when they did come. In spite of repeated letters we could gain no reason from the firm for this fact, nor could the other factories, and gradually we found ourselves with an empty storehouse, and nearly all our goods gone. Then followed a weary interval, during which we

had nothing whatever to do, and day succeeded day through the long hot season. It was now that I began to feel that Jackson had become of late more silent and reserved with me than ever he had been. I noticed, too, that he had contracted a habit of wandering out to the extreme end of the Point, where he would sit for hours gazing upon the ocean before him. In addition to this, he grew morose and uncertain in his temper toward the natives, and sometimes he would fall asleep in the evenings on a sofa, and talk to himself at such a rate while asleep that I would grow frightened and wake him, when he would stare about him for a little until he gathered consciousness, and then he would stagger off to bed to fall asleep again almost immediately. Also, his hands trembled much, and he began to lose flesh. All this troubled me, for his own sake as well as my own, and I resolved to ask him to see the doctor of the next mail-steamer that came. With this idea I went one day to the end of the Point, and found him in his usual attitude, seated on the long grass, looking seaward. He did not hear me approach, and when I spoke he started to his feet, and demanded fiercely why I disturbed him. I replied, as mildly as I could, for I was rather afraid of the glittering look that was in his eyes, that I wished to ask him if he did not feel ill.

He regarded me with a steady but softened glance for a little, and then said:

“My lad, I thank you for your trouble; but I want no doctor. Do you think I’m looking ill?”

“Indeed you are,” I answered, “ill and thin; and, do you know,

I hear you talk to yourself in your sleep nearly every night.”

“What do I say?” he asked eagerly.

“That I cannot tell,” I replied. “It is all rambling talk; the same things over and over again, and nearly all about one person – Lucy.”

“Boy!” he cried out, as if in pain, or as if something had touched him to the quick, “sit you down, and I’ll tell you why I think of her – she was my wife.”

He moved nearer to the edge of the cliff, and we sat down, almost over the restless sea beneath us.

“She lives in my memory,” he continued, speaking more to himself than to me, and looking far out to the horizon, beneath which the setting sun had begun to sink, “in spite of all I can do or think of to make her appear base in my eyes. For she left me to go with another man – a scoundrel. This was how it was,” he added, quickly: “I married her, and thought her as pure as a flower; but I could not take her to sea with me because I was only the mate of a vessel, so I left her among her own friends, in the village where she was born. In a little cottage by herself I settled her, comfortable and happy as I thought. God! how she hung round my neck and sobbed when I went away the first time! and yet – yet – within a year she left me.” And he stopped for several minutes, resting his head upon his hands. “At first I could get no trace of her,” he resumed. “Her friends knew nothing more of her than that she had left the village suddenly. Gradually I found out the name of the scoundrel who had seduced her away. He

had bribed her friends so that they were silent; but I overbribed them with the last money I had, and I followed him and my wife on foot. I never found them, nor did I ever know why she had deserted me for him. If I had only known the reason; if I could have been told of my fault; if she had only written to say that she was tired of me; that I was too old, too rough for her soft ways, – I think I could have borne the heavy stroke the villain had dealt me better. The end of my search was that I dropped down in the streets of Liverpool, whither I thought I had tracked them, and was carried to the hospital with brain-fever upon me. Two months afterward I came out cured, and the sense of my loss was deadened within me, so that I could go to sea again, which I did, before the mast, under the name of Jackson, in a bark that traded to this coast here.” And the old sailor rose to his feet and turned abruptly away, leaving me sitting alone.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.