

LE QUEUX

WILLIAM

THE GREAT WHITE
QUEEN: A TALE OF
TREASURE AND TREASON

William Le Queux

**The Great White Queen: A
Tale of Treasure and Treason**

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William Le Queux

The Great White Queen: A Tale of Treasure and Treason

CHAPTER I A ROMANCE!

It is a curious story, full of exciting adventures, extraordinary discoveries, and mysteries amazing.

Strange, too, that I, Richard Scarsmere, who, when at school hated geography as bitterly as I did algebraic problems, should even now, while just out of my teens, be thus enabled to write down this record of a perilous journey through a land known only by name to geographers, a vast region wherein no stranger had ever before set foot.

The face of the earth is well explored now-a-days, yet it has remained for me to discover and traverse one of the very few unknown countries, and to give the bald-headed old fogies of the Royal Geographical Society a lesson in the science that I once abominated.

I have witnessed with my own eyes the mysteries of Mo. I have seen the Great White Queen!

Three years ago I had as little expectation of emulating the intrepidity of Stanley as I had of usurping the throne of England. An orphan, both of whose parents had been drowned in a yachting accident in the Solent and whose elder brother succeeded to the estate, I was left in the care of a maternal uncle, a regular martinet, who sent me for several long and dreary years to Dr. Tregear's well-known Grammar-school at Eastbourne, and had given me to understand that I should eventually enter his office in London. Briefly, I was, when old enough, to follow the prosaic and ill-paid avocation of clerk. But for a combination of circumstances, I should have, by this time, budded into one of those silk-hatted, patent-booted, milk-and-bun lunchers who sit on their high perches and drive a pen from ten till four at a salary of sixteen shillings weekly. Such was the calling my relative thought good enough for me, although his own sons were being trained for professional careers. In his own estimation all his ideas were noble and his generosity unbounded; but not in mine.

But this is not a school story, although its preparatory scenes take place at school. Some preparatory scenes must take place at school; but the drama generally terminates on the broader stage of the world. Who cares for a rehearsal, save those who have taken part in it? I vow, if I had never been at Tregear's I would skip the very mention of his name. As it is, however, I often sigh to see the shadow of the elms clustering around the playground, to watch the moonbeans illumine the ivied wall opposite the dormitory window. I often dream that I am back again, a Cæsar-hating pupil.

Dr. Tregear, commonly called "Old Trigger," lived at Upperton, a suburb of Eastbourne, and had accommodation for seventy boys, but during the whole time I remained there we never had more than fifty. His advertisements in local and London papers offering "Commercial training for thirty guineas including laundress and books. Bracing air, gravel soil, diet best and unlimited. Reduction for brothers," were glowing enough, but they never whipped up business sufficiently to attract the required number of boarders. Nevertheless, I must admit that old Trigger, with all his faults and severity, was really good-hearted. He was a little sniffing, rasping man, with small, spare, feeble, bent figure; mean irregular features badly arranged round a formidable bent, broken red nose; thin straggling grey hair and long grey mutton-chop whiskers; constantly blinking little eyes and very assertive, energetic manners. He had a constant air of objecting to everything and everybody on principle. Knowing that I was an orphan he sometimes took me aside and gave me sound fatherly advice which I have since remembered, and am now beginning to appreciate. His wife, too, was a

kindly motherly woman who, because being practically homeless I was often compelled to spend my holidays at school, seemed better disposed towards me than to the majority of the other fellows.

Yes, I got on famously at Trigger's. Known by the abbreviated appellation of "Scars," I enjoyed a popularity that was gratifying, and, bar one or two sneaks, there was not one who would not do me a good turn when I wanted it. The sneaks were outsiders, and although we did not reckon them when we spoke of "the school," it must not be imagined that we forgot to bring them into our calculations in each conspiracy of devilment, nor to fasten upon them the consequences of our practical jokes.

My best friend was a mystery. His name was Omar Sanom, a thin spare chap with black piercing eyes set rather closely together, short crisp hair and a complexion of a slightly yellowish hue. I had been at Trigger's about twelve months and was thirteen when he arrived. I well remember that day. Accompanied by a tall, dark-faced man of decided negroid type who appeared to be ill at ease in European clothes, he was shown into the Doctor's study, where a long consultation took place. Meanwhile among the fellows much speculation was rife as to who the stranger was, the popular opinion being that Trigger should not open his place to "savages," and that if he came we would at once conspire to make his life unbearable and send him to Coventry.

An hour passed and listeners at the keyhole of the Doctor's door could only hear mumbling, as if the negotiations were being carried on in the strictest secrecy. Presently, however, the black man wished Trigger good-day, and much to everyone's disgust and annoyance the yellow-faced stranger was brought in and introduced to us as Omar Sanom, the new boy.

The mystery surrounding him was inscrutable. About my own age, he spoke very little English and would, in conversation, often drop unconsciously into his own language, a strange one which none of the masters understood or even knew its name. It seemed to me composed mainly of p's and l's. To all our inquiries as to the place of his birth or nationality he remained dumb. Whence he had come we knew not; we were only anxious to get rid of him.

I do not think Trigger knew very much about him. That he paid very handsomely for his education I do not doubt, for he was allowed privileges accorded to no one else, one of which was that on Sundays when we were marched to church he was allowed to go for a walk instead, and during prayers he always stood aside and looked on with superior air, as if pitying our simplicity. His religion was not ours.

For quite a month it was a subject of much discussion as to which of the five continents Omar came from, until one day, while giving a geography lesson the master, who had taken the West Coast of Africa as his subject, asked:

"Where does the Volta River empty itself?"

There was a dead silence that confessed ignorance. We had heard of the Russian Volga, but never of the Volta. Suddenly Omar, who stood next me, exclaimed in his broken English:

"The Volta empties itself into the Gulf of Guinea. I've been there."

"Quite correct," nodded the master approvingly, while Baynes, the fellow on my left, whispered:

—
"Yellow-Face has been there! He's a Guinea Pig—see?"

I laughed and was punished in consequence, but the suggestion of the witty Baynes being whispered round the school was effective. From that moment the yellow-faced mysterious foreigner was commonly known as "the Guinea Pig."

We did our best to pump him and ascertain whether he had been born in Guinea, but he carefully avoided the subject. The information that he came from the West Coast of Africa had evidently been given us quite involuntarily. He had been asked a question about a spot he knew intimately, and the temptation to exhibit his superiority over us had proved too great.

Not only was his nationality a secret, but many of his actions puzzled us considerably. As an instance, whenever he drank anything, water, tea, or coffee, he never lifted his cup to his lips

before spilling a small quantity upon the floor. If we had done this punishment would promptly have descended upon us, but the masters looked on at his curious antics in silence.

Around his neck beneath his clothes he wore a sort of necklet composed of a string of tiny bags of leather, in which were sewn certain hard substances that could be felt inside. Even in the dormitory he never removed this, although plenty of chaff was directed towards him in consequence of this extraordinary ornament. It was popularly supposed that he came from some savage land, and that when at home this string of leather bags was about the only article of dress he wore.

If rather dull at school, he very soon picked up our language with all its slang, and quickly came to the fore in athletics. In running, swimming and rowing no one could keep pace with him. On foot he was fleet as a deer, and in the water could swim like a fish, while at archery he was a dead shot. Within three months he had lived down all the prejudices that had been engendered by reason of his colour, and I confess that I myself, who had at first regarded him with gravest suspicion, now began to feel a friendliness towards him. Once or twice, at considerable inconvenience to himself he rendered me valuable services, and on one occasion got me out of a serious scrape by taking the blame himself, therefore within six months of his arrival we became the firmest of chums. At work, as at play, we were always together, and notwithstanding the popular feeling being antagonistic to my close acquaintance with the "Guinea Pig," I nevertheless knew from my own careful observations that although a foreigner, half-savage he might be, he was certainly true and loyal to his friends.

Once he fought. It was soon after we became chums that he had a quarrel with the bully Baynes over the ownership of a catapult. Baynes, who was three years older, heavier built and much taller, threatened to thrash him. This threat was sufficient. Omar at once challenged him, and the fight took place down in the paddock behind a hedge, secure from Trigger's argus eye. As the pair took off their coats one of the fellows jokingly said—

"The Guinea Pig's a cannibal. He'll eat you, Baynes."

Everybody laughed, but to their astonishment within five minutes our champion pugilist lay on the ground with swollen eye and sanguinary nose, imploring for mercy. That he could fight Omar quickly showed us, and as he released the bully after giving him a sound dressing as a cat would shake a rat, he turned to us and with a laugh observed—

"My people are neither cowards nor cannibals. We never fight unless threatened, but we never decline to meet our enemies."

No one spoke. I helped him on with his coat, and together we left the ground, while the partisans of Baynes picked up their fallen champion and proceeded to make him presentable.

Like myself, Omar seemed friendless, for when the summer holidays came round both of us remained with the Doctor and his wife, while the more fortunate ones always went away to their homes. At first he seemed downcast, but we spent all our time together, and Mrs. Tregear, it must be admitted, did her best to make us comfortable, allowing us to ramble where we felt inclined, even surreptitiously supplying us with pocket-money.

It was strange, however, that I never could get Omar to talk of himself. Confidential friends that we were, in possession of each other's secrets, he spoke freely of everything except his past. That some remarkable romance enveloped him I felt certain, yet by no endeavour could I fathom the mystery.

Twice or thrice each year the elderly negro who had first brought him to the school visited him, and they were usually closeted a long time together. Perhaps his sable-faced guardian on those occasions told him news of his relatives; perhaps he gave him good advice. Which, I know not. The man, known as Mr. Makhana, was always very pleasant towards me, but never communicative. Yet he made up for that defect by once or twice leaving half-a-sovereign within my ready palm. He appeared suddenly without warning, and left again, even Omar himself being unaware where he dwelt.

Truly my friend was a mystery. Who he was, or whence he had come, was a secret.

CHAPTER II

OMAR'S SLAVE

Omar had been at Trigger's a little over two years when a strange incident occurred. We were then both aged about sixteen, he a few months older than myself. The summer holidays had come round again. I had a month ago visited my uncle in London, and he had given me to understand that after next term I should leave school and commence life in the City. He took me to his warehouse in Thames Street and showed me the gas-lit cellar wherein his clerks were busy entering goods and calling out long columns of amounts. The prospect was certainly not inviting, for I was never good at arithmetic, and to spend one's days in a place wherein never a ray of sunshine entered was to my mind the worst existence to which one could be condemned.

When I returned I confessed my misgivings to Omar, who sympathised with me, and we had many long chats upon the situation as during the six weeks we wandered daily by the sea. We cared little for the Grand Parade, with its line of garish hotels, tawdry boarding-houses and stucco-fronted villas, and the crowd of promenaders did not interest us. Seldom even we went on the pier, except to swim. Our favourite walks were away in the country through Willingdon to Polegate, over Beachy Head, returning through East Dean to Litlington and its famed tea-garden, or across Pevensey Levels to Wartling, for we always preferred the more unfrequented ways. One day, when I was more than usually gloomy over the prospect of drudgery under my close-fisted relative, my friend said to me cheerfully:

"Come, Scars, don't make yourself miserable about it. My people have a saying that a smile is the only weapon one can use to combat misfortune, and I think it's true. We have yet a few months more together before you leave. In life our ways will lie a long way apart. You will become a trader in your great city, while I shall leave soon, I expect, to—" and he paused.

"To do what?" I inquired.

"To go back to my own people, perhaps," he answered mechanically. "Perhaps I shall remain here and wait, I know not."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait until I receive orders to return," he answered. "Ah, you don't know what a strange life mine has been, Scars," he added a moment later in a confidential tone. "I have never told you of myself for the simple reason that silence is best. We are friends; I hope we shall be friends always, even though my enemies seek to despise me because I am not quite white like them. But loyalty is one of the cherished traditions of my people, and now that during two years our friendship has been firmly established I trust nothing will ever occur to interrupt it."

"I take no heed of your enemies, Omar," I said. "You have proved yourself genuine, and the question of colour, race, or creed has nothing to do with it."

"Perhaps creed has," he exclaimed rather sadly. "But I make no pretence of being what I am not. Your religion interests me, although, as you know, I have never been taught the belief you have. My gods are in the air, in the trees, in the sky. I believe what I have been taught; I pray in silence and the great god Zomara hears me even though I am separated from my race by yonder great ocean. Yet I sometimes think I cannot act as you white people do, that, after all, what my enemies say is true. I am still what you term a savage, although wearing the clothes of your civilization."

"Though a man be a pagan he may still be a friend," I said.

"Yes, I am at least your friend," he said. "My only regret is that your uncle will part us in a few months. Still, in years to come we shall remember each other, and you will at least have a passing thought for Omar, the Guinea Pig," he added, laughing.

I smiled too, but I noticed that although he endeavoured to appear gay, his happiness was feigned, and there was in his dark eyes a look of unutterable sadness. Our conversation drifted to a local cricket match that was to be played on the morrow, and soon the gloomy thoughts that seemed to possess him were dispelled.

It was on the same sunny afternoon, however, that a curious incident occurred which was responsible for altering the steady prosaic course of our lives. The most trifling incidents change the current of a life, and the smallest events are sufficient to alter history altogether. Through the blazing August afternoon we had walked beyond Meads, mounted Beachy Head, passed the lighthouse at Belle Tout and descended to the beach at a point known as the Seven Sisters. The sky was cloudless, the sea like glass, and during that long walk without shelter from the sun's rays I had been compelled to halt once or twice and mop my face with my handkerchief. Yet without fatigue, without the slightest apparent effort, and still feeling cool, Omar walked on, smiling at the manner in which the unusual heat affected me, saying:

"Ah! It is not hot here. You might grumble at the heat if the sun were as powerful as it is in my country."

When we descended to the beach and threw ourselves down under the shadow of the high white cliffs to rest, I saw there was no one about and suggested a swim. It was against old Trigger's orders, nevertheless the calm, cool water as it lazily lapped the sand proved too tempting, and very shortly we had plunged in and were enjoying ourselves. Omar left the water first, and presently I saw while he was dressing the figure of a tallish, muscular man attired in black and wearing a silk hat approaching him. As I watched, wondering what business the stranger could have with my companion, I saw that when they met Omar greeted him in native fashion by snapping fingers, as he had often done playfully to me. Whoever he might be, the stranger was unexpected, and judging from the manner in which he had been received, a welcome visitor. I was not near enough to distinguish the features of the newcomer, but remembering that I had been in the water long enough, I struck out for the shore, and presently walked up the beach towards them.

Omar had dressed, and was in earnest conversation with a gigantic negro of even darker complexion than Mr. Makhana. Unconscious of my approach, for my feet fell noiselessly upon the sand, he was speaking rapidly in his own language, while the man who had approached him stood listening in meek, submissive attitude. Then, for the first time, I noticed that my friend held in his hand a grotesquely carved stick that had apparently been presented by the new-comer as his credential, together with a scrap of parchment whereon some curious signs, something like Arabic, were written. While Omar addressed him he bowed low from time to time, murmuring some strange words that I could not catch, but which were evidently intended to assure my friend that he was his humble servant.

In spare moments Omar had taught me a good deal of his language. Indeed, such a ready pupil had I been that frequently when we did not desire the other fellows to understand our conversation we spoke in his tongue. But of what he was saying to this stranger, I could only understand one or two words and they conveyed to me no meaning. The negro was a veritable giant in stature, showily dressed, with one of those gaudily-coloured neckties that delight the heart of Africans, while on his fat brown hand was a large ring of very light-coloured metal that looked suspiciously like brass. His boots were new, and of enormous size, but as he stood he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, showing that he was far from comfortable in his civilized habiliments.

Without approaching closer I picked up my things and dressed rapidly, then walked forward to join my companion.

"Scars!" he cried, as soon as I stood before him. "I had quite forgotten you. This is my mother's confidential adviser, Kouaga."

Then, turning to the grinning ebon-faced giant he uttered some rapid words in his own language and told him my name, whereupon he snapped fingers in true native fashion, the negro showing an even set of white teeth as an expression of pleasure passed over his countenance.

"We little thought that we were being watched this afternoon," Omar said to me, smiling and throwing himself down upon the sand, an example followed by the negro and myself. "It seems that Kouaga arrived in Eastbourne this morning, but there are strong reasons why none should know that he has seen me. Therefore he followed me here to hold palaver at a spot where we should not be observed."

"You have a letter, I see."

"Yes," he said slowly, re-reading the strange lines of hieroglyphics. "The news it contains necessitates me leaving for Africa immediately."

"For Africa!" I cried dismayed. "Are you going?"

"Yes, I must. It is imperative."

"Then I shall lose you earlier than I anticipated," I observed with heart-felt sorrow at the prospect of parting with my only chum. "It is true, as you predicted, our lives lie very far apart."

The negro lifted his hat from his brow as if its weight oppressed him, then turning to me, said slowly and with distinctness in his own tongue:

"I bring the words of the mighty Naya unto her son. None dare disobey her commands on pain of death. She is a ruler above all rulers; before her armed men monarchs bow the knee, at her frown nations tremble. In order to bring the palaver she would make with her son I have journeyed for three moons by land and sea to reach him and deliver the royal staff in secret. I have done my duty. It is for Omar to obey. Kouaga has spoken."

"Let me briefly explain, Scarsmere," my friend interrupted. "Until the present I have been compelled to keep my identity a secret, for truth to tell, there is a plot against our dynasty, and I fear assassination."

"Your dynasty!" I cried amazed. "Are your people kings and queens?"

"They are," he answered. "I am the last descendant of the great Sanoms of Mo, the powerful rulers who for a thousand years have held our country against all its enemies, Mahommedan, Pagan or Christian. I am the Prince of Mo."

"But where is Mo?" I asked. "I have never heard of it."

"I am not surprised," he said. "No stranger has entered it, or ever will, for it is unapproachable and well-guarded. One intrepid white man ventured a year ago to ascend to the grass plateau that forms its southern boundary, but he was expelled immediately on pain of death. My country, known to the neighbouring tribes as the Land Beyond the Clouds, lies many weeks' journey from the sea in the vast region within the bend of the great Niger river, north of Upper Guinea, and is coterminous with the states of Gurunsi and Kipirsi on the west, with Yatenga on the north-west, with Jilgodi, Aribinda, and Libtako on the north, with Gurma on the east, and with the Nampursi district of Gurunsi on the south."

"The names have no meaning for me," I said. "But the fact that you are an actual Prince is astounding."

With his hands clasped behind his head, he flung himself back upon the sand, laughing heartily.

"Well," he said, "I didn't want to parade my royal ancestry, neither do I want to now. I only tell you in confidence, and in order that you shall understand why I am compelled to return. During the past ten years there have been many dissensions among the people, fostered by the enemies of our country, with a view to depose the reigning dynasty. Three years ago a dastardly plot was discovered to murder my mother and myself, seize the palace, and massacre its inmates. Fortunately it was frustrated, but my mother deemed it best to send me secretly out of the country, for I am sole heir to the throne, and if the conspirators killed me, our dynasty must end. Therefore Makhana, my mother's secret agent, who purchases our arms and ammunition in England and conducts all trade we have with civilized countries, brought me hither, and I have since been in hiding."

"But Makhana has been bribed by our enemies," exclaimed the big negro, who had been eagerly listening to our conversation, but understanding no word of it save the mention of Makhana's name.

Turning to Omar he added: "Makhana will, if he obtains a chance, kill you. Be warned in time against him. It has been ascertained that he supplied the men of Moloto with forty cases of rifles, and that he has given his pledge that you shall never return to Africa. Therefore obey the injunction of my royal mistress, the great Naya, and leave with me secretly."

"Without seeing Makhana?" asked Omar.

"Yes," the black-faced man replied. "He must not know, or the plans of the Naya may be thwarted. Our enemies have arranged to strike their blow three moons from now, but ere that we shall be back in Mo, and they will find that they go only to their graves. Kouaga has made fetish for the son of his royal mistress, and has come to him bearing the stick."

"What does the letter say?" I asked Omar, noticing him reading it again.

"It is brief enough, and reads as follows," he said:

"Know, O my son Omar, that I send my stick unto thee by our trusty Kouaga. Return unto Mo on the wings of haste, for our throne is threatened and thy presence can avert our overthrow. Tarry not in the country of the white men, but let thy face illuminate the darkness of my life ere I go to the tomb of my ancestors.

"Naya."

I glanced at the scrap of parchment, and saw appended a truly regal seal.

"And shall you go?" I asked with sorrow.

"Yes—if you will accompany me."

"Accompany you!" I cried. "How can I? I have no money to go to Africa, besides—"

"Besides what?" he answered smiling. "Kouaga has money sufficient to pay both our passages. Remember, I am Prince of Mo, and this man is my slave. If I command him to take you with me he will obey. Will you go?"

The prospect of adventure in an unknown land was indeed enticing. In a few brief words he recalled my dismal forebodings of the life in an underground office in London, and contrasted it with a free existence in a fertile and abundant land, where I should be the guest and perhaps an official of its ruler. He urged me most strongly to go as his companion, and in conclusion said:

"Your presence in Mo will be unique, for you will be the first stranger who has ever set foot within its capital."

"But your mother may object to me, as she did to the entrance of the white man of whom you just now spoke."

"Ah! he came to make trade palaver. You are my friend and confidant," he said.

"Then you suggest that we should both leave Eastbourne at once, travel with Kouaga to Liverpool and embark for Africa without returning to Trigger's, or saying a word to anyone?"

"We must. If we announce our intention of going we are certain to be delayed, and as the steamers leave only once a month, delay may be fatal to my mother's plans."

As he briefly explained to Kouaga that he had invited me to accompany him I saw that companion to an African prince would be a much more genial occupation than calculating sums in a gas-lit cellar; therefore, fired by the pleasant picture he placed before me, I resolved to accept his invitation.

"Very well, Omar," I said, trying to suppress the excitement that rose within me. "We are friends, and where you go I will go also."

Delighted at my decision my friend sprang to his feet with a cry of joy, and we all three snapped fingers, after which we each took a handful of dry sand and by Omar's instructions placed it in one heap upon a rock. Then, having first mumbled something over his amulets, he quickly stirred the heap of sand with his finger, saying:

"As these grains of sand cannot be divided, so cannot the bonds of friendship uniting Omar, Prince of Mo, with Scarsmere and Kouaga, be rent asunder. Omar has spoken."

CHAPTER III

OUTWARD BOUND

How, trembling lest we should be discovered, we left Eastbourne by train two hours later—Kouaga joining the train at Polegate so as to avoid notice—how the Grand Vizier of Mo purchased our travelling necessities in London; how we travelled to Liverpool by the night mail, and how we embarked upon the steamer *Gambia*, it is unnecessary to relate in detail. Suffice it to say that within twenty-four hours of meeting the big negro we were safely on board the splendid mail-steamer where everything was spick and span. Kouaga had engaged a cabin for our exclusive use, and the captain himself had evidently ascertained that Omar was a person of importance, for in passing us on deck he paused to chat affably, and express a hope that we should find the voyage a pleasant one.

"Your coloured servant has told me your destination," he said, addressing Omar. "We can't land you there on account of the surf, but I understand a boat from shore will be on the look-out. If it isn't, well, you'll have to go on to Cape Coast Castle."

"The boat will be in readiness," Omar said smiling. "If it isn't, those in charge will pay dearly for it. You know what I mean."

The Captain laughed, drew his finger across his throat, and nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I've heard that in your country life is held cheap. I fancy I'd rather be on my bridge than a resident in the Naya's capital. But I see I'm wanted. Good-bye," and he hurried away to shout some order to the men who were busy stowing the last portion of the cargo.

As we leaned over the rail watching the bustle on board the steam tender that lay bobbing up and down at our side, we contemplated the consternation of old Trigger when he found us missing. No doubt a hue and cry would be at once raised, but as several persons we knew had seen us walking towards the Belle Tout, it would, without a doubt, be surmised that we had been drowned while bathing. The only thing we regretted was that we had not left some portion of our clothing on the beach to give verisimilitude to the suggestion. However, we troubled ourselves not one whit about the past. I was glad to escape from the doom of the gas-lit cellar, and was looking forward with keen anticipation to a new life in that mystic country, Africa.

At last there was shouting from the bridge, the tender cast off, the bell in the engine-room gave four strokes, the signal for full-speed ahead, and ere long we were steaming past that clanging beacon the Bell Buoy, and heading for the open sea. The breeze began to whistle around us, the keen-eyed old pilot tightened his scarf around his throat, and carefully we sped along past the Skerries until we slowed off Holyhead, where he shook hands with the captain, and with a hearty "good-bye" swung himself over the bulwarks into the heavy old boat that had come alongside. Thus was severed the last link that bound us to England.

Standing up in his boat he waved us a farewell, while our captain, his hands behind him, took charge of the ship and shouted an order.

Ting-ting-ting-ting sounded the bell below, and a moment later we were moving away into the fast falling night. For a long time we remained on deck with Kouaga, watching the distant shore of Wales fade into the banks of mist, while now and then a brilliant light would flash its warning to us and then die out again as suddenly as it had appeared. We had plenty of passengers on board, mostly merchants and their families going out to the "Coast," one or two Government officials, engineers and prospectors, and during the first night all seemed bustle and confusion. Stewards were ordered here and there, loud complaints were heard on every side, threats were made to report trivialities to the captain, and altogether there was plenty to amuse us.

Next day, however, when we began to bow gracefully to the heavy swell of the Atlantic the majority of the grumblers were glad enough to seek the comfort and privacy of their berths and to

remain there, for during the two days that followed the waves ran mountains high, the wind howled, the bulkheads creaked and the vessel made plunges so unexpectedly that to stand was almost impossible. The great waves seemed to rush upon us as we ploughed our way through them, sometimes burying our bows in foam and at others striking us and lifting us high up, the shock almost causing us to stop. The roar of the tempest seemed deafening, the ship's bell tolled with regularity, but no one appeared in the saloon, and it seemed as if the cook in his galley had little, if anything, to do.

"Never mind," I heard one officer say to another, as they lounged outside their cabins off duty. "It'll give 'em their sea legs, and the weather will be all right the other side of the Bay."

Both laughed. Sailors seem to enjoy the discomforts of passengers.

During those two days I think we were the only passengers who spent the whole day on deck. Kouaga was a poor sailor and was in his bunk horribly bad. When we visited him the whites of his eyes seemed perfectly green.

This was my first taste of a storm, and I must confess that I did not enjoy it. I was not ill, but experienced a feeling the reverse of comfortable. Through all, however, I congratulated myself that I had actually left England, and was about to commence life in a new land. The officer whose words I had overheard proved a prophet, for after three days of bad weather we ran into blue water, calm as a mill-pond, the sun shone out warm and bright, as quickly as the spirits of the passengers had fallen they rose again, and a round of gaiety commenced that continued unbroken until we left the vessel.

We touched at Funchal, a pretty town of white villas half hidden by the surrounding greenery, and with others went ashore, but we were not there more than a couple of hours, for soon the Blue-Peter was run to our masthead as signal that the ship was about to sail, and we were compelled to re-embark. Then a gun was fired on board, the crowd of small craft around us that had put out for the purpose of selling the passengers bananas, live birds, etc., sheered off, and very soon we had restarted on our southward voyage.

Ere long, having passed the snow-capped peak of Teneriffe of which we had heard so much at Trigger's, we entered the region of the trade-winds, and the steamer, aided by its sails that were now spread, held rapidly on its course rounding Cape Verd. For a day we anchored off Bathurst, then steamed away past the many rocky islands off the coast of Guinea until we touched Free Town, the capital of that unhealthy British colony Sierra Leone. Anchoring there, we discharged some cargo, resuming our voyage in a calm sea and perfect weather, and carefully avoiding the dangerous shoals of St. Ann, we passed within sight of Sherboro Island, a British possession, and also sighted Cape Mount, which Omar told me was in the independent republic of Liberia. For several days after this we remained out of sight of land until one afternoon, just about tea-time, the captain came up to us, saying—

"We shall make the mouth of the Lahou River in about two hours, so you'd better be prepared to leave. I'll keep a good look-out for your boat. Have you had a pleasant voyage?"

"Very," we both replied in one voice.

"Glad of that," he said, and turning to Omar added, "you'll look after me if ever I get up country as far as Mo, won't you?"

"Of course," my friend answered laughing. "If you come you shall have a right royal welcome. Come at any time. You'll have nothing to fear when once inside the borders of my mother's country."

"Ah, well. Perhaps I'll come some day, when I retire on my pension and set up as an African chief—eh?"

We all laughed, and he ascended the steps again to the bridge.

Kouaga, in the meantime, was busy collecting our things, giving gratuities to the stewards, and otherwise making preparations to leave. For over two hours we eagerly watched in the direction of the shore, being assisted by a crowd of passengers who had by this time learnt that we were to be taken off.

The shore which slowly came into view as our eager eyes scanned the horizon was the Ivory Coast, but the sun sank in a glorious blaze of crimson, and dusk crept on, yet the captain, whose glasses continually swept the sea, could distinguish no boat approaching us.

"I'm afraid," he shouted to us from the bridge, "their look-out is not well kept. We'll have to take you along to Cape Coast, after all."

"Why not fire a gun, Captain?" suggested Kouaga, his words being interpreted by Omar.

"Very well," he answered, and turning to the officer, he gave orders that the signal gun should be fired three times at intervals.

Presently there was a puff of white smoke and the first loud report rang out, making the vessel quiver beneath us. We waited, listening, but there was no response. The light quickly faded, night cast her veil of darkness over the sea, but we still stood in for the coast.

Again, about half-past nine, the gun belched forth a tongue of flame, and the report sounded far over the silent waters. All was excitement on deck, for it was a matter of speculation whether an answering shout or gunshot could be heard above the roar and throbbing of the engines. Ten, eleven o'clock passed, and presently the third gun was exploded so suddenly that the ladies were startled. Again we listened, but could hear nothing. Kouaga fumed and cursed the evil-spirit for our misfortune, while Omar, finding that we were to be taken to Cape Coast Castle, imparted to me his fear that the fortnight's delay it must necessarily entail, would be fatal to his mother's plans.

We were hanging over the taffrail together gazing moodily into the darkness, having given up all hope of getting ashore at the Lahou River, when suddenly about half a mile from us we saw a flash, and the report of a rifle reached us quite distinctly, followed by distant shouting.

"There they are!" cried Omar excitedly. "They've hailed us at last!"

But ere the words had fallen from his lips we heard the bell in the engine-room ringing, and next second the steam was shut off and we gradually hove to.

Kouaga was at our side almost immediately, and we found ourselves surrounded by passengers taking leave of us. Our boxes were brought up by a couple of sailors, and after about a quarter of an hour's wait, during which time the vessel rose and fell with the swell, the craft that had hailed us loomed up slowly in the darkness, amid the excited jabber of her demoniac-looking crew.

She was a large native vessel, brig-rigged, and as dirty and forbidding-looking a craft as you could well see anywhere. Kouaga hailed one of the black, half-clad men on board, receiving a cheery answer, and presently, having taken leave of the captain and those around us, we climbed over the bulwarks and sprang upon the deck of the mysterious ship.

As Omar alighted the whole crew made obeisance to him, afterwards crowding around me, examining me by the lurid light of the torches they had ignited.

Very quickly, however, several boxes belonging to Kouaga were lowered, the moorings were cast off, and slowly the great mail steamer with its long line of brilliantly-lit ports looking picturesque in the night, moved onward.

"Good-bye," shouted a voice from the steamer.

"Good-bye," I responded, and as the steamer's bell again rang out, "full speed ahead," I knew that the last tie that bound us to European civilization was severed.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGE PROMISE

By the light of the flambeaux the sleek, black, oily-looking natives managed their clumsy craft, which, dipping suddenly now and then, shipped great seas, compelling us to hang on for life. The sails creaked and groaned as they bent to the wind, speeding on in the darkness towards the mainland of Africa. To be transferred to such a ship, which I more than suspected was a slaver, was a complete change after the clean, well-ordered Liverpool liner, and I must confess that, had we not been in charge of Kouaga, I should have feared to trust myself among that shouting cut-throat crew of grinning blacks. Clinging to a rope I stood watching the strange scene, rendered more weird by the flickering uncertain light of the torches falling upon the swarm of natives who manned the craft.

"Are these your mother's people?" I inquired of Omar.

"Some are. I recognize several as our slaves, the remainder are Sanwi, or natives of the coast. Our slaves, I suppose, have been sent down to be our carriers."

"Judging from the manner in which they crawl about this is, I should think, their first experience of the sea," I said.

"No doubt. Over a thousand English miles of desert and almost impenetrable bush separates the sea from our kingdom, therefore few, very few of our people have seen it."

"They'll go back with some wonderful tales, I suppose."

"Yes. They will, on their return, be considered heroes of travel, and their friends will hold feasts in their honour."

As he finished speaking, however, our cumbrous craft seemed suddenly to be lifted high out of the water, and amid the unearthly yells of the whole crew we were swept through a belt of foaming surf, until in a few moments our keel slid upon the sand.

I prepared to leap down upon the beach, but in a second half-a-dozen willing pairs of arms were ready to assist me, and I alighted in the midst of a swarm of half-clad, jabbering natives.

One of them, elbowing his way towards me, asked in broken English:

"Massa have good voyage—eh?" whereupon the others laughed heartily at hearing one of their number speak the language of the white men. But Kouaga approached uttering angry words, and from that moment the same respect was paid to me as to Omar.

We found there was a small village where we landed, otherwise the coast was wild and desolate. In an uncleanly little hut to which we were taken when our boxes were landed and the excitement had subsided, we were regaled with various African delicacies, which at first I did not find palatable, but which Omar devoured with a relish, declaring that he had not enjoyed a meal so much since he had left "the Coast" for England. But I did not care for yams, and the stewed monkey looked suspiciously like a cooked human specimen. My geographical knowledge was not so extensive as it might have been, and I was not certain whether these natives were not cannibals. Therefore I only made a pretence of eating, and sat silently contemplating the strange scene as we all sat upon the floor and took up our food with our fingers. When we had concluded the feast a native woman served Omar with some palm wine, which, however, he did not drink, but poured it upon the ground as an offering to the fetish for his safe return, and then we threw ourselves upon the skins stretched out for us and slept till dawn.

At sunrise I got up and went out. The place was, I discovered, even more desolate than I had imagined. Nothing met the eye in every direction but vast plains of interminable sand, with hillocks here and there, also of sand; no trees were to be seen, not even a shrub; all was arid, dry and parched up with heat. The village was merely an assemblage of a dozen miserable mud huts, and so great was the monotony of the scene, that the eye rested with positive pleasure on the dirty, yellow-coloured

craft in which we had landed during the night. It had apparently once been whitewashed, but had gradually assumed that tawny hue that always characterises the African wilderness.

Again Omar and I were surrounded by the crowd of fierce-looking barbarians, but the twenty stalwart carriers sent down from Mo, apparently considering themselves a superior race to these coast-dwellers, ordered them away from our vicinity, at the same time preparing to start for the interior. Under the direction of Kouaga, who had already abandoned his European attire and now wore an Arab haick and white burnouse, the gang of chattering men soon got their loads of food and merchandise together—for the Grand Vizier had apparently been purchasing a quantity of guns and ammunition in England—hammocks were provided for all three of us if we required them, and after a good meal we at length set out, turning our backs upon the sea.

After descending the crest of a sand-hill we found ourselves fairly in the desert. As far as we could see away to the limitless horizon was sand—arid, parched red-brown sand without a vestige of herbage. The wind that was blowing carried grains of it, which filled one's mouth and tasted hot and gritty; again, impalpable atoms of sand were blown into the corners of one's eyes, and, besides, this injury inflicted on the organ of vision was calculated by no means to improve one's temper. However, Omar told me that a beautiful and fruitful land lay beyond, therefore we made light of these discomforts, and, after a march of three days, during which time we were baked by day by the merciless sun and chilled at night by the heavy dews, we at last came to the edge of the waterless wilderness, and remained for some hours to rest.

My first glimpse of the "Dark Continent" was not a rosy one. As a well-known writer has already pointed out, life with a band of native carriers might for a few days be a diverting experience if the climate were good and if there was no immediate necessity for hurry. But as things were it proved a powerful exercise, especially when we commenced to traverse the almost impenetrable bush by the native path, so narrow that two men could not walk abreast.

Across a great dismal swamp where high trees and rank vegetation grew in wondrous profusion we wended our way, day by day, amid the thick white mist that seemed to continually envelop us. But it required a little more than persuasion to make our carriers travel as quickly as Kouaga liked. At early dawn while the hush of night yet hung above the forest, our guide would rise, stretch his giant limbs and kick up a sleeping trumpeter. Then the tall, dark forest would echo with the boom of an elephant-tusk horn, whose sound was all the more weird since it came from between human jaws with which the instrument was decorated. The crowd of blacks got up readily enough, but it was merely in order to light their fires and to settle down to eat plantains. At length the horn would sound again, but produce no result. The whole company still squatted, eating and jabbering away, indifferent to every other sound. The head man would be called for by Kouaga. "Why are your men not ready? Know you not that the son of the great Naya is with us?" With a deprecatory smile the head-man would make some excuse. He had hurt his foot, or had rheumatism, and therefore he, and consequently his men, would be compelled to rest that day. He would then be warned that if not ready to march in five minutes, he would be carried captive into Mo for the Great White Queen herself to deal with. In five minutes he would return to Kouaga, saying that if the Grand Vizier would only give the men a little more salt with their "chop" (food) that evening, they would march.

Kouaga would then become furious, soundly rating everybody, and declare that the Naya herself should deal with the whole lot as mutineers; whereupon, seeing all excuses for further halt unavailing, loads would be taken up, and within a few moments the whole string of half-clad natives would go laughing and singing on the forward path.

The first belt of forest passed we entered a vast level land covered with scrub, which Omar informed me was the border of the Debendu territory. Proceeding down a wide valley we came at length to the first inhabited region. Every three or four miles we passed through a native village—usually a single street of thirty or forty houses. Each house consisted, as a rule, of three or four small sheds, facing inwards, and forming a tiny courtyard. The huts were on built-up platforms, with hard

walls of mud, and roofs thatched with palm-leaves, while the front steps were faced with a kind of red cement. In the middle of each centre of habitation we found a tree with seats around it formed of untrimmed logs, on which the elders and head-men of the village would sit, smoke, and gravely discuss events. As we left each village to plunge boldly onward through the bush we would pass the village fetish ground, well defined by the decaying bodies of lizards and birds, a grinning human skull or two, broken pots and pieces of rag fluttering in the wind, all offered as propitiation to the presiding demon of the place, while away in the bush, behind the houses, we saw the giant leaves of the plantain groves that yielded the staple food of this primitive people.

Deeper and deeper we proceeded until we came into regular forest scenery, where day after day we pushed our way through solemn shady aisles of forest giants, whose upper parts gleamed far above the dense undergrowth in white pillars against the grey-blue sky. Sometimes we strode down a picturesque sunny glade, and at others struggled through deep dark crypts of massive bamboo clumps. Here the noisome smell of decaying vegetation nauseated us, for the air in those forest depths is deadly. Beautiful scarlet wax-flowers would gleam high among the dark-green foliage of the giant cotton-tree, whose stem would be covered with orchids and ferns and dense wreaths of creeper, while many other beautiful blossoms flourished and faded unseen. In that dark dismal place there was an absence of animal life. Sometimes, however, by day we would hear the tuneful wail of the finger-glass bird or an occasional robin would chirrup, while at night great frogs croaked gloomily and the sloth would shriek at our approach.

It was truly a toilsome, dispiriting march, as in single file we pushed our way forward into the interior, and I confess I soon began to tire of the monotony of the terrible gloom. But to all my questions Omar would reply:

"Patience. In Africa we have violent contrasts always. To-day we are toiling onward through a region of eternal night, but when we have traversed the barrier that shuts out our country from the influence of yours—then you shall see. What you shall witness will amaze you."

CHAPTER V

THE GIANT'S FINGER

For quite three weeks we pushed forward through the interminable forest until one day we came to a small village beyond which lay a great broad river glistening in the noon-day sun. It was the mighty Comoe. We had entered the kingdom of Anno. In the village I saw traces of human sacrifices, and Omar, in reply to a question, told me that although these happy-looking natives were very skilful weavers and dyers who did a brisk trade in *fu*, a bark cloth of excellent quality—which I found afterwards they manufactured from the bark of a tree apparently of the same species as the much-talked-of *rokko* of Uganda—they nevertheless at the death of a chief sacrificed some of his slaves to "water the grave," while the memory of the departed was also honoured with gross orgies which lasted till everything eatable or drinkable in the village was consumed.

We only remained there a few hours, then embarked in three large canoes that were moored to the bank awaiting us. The chief of the village came to pay his respects to Omar, as the son of a ruling monarch, and presented us with food according to the usual custom.

Soon, amid the shouts of the excited villagers who had all come down to see us start, our canoes were pushed off, and the carriers, glad to be relieved of their packs, took the paddles, and away we went gaily up the centre of the winding river. Emerging as suddenly as we had from the gloomy forest depths where no warmth penetrated, into the blazing tropical sun was a sudden change that almost overcame me, for as we rowed along without shelter the rays beat down upon us mercilessly.

The banks were for the most part low, although it was impossible to say what height they were because of the lofty hedges of creeping plants which covered every inch of ground from the water's edge to as high as fifty feet above in some places, while behind them towered the black-green forest with here and there bunches of brilliant flowers or glimpses of countless grey trunks. Sometimes these trees, pressing right up to the edge of the warm sluggish water, grew horizontally to the length of fifty feet over the river. Creepers, vines, whip-like calamus, twisting lianes and great serpent-like convolvuli grew in profusion over everything, while the eye caught glimpses everywhere of gorgeous clouds of insects, gaily-plumaged birds, paraquets, and monkeys swinging in their shaded bowers.

Basking on the banks were crocodiles and hippopotami, while the river itself swarmed with fish and water-snakes. And over all rose the mist caused by heat and moisture, the death-dealing miasma of that tropic world.

But all were in good spirits, for rowing was more pleasurable than tramping in that dismal monotonous primeval forest that rose on either side, therefore against the broad, slowly-flowing waters our carriers bent to their paddles, grinning and joking the while.

Throughout that day Kouaga sat near us, smoking and thinking. Perhaps the responsibilities of State weighed heavily upon him; perhaps he was contemplating with trepidation the passage that would be necessary through a country held by the enemies of Mo; at all events he was morose and taciturn, his dark face bearing a strange, stern look such as I had never before noticed.

During the weeks I had been travelling up country I had embraced every opportunity of improving my knowledge of the curious language spoken by Omar and his mother's subjects, until I found I could understand a large portion of a conversation and could even give directions to our carriers in their own tongue.

Omar was in high spirits, eager, it seemed, to return to his own people. He took a gun and some ammunition from one of the cases that Kouaga had conveyed from England and gave us an exhibition of his skill with the rifle. He was a dead shot. I had no idea he could aim so true. As we sped past in our canoe he would raise his weapon from time to time and pick off a bird upon the wing, or fire directly into the eye of some basking animal, causing it to utter a roar, lash its tail and

disappear to die. He seldom missed, and the accuracy of his aim elicited from the sable rowers low grunts of admiration.

A lazy and enjoyable week we thus spent in the ascent of the Comoe, mostly through forest scenery or undulating grass-lands. By day our rowers bent with rhythmic music to their paddles, and at evening we would disembark, cook our food, and afterwards with Kouaga and my friend I would sleep in our canoe upon the heap of leopard skins that formed our couches. Here we were free from the pest of the myriad insects we had encountered in the forest; and at night, under the brilliant moon, the noble river and giant trees presented a fine picture of solitary grandeur. Onward we pressed through the flourishing country of the Jimini, where we saw many prosperous villages of large roomy houses of rectangular form and reed thatched, wide tracts under cultivation with well-kept crops of cotton and rice. Everywhere we passed, without opposition, and with expressions of good-will from the natives.

One evening when the blood-red sun had sunk low in the water behind us, we suddenly rounded a sharp bend of the river and there burst upon us, rising on our right high into the clouds, the great snow-capped crest of Mount Komono. Near its base it was hidden by a bank of cloud, but above all was clear and bright, so that the summit had the appearance of being suspended in mid-air.

"The Giant's Finger at last!" cried Omar, jumping up excitedly and pointing at the mountain. "We leave the river a little higher up, and push again across the bush a twelve days' journey until we come to the Volta, which will take us forward to the boundary of Mo."

"The Volta!" I cried, remembering the incident at school when he had answered correctly the master's question as to the estuary of that river, and had been dubbed "the Guinea Pig." "Why could we not have ascended it from the sea?"

"Because we should, by so doing, pass nearly the whole distance through the country of Prempeh, of Ashanti, one of our bitter foes. The Adoo, the Anno, and the Jimini kings have long ago made blood-brotherhood with our chiefs, therefore we are enabled to pass in peace by this route alone."

Before darkness fell we disembarked at a small village on the left bank, the name of which I learnt was Tomboura, and after our evening meal were given a hut in which to spend the night. Soon after dawn, however, we heard Kouaga stir, giving rapid orders to the carriers, and when we went out to go down to the canoes they were nowhere to be seen. We noticed, however, that the carriers were preparing their loads which they had no doubt landed during the night, and Omar, advancing towards the Grand Vizier, asked:

"Why do we not ascend the river further? We must cross to the other side if we would join the Great Salt Road."

"Dangers lurk there, O my Master," the negro answered, hitching his burnouse about his shoulders. "We must travel by a circuitous route."

"Did not my mother command me to speed unto her?" Omar asked, puzzled. "Is it not necessary that we should travel by the shortest path?"

"The safest is the shortest," Kouaga answered with a frown.

"But by following this bank we are turning our backs upon Mo. See!" and he produced from his pocket an instrument which I did not know he possessed, a cheap mariner's compass.

"Bah!" cried Kouaga in anger, after he had looked at it a long time. "That clock of the white men has an evil spirit within. See! its trembling finger points always in the direction of the Great Evil. It is bewitched. Cast it away. Kouaga has already made fetish for this journey."

"But why should we travel in an entirely opposite direction to Mo?" I argued, seeing that a crowd of grinning impish-looking carriers had gathered around us, enjoying our controversy.

"For three-score years Kouaga has lived in the forest and on the plains," he answered, turning to me. "He knows the direction of Mo."

"Oh, let him have his own way," Omar cried at last, finding persuasion of no avail. Then turning to the Grand Vizier he said in a firm tone: "Listen, Kouaga. If by your obstinacy we are delayed one single day, I shall inform my mother of that fact, and you will assuredly lose your office and most likely your head also. Therefore act as you think fit. Omar, Prince of Mo, has spoken."

"Kouaga bore the staff of the Great White Queen unto thee. He is the trusted of the Naya, if not of her son," the negro answered, turning away. But in that brief instant I noticed an expression on his face of relentless cruelty. An expression such as one might expect to see upon the face of a murderer.

Truth to tell, I had never liked Kouaga; now I instinctively hated him. But ere he had strode a dozen paces he turned back smiling, saying:

"I mean no defiance to the Son of my Queen. He is in my charge, and I will take him safely back unto Mo, the city with walls unbreakable, the capital of the kingdom unconquerable."

"I shall act as I have decided," Omar answered with true princely hauteur. "The rulers of Mo never depart from their word."

"Very well," the other answered laughing, at the same time lighting his pipe with cool indifference. Then, glancing round to see that all was ready, he shouted an order to the head-man and the string of carriers moved away, jabbering and shouting, down the path into the dark gloomy forest depths.

In ill-humour we followed. I must confess that towards Kouaga I entertained an ill-defined feeling of distrust. Once or twice during that day's march in the dull dispiriting gloom, almost every ray of daylight being shut out by the thick canopy of creepers spreading from tree to tree, I had caught Omar surreptitiously consulting his pocket compass, and saw upon his face a look of anxiety. Yet, on the other hand, Kouaga had become particularly jocular, and the carriers were now singing snatches of songs, joking, and laughing good-humouredly at each other's misfortunes, whereas on our journey from the coast to the river they had generally preserved a sullen silence.

No. Try how I would I could not rid myself of the thought that there was something very mysterious in Kouaga's actions.

CHAPTER VI

THE ROYAL JUJUS

On the fifth day after we had left our canoes the Grand Vizier of Mo had gone far forward along the line of carriers to speak with the head-man, and Omar was walking immediately before me at the rear of the procession.

As I pulled him by the sleeve he halted, and when the last carrier had got out of hearing I confided to my friend my misgivings.

"Have you not noticed of late a change in Kouaga's manner towards us?" I asked him. "At first he was deferential and submissive to your every wish, but it occurs to me that of late his manner is overbearing, and he watches us closely, as if fearing we might escape."

"Curiously enough," my friend replied, "I have for some days past had similar thoughts. If he's playing any double game his life won't be worth a moment's purchase when once we enter our own land."

"But you had perfect confidence in him," I observed.

"Yes. If my mother trusts him as her chief adviser I have no right to entertain any suspicion of his fidelity," he said.

"True, but, after all, you are the Prince and heir. Surely he ought to have followed your desire as to the route we should take."

"The route!" he cried. "Since we left the river we have travelled in these cross-paths in such an amazing manner that at present I have no idea where we are."

"The carriers have, or they would not be in such high spirits," I observed.

"Yes, but the strangest part of the affair is that every man among them fears to tell us anything. I have secretly questioned most of them as to Kouaga's motive, and all I can glean is that the fetish-man at Tomboura gathered them together and, after performing some of the usual rites and sacrificing to our Crocodile-god Zomara, told them if a word were spoken to us regarding our route or destination the dread god will meet us in the forest path and devour all of us. Not one shall survive."

"And you believe this pagan humbug?" I exclaimed, in disgust.

He opened his dark eyes wide, regarding me in astonishment. I had never before ridiculed his religion.

"The jujus around my neck preserve me from every evil, except those worked by Zomara. He is the great god whose power only the fetish-man can withstand. Slaves, princes, kings, all sacrifice to him. If we offend him death or torture is inevitably our punishment."

"Do you think you've offended him?" I inquired.

"I know not," he sighed with a serious look. "If I have, then nothing can save me; the fetish-man of Tomboura has worked evil against me."

"Well," I said, "this is my first experience of Africa, but it strikes me very forcibly that these fetish-men of yours will do anything they are paid to do. What was there to prevent Kouaga paying that hideous old demon at Tomboura to utter his horrible incantations and so frighten our carriers into silence?"

"Zomara is a terrible god. None dare tamper with him, or utter his name in vain threats," Omar answered.

"Well, whoever he is I still stick to my opinion," I said. "Depend upon it Kouaga is at the bottom of this conspiracy of silence."

Just at that moment the black face of that worthy, rendered darker by the snow-white haick that surrounded it, appeared among the tangled bamboos. He had missed us, and had come back to

search. Yes, my surmise seemed correct. He was watching us closely and trying to understand our conversation.

That evening when we halted and the natives went into the bush to collect fuel for the fire, I managed to take one or two of them aside and secretly inquire our destination. But I got the same answer always.

"Zomara has tied our tongues. He commands us to be mute, or we shall be destroyed to the last one."

To endeavour to learn anything from these simple-minded blacks seemed useless. They would speak freely on every subject, indeed they seemed fond of talking with one whose face was white, yet regarding our journey they obeyed the command of the fetish-man to the very letter. It is the same everywhere in West and Central Africa; the fetish-man rules. What he says is more law than the word of kings. If he declares a man or woman bewitched that person will assuredly be murdered before the sun sets; if he orders the people of the village to perform a certain action they will do it, even if death stares them in the face. They blindly believe that the fetish is all-powerful, and that the half naked dancing savages who administer it are endowed with supernatural powers.

That night, feeling tired out I threw myself down early near the camp fire and slept soundly for several hours. But at length some unusual sound awoke me, and when I opened my eyes I saw that the fire had died down to one single flickering ember, which still blazing cast a fitful light upon the boles of the forest giants around.

Scarcely had I opened my eyes when I became conscious of low whispering in my vicinity. This thoroughly aroused me, and without stirring my body I slowly turned my head, when to my astonishment I beheld Kouaga, standing erect with arms folded beneath his white burnouse, talking in an undertone to a dark-bearded stranger who also wore flowing Arab garments and bore in his hand a long-barrelled flint-lock gun with quaintly-inlaid stock. The man seemed older than the Grand Vizier of Mo, for his beard was tinged with grey, and the brown hand that held the gun was lean and bony.

I strained my ears to catch the drift of their earnest conversation, but could not. It was tantalizing that they spoke in so low a tone, for the stranger seemed to mumble into his beard, while Kouaga whispered with his mouth turned from me. The presence of a stranger in our camp was, to say the least, strange, for through those gloomy forest glades no single traveller could journey. Omar had told me that for a person to attempt to traverse that region alone would be merely suicide. My friend was sleeping soundly at some distance from me, therefore I could not awaken him without attracting attention. If only he would open his eyes, I thought, he might recognize the new comer, either as friend or foe.

But no, he slept on as peacefully as if he were still in the cosy dormitory at old Trigger's, with its blue and white counterpanes and windows commanding a wide sweep of distant sea.

While I lay gazing upon my friend and hoping that he might open his eyes, I suddenly heard the stranger raise his voice louder than before. It was only for an instant, but in that moment upon my ear there fell three words the English equivalents of which I understood.

They were "Seek the treasure!"

But I could distinguish nothing more, and in a few moments the two men hurriedly snapped fingers, and the mysterious stranger disappeared noiselessly into the dark silent bush.

When the loud blasts from the ivory-horn, with its hideous ornamentation of human teeth, proclaimed the advent of another day I took Omar aside and told him of what I had witnessed and overheard. After I had described the stranger he said:

"I know not who he may be. It is evident, however, we are travelling in the opposite direction to Mo, therefore we will go no further. I will command Kouaga to return to Tomboura, cross the river, and press forward over the hills of Dabagakha to the Black Volta."

"And if he refuses?"

"Then we will go alone."

An hour later, when we had eaten our plantains and the usual babel was proceeding which was always precursory of a start being made, my companion strode up to Kouaga with a look of fierce determination upon his face, saying:

"Give ear to my words. I am Omar, son of the Naya, the Great White Queen, before whose wrath all nations tremble."

"Speak. I listen," answered the giant negro, with a look of surprise upon his ugly countenance.

"I will go no further along this path. You, the head-man and the carriers shall return with me to the bank of the Comoe, otherwise my mother shall punish you for disobeying my orders. All who dare go forward from this moment shall be sacrificed at the yam feast and the dogs shall eat their entrails. These are my words."

"Then whither would you go from Tomboura?" asked Kouaga, apparently astonished at Omar's sudden decision.

"I will only approach Mo by the Great Salt Road."

"It is impossible. There is fighting in the hills, for the Karaboro and the Dagari are at war."

"And what matters, pray, since they are both our allies?" Omar asked.

For a moment the negro was nonplussed, but with a broad grin showing his even row of teeth, he said:

"The bird goes not into the serpent's lair, neither does the son of the Queen enter the country of her enemies."

"I have already given tongue to my decision," my friend replied. "Advance, and each of your heads shall fall beneath the keen *doka* of Gankoma, the executioner."

Kouaga, hearing these words, set his teeth fiercely, and glancing at us with his fiery eyes, the whites of which were bloodshot, retorted:

"Recede, and we will carry you forward, bound as a slave."

"This is a threat!" cried Omar, drawing himself up to his full height and stretching forth his arm. "You, whom my mother raised from a palace-slave, thus threaten me! Let it be thus, but I warn you that if you ever set foot across the borders of Mo, your head shall be set upon the palace wall as a warning to disobedient slaves." Then, turning to me, and waving back the crowd of carriers who had collected and stood open-mouthed around us, he said, "Come, Scars, we will return. I have thrice traversed the path from Tomboura to the Great Salt Road, and can follow it without a guide."

Then, calling down the curse of Zomara, the dreaded, upon them all, he turned on his heel and walked down the narrow path we had traversed on the previous night, while, with a final glance of triumph at the irate negro, I followed.

Scarcely had we gone fifty yards, however, before a dozen carriers, acting upon orders from Kouaga, had rushed after us, seized us, and dragged us back to him despite our desperate struggles.

"So you defy me!" the negro cried in a paroxysm of rage, as Omar was brought up. "This is because I was fool enough to allow your white-faced friend to accompany you. Our country is no place for whites, but he will make a good sacrifice to Zomara when our journey is ended. You have both refused to accompany us, therefore we must use force." Then, turning to the half-naked savages who held us, he said: "Bind them, and tie them in their hammocks. Let not their bonds be loosened until our march be ended, for both are my prisoners." And he laughed triumphantly at our discomfiture.

"You shall pay for this insult with your life," Omar cried angrily.

"Take off his European clothes, and let his string of royal jujus be burned. Henceforth he is a slave, as also is his white companion."

Next moment twenty ready hands tore from Omar most of his well-worn clothes, and although he fought with all the strength of which he was capable, his necklet of jujus, the magical charms that protected the Queen's son from every evil, was ruthlessly spat upon and destroyed by the excited natives, together with his clothes.

Then, after each of us had been tied in a hammock with our hands behind our backs, we were lifted by four stalwart bearers and carried forward at a brisk pace towards an unknown bourne.

It was evident that we were not going to Mo, and it was equally evident too, that Kouaga, whom we had trusted implicitly, was our bitter enemy.

CHAPTER VII

SAMORY'S STRONGHOLD

Through dense dark forests and over great open grass-lands, passing several villages, we were carried forward many days, still bound and never allowed to have our hands free except during our meals.

The face of Kouaga grew more brutal and fierce as we proceeded, and he urged on the carriers until we found ourselves travelling at a pace that for African natives was amazing.

Omar spoke little. He was always pre-occupied and thoughtful. He had told me that he now regretted having brought me with him from England, but I assured him that our misfortunes were not of our own seeking, and urged him to be of good cheer.

Truth to tell, my heart was full of dark forebodings. I saw in the ugly countenance of Kouaga expressions of deadly hatred, and I knew that they were of ill-portent. Yet to escape in that deadly bush, extending for hundreds and hundreds of miles, dark, monotonous and impenetrable, meant certain death even if we eluded the watchful vigilance of this muscular negro.

One day, when passing through a forest village, a half-naked savage rushed towards us brandishing his spear and uttering a loud yell, but whether expressive of hatred or joy I knew not. Suddenly, as he approached the hammock in which Omar was lying, my friend addressed him in some tongue that was strange to me, but to which the native answered readily.

"As I thought, Scars!" Omar shouted to me in English a moment later. "We have travelled away from Mo, crossed Tieba's territory, and have now entered the country of the great Mohammedan chief Samory, my nation's bitterest enemy. It was he who seized my father by a ruse and sent his head back to my mother as a hideous souvenir."

"But what object has Kouaga in bringing us here?" I asked.

"I cannot imagine," he answered. "Unless he travelled to England, for the sole purpose of delivering me into the hands of our enemies. Three times within the last five years has Samory attempted to invade our country, but each time has been repulsed with a loss that has partially paralysed his power. All along the right bank of the Upper Niger his bands of hirelings and mercenaries, whom we call Sofas, are constantly raiding for slaves. Indeed Samory's troops are the fiercest and most merciless in this country. They are the riff-raff of the West Soudan and are a terror to friend and foe, a bar to the peaceful settlement of all lands within the range of their devastating expeditions."

"Do they make raids towards your country?" I inquired, for I had heard long ago of this notorious slave-dealing chief.

"Yes, constantly. They are pitiless marauders who lay waste whole kingdoms and transform populous districts into gloomy solitudes. While on my way from Mo to England we passed through Sati, a large market town at the convergence of several caravan routes, which was only three months before a prosperous and wealthy place situated fifty miles south of our border. We found everything had been raided by the Sofas, who had sacked, burned or destroyed what they were unable to take away. Heaps of cinders marked the sites of former homesteads, the ground was strewn with potsherds, rice and other grain trodden under foot, while our horses moved forward knee deep in ashes. The whole land, lately very rich, prosperous and thickly peopled, was a melancholy picture of utter desolation."

"Do you think we have actually fallen into Samory's hands?" I asked.

"I fear so."

"But is not Kouaga Grand Vizier of Mo? Surely he would not dare to take us through the enemy's land," I said.

"Do you not remember that when he met us at Eastbourne he forbade us to inform Makhana of our intended departure?" he answered. "He had some object in securing our silence and getting us away from England secretly. It now appears more than probable that my mother has dismissed and banished him, and he has gone over to our enemy, Samory, who desires to seize our country."

"In that case our position is indeed serious," I observed. "We must do something to escape."

"No," he said. "We cannot escape. Let's put on a bold front, and if we find ourselves prisoners of the slave-raiding chief, I, at least, will show him that I am heir to the Emerald Throne of Mo."

As each day dawned we still held upon our way, until at length, under a broiling noon-day sun, we crossed a wide stretch of fertile grass-land where cattle were grazing, and there rose high before us the white fortified walls of a large town of flat-roofed Moorish-looking houses. It was, we afterwards learnt, called Koussan, one of Samory's principal strongholds.

As we approached the open gate, flanked on either side by watch-towers and guarded by soldiers wearing Arab fezes and loose white garments, a great rabble came forth to meet us. We heard the din of tom-toms beaten within the city, joyous shouts, and loud ear-piercing blasts upon those great horns formed out of elephant tusks.

Thus, in triumph, amid the howls and execrations of the mob, Omar, son of Sanom, and myself, were marched onward through the gate and up a steep narrow winding street, where the solidly-built houses were set close together to obtain the shade, to the market-place. Here, amid the promiscuous firing of long flint-lock guns and quaint ancient pistols, such as one sees in curiosity shops at home, a further demonstration was held, our carriers themselves infected by the popular enthusiasm, seeming also to lose their senses. They heaped upon Omar every indignity, scoffed and spat at him, while my own pale face arousing the ire of the fanatical Mohammedan populace, they denounced me as an infidel accursed of Allah, and urged my captors to kill me and give my flesh to the dogs.

Truly we were in pitiable plight.

I looked at Omar, but heedless of all their threats and jeers, he walked with princely gait. His hands were tied behind his back, his head erect, and his eyes flashed with scorn upon those who sought his death. Presently, turning sharply to the left, we found ourselves in another square which we crossed, entering a great gateway guarded by soldiers, and as soon as we were inside the heavy iron-studded doors closed with an ominous clang. I glanced round at the thick impregnable walls and knew that we were in the Kasbah, or citadel. Gaily-dressed soldiers were leaning or squatting everywhere as we crossed the several court-yards, one after the other, until, by the direction of one of the officials who had joined us on entering, we were led through a low arched door, and thence a dozen soldiers who had come forward hurried us down a flight of dark damp steps into a foul noisome chamber below.

Struggles and protestations were useless. We were pushed forward into a deep narrow cell lit only by a tiny crack in the paving of the court above and the door quickly bolted upon us.

"Well, this is certainly a dire misfortune," I said, when we had both walked round inspecting the black dank walls of our prison. "I wonder what fate is in store for us?"

"Though they destroyed my jujus, they cannot invoke the curses of Zomara upon me," he said. "The Crocodile-god will not hear any enemies of the Naya."

"But have you no idea whatever of the motive Kouaga has had in bringing you hither?" I asked.

"Not the slightest," he answered, seating himself at last on the stone bench to rest. "It is evident, however, that he is a traitor in the pay of Samory. On each occasion when the Moslem chief endeavoured to conquer our country, it was Kouaga who assumed the generalship of our troops; it was Kouaga who fought valiantly for his queen with his own keen sword; it was Kouaga who drove back the enemy and urged our hosts to slaughter them without mercy; and it was Kouaga who, with fiendish hatred, put the prisoners to the torture. In him my mother had a most trusted servant."

"He doesn't seem very trustworthy now," I observed. "It seems to me we are caught like rats in a trap."

"True," he said. "We are beset by dangers, but may the blessings of their Allah turn to curses upon their heads. It may be that our ignominious situation will not satisfy the malice that Samory has conceived against me, but if a single hair of the head of either of us is injured, Zomara, the Crocodile-god, will punish those who seek our discomfiture."

It occurred to me that it was all very well to speak in this strain, but as no man is a prince except in his own country, it seemed idle to expect mercy or pity. Omar was in prison for some unknown offence, and I was held captive with a well-remembered threat from Kouaga that my life should be sacrificed.

For six hours we remained without food, but when the light above had quite faded, three soldiers with clanging swords unbarred the door and pushed through some water in an earthen vessel and some *fufu*, a kind of dumpling made of mashed African potato. During the night, disturbed by vermin of all sorts, including some horrible little snakes, we slept little, and at dawn we were again visited by our captors. The next day and the next passed uneventfully. For exercise we paced our cell times without number, and when tired would seat ourselves on the rough stone bench and calmly discuss the situation.

The Naya, the mysterious Great White Queen, had ordered Omar to return with all haste, yet already two moons had run their course since we had landed in Africa. This troubled my companion even more than the fact of being betrayed into the hands of his enemies.

The tiny streak of light that showed high above our heads grew brighter towards noon, then began slowly to decline. Before the shadows had lengthened in the court above, however, the sound of our door being unbarred aroused us from our lethargy, and a moment later, three soldiers entered and told us to prepare to go before the great ruler Samory. Omar, attired only in a small garment of bark-cloth, took no heed of his toilet, therefore we at once announced our readiness to leave the loathsome place with its myriad creeping things, and it was with a feeling of intense relief that a few minutes later we ascended to the blessed light of day.

Marched between a small posse of soldiers, we crossed the court to a larger and more handsome square, decorated in Arab style with horseshoe arches and wide colonnades, until at the further end a great curtain of crimson velvet was drawn aside and we found ourselves in a spacious hall, wherein many gorgeously attired persons had assembled and in the centre of which was erected a great canopy of amaranth-coloured silk supported by pillars of gold surmounted by the crescent. Beneath, reclining on a divan, slowly fanned by a dozen gaudily-attired negroes, was a dark-faced, full-bearded man of middle age, whose black eyes regarded us keenly as we entered. He was dressed in a robe of bright yellow silk, and in his turban there glittered a single diamond that sparkled and gleamed with a thousand iridescent rays. His fat brown hand was loaded with rings, and jewels glittered everywhere upon his belt, his sword, and his slippers of bright green.

It was the notorious and dreaded chieftain, Samory.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECRET OF THE QUEEN

As we were led forward to the space in front of the divan all eyes were directed towards us. The glitter and pomp of the merciless slave-raider's court was dazzling. Before their ruler all men salaamed. His officers surrounding him, watched every movement of his face, and the four-score slaves behind him stood mute and motionless, ready to do his bidding at any instant.

When our feet touched the great carpet spread before him, and we halted, he raised himself to a sitting posture, fixing his dark, gleaming eyes upon us. At sight of Omar a sudden frown of displeasure crossed his features, but an instant later a grim smile of triumph lit his sinister face.

Apparently he was waiting for us to bow before him, but Omar had forbidden me to do so.

"And who, pray, art thou, that thou deignest not to bend the knee before me?" he cried, in anger that his people should witness a slur thus cast upon his power.

"I am Omar, son of the Naya of Mo," my companion answered, folding his arms resolutely, and regarding the potentate with supreme disdain. "Princes do not make obeisance to any but their equals."

"Am I not thine equal, then, thou son of offal?" cried Samory.

"In strength thou art, possibly, but not by birth. In order to protect thy country against the white men thou hast sought to make palaver with Prempeh of Ashanti, but I would remind thee that the rulers of Mo have never besought any aid of their neighbours."

"Thou speakest well, lad," he said thoughtfully. "Thine is a mighty kingdom, but by peace or war I will rule over it."

"Never, while I live," answered Omar with pride.

"But thou art the last of thy race. If thou diest—what then?"

"If I die, then every man in Mo will seek blood revenge upon thee, and Zomara will guide them into this, thy land, and arm them with spears of fire."

"I care nought for thy Naya nor thy pagan Crocodile-god," exclaimed the Mohammedan chief impatiently. "Bow unto my divan, or of a verity my slaves shall compel thee."

"I refuse."

"May thine entrails be burned," cried Samory in anger, and raising his hand he ordered the guards of the divan to cast us both to earth before him.

They threw us down, and their ruler, rising, placed his foot firmly on the neck of the heir to the throne of Mo, saying in a loud voice:

"As I hold thee thus within my power, so also will I, ere many moons have run, hold thy country. Cursed by the Prophet may be thy detested race. There is neither peace nor friendship, there is neither gratitude nor love in the people of Samory, and they shall be the first to curse thee. When I enter Mo every day shall the knife of the executioner be fed with blood; thy cities shall mourn the loss of their sages, husbands their wives, wives their children, and children their fathers. The country shall be devastated to its most northerly limits and it shall be rendered a wilderness of silence and sorrow."

Then withdrawing his foot, amid the plaudits of his crowd of fierce-looking courtiers, Omar sprang to his feet in rage, and facing him, cried:

"The men of Mo are forewarned already against thy designs, notwithstanding that our ex-Grand Vizier Kouaga, the son of a dungheap who betrayed us hither, hath joined thine accursed ranks. The soldiers of the Naya are still anxious for the fourth time to try conclusions with thy white-cloaked rabble. Come, march forward into Mo—thou wilt never return."

"Thou defiest me, even as thy mother hath done," he roared, his hand upon the bejewelled hilt of his curved blade. "Were it not for one fact I would smite thee dead."

"I fear thee not," Omar answered with a calmness that astounded me. "Sooner or later thou wilt, I suppose, order my death, therefore the sooner the better."

"Why insultest thou our race by bringing hither with thee this dog of a Christian?" the chief enquired, looking at me with a terrible expression of hatred.

"He cometh as my companion," replied Omar briefly.

"As thy companion he shall accompany thee to the grave," Samory cried fiercely, his eyes swimming in malice.

"So be it," answered Omar, with a smile of contempt. "May Zomara curse thy work."

"Speak, infidel!" Samory said, fixing his fiery glance upon me. "Whence comest thou?"

"From England," I answered briefly, in fear.

"From that country where dwell the accursed of Allah," he said, as if to himself. "They are pig-eaters who despise the Book of Everlasting Will and declare our great Prophet—on whom may be everlasting peace—to be a false one. Accursed be thy country, infidel! May thy people suffer every torment of Al-Hâwiyat; may their food be offal, and may they slake their thirst with boiling pitch. The white men have sent their messengers to me time after time to urge me to ally myself with them, but it shall never be recorded that Samory besought the assistance of infidels to extend his kingdom. We fight beneath the green banner of Al-Islâm, and will continue to do so until we die. Ere long, the day of the Jihad will dawn; then the forces of Al-Islâm will unite to sweep from the face of the earth those white parasites who seek the overthrow of the Faithful. Allah is merciful, and his servant is patient," added the old scoundrel piously.

There arose, as if with one voice from those assembled, the words: "Samory hath spoken! Allah send him blessings abundant!" and as they did so each fingered his amulets, little scraps of parchment whereon verses from the Korân were written in sprawly Arabic. At that moment, too, I noticed, for the first time, that right opposite us was the grinning, evil face of the black giant, Kouaga, the man who had so foully betrayed us.

We exchanged glances, and he laughed at us in triumph.

"Dost thou intend to keep me as hostage?" Omar asked his mother's enemy boldly.

"Until thou hast performed the service for which I caused thee to journey hither with our good Kouaga."

"The traitor's head shall fall," Omar blurted out with pardonable passion. Then he asked, "Thou desirest a service of me. Well, what is it?"

There was a silence so deep that a feather if dropped upon the cool floor of polished marble would have made audible sound, and Samory slowly seated himself.

"Give ear unto my words," he said a few moments later, in a clear voice, as he stroked his beard with his fat hand. "I know that within thine impenetrable kingdom many undreamed-of mysteries and wealth untold lie concealed. This is common report. Thine ancestors in their treasure-house, the whereabouts of which is known only to the Naya and to thyself, have deposited heaps of jewels and great quantities of gold, the spoils of war through many generations. I desire to ascertain, and I will ascertain from thine own lips, the exact spot where we may seek that treasure."

A look of abject bewilderment crossed Omar's features, and he turned to me, saying in English:

"All is now plain, Scars. Because only the Naya herself is aware of the spot where the treasure of the Sanoms is deposited, my mother, on the eve of my departure for England, divulged to me the secret, fearing lest she should die before my return. Kouaga was the only person who knew that my mother had thus spoken to me, and he has informed Samory and joined him for the purpose of obtaining the treasure."

"Is not Kouaga aware of the spot where the treasure is hidden?" I asked hurriedly.

"No. He came to England at Samory's suggestion to convey me hither so that they could get the secret from me. On gaining the information it is apparently their intention to make a raid, with Kouaga leading, in order to secure our wealth."

But Samory himself interrupted our consultation.

"Speak not with thine infidel companion," he roared. "Answer me. Tell me where this treasure of the Sanoms lieth."

"The son of the Naya is no traitor," he answered with hauteur.

"If thou speakest thou shalt have thy liberty. Indeed, if thou deemest fit thou shalt join the expedition into Mo, and share with us the loot," the chief urged.

"Thy words insult me," cried Omar, full of wrath. "I will never share with thee, who murdered my father, that which is my birthright."

"Very well," answered Samory indifferently. "Thou needest not. We will take it, kill thy mother and annex thy country. Already the whole kingdom is ripe for revolt, and we shall quickly accomplish the rest. I had thee brought hither because thou alone holdest a secret I desire to know—the secret of the royal Treasure-house, and—"

"And I refuse to disclose it," my companion said, interrupting the gaudily-attired potentate.

"If thou wilt not speak willingly, then my executioners shall force thee to loosen thine obstinate tongue's strings," Samory cried, frowning, while the hideous face of the black traitor grinned horribly.

"The secret of the queen is inviolable. My lips are sealed," answered Omar with resolution.

"Then my executioners shall unseal them."

"If I cannot save my country from desolation at the hands of thy lawless bands," exclaimed my friend, "I can at least preserve from thee the treasure accumulated by my ancestors to be used only for the emancipation of our country should evil befall it. Until the present, Mo hath been held against all invaders by the hosts ready at the hands of my mother and her predecessors, and even now if thou marchest over my dead body thy path will not be clear of those who will oppose thee. Remember," he added, "the army of the Naya possesses many pom-poms¹ of the English, each of which is equal in power to the fire of one of thy battalions. With them our people will sweep away thine hosts like grains of sand before the sirocco."

"Darest thou oppose my will?" cried Samory, rising in a sudden ebullition of wrath.

"Thy will ruleth me not," Omar answered, his face pale and calm. "A Sanom never betrayed his trust, even though he suffered death."

"Very well, offspring of sebel," he hissed between his white teeth. "We will test thy resolution, and cause thee to eat thy brave words. Thy body shall be racked by the torture, and thy flesh given unto the ants to eat." Then, turning to the executioner, a big negro with face hideously scarred by many cuts, who stood at his side leaning upon his razor-edged *doka*, he added:

"You know my will. Loosen the lad's tongue. Let it be done here, so that we may watch the effect of thy persuasion."

And all laughed loudly at their ruler's grim humour, while twenty slaves of the executioner rushed away in obedience to their master's command to bring in the instruments of torture.

I turned to Omar. He still stood erect, with arms folded. But his face was pale as death.

¹ Maxim guns. They are called "pom-poms" by the African natives on account of the noise they cause when fired.

CHAPTER IX

CONDEMNED TO THE TORTURE

Eager to witness the agony of the son of the powerful Naya of Mo, the crowd of evil-faced men in silken robes who surrounded their brutal chief watched with lively anticipation the preparations that were in a few moments in active progress. The black slaves of the weirdly-dressed executioner first carried in a large blazing brazier, and rolling away the thick crimson carpet placed it upon the floor of polished marble in front of Samory's divan.

A slave boy had, in response to a sign from the great chief, lit his long pipe with its bejewelled mouthpiece, and as he half reclined on the couch he smoked on calmly, regarding the execution of his orders with undisguised satisfaction.

The slaves, each wearing black loin-cloths with bunches of sable ostrich feathers on their heads that waved like funeral-plumes as they walked, brought in grim-looking instruments of iron like blacksmiths' tools, strange spiked chains, fetters with sharp spikes on the inside, and many curiously-contrived irons, each devised to cause some horrible torture, each red with rust, the rust of blood.

As my eyes fell upon them I involuntarily shuddered. Omar, my loyal friend, was about to be murdered by these inhuman brutes, and I knew that I was powerless to defend him from their fiendish wrath. Already he was standing in the grip of two black-plumed slaves, while no attempt had been made to secure me. I stood near him, breathlessly anxious, wondering what the end would be.

Presently, when all was ready, a silence fell. Then, the deep voice of Samory was heard, asking the final question:

"Speak, son of a dog," he cried, addressing my unhappy friend. "Wilt thou tell us where the secret Treasure-house of the Sanoms is situated?"

"No," Omar answered, flashing at his enemy a look of defiance. "I will not betray my mother's secret to my father's murderer."

"Then use thy powers of persuasion," he said, lifting his hand towards the executioner. "Unseal his lips, and that quickly."

"Chief of our race, whose praises rise earliest and most frequent in the presence of Allah, I am ready to obey thee," answered the hideous functionary. So saying, he took up a long iron instrument, fashioned like a pair of pincers and thrust it into the burning coals.

"Vain, O persecutor," cried Omar in a loud voice. "Vain are thy tortures against the will power of the son of the Great White Queen, whose veins are filled with royal blood. Tremble at thy doom, a myriad of my race are determined against thee, and thy throne noddeth over thine head. The fiend of darkness is let loose, and the powers of evil shall prevail."

"Hold thy peace," shouted the Moslem chieftain, enraged. "Thine own blood shall make satisfaction for those of my race slain by thy warriors when last we marched upon thy kingdom."

"The curses of Takhar, of Tuirakh, and of Zomara, dreaded by all men, be upon thee," my companion cried, lifting his voice until it sounded loud and clear through the vaulted hall, and pointing to the slave-raiding king whose power no European influence could break. "May the vengeance of my injured blood fasten upon thy life."

Those around Samory looked aghast as Omar uttered these ominous predictions in the spirit of prophecy, for they perceived he spoke as he was moved, and the whole council seemed dismayed. Silence and amazement for a few moments prevailed. Omar alone appeared unconcerned at his fate.

Quickly, however, the executioner bent over his fire, and as the wretched victim of the potentate's hatred was dragged to a kind of square iron frame that lay upon the floor, thrown down, and fastened thereto by his wrists and ankles, the fiendish-looking hireling took the long pincers, now red hot, and tore from Omar's shoulder a great piece of flesh.

A piercing scream of agony rent the air, mingled with the triumphant jeers of the excited councillors, but my friend's teeth were tightly clenched and his face blanched to the lips. Again and again cries of agony escaped him as the red-hot iron touched him, although he exerted every nerve to maintain a dogged silence. From his back, shoulders, and chest the brutal negro ruthlessly tore pieces, holding them up to the assembled court in triumph, while the air was filled with the nauseating odour of burning flesh.

The sight was so sickening that I turned faint, and with difficulty prevented myself from falling.

"Wilt thou now impart to us the knowledge that we seek?" asked Samory in ringing tones that sounded above the whispered exultations of his courtiers.

"Never," gasped Omar in a weak voice, his eyes starting from his head. "Life cannot be unchequered by the frowns of fate, but death must bring dumbness to my lips. Caution, when besmeared in blood, is no longer virtue, or wisdom, but wretched and degenerate cowardice; no, never let him that was born to execute judgment secure his honours by cruelty and oppression. Hath not thy Korân told thee that fear and submission is a subject's tribute, yet mercy is the attribute of Allah, and the most pleasing endowment of the vicegerents of earth."

"From the lips of a fool there sometimes falleth wisdom," Samory said impatiently. "Thou hast deemed it wise to thwart the will of one whose wish is law, therefore ere the bud of thy youth unfolds in the fulness of manhood, thou shalt be cut off as the husbandman destroyeth the deadly serpent in the field."

"Is there no way to build up the seat of justice and mercy but in murder?" cried Omar. At a signal from the slave-raider, however, the scarred-face brute again withdrew the pincers from the fiery brazier, and applied them once more to the wretched prince's back.

He winced and turned with such strength that his limbs, fettered as they were in bonds of blood-smearred iron, cracked, while the muscles and veins stood out knotted like cords. The spotless marble of the floor was stained by a dark red pool, becoming larger every moment as the life-blood dripped slowly from beneath.

The scene was revolting. I placed my hands over my eyes to shut out from my gaze the horrible contortions of the victim's face.

Yet those assembled were gleeful and excited. Omar was the son of their unconquerable enemy, and they delighted in witnessing his humiliation and agony. Times without number the negro with the strangely-marked visage seared the flesh of my helpless companion; then in response to his orders his black-plumed slaves drew tighter the bonds that confined his ankles and wrists until the sound of the crushing of bones and sinews reached our ears.

Again a loud shriek echoed along the high-roofed hall. Omar was no longer able to bear the excruciating pain in silence.

"Courage," I cried in English, heedless of the consequences. "Courage. Let this fiend see that he cannot rule us as he does his cringing slaves."

"Think! think of yourself, Scars!" he gasped with extreme difficulty. "If they kill me, forgive me for bringing you from England. I—I did not know that this trap had been prepared for me."

"I forgive you everything," I answered, glancing for a moment at his white, blood-smearred countenance. "Bear up. You must—you shall not die."

But even as I spoke, the executioner, who had been bending over the fire, withdrew with his tongs a band of iron with long sharp spikes on the inside now red with heat, and as the slaves released the pressure upon his wrists and ankles the sinister-faced negro placed the terrible band around the victim's waist and by means of a screw quickly drew it so tight that the red-hot spikes ran into the flesh, causing it to smoke and emit a hissing noise that was horrible.

Again poor Omar squirmed in pain and gave vent to a shrill, agonised cry. But it was not repeated.

Everyone stood eager and open-mouthed, and even the villainous Samory rose from his divan to more closely watch the effect of the fearful torture now being applied.

The victim's upturned face was white as the marble pavement. From the corners of the mouth a thin red stream oozed, and the closed eyes and imperceptible breathing showed plainly that no torture, however inhuman, could cause him further agony. He had lapsed into unconsciousness.

"Hold!" cried Samory at last, seeing the executioner about to prepare yet another torture. "Take the pagan author of malice from my sight, let his wounds be dressed, and apply thy persuasion unto him again to-morrow at sundown. He shall speak, I vow before the great Allah and Mahomet, the Prophet of the Just. He shall tell us where the treasure lieth hidden."

"O, light of the earth," cried one of the councillors, a white-bearded sage who wore a robe of crimson silk beautifully embroidered. "Though the hand of time hath not yet spread the fruits of manhood upon this youth's cheeks, yet neither the splendour of thy court nor the words from thy lips could steal from the young prince the knowledge of himself. He hath cursed thee with the three curses of the pagans Takhar, Tuirakh, and Zomara, the Crocodile-god, held in awe by all."

"Well, thinkest thou that I fear the empty threats of a youth whose hostility towards me arises from the fact that I captured his father on the Great Salt Road, and smiting off his head, sent it as a present to the Naya?" asked Samory in indignation.

But as the black-plumed slaves removed the inanimate form of Omar, the aged councillor stepped forward boldly, saying:

"I perceive, O source of light, that the dark clouds of evil are gathering to disturb the hours of futurity; the spirits of the wicked are preparing the storm and the tempest against thee; but—the volumes of Fate are torn from my sight, and the end of thy troubles is unknown."

The councillors exchanged glances and stood aghast, but Samory, livid with rage, sprang from his divan and commenced to upbraid the aged seer for his words of warning. I was not, however, allowed to listen to the further discussion of the old man's prophecy, being hurried by two of the torturer's slaves back to my underground cell, where I remained alone for many hours awaiting Omar, who, I presumed, was being brought back to consciousness in another part of the great impregnable fortress, the mazes of which were bewildering.

CHAPTER X

ZOMARA

In darkness and anxiety I remained alone for many days in the foul subterranean prison. Had the fiendish tortures been repeated upon my hapless friend, I wondered; or had he succumbed to the injuries already inflicted? Hour by hour I waited, listening to the shuffling footsteps of my gaolers, but only once a day there came a black slave to hand me my meagre ration of food and depart without deigning to give answer to any of my questions.

I became sick with anxiety, and at last felt that I must abandon all hope of again seeing him. I was alone in the midst of the fiercest and most fanatical people of the whole of Africa, a people whose supreme delight it was to torture the whites that fell into their hands as vengeance for the many expeditions sent against them. Through those dismal days when silence and the want of air oppressed me, I remembered the old adage that when Hope goes out Death smiles and stalks in, but fortunately, although wearied and dejected, I did not quite abandon all thought of ever again meeting my companion. The hope of seeing him, of being able to escape and get into the land of Mo, was now the sole anchor of my life, yet as the monotonous hours passed, the light in the chink above grew brighter and time after time gradually faded into pitch darkness, I felt compelled to admit that my anticipations were without foundation, and that Omar, the courageous descendant of a truly kingly race, was dead.

In the dull dispiriting gloom I sat hour after hour on the stone bench encrusted with the dirt of years, calmly reflecting upon the bright, happy life I had been, alas! too eager to renounce, and told myself with sorrow that, after all, old Trigger's school, or even the existence of a London clerk, was preferable to imprisonment in Samory's stronghold. Many were the means by which I sought to make time pass more rapidly, but the hours had leaden feet, and while the tiny ray struggled through above, my mind was constantly racked by bitter thoughts of the past, and a despairing dread of the hopeless future.

One morning, however, when I had lost all count of the days of my solitary confinement, my heart was suddenly caused to leap by hearing the unusual sound of footsteps, and a few moments later my door was thrown open and I was ordered by my captors to come forth.

I rose, and following them unwillingly, wondering what fate had been decided for me, ascended the steep flight of steps to the courtyard above, wherein I found a crowd of Arab nomads in their white haicks and burnouses. Samory was also there, and before him, still defiant and apparently almost recovered from his wounds, stood my friend Omar.

I sprang towards him with a loud cry of joy, and our recognition was mutually enthusiastic, as neither of us had known what fate had overtaken the other; but ere he could relate how he had fared, the Mohammedan chief lifted his hand, and a dead silence fell on those assembled.

"Omar, son of the accursed Naya whom may Eblis smite with the fiery sword, give ear unto my words," he said, in a loud, harsh voice. "Thou hast defied me, and will not impart to me the secret of the Treasure-house, even though I offer thee thy freedom. I have spared thee the second torture in order that a fate more degrading and more terrible shall be thine. Hearken! Thou and thy friend are sold to these Arab slavers for this single copper coin."

For an instant he showed us the coin in the palm of his brown hand, then tossed it far away from him with a gesture of disgust.

"Ye are both sold," he continued, "sold for the smallest coin, to be taken to Kumassi as slaves for their pagan sacrifice."

At his words we both started. It was indeed a terrible doom to which this villainous brute had consigned us. We were to be butchered with awful rites for the edification of Prempeh and his wild hordes of fanatics!

"Rather kill us outright," Omar said boldly, his hands trembling nevertheless.

"Death will seize thee quite soon enough," laughed the chief derisively. "Mine ally Prempeh will have the satisfaction of offering a queen's son to the fetish."

"Rest assured that the god Zomara will reward thee for this day's evil work," Omar cried, with a fierce look in his eyes. "Thou hast spent fiercest hatred upon me, but even if I die, word will sooner or later be carried into Mo that thou wert the cause of the death of the last of my race. Then every man capable of bearing arms will rise against thee. Standing here, I make prophecy that this thy kingdom shall be uprooted as a weed in the garden of peace, and that thine own blood shall make satisfaction for thy cruelty."

"Begone!" cried Samory, in a tumult of wrath. And turning to the Arabs he cried in a commanding tone: "Take the dog to the slaughterers. Let me never look again upon his face."

But ere they could seize him, he had lifted his hand, invoking the curse of Zomara, saying:

"Omar, Prince of Mo, has spoken. This kingdom of Samory shall, ere many moons, be shaken to its foundations."

But the fierce Arabs quickly dragged us forth, bound us when out of sight of the great chief, and led us beyond the gates of the Kasbah to where we found a great slave caravan assembled in readiness to depart. Fully one hundred black slaves, each fastened in a long chain, were lying huddled up in the shadow, seeking a brief rest after a long and tedious march. Most of them were terrible objects, mere skin and bone, and all showed signs of brutal ill-treatment, their backs bearing great festering sores caused by the lashes of their pitiless captors. The majority of them had, I ascertained, been captured in the forest wilds beyond the Niger, and all preserved a stolid indifference, for they knew their terrible doom. They were being hurried on to Kumassi to be sold to King Prempeh for sacrificial purposes.

To this wretched perspiring crowd of hopeless humanity we were bound, and amid the jeers of a number of Samory's officials who had crowded to the gate to see us depart, we moved onward, our steps hastened by the heavy whips of our masters who, mounted on wiry little ponies and heavily armed, galloped up and down the line administering blows to the laggards or the sick.

From the city away across the open grass-lands we wended our way, a dismal, sorrowful procession, but Omar, now beside me again, briefly related how, after being removed from the torture-frame, his wounds had been dressed and he had been tenderly nursed by an old female slave who had taken compassion upon him. A dozen times messengers from Samory had come to offer him his liberty in exchange for the secret of the Treasure-house, but he had steadfastly refused. Twice the scoundrel Kouaga had visited him and made merry over his discomfiture.

"But," said my friend, "the boastings of the traitor are empty words. When we laugh it shall be at his vain implorings for a speedy death."

"To him we owe all these misfortunes," I said.

"Yes, everything. But if only we get into Mo he shall render an account of his misdeeds to my mother. No mercy will be shown him, for before the Naya's wrath the nation trembles."

"But our position at the present moment is one of extreme gravity," I observed. "We are actually on our way to another of your mother's enemies, whose relentless cruelty is common talk throughout the world."

"True," he answered. "If we find the slightest loop-hole for escape we must embrace it. But if not—" and he paused. "If not, then we must meet our deaths with the calm indifference alike traditional of the Sanoms and of Englishmen."

Whenever misfortune seemed to threaten he appeared only the more composed. Each day showed me that, even though an African and a semi-savage, yet his bearing in moments when others

would have been melancholy, was dignified and truly regal. Even though his only covering was a loin-cloth and a piece of a white cotton garment wrapped about his shoulders, Omar Sanom was every inch a prince.

"If we made a dash for liberty we should, I fear, be shot down like dogs," I said.

"Yes," he answered. "The country we shall now traverse will not facilitate our flight, but the reverse. From the edge of the Great Forest to Buna, beyond the Kong mountains, it is mostly marshy hollows and pestilential swamps, while the lands beyond Buna away to Koranza, in Ashanti, are flat and open like your English pastures. We will, if opportunity offers, endeavour to escape, but even if we succeeded in eluding their vigilance death lurks everywhere in a hundred different forms."

"Well, at present we are slaves hounded on towards the dreaded Golgotha of the Ashantis," I said. "We have escaped one fate only to be threatened by one more terrible."

"True," he answered. "But down on the Coast they have an old proverb in the Negro-English jargon which says, 'Softly, softly catchee monkey.' Let us proceed cautiously, bear our trials with patience, seek not to incense these brutal Arabs against us, and we may yet tread the path that leads into my mother's kingdom. Then, within a week, the war-drums will sound and we will accompany our hosts against Samory and his hordes."

"I shall act as you direct," I replied. "If you think that by patience all may come right no complaint shall pass my lips. We are companions in misfortune, therefore let us arm ourselves against despair."

The compact thus made, we endured the toil and hardships of travel without murmur. At first our bearded masters heaped upon the queen's son every indignity they could devise, but finding they could not incense him, nor cause him to utter complaint, ceased their taunts and cuts from their loaded whips, and soon began to treat us with less severity.

Yet the fatigues of that march were terrible. The suffering I witnessed in that slave gang is still as vivid in my memory as if it were only yesterday. Ere we had passed through the great forest and gained the Kong mountains, a dozen of our unfortunate companions who had fallen sick had been left in the narrow path to be eaten alive by the driver-ants and other insects in which the gloomy depths abound, while during the twenty days which the march to the Ashanti border occupied many others succumbed to fever. Over all the marshes there hung a thick white mist deadly to all, but the more so to the starving wretches who came from the high lands far north beyond the Niger. Scarcely a day broke without one or more of the lean, weak negroes being attacked, and as a sick slave is only an incumbrance, they were left to die while we were marched onward. Whose turn it might next be to be left behind to be devoured alive none knew, and in this agony of fear and suspense we pushed forward from day to day until we at last reached the undulating grass-land that Omar told me was within a few days' march of Kumassi.

Here, even if the sun blazed down upon us like a ball of fire, it was far healthier than in the misty regions of King Fever, and at the summit of a low grass-covered hill our captors halted for two days to allow us to recuperate, fearing, we supposed, that our starved and weak condition might be made an excuse for low prices.

Soon, however, we were goaded forward again, and ere long, having traversed Mampon's country, entered the capital of King Prempeh, slaves to be sacrificed at the great annual custom.

No chance of escape had been afforded us. We were driven forward to the doom to which the inhuman enemy of the Naya of Mo had so ruthlessly consigned us.

CHAPTER XI

THE HUMAN SACRIFICE

Kumassi, the capital of the Ashanti kingdom, was, we found, full of curious contrasts. We approached it through dense high elephant grass, along a little beaten foot-path strewn with fetish dolls. It was evening when we entered it, and drums could be heard rumbling and booming far and near. Presently we passed a cluster of the usual mud huts, then another; several other clusters were in sight with patches of high jungle grass between. Then in a bare open space some two hundred yards across, were huts, and more thatched roofs in the hollow beyond. This was Kumassi.

During that day three of our fellow-sufferers, knowing the horrible fate in store for them, managed to snatch knives from the belts of our captors and commit suicide before our eyes, preferring death by their own hands to decapitation by the executioners of Prempeh, that bloodthirsty monarch who has now happily been deposed by the British Government, but who at that time was sacrificing thousands of human lives annually, defiant and heedless of the remonstrances of civilized nations.

In size Kumassi came up to the standard I had formed of it. The streets were numerous, some half-dozen were broad and uniform, the main avenue being some seventy yards wide, and here and there along its length a great patriarchal tree spread its branches. The houses were wattled structures with alcoves and stuccoed façades, embellished with Moorish designs and coloured with red ochre. Red seemed the prevailing colour. Indeed it is stated on good authority that on one occasion Prempeh desired to stain the walls of his palace a darker red, and used the blood of a thousand victims for that purpose. Behind each of the pretentious buildings which fronted the streets were grouped the huts of the domestics, inclosing small courtyards.

Passing down this main avenue, where many people watched our dismal procession, we came to the grove whence issued the terrible smell which caused travellers to describe Kumassi as a vast charnel-house; we, however, did not halt there, but passed onward to the palace of Prempeh, situated about three hundred yards away and occupying a level area in the valley dividing the two eminences on which the town is situated. The first view of what was designated as the palace was a number of houses with steep thatched roofs clustered together and fenced around with split bamboo stakes, while at one corner rose a square two-storeyed stone building. The lower part of the lofty walls of stucco was stained deep red, probably by blood, and the upper part whitewashed.

Presumably our captors had received a commission from Prempeh to supply him with slaves for the sacrifice, for we were marched into a small courtyard of the palace itself and there allowed to rest until next day, being given a plentiful supply of well-cooked *cankie*, or maize pudding wrapped in plantain leaves. Our position was, we knew, extremely critical. Attired in the merest remnant of a waist cloth, with a thick noose of grass-rope securely knotted around our necks, we lay in the open court with the stars shining brilliantly above us, unable to sleep from the intensity of our feelings. In the next court there were more than a hundred unfortunates like ourselves huddled together, ready to be sacrificed on the morrow.

Soon after sunrise, while moodily awaiting our fate, we were made to stand up for inspection by one of the King's Ocras. These men were of three classes; the first being relatives of the King and entrusted with State secrets, were never sacrificed, the second were certain soldiers appointed by the king, and the third slaves. All, on account of their distinguished services, were exempt from taxes, palavers and military services, and were kept in splendid style by the Royal exchequer, those of the inferior classes being expected to sacrifice themselves upon the tomb of the king when he died.

The tall, rather handsome, man who inspected us was an Ocra of the first class, for he wore a massive gold circle like a quoit suspended around his neck by golden chains, and, walking beneath

an enormous, gaudily-coloured silken umbrella bearing the crude device of a crouching leopard, was attended by a numerous retinue, who paid him the greatest respect.

The Arabs who had brought us there made him profound obeisance, while some members of the retinue snapped fingers with several of the Arabs, and the usual teetotal ceremony of drinking water to "cool the heads" was gone through. The inspection was a keen one, each of us being passed in review before the Ocra, who made brief comments to the Arabs at his side. As Omar passed the dark-faced official scrutinised him carefully and seemed interested to learn what the leader of the slave caravan told him in a tongue unknown to me regarding us both, for his gaze wandered from my companion to myself, and I was at once called out to pass before his keen glance. We were both kept there several minutes while the Arab presumably explained how we had been entrapped at the court of Samory. At last, however, we were allowed to retire, and very soon afterwards the great Ocra moved forward into the next court, followed by a couple of youths bearing long knives and a thin, lean-looking wretch with a stool curiously carved from a solid block of cotton wood, richly embellished with gold ornaments.

When he had gone I cast myself upon the ground in the shadow beside Omar, saying:

"After all, it would have been better if we had died in the woods than to endure this torture of waiting for execution."

"Yes," he answered, gloomily. "That Ocra who has just inspected us was Betea, a bitter enemy of my mother. He is certain to revenge himself upon us."

But even as he spoke we heard the adulatory shouts of the royal crier somewhere in our vicinity. They were more than sufficient to transform any man, white or black, into a vain despot, and as translated by Omar were in the strain of:

"O, King, thou art the king above all kings! Thou art great! Thou art mighty! Thou art strong! Thou hast done enough! The princes of the earth bow down to thee, and humble themselves in the dust before thy stool. Who is like unto the King of all the Ashantis?"

It was the preliminary of the great sacrifice!

King Prempeh, though arrogant, vain and cruel beyond measure, had, we afterwards saw, the eye of a king, which means that it was the eye of one possessing unlimited power over life and death. It was the custom for the king to be placed on the stool by the united voice of the chiefs; but immediately he was seated in him became vested the supreme power.

Soon the firing of guns and the loud beating of the great *kinkassis*, or drums ornamented with human skulls, sounded outside the walls wherein we were confined, while the air was rent by the wild yells of the excited populace. For nearly an hour this continued, and we thus remained in terrible suspense until at last the gate opened, and with the grass ropes still around our neck we were marched out of the palace under an escort of the king's slaves.

Turning to the left along the broad avenue we saw upon a long pole a human head grinning at us, two vultures perched upon it eagerly stripping it. It was, Omar told me, the head of a thief. The street was crowded with people, who shouted to their gods as we passed in procession, and presently we came to a great fetish-gallows, from the cross beams of which hung the decomposing body of a ram. Some of the men forming our escort were a strangely-dressed set, their uniform consisting of striped tunics reaching to the knee, confined round the waist by belts profusely decorated with strips of leopard skin and tiny brass bells which tinkled musically as they moved. In their belts they carried several knives, while the musket and the little round cap of pangolin skin completed their equipment.

At last we reached the grove at Bantama on the out-skirts of the town, one of the three execution places. Several thousand people had assembled around a great tree where a number of gorgeous umbrellas of every hue and material had been erected. Many were ornamented with curious devices, and the tops of some bore little images of men and animals in gold and silver. Under the centre umbrella, upon a brass-nailed chair close to the tree, sat King Prempeh in regal splendour, surrounded by a crowd of chiefs, whose golden accoutrements glittered in the sun. Three scarlet-clad dwarfs were

dancing before him amid the dense crowd of sword-bearers, fly-whiskers, court criers and minor officials. As he sat there, his thin flabby yellow face glistening with oil, he looked a truly regal figure, wearing upon his head a high black and gold crown, and on his neck and arms great golden beads and nuggets. His habit was to suck a large nut that looked like a big cigar, and as he sat there with it in his mouth it gave his face a strangely idiotic expression.

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