



THE

YELLOW GOD

BY

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"KING SOLOMON'S MINES"

"THE WITCH'S HEAD", ETC.

Resume: Major Alan Vernon withdraws from partnership with Sir Robert Aylward and Mr. Champers-Haswell, promoters of Sahara, Limited, because the editor of "The Judge" has informed him of the company's dishonorable methods. Vernon refuses to sell to Sir Robert a curious idol which has been a feature of the office for over a year, and which seems to have a talismanic quality. Vernon spends the week-end at "The Court," Mr. Champers-Haswell's home, and while there Jeeki, the negro servant, tells the story of the idol, the "Yellow God," which was brought from Africa. Miss Barbara Champers, the niece of the host, is the object of Sir Robert Aylward's and also Major Vernon's devotion. Alan finally wins Barbara's promise to become his wife but their engagement is to be kept secret. Sir Robert becomes Alan's bitter enemy on learning of the betrothal. Alan and Jeeki set out for Africa in search of treasure from the worshippers of the Yellow God, "Little Bonga." In their African adventures, Major Vernon and Jeeki are attacked by dwarfs, armed with poisoned arrows, who are driven off by a cannibal tribe, the Ogula, who take Alan and Jeeki prisoners but treat them kindly on account of the Yellow God. Alan falls sick but the Ogula take him and Jeeki up the river. They reach the Gold House where the Yellow God is placed and meet the wonderful priestess, Asika, who takes them through the treasure house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HALL OF THE DEAD.



THEY went through doors, and by long half-lit passages till they came to great gates guarded by old priests armed with spears. As they drew near to these priests the Asika loosed a scarf that she wore over her breastplate of golden fish-scales, and threw the star-spangled thing over

Alan's head, that even the priests might not see his face. Then she spoke a word to them and they opened the gates.

The Asika led the way down a passage which they saw ended in a big hall lit with lamps. Now they were in it, and Alan became aware that they had entered the treasure house of the Asika, since here were piled up great heaps of gold, gold in ingots, gold in nuggets, in stone jars filled with dust, in vessels plain or embossed, with monstrous shapes, in fetishes, and in little squares and disks that looked as though they had served as coins.

"You are rich here, lady," he said, gazing at the piles, astonished.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Yes, as I have heard that some people count wealth. These are the offerings brought to our gods from the beginning; also all the gold found in the mountains belongs to the gods, and there is much of it there. Look, these are prettier than the gold," and from a stone table she picked up at hazard a long necklace of large uncut stones, red and white in colour.

"Take it," she said, "and examine it at your leisure. It is very old. For hundreds of years no more of these necklaces have been made."

Alan thanked her, then remembered that the man called Mungana, who was the husband, real or official, of this priestess, had been somewhat similarly adorned, and shivered a little as though at a presage of advancing fate.

"Oh, my golly! Major," Jeeki ejaculated, pointing to the wall, "look there!"

"Come and see," said the Asika, and taking a lamp from that table on which lay the gems, she

led him past the piles of gold to one side of the vault or hall. Then he saw, and although he did not show it, like Jeeki, was afraid.

For there, each in his own niche and standing one above the other, were what looked like hundreds of golden men with gleaming eyes. At first, until their utter stillness undeceived him, he thought that they *must* be men. Then he understood that this was what they had been; now they were corpses wrapped in sheets of thin gold and wearing golden masks with eyes of crystal, each mask being beaten out to a hideous representation of the man in life.

"All these are the husbands of my spirit," said the priestess, waving the lamp in front of the lowest row of them, "who were married to the Asikas in the past. Look, here is he who said that he ought to be king of that rich land where year by year the river overflows its banks," and going to one of the first of the figures in the bottom row, she drew out a fastening and suffered the gold mask to fall forward on a hinge, exposing the face within.

Although it had evidently been treated with some preservative, this head now was little more than a skull still covered with dark hair, but set upon its brow appeared an object that Alan recognised at once, a simple band of plain gold, and rising from it the head of an asp. Without doubt it was the *uraeus*, that symbol which only the royalties of old Egypt dared to wear.

Meanwhile his guide had passed a long way down the line, and halting in front of another gold wrapped figure, opened its mask. "This is that man," she said, "who told us that he came from a land called Roma. Look, the helmet still rests upon his head, though time has eaten into it, and that ring upon your hand was taken from his finger."

"Indeed," answered Alan, looking at the sunken face above which a ring of curls appeared beneath the rusting helmet. "Well, he doesn't look very gallant now, does he?"

"There is one more white man," she said, though we know little of him, for he was fierce and barbarous and died without learning our tongue, after killing a great number of the priests of that day, because they would not let him go."

Jeeki advanced, and actively as a cat the priestess leaped on to his back, and reaching up opened the mask of a corpse in the second row, and held her lamp before its face.

It was better preserved than the others, so that its features remained comparatively perfect, and about them hung a tangle of golden hair. Moreover, a broad battle-axe appeared resting on the shoulder.

"A viking," thought Alan, "I wonder how he came here."

"She say," explained Jeeki, between his chattering teeth as the Asika began to talk, "that all rest these johnnies very poor crowd, natives and that lot, except one who worship false Prophet and cut throat of Asika of that time, because she infidel and he teach her better; also eat his dinner out of Little Bonga, and chuck her into water. Very wild man, that Arab, but priests catch him at last and fill him with hot gold before Little Bonga because he no care damn for ghosts. So he died saying: 'Hip, hip, hurrah! for houri, and green field of Prophet, and to hell with Asika and Bonga, Big and Little. Now he sit up there, and at night time worst ghost of all the crowd, always come to finish off Mungana. That all she say, and quite enough, too. Come on quick, she want you, and no like wait."

By now the Asika had passed almost round the hall, and was standing opposite to an empty niche beyond and above which there were perhaps a score of bodies gold-plated in the usual fashion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GOLD HOUSE.

"How you like Asiki-land, Major?" asked Jeeki, who had followed him and was now leaning against a wall fanning himself feebly with his great hand. "Funny place, isn't it, Major? I tell you so before you come, but you no believe me."

"Very funny," answered Alan, "so funny that I want to get out."

Just then the Asika arrived, and by way of excuse for his flight, Alan remarked to her that the treasure-hall was hot.

"I did not notice it," she answered, "but he who is called my husband, Mungana, says the same. The Mungana is guardian of the treasure," she explained, "and when he is required so to do, he sleeps in the Place of the Treasure and gathers wisdom from the spirits of those Munganas who were before him."

"Indeed. And does he like that bedchamber?"

"The Mungana likes what I like, not what he likes," she replied haughtily. "Where I send him to sleep, there he sleeps. But come, Vernoon, and I will show you the Holy Water where Big Bonga dwells; also the house in which I have my home, where you shall visit me when you please."

"Who built this place?" asked Alan, as she led him through more dark and tortuous passages. "It is very great."

"My spirit does not remember when it was built, Vernoon, so old is it; but I think that the Asiki were once a big and famous people who traded to the water upon the west, and even to the water upon the east and that was how those white men became their slaves and the Munganas of their queens. Now they are small, and live only by the might and fame of Big and Little Bonga, not half filling the rich land which is theirs. Slave," she added, addressing Jeeki, "set the mask upon your lord's head, for we come where women are."

Alan objected, but she stamped her foot and said it must be so; having once worn Little Bonga, as her people told her he had done, his naked face might not be seen. So Alan submitted to the hideous head-dress, and they entered the Asika's house by some back entrance.

It was a place with many rooms in it, but they were all remarkable for extreme simplicity. With a single exception, no gilding or gold was to be seen, although the food vessels were made of this material here as everywhere. The chambers, including those in which the Asika lived and slept, were panelled, or rather boarded, with cedar wood that was almost black with age, and the little furniture which they had mostly made of ebony. They were very insufficiently lighted, like his own room, by means of barred openings set high in the wall. Indeed, gloom and mystery were the keystones of this place, amongst the shadows of which handsome, half-naked servants or priestesses flitted to and fro at their tasks, or peered at them out of dark corners.

"Does my house please you?" the Asika asked of him.

"Not altogether," he answered, "I think it is dark."

"From the beginning my spirit has ever loved the dark, Vernoon. I think that it was shaped in some black midnight."

They passed through the chief entrance of the house, which had pillars of woodwork grotesquely carved, down some steps to a walled and roofed-in yard, where the shadows were even more dense than in the house they had left. Only at one point was there light flowing down through a hole in the roof, as it did, apparently, in that hall where Alan had found the Asika sitting in state. The light fell on to a pedestal or column made of gold.

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