

I

THE GENERAL PROPOSES

“MY dear General, if I had not cultivated politeness in the course of my medical career I should say that you were talking nonsense. You speak of a vast, unexplored region in Australia as if it were about as big as Yorkshire. You propose to penetrate into a country swarming with hostile blacks, and look for a gentleman whom you are not certain is there. And, lastly, you ask me to accompany you. Pardon me for saying so, but that suggestion is absolutely monstrous. I intend to spend the autumn of my life in quiet retirement, not in dodging the catering department of some cannibal queen.”

The General laughed as he bit off the end of a long black cigar. “It’s the same old Dickie Payne,” he said. “The same stubborn, conservative, severely logical, kind-hearted old Dickie. Twenty years have elapsed since you were the sawbones in my regiment, Dickie, and you have not changed an atom.”

“How about the natural process called decay?” I inquired.

“You are not decaying, Dickie,” cried the General. “You have moulted a little on top, and your waist measurement has increased half-a-dozen