

A Goddess of Africa

A Story of the Golden Fleece.

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "MISS CAPRICE," "DR. JACK'S WIFE,"
"DR. JACK," ETC., ETC.

"As she stood there upon the ledge, she suddenly raised her voice and sang. Heavens! such a voice, Bruno—I have heard Patti and many queens of song, but they never filled me with the satisfaction, the sense of ecstatic delight that crept over my very soul then."

"Perhaps the remarkable surroundings had something to do with it, for you must confess every element of the romantic was present."

"And what do you think she sang—Home, Sweet Home? It affected me weirdly. I seemed to realize that there was a bird caged against her will and fluttering her poor wings against the cruel bars, haunted perhaps by the memory of days far back in the dim past."

"I remember looking down to see what effect Rex's famous melody had upon the assembled blacks, for you know they say 'music hath charms to soothe the savage breast'; and sure enough the whole vast assemblage seemed awed and awed as I have never seen an audience moved before."

"Then suddenly the plaintive air gave place to a weird melody—to words that were foreign to my ear but to which the professor listened eagerly—you see he knows a smattering of nearly every tongue spoken since Babel was erected."

"Later he told me it was a war chant, a sort of barbaric incantation as it were, calculated to work upon the feelings of the warriors, and arouse them to a feverish state, preparatory to advancing upon some foe."

"The effect upon the imps was amazing. They no longer knelt or remained prostrate in mute adoration, but leaping to their feet, began to flourish weapons and great shields, to shout, shriek and sing, and in a minute the plain was covered with a mass of whirling, whooping blacks, eager to emulate the daring deeds of their ancestors, as pictured in the battle song."

"In the midst of the racket I looked up again and saw the fair goddess looking directly at the spot where the professor and myself crouched."

"Probably it was the height of recklessness, but I confess I never stopped to consider that—something impelled me to half rise, and make a motion toward her. Whether my action had the effect of frightening her or not, she vanished from view, and I saw her no more; but I am positive her gaze fell upon me, and that she knows white men were in the neighborhood of the kraal."

"Who she is, and what strange fortune has caused her to be worshipped by these savage barbarians—these are grave questions that have been upon my mind ever since, and even before I met you, as I have said, my determination was taken to return again to this strange land of the Zambodi, and at the risk of my life if need be, endeavor to gain an interview with this charming goddess."

"I applauded your resolution, Rex, and give you my word you shall be well backed up in your undertaking. We'll introduce a few American up-to-date methods among these tribes of the African wilds, and see what the result may be. Now tell me what followed."

"Well, it's been hot enough ever since. We managed to get away from the vicinity of the kraal all right, but fortune wearied of smiling and began to frown."

"Presently the unhappy discovery was made that but one man remained of all our band of helpers. Then we ran into a marauding regiment of blacks and had to fight for it. Each hour since that time has been fraught with new anxieties, until it seemed finally that the end had come. You found us battling for our lives. We fought in grim despair, resolved to die hard, as every true descendant of Anglo-Saxon blood should do. Further words are needless, since you were on the spot in person, and your good right hand had a share in clearing the field."

"Briefly, that is all. You will admit that it was a singular fortune that gave me a privilege the few other men of our race have enjoyed—that of actually resting my eyes

upon the mystic worship of these barbarian imps, and on the dazzling face of their fair god."

"Yes, you have been indeed favored. From what you say, the girl speaks English, since you heard her sing that grand old song."

"Yes, yes, and even distinguished the words. Her whole soul was in them, and her pronunciation as perfect as yours or mine."

"Ah! there is the doctor beckoning. Supper is ready. Come, we will eat. It must refresh you after what has passed. Then we shall have to decide upon our plan of action. Much depends upon your condition."

"I'm tough enough to stand it, and the golden opportunity is too good to be lost. You can count upon me as in favor of an immediate advance upon the enemy."

Rex had no idea he was hungry until he started in. Their own meals of late had been so meagre that this put new vim into him. He brushed aside unpleasant memories of recent experiences, and remembered only his resolve to again see the white girl whom these superstitious blacks had set above them as an idol. A god to worship; and who swayed their minds with the magic of song. When they had finished the meal, Lord Bruno conferred with Bludsoe, who motioned to the doctor, after which they walked out to relieve the sentries."

These coming in a few minutes later, Rex spoke a few words to his employer.

"Come with me, Rex," said the latter rising. "Bludsoe wants us up yonder."

Ascending the rise they reached the spot where the athletic cowboy leaned against the lone tree, and smoked his pipe.

"What's in the wind?" asked Bruno as they drew up beside the statue. Thereupon Bludsoe waved his hand in a semicircle, with not a little of the natural dramatic spirit found in forcible, decisive characters untrammelled by the false restrictions of society."

"Look yonder, and there and there. Those lights you see are signal fires of these black heathen. There's a method in the way they burn, and I'm dead sure they're war blazes, intended to gather a great force of the warriors in this region; so the sooner we skip, the better for our health, Lord Bruno," was the startling announcement he so calmly made."

CHAPTER VII.

DR. JAMESON'S RIDE AND THE SIEGE OF BULUWAYO.

Their preparations for a change of base did not consume much time, since the company of adventurers might be said to be in light marching order."

It was really the remarkable man of science who delayed their departure. The professor found himself in a quandary, since he dared not attempt to advance in the direction of Buluwayo alone, and could not venture back into the heart of the enemy's country carrying the accumulated mass of specimens with which he had burdened himself."

A happy compromise was suggested, of which he hastened to avail himself."

Near by there chanced to be a cleft in the rocks, where possibly at some time in the remote past a wild beast had made his lair. Into this recess the scientist dragged his bundles, and snugly deposited them, marking the spot so that he might find it again, provided he lived through the dangers that lay in wait for them in the African wilds—dangers more real, more terrible than the Scylla and Charybdis of the ancient mariners."

Jim Bludsoe took command. Possibly he was to a certain extent in the confidence of his employer—at any rate they held frequent whispered consultations, and by degrees Hastings was induced to relate that portion of his story concerning the appearance of the white god to the cowboy, whose interest seemed to be at once aroused."

They rode cautiously toward the north, and gradually lost sight of the Makalaka signal fires."

Rex had already taken quite a fancy to this "Goddess of Africa," and in the African wilds, in whom he recognized a man of great determination of character, a king among scouts."

Bludsoe was not a boaster, but had a good command of language, being able to point to a striking scene in words with as much power as an artist might employ in manipulating his brush. To but few is given this talent to describe a scene so that it rises before the mental vision with all the charm of a picture."

A few words casually dropped informed Rex that Bludsoe had been of that band of heroic souls who accompanied Jameson over the border into the land of the Boer."

After that he could not rest content until the ranger had given him a graphic description of the doctor's ride, the fearful battle in which such a harvest of death was reaped, and the final surrender, though Bludsoe confessed he was not present when this latter took place, having been charged with a desperate mission by "Doctor Jim," which he faithfully executed."

Following this came a brief but exceedingly graphic account of the attack on Buluwayo by the imps of the savage Matabele."

This town had previously been one of the headquarters of the renegade Zulus, who, having broken away from their parent stock, trekked far

into the northward, subdued the Makalakas, and became a terror to the country; but when reverses fell upon them in 1894 with the defeat of King Lobengula, the capital had to be delivered over to the British."

In the month of May, 1896, only a few weeks previous to the meeting of Hastings with these remarkable characters, the Matabele had swarmed out of their fastnesses, incited to war by the high priest N'dubi who had assumed the identity of the wonderful black god M'limo so feared by all the tribes of South Africa."

Buluwayo had been besieged, the women and children, over a thousand in all, were shut up in the great wooden market-place, while the men defended them."

Desperate scenes took place, which must go down to posterity in the history of that era during which South Africa was redeemed from the darkness of fetish superstition."

Those men were of the heroic order, and in those days when the cruel foe flung their compact masses against the thin line of defenders, each and every member of the little band fought with a valor that should win the Victoria Cross, remembering the innocent ones within the great shed, in whose service they were ready to die."

It was the siege of Lucknow over again, only instead of mutinous Sepoys, theordes of idolatrous Matabele flung their plumes, time and again upon the hollow square, through which they could not force a passage."

Death reaped a rich harvest, for the defenders were well armed, and heaps of the warriors, decked in their fantastic war dress, lay in spots where the terrible warfare had been most severe."

At last came succor, and never was the arrival of reinforcements more eagerly welcomed. No one heard the bagpipes in the distance as at Lucknow, where the glorious refrain—"The Campbells are Coming," reached the ears of the desperate defenders, reduced to the last extremity, and causing them to leap for the very madness of joy; but the crash of guns, the hearty English cheers, the shouts of savage dismay and the flight of the demoralized imps were quite as effective as the weird notes of the Scottish pibroch in telling the weary defenders of Buluwayo that all was well."

Hastings heard these things and pondered."

Eventually he realized that the most remarkable events for which the close of the nineteenth century would be noted, were destined to be enacted on South African soil."

Here was the theatre around which momentous results must cluster, results that interested the whole English-speaking world."

Yes, of a certainty the day had come for Africa's awakening, and the sleep of centuries was to be broken. As in America, so in India, as in Egypt and elsewhere, the glory of this achievement must in a great measure fall to the Anglo-Saxon race. Colonial methods as a general thing, save under the British and French flags, are harsh and cruel."

It is true, as a recent writer has said, "The British do not hesitate to wage unprovoked wars of conquest; but after they have obtained possession of a country they treat their subjects kindly. The natives of Natal, Zululand, Basutoland and other regions in South Africa are happy and contented. The natives of Swaziland sent a delegation to England to beg the Government to take them under its rule and protect them from the Boers. The Fellaheen of Egypt look upon the British as their benefactors, their saviours. And so it is everywhere. The Englishman calls the black man a 'nigger' and regards him as his inferior; but he never forgets that the 'nigger' is, after all, a man, entitled to humane treatment. And so the subject races under British rule increase and multiply and thrive, and actually make some progress toward civilization."

"Far different is the state of affairs in 'colonies' under other flags. The horrors of Spanish rule in South America and the Indies are well known, as witness the barbarities attending the rebellion in Cuba as well as that in the Philippine Islands. For many years the Portuguese flag has been the chief shelter of the slave trade in South Central Africa. The Dutch colonists, from the Cape to the Limpopo, have offered the natives no other choice than that between slavery and extermination. Of German rule in Africa the case of Carl Peters is a sample. Says a recent writer: 'In the Cameroons the Germans seem to have devoted their energies chiefly to the wholesale thrashing of natives, male and female, and to the repression of rebellions that have broken out in consequence of this conduct.' Naturally enough, the growth of these 'colonies' is slow. Germany has occupied Togoland, which is near

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ly half as large as New York State, for a dozen years, and yet its white population to-day comprises only seventy-nine Germans, six Frenchmen and three Englishmen. She has owned for the same time the Cameroons, a region as large as all the North Atlantic States and Virginia to boot, yet has there only one hundred and fifty-seven Germans, thirty-three Englishmen, seventeen Americans, fifteen Swedes and eight other white men. In German South-west Africa, with an area twice that of all the Northern Atlantic States, the white population after twelve years is scarcely twelve hundred."

"The fact is the Anglo-Saxon seems to be the one great colonizing race. The Latins had the start of it in America, but it has immeasurably outstripped them. The Dutch and Portuguese were the first in South Africa but must now yield place to the British. France got the first grip upon India, but had to loosen it in favor of her island rival. New Zealand and Australia are other examples of the marvelous ability of this race in founding and developing new States. Men of other blood come in later, as they came to the United States by millions, and made admirable citizens; but the pioneers are of Anglo-Saxon origin."

It is a strong, proud race, sometimes arrogant and domineering, but on the whole both just and generous. It has established in every quarter of the globe such an empire, political, commercial and intellectual, as no other in this or any day has ever dreamed of, covering six times the area of the Roman Empire at its greatest, and comprising one-third of the whole population of the globe. And with all this achieved, it is still so fresh and vigorous and full of vital energy that every would-be rival seems weak and decaying in comparison with it. It has played a great part in the history of the last century. It will dominate the doings of the century to come."

Such were the thoughts of Hastings while he listened to the story of how the fierce Matabele had been driven back toward their strongholds of the Matoppos hills, now aflame with signal fires, and echoing with the hollow music of the war drum."

No wonder that men living in a country where such events come to pass find their opportunity to prove that the age of heroes has not yet gone—no wonder they strive to emulate the many glorious examples set by Anglo-Saxon valor of past ages."

Destiny is at work, and nothing can stay the march of progress. Only a few years must pass ere the traveler will find it possible to journey from the region of the Nile to the Cape of Good Hope without once leaving territory controlled by the sons of St. George; and that day will mark a new era in the history of the so-called Dark Continent, since the blackness of superstition must give way before the torch of civilization."

The little band rode on.

Sounds of the night came to their ears, sounds that were more indicative of life than the whisper of the wind among the tops of the forest trees."

Wild animals roamed through the region, and at intervals their voices could be heard in the distance as they sought for food."

Every man kept his rifle ready for immediate use, since there could be no telling when it might be needed. Conversation had utterly ceased, only an occasional whisper being heard as Bludsoe conferred with Lord Bruno, or gave orders to his faithful fellows."

Professor Jules stood it like a stoic—small man that he was, he had spent so many years in an arduous chase after an elusive chimera, a yclept fame, that his system had in a measure become hardened, and he was thus enabled to withstand knocks which might have used up many a man apparently much stronger."

Hastings was for a time puzzled to account for his willingness to return, but finally believed he had alighted upon the true reason when he remembered a chance meeting that had occurred with a strange creature possessing a tail, and which in describing to Verdant he had declared possessed many of the attributes of a wild man."

Yes, the eager professor actually believed this might turn out to be the long sought "missing link" of Darwin's theory, and could he but make such a discovery his claim to a niche in the column of Fame was assured."

Thus, it will be seen that quite a variety of motives influenced the members of Lord Bruno's little expedition in making their way northward."

The bright stars swept on in their westward course—the moon hung

suspended in the heavens almost as round as a silver cart wheel, being near her full."

How like an old friend she seems to travelers far distant, this guardian of the night that now hangs over them in South Africa, and in a few hours will smile upon their beloved nests in England or America. How many have fondly wished they could entrust fair Luna with a message to loved ones at home; but alas, the wizard of to-day has not yet arrived at a solution of this perplexing problem."

That same old moon has looked down upon all history from the time of Adam—wars and conquests have been carried on, the spread of civilization has girdled the earth, America from being the home of the savage has become the abiding place of tens of millions whose magic influence is for the benefit of mankind. And in ages to come the calm heavenly luminary will look down upon an earth that "blossoms like the rose," upon which superstition and idolatry and darkness have no place, and where war is no longer the dread arbiter of nations."

Hastings' ruminations were suddenly distributed by a sudden exclamation from Bludsoe, who at the same time drew in his horse."

"It is an hour past midnight—the beasts are tired, and we had better rest," said the scout."

Immediately the small detachment of venturesome spirits went into camp. Every man appeared to know just what duty was assigned to him, such was the remarkable accuracy with which Bludsoe had inculcated his ideas among his followers."

In ten minutes after the word to halt was given, the little laager presented an appearance of peacefulness and rest. Horses had been hitched, sentries posted, and the remainder of the band lay upon the ground, wooing the gentle goddess of slumber."

Hastings had endured many discomforts during the last three months, and to feel a saddle under his head for a pillow, with a warm blanket between his body and the chill night air were luxuries rather than otherwise. Hence, it was not the lack of comforts to which he had become accustomed that caused him, weary as he was, to lie there and stare up at the yellow moon, glimpses of which could be seen through the branches of the trees."

Nor did the thoughts of the marvelous treasure-trove of which he had come within an ace of being possessed, have aught to do with his wakefulness."

Between his eyes and the magic orb of the moon there came in imagination the face of the fair god of the Zambodi. Again he was staring at her as she waved her white arms and sang—again in imagination he could see the spellbound imps crouching on the plain below, groveling and worshipping this angel of light who seemed to sway their destinies."

Who was she—what was she—how came such a lovely being in the midst of these savage and merciless blacks—what connection had her past life history with that of his artist friend Lord Bruno?"

These were the questions that riot through his brain and baffled his efforts to obtain sleep. Again he seemed to feel the mystic influence of the wonderful presence; again he experienced that overpowering determination to learn more of her history, and assist her to escape from confinement if, as he suspected, she proved to be a prisoner even while a god."

Over the hills in the west the moon hovered ere Rex Hastings' thoughts became an incoherent jumble, and he finally drifted away in the boat of the dream king."

There may have come to him while he slept visions of that same charming face which seemed destined to live such an influence over his whole future; but we draw the limit of our powers of divination at dreams, so that his secret must remain such."

CHAPTER VII.

MONSIEUR JULES AND THE "MISSING LINK."

There was no stirring reveille to arouse the occupants of the little camp in the heart of the enemy's country, no beating of drums or blowing of cavalry bugles such as might have marked the hour for rising in a military laager."

Instead, a hand touched the face of Rex, who opened his eyes to find the sun up, a small smokeless fire blazing in a cleft, and his friend Lord Bruno bending over him."

"Breakfast is about ready, Rex. Just give you time to dash some water in your face from the little brook yonder. This may be the last cooked meal we shall have for some days, so we'll make the most of it."

It did taste remarkably fine. Rex hardly realized how much he had missed the luxury of a hot cup of coffee until given the opportunity to indulge. They chatted over the meal, and laid all manner of plains, which no doubt would undergo the ordinary metamorphosis consequent upon the shifting surrounding conditions."

They were in no hurry to leave their present camp, since a further advance could only be made in safety under cover of darkness, owing to the danger of discovery."

Through the morning they lounged about."

The sontries were repeatedly changed, and taking advantage of the chance presented, Rex and Lord Bruno clambered up the side of a steep elevation near by, from the top of which they hoped to have a view of the surrounding country, which would aid Hastings in his efforts to locate the situation of the great kraal, upon which he and the professor had looked at the time of the white god's appearance."

The view amply repaid them for their efforts, since they were able to mark out their future course."

Smoke attracted their attention in several quarters, but Lord Bruno declared these were signals of the blacks, it being a favorite method of passing communications around."

Whether these smoke columns had

anything to do with their presence in the neighborhood was a question they could not solve, nor would Jim Bludsoe have been any better able to have read the secret in those spirals that crept into the ambient atmosphere from various hilltop signal stations."

Having accomplished all that was possible the two friends commenced the descent, which was more of a task than the climb had been. Lord Bruno had, at the suggestion of Bludsoe, carried a lasso, without which no respectable cowboy would ever mount a horse."

This rope came in useful enough on several occasions, when it was doubled over the outcropping limb of a tree, and allowed the two adventurers an opportunity to reach the foot of an abrupt descent."

Thus they arrived at the base of the hill, and entered the dense stretch of forest."

Game abounded on all sides, and but for the dangerous condition that rendered the discharge of a rifle especially hazardous, the temptation to use their weapons must have proven irresistible."

It was while they were advancing in the direction of the secret camp that the Englishman suddenly clutched the arm of his companion, and pointed to the left, as though he had discovered that which demanded immediate attention."

Rex turned his eyes in that quarter, fully expecting to see one or more black warriors in all the regalia of savage war dress, stealing along to cut off their passage to the camp."

Indeed, he instinctively half raised his rifle as though in readiness to open the ball, knowing what advantage accrues to the party taking the initiative in such affairs; but he did not fire. Instead, a broad smile flashed over his face, as though the spectacle might be of the humorous order."

The professor was in it, very much so; for at that moment there seemed to be a tug of war on the part of a large monkey and himself, between whom a rope was stretched, and the chances were apparently in favor of the gentleman of the African woods."

Rex comprehended the truth as soon as he grasped the situation. Monsieur Jules, still harping upon the possibility of fame awaiting him in the wilderness, and perhaps in hopes of running across a specimen of the "missing link," had borrowed a lasso, and wandered forth for a little stroll in the interests of science."

How in the name of all that was wonderful he had ever managed to cast that noose over the shoulder of the big monkey was a mystery that could never be explained; but he had done so, and doubtless started for camp, to examine his capture at his leisure, and determine whether it had any claims on science or merely represented a type of animal life."

The beast, however, strenuously objected to such summary proceedings. Possibly he remembered an appointment made with a dusky belle of the wildwood about this time, and concluded to start for the rendezvous."

Be that as it may, at the moment our comrades burst upon the scene the man of science, who had rashly fastened the other end of the lasso around his body, was engaged in a tremendous struggle to hold his own against the giant monkey, and being slowly but surely dragged into the depth of the woods where the beast doubtless had its home, though Jules contested every foot of ground, and strained and tugged as he planted his heels against each projecting root, all to no avail."

What the ultimate result of the tug of war might have been but for the coming of the twain upon the scene, must be left entirely to conjecture. Whether the plucky scientist would have eventually succeeded in securing the mastery, or, finding himself being dragged at the heels of the monkey be compelled in self-defense to cut loose with his knife, must remain a mystery."

At the appearance of our friends the animal redoubled his efforts, and poor Jules was tossed about like an adventurous thistle-down."

When Bruno managed to lay hold of the rope, a new element entered the game, and the beast's defeat was settled."

Jules was released, and his end of the lasso fastened to a tree. Then an advance was made from several quarters, but the beast looked so fierce in his despair, that, being deterred from using their guns, they were compelled to resort to strategy in order to accomplish his downfall."

Retreating before them the beast gradually shortened his circuit and wound himself up until he was powerless to resist and fell an easy prey to their combined assault."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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