

troutrifical, and deadened to part with his secret, now that the critical hour had come. He proposed instead to take me for a climb in the hills, which towered above the valley like mighty giants.

Quickly seeing that an undue eagerness on my part might possibly cause the Hungarian to withdraw from the compact I consented to accompany him. I took care, however, to put into my pocket an excellent revolver, for I could not know but that some band of outlaws might be in the vicinity, oppressions of the Government having rendered some of the poorer classes well-nigh desperate.

Our path lay down the valley for about half a mile, and then turned back up the great hill directly over us. Several hours we toiled on, but always higher, and at each step, as the noble panorama of a glorious landscape opened out before me, I felt that I was being well repaid.

At length the summit was reached, and I was able to look across the mountains, far into the plains of Galicia, once a province of ill-fated Poland. Yonder was the winding Vistula; here, on our right gleamed the distant towers of Lemberg; and just at our feet nestled a beautiful lakelet, a veritable "Eye of the Sea," flashing its blue waters beneath the sun. This was fed by melting snow from the surrounding peaks, and was now full to the brim. It was surely a freak of nature that rolled that tiny lake into its bed on the mountain summit.

We prepared to return, and then, for the first time, I broached the subject of the treasure. Old Karl had a way of shrinking within himself, like a tortoise, and then bursting out with startling impetuosity. As I spoke again of the tomb, he bit his poor old lips until they bled; then, as though severing the last thread that held his secret back from the world, he said, in thick and husky tones: "Yes; we shall see the lucky to-night. Our work must be done in the darkness and at once."

"Does your son know of the treasure?" I asked. "He knows nothing of its value nor location, although he is aware of its existence. The poor lad is here he choked up, and ended by tapping his forehead. "Twas the fever did it," he added a moment later, and tears trickled plentifully down the brown cheeks. "He went to Wagram, where I thought he might get better employment. When I next saw my son, some months later, his memory was darkened."

It was late when we reached the hut, but, although my fatigue was great, a hearty supper refreshed me so that by eight o'clock I was ready to set forth once more. The peasant, who never seemed to weary, now that the final determination was taken, became again feverishly anxious to bring the gold to light. The meal over we sallied forth, equipped with lanterns and a spade and pick. An eighth of a mile down the ravine was the sheepfold, and along this Old Karl silently took his way. I following. This fold was a large pen, with a covered shelter at one end and about five feet high. Passing through the bars we entered the pen, and then lighted our lanterns. I was on tip-toe with suppressed excitement. As the light streamed out I noticed in one corner a heap of rubbish. Diving into this with both hands, the peasant soon laid the ground bare, and then exclaimed: "Come! Our work is here!"

I needed no second bidding, but immediately set to work with the pick, the shepherd throwing the dirt behind us. Soon a large round boulder was exposed to view. "Behind that rock," said he, "is the cave. We may easily roll it away, for I put it there."

In an hour the whole work of excavation was done, and the mouth of a deep cavern in the hillside was opened. I dared not enter it at once, for fear of poisonous air; but old Karl, who now seemed half-dazed with excitement, crawled in. In a moment he crept back, nearly overcome with asphyxia. Plainly the air must be purified before we could proceed. While the shepherd was recovering, I went to the hut and returned at once with a large bag of powder. Placing this as far into the cave as I dared go, I laid a train to the entrance and lighted it. Immediately there was a dull flash, followed by a blinding cloud of smoke gushing from the opening. As soon as this had cleared, I took my lantern and again crawled into the cave. The explosion of the powder had driven out the foul air, and I could breathe easily. The cave was deep, but not large, and proceeding to the far end, I discovered a shelf of stone, upon which lay a huge metal coffin. Clambering upon the ledge, I carefully examined the coffin, to discover if it was anything of its age. It was apparently very old, and far too heavy for me to lift. I struck a few blows upon it with the pick, and stooped to notice the effect. It was startling and unlooked-for. A dull, yellow gleam at the point of impact was all, but quite enough to convince me that the coffin before me was doubtless of pure gold. Straightening up in astonishment, my attention was attracted to a large copper plate, fastened into the wall of the cavern just above the coffin. It was green with verdigris. Brushing this away as well as I was able, I could perceive an inscription which had evidently been in Latin.

After many minutes' study I made out a few of the letters, still decipherable, the remainder were hopelessly defaced by the chemical action of the moisture and gases in the cave, but there, still clear out and bold, were the two words—

ATTILA I I knew that I stood in the presence of the mortal remains of Attila the Hun, Scourge of God, Destroyer of Nations, and Plunderer of the Roman Empire.

The truth, as it flashed across my brain, was overwhelming; and I turned and ran to the entrance of the cavern, overpowered at the tremendous discovery I had made. Old Karl was just entering. I caught him by the collar and hugged him in a frenzy.

"Karl! Karl!" I cried, "within this vault lie the spoils of the mightiest city the world has ever seen. Beyond doubt we are in the presence of untold millions of wealth, plundered from Rome and her provinces by barbarian hordes, and buried with Attila the Hun."

Karl did not move. "The fearfullest enemy Roman civilization ever knew, extorted an almost fabulous ransom from the city, sacked its provinces, and carried away with him every piece of gold and silver his hordes could lay their hands upon. History has recorded that when he died, more than fourteen hundred years ago, he was interred in three coffins—iron, silver and gold—and that all that vast treasure was buried with him in a secret grave, secret no longer, old shepherd! The few who entered him, with all his stupendous spoil, were murdered by the army in order that no one might know the spot to disclose it. And it has remained unknown until this hour. Karl, old shepherd, we are two of the richest men in the world!"

"Silence!" was all the reply. Then again: "Think you that I was ignorant of all this? I suspected it from the beginning. But how know you the truth?"

I told him of the inscription on the copper plate, and together we returned and examined it. My companion was unacquainted with Latin, which had been much affected by the conquering Huns; but he could clearly read the name Attila staring at us from the wall of the tomb. It was too real to seem real. So soon as our excitement had somewhat abated, I inquired where we must look for the treasure. "You are standing in it," he replied. "This proved to be true. The floor of the cavern was of rock, but it was covered with silver and gold in every form of workmanship, to a depth of two feet. Crowns, such as Karl had already shown me; plate, coin, which had evidently once been in bags; ornaments of every conceivable kind, and most of them studded with the most wonderful precious stones I ever beheld; spoil of temples, caudabra and crucifixes of gold and silver; plunder of palaces, cups and small tables, and various utensils, for the most part of silver; and all thinly covered with earth which had dropped, bit by bit, from the ceiling, lay beneath our feet. We were half-dazed with excitement. As one returned to the hut, we brought to the treasure, the three trunks now empty, and several empty packing cases, and filled them with the lost wealth of Rome and her colonies, and then we had made no perceptible diminution of the vast hoard. There were doubtless one hundred million pounds sterling at our command, and we labored until long after daylight, picking and choosing the heaviest pieces of metal and choicest gems. Of gold coins alone, we gathered enough to fill my smallest trunk.

It was far into the day when we returned to the air, and replaced the stone before the mouth of the cavern. I seemed to have lived ten years in that single night, within the bowels of the mountain. The old shepherd, on the contrary, had apparently renewed his youth, and it now only remained to take it away. What he had secured I roughly estimated at the value of thirty million dollars, although there might have been twice that amount, for we had taken every jewel we could find. One piece, a beautiful gold oset, was studded with twenty rubies of rarest lustre, each worth a prince's ransom.

After many hours' discussion I persuaded the old peasant to consent to our leaving with what we had secured, showing him that at some time in the near future he could buy his peace with the Government, return to Austria, and repurchase his family estate. That then it would be far easier for us to get the remainder of the treasure, and dispose of it. In

the meantime the cavern could be secured as it had before been. Karl finally agreed to this plan, and after removing every vestige of our labor from the outside we returned to the hut. I intended to go the next morning and buy an ox team and cart to carry away the priceless boxes and trunks, and by early dawn I was on the road. Two days passed before I found what I sought. Being unfamiliar with ox driving, I employed a peasant to take the team to old Karl's hut. I was fearfully eager to get back to him, and hurried on the driver at the team's best pace; but on the afternoon of the third day, while only about two miles from the cave, we stopped a few minutes to rest upon a low summit on the opposite side of the valley. The hut, and even the sheep-fold, was plainly in sight, where I knew that old Karl was watching for my return with eager, straining eyes. The previous ten days had been so crowded with startling events that now I began to feel the strain. My accidental meeting with the shepherd and his strange story; the enormous wealth at my command; the amazing discovery of the identity of the tomb, which would make mine one of the famous names of the nineteenth century; and, lastly, the responsibility resting upon me of taking the treasure safely out of Austria to a market. All these things, which had stirred almost every emotion of my soul to its profoundest depths, now combined to overwhelm me with oppression. I was wearied in body, as well as in mind, and throwing myself on the ground, closed my eyes, and tried to think.

Visions of a stately palace on the banks of the Hudson rose before me—a magnificent pile of marble, as gloriously complete as money could make it. I would roam the world over, and where I went thousands would throng to see him who had recovered one of the lost secrets of the world. I would endow colleges, found hospitals and asylums, succour all distressed, and my name should live in history a synonym of liberality and splendour. All this was within my power, and I leaped to my feet, impelled by a vast flood of nervous energy, to proceed to the consummation.

A strange quivering ran through the ground. "For an instant I fancied that my highly wrought nerves were playing me tricks, then another long-continued tremor, and my ears were deafened by a mighty craze, as though the world were bursting asunder. I looked across the valley, where the hut lay, but could now discern it not. The giant hill, which had stood sentinel for fourteen centuries over the most magnificent treasure ever accumulated by human hands, had split in two, and was even then falling into the ravine, a frightful spectacle. A second of suspense, and, with awful roar, it struck, a vast chaos of earth and rock, and a wild cloud of dust arose and outruined the catastrophe. The shock threw me, half-tunped, to the ground. In a moment I was on my feet again, though all the hills trembled and roared with the vibration. I shrieked in pain, anguish, and despair, for it seemed as though the earth had thrown off her adhesion to the solar system, and were rushing to destruction in the voids of space; but as minutes passed the blinding dust cloud which overhung the ravine cleared, revealing the true extent of the cataclysm. Alas! for all my hopes! A million tons of granite rock were heaped upon the spot where old Karl rest his troubled soul—had built his cot and sheep-fold.

The great stain under which I had been labouring, and the shock of the appalling disaster, were too much to be borne by human nerves. I swooned away, and for many hours lay as one in the arms of death.

When I recovered I was lying in a respectable farmhouse, several miles from the scene of the calamity, whither I had been borne by an ox-driver. He was gone and the family could tell me nothing of that dreadful week within which lay the old tomb, had burst in twain, the south half toppling over upon the gully below. In a day or two I was strong enough to ride, and immediately took my way towards the broken hill. The spot where the shepherd's hut had stood was totally unrecognisable—the entire ravine had been filled almost level full. I rode as close to the edge of the wall as I dared, for loosened stones were falling off continually. There was no mystery about the great upheaval.

In the half of the hill yet standing I could see what had been a great hollow basin, evidently of volcanic origin, showing traces of the recent presence of water. Almost straight from this through what had been the centre of the mountain, was a channel, terminating at the lake-bed on the summit. The water from the lake had doubtless been centuries in percolating through to the basin beneath. Once this communication was established, however, the channel must have rapidly enlarged. It looked to be four feet in diameter. The weight of the water in this tall column, and in the rising lake, acting with growing and resistless power upon the accumulated water in the lower chamber, had burst asunder the mountain as surely as ever was herculean labor performed by hydrostatic pressure.

I made no effort to locate the possible whereabouts of the hut and sheep-fold; that had been a hopeless task

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