

A West African Story.

By the author of "Rising of the Brass Men."

BEHIND the coast-line of West Africa, from the Gambia to the Congo, lies a wild country of dense forest and dismal swamp intersected here and there by sluggish rivers and shallow lagoons. Although the Portuguese, Dutch and English have traded along the coast for more than four hundred years, civilization has but lightly touched the savage inhabitants of the interior, and "battle, murder and sudden death," the "Ju Ju" or fetish worship, with its horrible rites of human sacrifice, and in many places cannibalism, are prevalent.

In British dominions a few District Commissioners and other officers in charge of small detachments of Haussas, who are Mohammedan black troops, maintain, or struggle to maintain, some kind of order along the frontier, among many thousands of savages.

Now it happened that one morning in April, Captain Wayne, in command of a dozen Haussas, sat out on the verandah of his house, which was situated near the headwaters of a muddy river on the frontier of the Gold Coast and the Shantee country, and looked across the misty landscape that lay before him. By and by as the sun rose the mist gathered itself together into heavy wreaths and rolled away to seek a hiding-place till nightfall among the swamps leaving open to view mile after mile of dense forest that stretched away to the blue line of distant mountains on the northern horizon, while near at hand three winding rivers and a wide lagoon lay glittering in the early sunshine.

The captain lay wearily back in his chair, haggard and yellow-faced from constant attacks of the malaria fever, the scourge of the land, and oppressed by the intense loneliness, for he had seen no white man for more than a year. Instead of the slight coolness that might have been hoped for in the morning breeze, the air was hot and heavy with the smell of vegetation rotting in the swamps and the river mud.

At this moment Akoo, sergeant of Haussas, came up the stairway leading to the verandah, and saluting the officer, said: "Bush man come in, sah, bring little word, say Kasro people chop two men, make Ju Ju."

"Hang the Kasro people," said the captain aside. "I must stop the Ju Ju sacrifice, and yet if there's any bloodshed, it will mean the sending up of an expedition and unending trouble. Akoo, get ten men ready, rifles and twenty rounds of ammunition."

The sergeant saluted as he went away, and shortly afterwards a bugle-call rang out, and Captain Wayne, weak and trembling from fever, marched into the forest at the head of his men. Tall, splendidly developed negroes from the far north, staunch Mussulmans, lighter in color and in every way superior to the coast tribes, the Haussas will follow their white officers with a courage and devotion equal to that of any of Her Majesty's troops.

Meantime, in the Shantee town of Kasro, a great Ju Ju feast was being held at which the chief administered justice and various rites were performed by the fetish men to propitiate their gods. The mud-built, palm-thatched huts lay in rows beneath the shade of feathery palm trees around a great open square. In the centre of this, beneath the shade of a huge tree consecrated to the Ju Ju or fetish gods, sat chief Kasro, attired in a cast-off steamboat officer's uniform, and a dragoon's brass helmet. Over his head stretch-

ed the spreading arms of the tree from which hung long strings of charms, human skulls, bones, sharks' teeth, leopards' claws and similar odds and ends, the symbol of the fetish authority, for over native warfare, trade and justice, or rather injustice, the Ju Ju man reigns supreme. Round the king stood rows of native warriors, naked with the exception of a narrow strip of cloth around the loins, while the whole of the square was filled by an excited crowd of men and women, equally scantily attired, singing and dancing in groups round a crouching musician tapping the native skin drum, firing their long flintlock guns in the air, or reeling about hopelessly intoxicated with palm wine. Two stalwart slaves held a large umbrella, the symbol of authority, over the chief's head, while on either side stood a Ju Ju man to act as counsellor, as the chief dismissed one after another the trembling prisoners who awaited his sentence. Lying on the ground bound hand and foot with palm fibre were two men evidently of a different tribe, entirely naked, their black skins shining as the perspiration beads rose upon them, for they were purposely placed in the fierce glare of the sun, and smudged the stripes of white clay with which they were daubed.

When the last criminal was led trembling away, the two Ju Ju priests advanced towards a fire of scented wood, round which lay a number of brass vessels; and as the chief raised his hand a bloodthirsty roar broke from the excited crowd, while the guards dragged forward the white-painted victims, and loosening their hands, placed one on either side of the fire. A huge naked negro with a necklace of bones now advanced, a heavy straight sword in his hand, while the priests threw armfuls of an aromatic wood on the fire, so that the whole square was filled with the odor. The executioner stepped forward and swung his sword round his head, while a fresh howl like that of a pack of hungry wolves burst from the crowd, when the chief rose to his feet and ordered him to desist.

Towards the outside of the square the crowd were shouting, pushing and struggling, and a few moments later fell away left and right, while down the clear passage came Captain Wayne at the head of ten Haussas with fixed bayonets. His khaki uniform was torn and plastered with mud, and the captain between weakness and fever could scarcely stand erect. But keeping himself in hand by a desperate effort he walked up to the two shivering wretches and laid his hand on the shoulder of the nearest; then turning to the chief, he said in his own tongue: "I demand these men, in the name of the White Queen."

There was a roar of fury from the crowd, while the chief, waving his hand for silence, said: "I wish you no harm, go in peace, for I desire no war with the White Queen; but it is not good to meddle with the gods of the Shantee. Wherefore go while you are safe, before my people tear you limb from limb."

"Though we are but one white man and ten Haussas, yet for every one of us who die, we will kill ten of your people. Also the arm of the Queen is long, and afterwards the troops will come and burn your town and stamp it flat."

As he spoke the captain fixed his eyes on the chief's face and the latter lowered his head and moved uneasily, then he whispered for a little with his Ju Ju priests. At length he lifted his hand and said: "Your words are good; take the men and go in peace."

At the head of his troopers the captain turned and faced the angry crowd, the prisoners, now unbound, standing between two files of Haussas. In front and on every side surged a furious mob shouting and shaking their barbed spears and flintlock guns.

"Fix bayonets, Haussas—march!" called the captain, as he drew his revolver, and the angry negroes fell away on either side before the line of glistening steel and calm unmoved man. So they passed slowly and deliberately