

THE YELLOW GOD

By H. RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "King Solomon's Mines," "The Brethren," "Benito," "She," Etc., Etc.

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CHAPTER XVII (Continued.)

"No, no, Major. I make her swear not to spit on ghosts of all her husbands, and by Big Bona himself. She sits tight as wax, because she thinks they haunt her if she don't. I see, by when I dead. P'raps she get to Ogula country and p'raps not. If she don't, can't help it, and no harm done. Break my heart, but only one old woman like me. Anyhow, she hold tongue, that main point, and I really very glad to find my ma, who never hoped to see again. Heaven very kind to Jeeki, he give him back to family bosom," he added innocently.

That day there were no excitements, and to Alan's intense relief he saw nothing of the Asika. He was weary of witchcraft and bloodshed on the previous night, weariness and silence seemed to have fallen upon the town. At any rate no sound came from it that could be heard above the low, constant thunder of the great waterfall rushing down its precipice, and in the cedar-shadowed glades where Alan walked till he was weary, at least Jeeki and the Ogula savages, not a soul was to be seen.

On the following morning, when he was sitting moodily in his room, two priests came to conduct him to the Asika. Having no choice, followed by Jeeki, he accompanied them to her house, masked as usual, for without this hateful disguise he was bound to stir. He found her lying upon a pile of cushions in a small room that he had never seen before, which was better lighted than most in that melancholy abode, and seemed to serve as her private chamber. In front of her lay the skin of the lion that he had sent as a present, and about her throat, heavily set in gold, hung a necklace made of its claws, with which she was playing idly.

"Say, Vernon," she asked in her languorous voice, "can you not stir a yard without that ugly black dog at your heels? Do you bring him to protect you? If so, what is the need? Have I not sworn that you are safe in my hands?"

Alan made Jeeki interpret this speech then answered that the reason was that he knew but little of her tongue.

"Can I not teach it to you alone, then, without this ugly black dog at your heels? Well, it will not be for long," she looked at Jeeki in a way that made him feel very uncomfortable.

OPEN SECRETS.

To overcome the well-grounded and reasonable objections of the more intelligent to the use of secret, medicinal compounds, Dr. R. V. Pierce, of Buffalo, N. Y., some time ago, decided to make a bold departure from the usual course pursued by the makers of put-up medicines for domestic use, and so published broadcast and openly to the whole world, a full and complete list of the ingredients entering into the composition of his widely celebrated medicines. Thus he has taken the many users of his medicines into his full confidence. Thus too he has absolutely and completely removed his medicines from among secret nostrums of doubtful merits, and made them REMEDIES OF KNOWN COMPOSITION.

Dr. Pierce's medicines are now in a class all by themselves—being absolutely and in every sense Non-secret.

By this bold step Dr. Pierce has shown that his formulas are of such excellence that he is not afraid to subject them to the fullest scrutiny.

Not only does the wrapper of every bottle of Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery, the famous medicine for weak stomach, torpid liver or biliousness and all catarrhal diseases wherever located, have printed upon it, in plain English, a full and complete list of all the ingredients composing it, but a small book has been compiled from all the different schools of practice, containing very numerous extracts from the writings of leading practitioners of medicine, endorsing in the strongest possible terms, each and every ingredient contained in Dr. Pierce's medicines. One of these little books will be mailed free to any one sending address on postal card or by letter, to Dr. R. V. Pierce, Buffalo, N. Y., and requesting the same. From this booklet it will be learned that Dr. Pierce's medicines contain no alcohol, narcotics, mineral agents or other poisonous or injurious agents and that they are made from native, medicinal roots of great value; also that some of the most valuable ingredients contained in Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription for weak, nervous, over-worked, "run-down," nervous and debilitated women, were employed, long years ago by the Indians for similar ailments affecting their squaws. In fact, one of the most valuable medicinal plants entering into the composition of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription was known to the Indians as "Squaw-Weed." Our knowledge of the uses of not a few of our most valuable native medicinal plants was gained from the Indians.

As made up with improved and exact processes, and with the use of specially designed chemical apparatus, the composition of these medicines, as well as the working formula and peculiar processes, apparatus and appliances employed in their manufacture, are withheld from publicity that Dr. Pierce's proprietary rights may not be infringed and trepassed upon by unprincipled

Vernon," and without waiting for his permission, she sat up and did so. "Ah!" she went on, "we shall be happy when we are married, shall we not? Do not be afraid, Vernon, I will not eat out your heart as I have those of the men that went before you. We will live together until we are old, and die together at last and together be born again, and so on and on till the end, which even I cannot foresee. Why do you not smile, Vernon, and say that you are pleased, and that you will be happy with me, who loved you from the moment that my eyes fell upon you in sleep? Speak, Vernon, lest I should grow angry with you."

"I do not know what to say," answered Alan despairingly through Jeeki, "the honor is too great for me who am but a wandering trader who came here to barter Little Bona against the gold I need—to support my wife and family, he was about to add, then remembering that this statement might not be well received, substituted, "to support my old parents and eight brothers and sisters who are dependent upon me, and remain hungry until I return to them."

"Then I think they will remain hungry a long time, Vernon, for while I live you shall never return. Much as I love you I would kill you first," and her eyes glittered as she said the words. "Still," she added, noting the fall in his face, "if it is gold that they need, you shall send it them. Yes, my people shall take all that I gave you down to the coast, and there it can be put on board our forefathers have handed on to us? Tell me, Vernon, for I would know?"

"You make your own hell," answered Alan when, with the help of Jeeki, he understood her talk.

"I must think. The thing is big. I wander in blackness; I will speak with your own language; now, what else is wrong with me?"

Now Alan thought that he saw an opportunity for a word in season, and made a great mistake.

"I am sorry," she answered in a low voice, "but I have for every day, I forgot that it might seem strange in your eyes. It has always been the custom for the Asika to do as I did at feasts and sacrifices, but perhaps that is not the fashion among your

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women; perhaps they always remain veiled, as I have heard the worshippers of the Prophet do, and therefore you thought me immodest. I am very, very sorry, Vernon, to pray you to forgive me, for an ignorant, and only do what I have been taught."

"Yes, they always remain veiled," stated Alan, though he was not referring to their faces, and at the words passed his lips he wondered what the Asika would think if she could see a ballet at a London musical.

"Is there anything else wrong?" she went on gently, "if so, tell me that I may set it right."

"I do not like cruelty or sacrifices, O Sir," she said, "I have told you that blood is around to me, and at the feast those men were poisoned and you mocked them in their pain; also many others were taken away to be killed for no crime."

She opened her beautiful eyes and stared at him, answering,

"But, Vernon, all this is not my fault; they were sacrificed to the gods, and I did not sacrifice them. I must be sacrificed by the priests and wizards who live to sacrifice. Yes, myself, I should be made to drink the poison, and then they will kill me, like a snake with a broken back. Oh, how I escaped the vengeance of the people, the gods themselves would kill me and raise up another in my place. Do they not sacrifice in your country, Vernon?"

"No, Asika; they fight if necessary and kill those who commit murder. But they have no fetich that asks for blood, and the law they have from heaven is a law of mercy."

"All this is strange to me," she said. "I was taught otherwise. Gods are devils, and must be appeased by bringing misfortune on us; men must be ruled by terror, or they would rebel and pull down the Great House; doctors must learn magic, or how would they avert spells? wizards who are killed, or the people would perish in their net. May not who we live in a hell strive to beat back its flames with the weapons our forefathers have handed on to us? Tell me, Vernon, for I would know?"

"Capital notion that, Major," said Jeeki, much relieved. "She not want bury you just at present; next year perhaps, but not now. I tell him." And he came back again, with the help of Jeeki, he understood her talk.

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though pity to part with all that cash, because 'spot someone bag it.' Alan reflected a white.

"Don't you see, Jeeki, that here is a chance, if a very small one, of getting a message to the coast. Also is quite clear that if we are ever able to escape, it will be impossible for us to carry this heavy stuff, whereas if we send it to the coast, it will be something to do. Go now, and send a message to the coast, and I will be waiting for you."

The message was sent, and an hour later a dozen of the native craftsmen arrived with rude tools and a supply of planks cut from a kind of iron-wood or ebony tree. They prostrated themselves to Alan, then the master of them, rising, incontinently began to mutter, "Jeeki, marked neck."

That worthy sprang back and asked what in the name of Bona, Big and Little, they were doing, whereupon he explained with humility that the Asika had said that she thought the white lord wanted the wood to make a box to bury his servant in, as he, the said servant, had offended her. That morning, and doubtless the white lord wished to kill him on that account, or perhaps to put him away under ground alive.

"Oh, my golly!" said Jeeki, shaking till his great knees knocked together, "oh, my golly! here pretty go. She think you want bury me all alive. That is what she want to do, and play Gossamer when she wish talk alone with you. Oh, yes, I see her little game."

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With the assistance of Jeeki, who kept at a respectable distance, he informed her that there was a message in writing to tell the white men at the coast to forward the gold to his starving family.

"Oh!" she said, "I never heard of writing. You shall teach it me. It will serve to pass the time till we are safe afterwards, as we shall never be separated any more, and words are better than marks upon a board."

"Yes," she added cheerfully, "I can send away this black dog of yours," as she looked at Jeeki, "and he can write to us. No, I cannot, for an accident might happen to him; and they say you say that if he dies, you die also, so he must stay here always. What have you in those little boxes?"

"The gold you gave me, Asika, packed in loads."

"A small gift enough," she answered contentedly, "would you not like more, since you value that stuff? Well, another time you shall send all you want. Meanwhile the porters are waiting for the gold, and they must be sent me word, and ten sparrows one to take the place of any who die. But how they will find their way, I know not, since none of them have ever been to the coast."

An idea occurred to Alan, who had small faith in Jeeki's "Ma," as a messenger.

"The Ogula prisoners could show them," he said "at any rate as far as the forest, and after that they could find out. May they not go, Asika?"

"If you will," she answered carelessly. "Let them be ready to start tomorrow, at the dawn, all except the chief, Fahni, who must stop here as a hostage. I do not trust those Ogula, who more than once have threatened to make war upon us," she added, then turned and bade the priests bring in the bearers and receive their instructions.

"Presently they came, picked men all of noting the gold, and with them the Asika captain, and with them the Ogula, whom she summoned also."

"Go where the white lord sends you," he said in an indifferent voice, "carry the gold to the coast, and do not know where it is, but these man-eaters will show you some of the way, and if you fall in the business and live to come back again, you shall be sacrificed to Bona at the next feast; if you run away, then your wives and children shall be sacrificed. Food shall be given you for your journey, and gold to buy more when it is done. Now, Vernon, tell them what they have to do."

So Alan, or rather Jeeki, told them, and these directions were so long and minute that before they were finished Alan grew tired of listening and went away, saying as he passed the captain of the company:

"Remember my words, man, succeed or die, but of your land and its secrets say nothing."

"I hear, answered the captain, prostrating himself."

"That night Alan summoned the Ogula and spoke to them through Jeeki in his own language. At first they declared that they would not leave their camp, preferring to stay and die with him."

"Not so," said Fahni, "go, my children, that I may live, go and gather the tribe, all the thousands, and bring them to attack Aski-land, to rescue me if I am still alive, or to avenge me if I am dead. As for those bearers, do them no harm, but send them on to the coast with the white man's goods."

So in the end the Ogula said that they would go, and when Alan woke up on the following morning, he was informed that they and the Aski porters had already departed upon their journey.

Alan rose and cast his eyes upon the floor, then he dismissed the matter from his mind, for to tell the truth he never expected to hear of them any more.

CHAPTER XVIII. Alan Falls Ill.

After the departure of the messengers a deep melancholy fell upon Alan, who was sure that he had now no further hope of communicating with the outside world. Bitterly did he reproach himself for his folly in having ever journeyed to this hateful place in order to secure—what? About £100,000 worth of gold which, of course, he never would secure, as it would certainly vanish or be stolen on its way to the coast. For this gold he had become involved in a dreadful complication which would cost him much misery and sorrow, and which, since he could not marry that beautiful savage, Asika, and if he refused her she would certainly kill him in her outraged pride and fury.

Day by day she sent for him, and when he came, assumed a new character, that of a woman humbled by a sense of her own ignorance, which she was anxious to amend. So he must play the role of tutor to her, telling her of civilized peoples, their laws, customs and religions, and instructing her how to write and read. She listened and learned submissively enough, but all the while Alan felt as one might who is called upon to teach tricks to a drugged panther. The drug in this case was her passion for him, which appeared to be very genuine. But when it passed off, or when he was obliged to refuse her, what, he wondered, would happen then?

Anxiety and contentment told on him far more than all the hardships of his journey. His health ran down, he became fatigued, and had bad luck would have it, walking in that damp unhealthy cedar garden out of which he might not stray, he contracted the germ of some kind of fever which in autumn was very common in this poisonous climate. Three days later he became delirious, and for a week after that hung between life and death. Well was it for him that his medicine chest still remained intact, and that, recognizing his own symptoms before his head gave way, he was able to instruct Jeeki what drugs to give him at the different stages of the disease.

For the rest his memories of that dreadful illness always remained very vague. He had visions of Jeeki and of a robed woman whom he knew to be the Asika, bending over him continually. Also it seemed to him that from time to time he was talking with Barbara, which even then he knew must be absurd. But he never got up on anything and do to bed another. If she say she send gold, she send it.

weak that it was an effort to him to lift his hand. He started about him, and quite cool and without pain, but so was astonished to see the white head of Jeeki rolling uneasily to and fro upon the cushions of another bed near by.

"Jeeki," he said, "are you ill, too, Jeeki?"

"At the sound of that voice his restlessness started up violently.

"What, Major, you awake?" he said. "Then thanks be to all gods, white and black, yes, and yellow too, for I thought your goose cooked. No, no, Major, I not ill, only Asika say so. You go to bed, so she make me go to bed. You get worse, she treat me cruel; you not better, she stuff me with food till I burst. All because you tell her that you and I die same day. Oh Lord! poor Jeeki think his end very near just now, for he know quite well that she not let him breathe ten minutes after you peg out. Jeeki never pray so hard for anyone before as he pray this week for you, and he think I think he do the trick, he and that medicine stuff, which make him feel very bad in stomach, and he groaned as under the weight of his many miseries."

Weak as he was, Alan began to laugh, and that laugh seemed to do him more good than anything that he could remember, for after it he was sure that he would recover.

Just then an agonized whisper reached him from Jeeki.

"Look out!" it said, "here come Asika, go sleep and seem better, Major, please, or I catch it hot."

So Alan almost shut his eyes and lay still. In another moment she was standing over him, and he noticed that her hair was disheveled and her eyes were red as though with weeping. She scanned him intently for a little while, then passed on to where Jeeki lay and appeared to pinch his ear so hard that he wriggled and uttered a stifled groan.

"How is your lord, dog?" she whispered.

"Better, O Asika, I think that last medicine do us good, though it make me very sick inside. Just now he spoke to me and said that he hoped your heart was not sad because of what I did at all this time in his dreams he had seen and thought of nobody but you, O Asika."

"Did he?" asked that lady, becoming intensely interested. "In this talk, dog, why is he ever calling upon one Bar-bar-a? Surely that is a woman's name?"

"Yes, O Asika, that is the name of his mother, also of one of his sisters, whom, after you, he loves best of anyone in the whole world. When you are here he talks of no one but you. Al-though he is so sick, and he remembers white man's custom which tells him that it is very wrong to say sweet things to lady's face till he is quite near passing away. After that they say they always."

She looked at him suspiciously, and muttered:

"Here it is otherwise. For your own sake, man, I trust that you do not lie. She left him, and drawing up to the side of Alan's bed, sat herself down and examined him carefully, touching his face and hands with her long, thin fingers. Then noting how pale and wasted he was, of a sudden she began to weep, saying between her sobs:

"Oh! if you should die, Vernon, I will die also, and be born again, not as Asika, as I have been for so many generations, but as a white woman, that I may be with you." "Only first," she added, setting her teeth, "I will sacrifice every wizard in this land, and they have brought the sickness on you by their magic, and I will burn Bona-Town and cast its gods to melt in the flames, and the Mungana with them. And then still I will let you live out my life, and again she began to weep very piteously and to call him by endearing names and pray him that he would not die.

Now Alan thought it time to wake up. He opened his eyes, stared at her vacantly, and asked if it were raining, which indeed it might have been, for her big tears were falling on her face. She uttered a gasp of joy.

"No, no," she answered, "the weather is very fine. It is I—I who have rained, because I thought you die." She wiped his forehead with the soft linen of her robe, then went on, "But you will not die; say that you will live, say that you will live for Vernon."

He looked at her, and, feeling that he was, the awfulness of the situation sank into his soul.

"I hope that I shall live," he answered. "I am hungry, please give me some food."

Next instant there was a tumult near by, and when Alan looked up again it was to see Jeeki, very lightly clad, flying through the air, and shouting:

"It will be here presently," she said. "Oh! if you knew what I have suffered, if you only knew. Now you will recover whom I thought dead, for this fever passes quickly, and there shall be a sacrifice—no, I forgot, you hate sacrifices—there shall be no sacrifice. There shall be a thanksgiving, and every woman in the land shall bear bonds to husband or to lover, and take him whom she desires without reproach or loss. I will do as I would be done by, that is the law you taught me, is it not?"

This novel interpretation of a sacred doctrine, worthy of Jeeki himself, so paralyzed Alan's enfeebled brain that he could make no answer, nor do anything except wonder what would happen in Aski-land when the decree of his priestess took effect. Then Jeeki arrived with something to drink, which he swallowed with the eagerness of the convalescent, and almost immediately went to sleep in good earnest.

CHAPTER XIX. The Treasure House.