

FURTHER DOINGS OF THE MAJOR.

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(Author of "The Major's Big Talk Stories," "The Bewildered Quercus," &c.)

THE PROPHECY.

At last the cup of the cruelties of King Pip was quite full.

It was the annual "custom," or annual butchery, at Lotoli. The tyrant had feasted on horrors all the forenoon. Then he had dined luxuriously in the open air, surrounded by some caged cannibals whom his warriors had captured in a raid. Their hungry faces, he said, improved his appetite, just as the sound of rain on the roof of his royal hut made him appreciate the dryness and comfort within.

The crowning attraction of the festival came last. The conquered rebel chieftains, Tookee, Hookee, and Tehee, were ushered into the royal presence, stepping proudly and defiantly, though they were chained together. They had been sentenced to fight a huge gorilla that had been provoked into pursuing a canoe on the Gaboon, and soon captured in a net and towed to shore half drowned. Now it was caged, and ready to minister to the vengeance and amusement of the king.

A choice of weapons had at first been offered to the prisoners. But that very morning a famous soothsayer, a seventh son of a seventh daughter and born with an odd number of toes, had said ominously: "The national weapon shall slay the great ape, and the slayer shall die a king."

In consequence of this alarming prediction the superstitious despot forbade the use of the bow, for all his councillors agreed that it was the national weapon of the Lotolies. After the rebels should have been slain, Pip purposed winding up the sport, and securing himself for life upon the throne in accordance with the prophecy, by shooting the gorilla with arrows—from his safe and comfortable seat above the walls of the arena.

Meanwhile he was in fine spirits, and in a pleasurable state of expectancy, for he had never seen a gorilla killing a human being. It would be a new sensation, and he expected to enjoy it as much as Squeers enjoyed his first opportunity of thrashing a boy in a cab. He had already rewarded the courtier to whose suggestion he owed so agreeable a prospect.

Tookee, Hookee, and Tehee were finally given only three weapons—a sword, an assegai and a lasso.

They drew lots for first choice. Hookee, who won, selected the assegai, thinking it *might* be the national weapon. For the same reason Tookee, who drew the second longest lot, chose the sword, which was of native manufacture. The lasso only remained for Tehee, and he had never used one in his life!

They were to encounter the gorilla one after the other.

Tookee who was himself of royal blood, entered the arena determined not to give his cruel kinsman Pip the extra pleasure of seeing him quail. He rushed straight towards the gorilla's cage, which was not yet opened, evidently hoping to gain an advantage before the brute could get out. But the door was pulled up from above a moment too soon for the brave Tookee, and the huge ape bounded into the open arena, beating an echoing note of defiance upon his ample bosom. The undaunted chief lunged swiftly at the creature's heart, with such force that the worthless blade, encountering a rib, snapped in two. One crushing blow on his forehead from his enemy, and Tookee had died like a warrior of Lotoli.

Hookee had been dragged into the rebellion against his will, and had vainly begged the king to pardon him on that ground. However, he entered the lists with some appearance of courage, and brandishing his assegai. But the fate of his friend had unmanned him a little, and destroyed his trust in his weapon. When the hideous brute renewed his deep, angry roar, Hookee trembled and fled, prodding blindly behind him at his pursuer. But Hookee might as well have tried to check a tornado with a paper fan. In a moment the gorilla had broken the spear's shaft. In another moment he had felled Hookee with a blow that was less effective than the one which had finished poor Tookee, only because the latter chief had been advancing gamely against the stroke, while Hookee was running away from it as fast as his legs would carry him. He who fights and runs away, may live to fight another day.

Before the gorilla had time to make a sure end of his motionless foe, Tehee bounded from the prisoner's door with the agility of a harlequin, and waved his hand gracefully to the audience. He carried no lasso, and was armed only with an inspiration. His supple frame glistened in the sun, having been freshly anointed; and his new, purple-bathing-drawers struck some of the spectators as showing too frivolous a regard for style in one about to die. But the medicine-man who had made the prophecy in the morning, muttered "Mumbo," which afterwards increased his credit very much; for "Mumbo" was a learned word, unknown to the Lotolies, and which, as afterwards interpreted by the soothsayer himself, meant "appropriate." It was, in fact, a cabalistic term, whose meaning varied a good deal according to circumstances, making it quite handy for an anti-vernacular, highly oracular, feather-his-nest old man.

Tehee answered the ape's angry challenge with a loud and defiant Ethiopian chuckle, as the man and his deformed image rushed swiftly at each other. Not a woman there but trembled and prayed for the graceful and intrepid Tehee. At the decisive moment that active chieftain projected himself into the air, in a horizontal posture and head foremost, as a swimmer takes a header into the water off a spring-board. In fact, he converted himself into a human missile. His head flew safely through the terrible arms of his surprised antagonist, and struck the latter full but just under the breast bone. The gorilla fell without a groan—not because he felt no pain, but because he had not a single breath left in his body. His mighty right hand, which had fractured Tookee's skull, came down on Tehee only in a

tremendous spunk, so that it broke no bones, if it did detract somewhat from the glory of the victory, and remind the victor unpleasantly of his nursery days.

At this point in the proceedings Hookee opened both eyes. He had half-opened one a few seconds earlier, but, the contest being then undecided, he had closed it again, and resumed his judicious inaction. Now he sprang fearlessly to his feet, and, picking up the head of his broken assegai, buried it in the neck of the fallen gorilla. Then he looked proudly and victoriously around the audience.

"Stand against the wall!" shouted Tehee to the posing Hookee.

No sooner had the latter wonderingly obeyed this mandate, than the aspiring Tehee bounded on his shoulders, and, grasping the top of the wall, drew himself up out of the arena. He snatched a sword from the captain of Pip's body-guard, and dealt a death-blow to the cruel king. Then he seated himself upon the throne, and nominated a friend of his own captain of the guard.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

So thought the medicine-man. And before the soldiers had decided how to act, he started to his feet.

"Tehee hath overcome the gorilla with the national weapon," he cried, "and he shall die a king. The head is the national weapon of the African and the ram. Long live the great King Tehee!"

"Long live King Tehee!" echoed the late Pip's Carolinian interpreter; and, in his enthusiasm, forgetting he no longer wore such an article, he raised his hand to toss his hat into the air. He chucked up a wisp of his wool instead, and the expression of his face was not blissful when he felt his mistake. A few minutes later he was arrested on a charge of tearing his hair in spite and mortification at the change of dynasties, and he lost his valuable post of interpreter in consequence.

"Long live Tehee!" shouted the spectators with one accord, dazed at his audacity.

"Your Majesty will remember that I said 'Mumbo'—that is to say 'fit and meet'—the moment I saw your Majesty enter the arena clad in purple, which is the royal color."

"We shall not forget it," answered King Tehee; "and we herewith appoint you our Prime Minister. The design of your seal of office shall be a serpent embracing an owl with the motto 'Mumbo,' which, I believe, means fit and meet."

Tehee was not ungrateful, but he was a wee bit satirical.

There was one incident of the revolution at Lotoli that I did not choose to look at. The starving cannibals who had been forced to witness Pip dining were unengaged, and, after kissing the feet of their liberator, were allowed to eat their tormentor, Pip. Old Mumbo said this was poetic justice, but I could not see the poetical part of it myself.

Next morning the gallant Tookee was buried with great pomp, Tehee himself being chief mourner.

"He was a splendid fellow!" sighed Hookee, strutting home from the funeral with the mien of a hero; "but he wanted discretion, or he might have lived to see the glorious victory that WE won!"

(To be continued.)

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