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THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOUM

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "Dr. Jack," "Dr. Jack's Wife," "Miss Caprice," Etc., Etc.

It has had a trial by arms, and the decision rests against him. Let him frankly apologize, not to my friend only, but to Americans everywhere, and I am sure Mynheer Joe will be satisfied as well as myself.

The proposition is reasonable. "Parbleu! I see no reason why it should not be done in common justice, since it has been decreed that my principal was in the wrong. It was a grand sight though; a superb spectacle that will haunt me always. What say you, monsieur le baron? do you withdraw your allusion to the flag under which this gentleman serves?"

The Russian smiles. "I am compelled to, since I declared that it covered only cowards, for I have proven very plainly that I made a mistake. Mynheer Joe knows my allusion was made only to provoke him to a meeting, so that I need retract my words no further than this."

"You have had the meeting; are you satisfied, baron?" asks Joe, himself. "For the present, yet," returns the other, between his teeth, "but this does not end it, my American friend. No man has ever yet run across my path and lived. Your time will come!"

"No man up to now has ever worked you in a duel, Russia, but you met your life there. Take care it is not your life that is snuffed out like a candle. We Americans shoot to kill when we engage with wolves or tigers," says Mr. Grimes.

The baron does not answer, but if looks can do deadly execution, ten would our three friends drop on the spot.

By this time the surgeon has taken the baron in charge, and leaving open his shirt which is already saturated with blood, he proceeds to bind up the wound in a business-like way.

It will prove painful for some little time, but not dangerous, unless the baron's blood is in a wretched condition, when blood-poisoning may set in. A wound of this sort is of a more serious nature in a hot country than in a cold one where the air is bracing.

Mynheer Joe quietly resumes the garments he cast off when preparing for the duel, and in five minutes one would not imagine he has been engaged in any such business.

It is time they returned to the river. Sandy, in particular, is anxious to reach Cairo for some reason or other.

Just as they are about to bid the others a courteous good morning and withdraw from the scene, the silence that broods over the place is suddenly and rudely broken.

Shrill cries, filled with anger, ring out, coming from the direction of the river. It sounds as if a dozen men or tiger cats are endeavoring to see which can make the most noise.

"They're coming!" exclaims Sandy, whipping out his revolver, and selecting a good-sized palm as a base of defense.

It flashes through the minds of the two Americans that a threat when the baron has made a threat when he declared the duel did not end the feud between himself and Mynheer Joe.

Then again, they remember their conversation in the cabin of the dahabeah, when the possibility was mentioned, of a conspiracy to overwhelm them in case the baron lost the fight.

When they hear those fearful shouts, it comes to the mind of Mynheer Joe as well as Mr. Grimes, that the Arabic crews of the two boats have combined and are rushing upon the scene to down the enemies of the baron. Perhaps some prearranged signal has been given, and that it now rests with them.

Hence, acting on this belief, the two Americans instantly draw their weapons. They do not stand in their tracks, but immediately leap forward to meet their expected foes.

Sandy, seeing the new state of affairs, quits his beloved palm, and follows after them as rapidly as his shorter legs will allow.

To their surprise the enemy does not show up; their fierce clamor still continues, but it seems to be in the quarter where the boats have both been left. Mr. Grimes is the first to guess the truth.

"Bless my soul, I believe they're having a small war among themselves!" he says.

"Yes, we're not in it," gasps Sandy. Another moment, and they turn an angle of the rocks that allows them a clear view of the battlefield. Sure enough, the rival crews of the two dahabeahs are at it, hammer and tongs.

How the affair started may never be known, for these rascally Arabs cannot be hired to tell the truth when there is a chance to lie; nor do the Americans care materially about this point.

Mynheer Joe, without a moment's hesitation, bounds away, heading for the boats as though it is his intention to join in the melee, where broken heads will soon be the order of the day.

"He'll be killed!" cries Sandy, hurrying along at the side of Mr. Grimes. "Don't you believe it, my boy. Joe is used to quelling such disturbances among the blacks of the Soudan; and, my word for it, he'll bring this affair to a sudden close. Watch! There he goes now."

The explorer has leaped aboard the dahabeah nearer the shore. It is upon the deck of this all the Arabs are gathered in a noisy crowd, pulling one another's trowsers hair and threatening to make blood flow.

Mynheer Joe's voice is heard like a trumpet above the clamor, which gradually dies down as different members of the mob quail before his eye and terrible appearance.

"Back to your boat, all who belong there! Back, or you shall die like cowards!" he shouts in the Arabic tongue, which in his long service in the Soudan, he has fully mastered.

They hear his words, they see his threatening manner, and as the mob of blacks obeyed the slightest wish of the magnetic hero Gordon, so a prill of his reflected light is placed, like Elijah's mantle, on the shoulders of the man who saw him die and avenged his fall.

First the old reis jumps across to his own deck, and he is speedily followed by one and another of his crew.

The will-power of a single man has now controlled thousands, and Mynheer Joe is possessed of this personal magnetism, that draws men to him, and even affects his enemies.

When Mr. Grimes and Sandy pull up at the rocky landing, peace has fallen upon the crews of the rival river boats.

Though they glare at one another and make threatening gestures, they do not longer call out.

Some of the Arabs look rather the worse for their little tussle, and one in particular seems to be such a wreck that Sandy proceeds to draw his picture for the great book which he expects to issue some day, and which will illustrate all that a wide-awake war correspondent has seen during his travels in times of following cannon and piping peace, the world over.

They cast off and are soon beating against the contrary wind. As the current of the river favors their return to Cairo, they make fair progress, and the glittering city, with its mosques and minarets, its ancient buildings and modern quarters, seems to draw closer all the while.

Mr. Grimes seems thoughtful, while Sandy can hardly keep quiet, so exuberant are his spirits over the success of his friend.

When Mynheer Joe notices this, he does not hesitate to speak to the pseudo silver king.

"You don't look satisfied, Mr. Grimes?"

"That's a fact," replied the other. "Didn't the affair turn out to suit you?"

"Not exactly."

"Ah! you wouldn't have had the boot on the other leg, my friend?"

"Never! But that man should just now be lying there under the palm tree. That Indian is a dead Indian; and I'm sure the only time the baron will be a gentleman in the true sense of the word, is when he is laid out."

"Well, we needn't worry; we have Cairo before many hours, bound for India. Let the baron fume and the heathen rage; we'll sail away over the seas and be happy."

Joe is thinking of Molly, for he already knows she and her father are to be members of the company of Lord the Alhambra, when the steamer leaves Alexandria for Port Said and the Suez Canal.

"Don't count on that, my lord," remarks Sandy, looking up from his drawing. "What d'ye mean, old fellow?" asks Joe, while Mr. Grimes, who already knows, nods his head and looks very wise.

"The baron goes to India by the steamer, the Alhambra."

Mynheer Joe frowns; he sees trouble ahead, knowing as much as he does of the man.

"That is too bad. It will spoil all our pleasure on the voyage. I am sure Miss Molly will regret to hear of it," he says. "Like a death's head at a feast," from Sandy.

"If we could postpone our fitting until the next steamer," suggests Mr. Grimes. Joe shakes his head.

"Impossible for me," he says, soberly. "I've got it!" exclaims Sandy, beginning a war dance on the roof of the cabin, paper in one hand, pencil in the other. "Yes, I've got it!"

"What! The Nile fever?" demands Mr. Grimes.

"A subject for a dancing dervish," suggests Joe.

"Wrong, both of you, gentlemen. What I've got concerns us all. It's an idea!"

At this moment Mr. Grimes and Joe make out to be dreadfully excited, appealing to Sandy not to let it get away and to be very careful lest his brain should burst.

"These sudden ideas are dangerous," declares Grimes, with great soberness. "They may be for you, but my friend, and better depend on them you see," returns Sandy, not at all annoyed by their joke.

"Well, share it, old fellow."

"Don't you see we're anxious to hear all?"

But Sandy takes his time. "It concerns you both, of course, but most of all, it interests the baron."

"Ah, yes; of course, it does."

"The next steamer after the one we take arrives a week later at Alexandria. It is called the Malwa. What I propose is that the Russian bear shall miss the Alhambra and be compelled to lie over a week at Alexandria."

The others soberly take his hand and squeeze it to show their appreciation of his brilliant idea, which appears to strike them in a favorable light. At the present they do not stop for investigation.

"How will you do it, Sandy?" asks Joe, his eyes bent upon the wonder city ahead on the east bank of the Nile, the environs of which they have now reached.

The work of a farmer's wife is never ended. But it is wholesome, enjoyable, productive work that is pleasurable if the farmer's wife is a well woman.

The work becomes weary drudgery when the woman is sick. The work drags and the woman's pride is hurt. Her ambition is to do as much and better work than her neighbors. It is a distinct triumph if her butter is generally regarded as the finest in the county. But fine butter and bad health don't go together.

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"I haven't bothered myself about that yet, but this brain of mine can be depended on to bring out the proper thought when the time comes. Count upon it as a settled fact. The baron will remain in Alexandria when the steamer leaves; more than that I do not feel able to promise."

It is just as well he does not, since he may be unable to fulfill the conditions.

Their attention is now directed in another quarter, and the conversation wheels around to different subjects. Both of Joe's companions have had their respect for the explorer increased on this morning, first by the brave manner in which he went to meet a foe, who, up to this time, has proven invincible, and in the second place by his dexterity in vanquishing that same invincible foe.

They have regarded him with respect before, but now their feelings are almost like those of a brother. He is a wonder and a marvel to them.

Other boats sail upon the broad Nile, and the picture is one that the student of nature and peculiar customs never tires of admiring; for what with the strange craft, their gaudily dressed passengers and the setting of old Cairo in the background, the scene is one that appeals to all that is romantic.

They see nothing of the rival dahabeah, but among the scores of similar boats in sight she may be nearer than they think. At any rate, the subject is one of indifference now.

To be Continued.

Why should a compliment from a chicken be an insult? Because it would be in fowl language.

Why is a fly as tall as a big man? Because it stands over six feet without shoes or stockings.

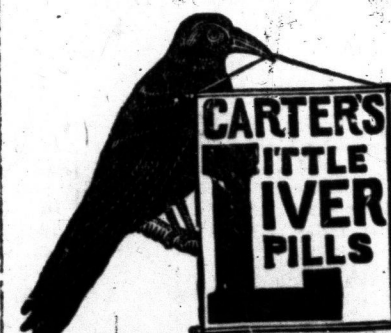
What is the best way to make a slow horse fast? Don't feed him.

What is it we can't do well without, yet we turn it out? The gas!

Why is the nose of your face like V in civility? Because it is between two eyes.

Why is a baby like wheat? Because it is first sowed, then thrashed, and finally becomes the flower of the family.

Why is a selfish friend like a letter P? It is the first in pity and the last in help.



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