

one. Ah! You laugh at that. Never mind, my day will come. You shall suffer yet—you and her," and he pointed backwards to the store.

"The best thing that you can do," I said, firmly, "is to go. It's rather tiring work here holding my shooter up like this; and may-be. I might accidentally pull the trigger, and blow a hole through you. Clear out!"

The Spaniard flashed a look of demoniacal hatred at me, and then, with his head between his shoulders, moved slowly away.

At the end of the straggling byway, he stopped, turned, and shook his list at me. "Remember," he shrieked, "I will have revenge. I will neither forgive, nor forget."

The two months following the Spaniard's ejection slipped peacefully away.

Day by day my hoard of gold under the earthen floor of my hut had increased, and at last, emboldened thereby, I had declared my passion to the storekeeper's fair daughter. With many blushes, and down-castings of the eyes, she listened to my fervent, but unpolished declaration, as we wandered side by side about the moonlight diggings.

"Oh, Cockney," she cried, suddenly pointing as she spoke to the ridge of rocks lying like a bolt in the whiteness. "Oh, Cockney, was it really you that saved me from that detestable Roderigues?"

I replied that it was, expressed my determination to do the same thing a thousand times over were it necessary.

"Oh, I hope it never will be," she cried, laughingly; and then, suddenly becoming grave, she added, "and I have never thanked you for that act. Oh! how can I show my gratitude?"

I don't know whether Ida intended it, but it was the very opening for which I was longing.

"By being my wife," I said. "Miss Anstall—Ida—I—I love you." I caught her round the waist, and drew her towards me. "Will you—do you care for me—only—only a little bit?"

Ida looked quickly up at me. "Well," she said, slowly, teasingly, I do like you a little bit, and—"

What the remainder of her speech was to be will never be known, for when she had got that far I drew her madly to me and sealed her mouth with kisses.

"Oh!" Ida shrieked, suddenly clutching my arm, "Look! Look! What is that?" I looked in the direction that she pointed but saw nothing but the white, moonlit sands, and the ridge of black rocks.

"I see nothing, my dear," I answered, "What is it?"

"Oh!" Ida cried, and her hand on my arm trembled: "Let us go back at once, I am so—so frightened."

"But what did you see?" I queried again.

"Oh," and she shuddered, "let us get home," and she commenced dragging me after her. "I saw three men skulking along by the rocks there, and one of them was—was Roderigues."

"Well," I laughed, hoping by merriment to allay her fears, "Well, let us get him quick. The boys will make short work of him, I reckon."

Half an hour later the diggers were scouring the plain and the surrounding sands, but discovered no signs of the men, and at last, worn and waxy, and fully convinced that Ida had been deceived, they returned.

IV.

One evening, about a week after the fright, as I was standing at the bar in Anstall's store, a stranger came hastily in, and, looking around, asked one of the bystanders which was Cockney.

I was immediately pointed out, and the man addressed himself to me.

"Will you please come down, at once, to the hut beyond the ridge?" he said. "Old Saul is there and wants to see you. He is dying."

Old Saul my first Australian chum—the whom I had pictured as trudging along with the others through the bush—here—and dying.

In a moment I answered the fellow. "I will come at once," I answered; and the man, evidently pleased with his success, hastened off.

I turned to the bar to bid old Anstall good night when I caught a glimpse of Ida's face, white and awestricken, peering at me from a door behind him. Directly our eyes met she beckoned me, and I went into the room where she was.

"Darling," she said, directly I entered "if you love me, don't stir from here alone to-night. I heard what that stranger said.

lie. Old Saul is not there. It is only some wickedness planned by that Spaniard, Roderigues."

"Ida," I remonstrated, quietly, "this is nonsense. You really must shake such thoughts out of your head. It—"

"I can prove what I say," Ida broke in, determinedly; and, crossing the room, she picked up a letter, which she pressed into my hand.

"Read it," she said, firmly. "It is for my father, and is from old Saul himself. You will see by it that he has left Australia, and by this time is doubtless far out at sea. He has decided to return to the Cape, and go up to the diamond fields again."

I looked from the letter to Ida, and back again in astonishment. Then it all gradually dawned on me. It was really, as she said, all a planned affair, Roderigues must be at the bottom of it. To reach the hut, at which the stranger said old Saul lay, I should have to go through the rocky roadway; and what better place could the cowardly Spaniard have wherein to wait and murder me?

Realising the danger that I had escaped, and filled with admiration for my loved one's thoughtfulness, I embraced her.

"Ida, my dear," I said at last, "I really must go. It is getting late. Why," looking up at the clock, "I declare it is quite an hour since that rascal was here. I must be quick. I will get the boys out, and, never fear, we will lay Roderigues and his friends by the heels to-night."

Then, after a farewell kiss, I re-entered the bar, and in a few minutes had related the whole affair to the men still clustered there. With stern faces and muttered oaths they listened to my recital. When I had concluded, hoarse cries for vengeance arose.

"Let us go for him!" shouted one tall, bearded digger. "A rat like him would soon be a terror. The skeletons are allurs a bigger nuisance than the lions."

"Just so," cried another, whilst I noticed a third significantly coiling up a length of rope that lay near.

"Well boys," I shouted "we musn't lose time. To-morrow the police shall have the skulking hound!"

The man with the rope chuckled grimly. "Mebbe," he said, "Tany rate they can have as much of him as will be left."

Then we all trooped through the door, and, at a dog trot, set off towards the rocks.

We had traversed about half the distance when a couple of reports rang shrilly out upon the air.

"Hullo!" I cried; "what's that mean?"

"some mistake, I expect," answered the man nearest me. "Let's hope that the greaser has shot himself."

"No such luck!" put in another, who had overheard this remark.

"Hullo!" he suddenly shrieked. "Look thar! Quick, boys, the birds have flown." Away in the distance a couple of black specks could be seen moving rapidly across the whiteness.

In a moment the men split into two parties, one racing after the flying pair, while the rest, myself included, dashed into the black shadow of the roadway between the rocks.

Half way through I stumbled over some object lying in my path, and went sprawling into the road.

As I scrambled to my feet again one of the men struck a match, and by its faint, yellow flicker I discovered that I had fallen over the recumbent figure of a man.

"Ha!" cried one of the diggers; "that's one o' Roderigues' gang, I bet. Mebbe there's been a split in the cabbynet, and, consequently, some shooting. Let's carry him into the open, boys, and see who he is. He's as dead as Sydney beer, anyway."

Two of the crowd rapidly picked the body up, and carried it rapidly through the pass and out to the moonlit sands, on which they laid it.

I stooped and looked at the grey, dead face, all beamed with blood from the bul let-hole in the temple.

"Good Heaven!" I grasped. "Miss Anstall was right, boys. It is Roderigues." "Hooroar!" cried the men in chorus. "Good riddance to bad rubbish!" whilst the man with the rope added: "Then I've carried this haltar for nuthink, eh?"

A faint shout from across the sands made the boys turn, and away in the distance we could see our chums hurrying towards us with a prisoner.

At last they came up with us, and I immediately recognised the man they had caught as the stranger who had brought me the false message.

When I stepped up and looked at him he smiled.

"Hang it!" he cried. "Didn't we hit you arter all?"

In a minute I understood the situation; by some fortunate mistake the men had shot their employer instead of me. I waved my hand in the direction of the corpse, and one of the diggers led their prisoner up to it.

Directly his eyes fell on it he gave vent to a harsh, callous laugh.

"Well I'm blest," he cried; "if we didn't shoot the wrong'un, Roderigues must have walked into his own trap."

And so it turned out.

It appeared that when the messenger had returned from giving me the false message, Roderigues had stationed him amongst the rocks on one side of the road, and his companion (who had managed to get clear away) on the other, with instructions, to shoot me as I came along. But, as time passed and I did not turn up, the Spaniard had become suspicious regarding his man, and sauntered down the roadway himself. In the darkness he had been mistaken for me, the man had fired, and—well, Justice works its ends in many strange ways!

A hurried consultation was held as to what was to be the end of our prisoner. Some were for shooting, others for hanging; but the majority inclined to mercy. In the end the man was ordered to clear out at once on pain of instant death. This he did. Roderigues was buried in the soft, yielding sand, and we returned to the store. What followed I need not describe in detail. Ida, of course, was delighted to see me back safe. The pistol reports had alarmed her, and her father was equally delighted to hear that the Spaniard was dead. Then I retired into the little room behind the bar with Ida, and there I told her of my good fortune in the deserted claim, and—well, we were married three months later.

Escapes Deficiency.

That Europe will be short of bread this year is a statement universally admitted. According to the latest and soberest estimates Great Britain will require 160,000,000 bushels, France nearly as much, Germany will have a large deficiency while the quantity required to supply the other countries of Western Europe will probably bring up the total European demand to about 400,000,000 bushels. To supply this deficiency India will probably be able to send out 50,000,000 bushels, Canada is expected to be able to spare 22,000,000, Australia and South America will also have some to export, while many estimate that the United States will have a surplus of over 200,000,000 bushels. This will still leave about 100,000,000 bushels of a deficiency. Must it be inferred therefore that starvation will result? Not necessarily. None need starve who can secure corn and of this grain the United States expects to have a large amount, probably 200,000,000 bushels, available for export if necessary. Besides it is known that European populations consume root crops largely in place of wheat, especially when the latter is scarce and dear. It is believed by competent authorities that the consumption of wheat has varied as much as two bushels per capita in France and some other countries without anything approaching famine or general starvation. If there should be such a decrease in the consumption during the coming year the quantity required for 200,000,000 people would be 400,000,000 bushels less than the usual supply, which would balance the expected deficiency of wheat and yet no famine or world wide distress would result. The real difficulty with the Europeans will be to find money to pay for the food which the other countries of the world will have to give. Unfortunately it happens that the deficiency occurs at a time when the industries of Europe are particularly depressed. This means that labor will not find as great remuneration as formerly, which of course means less money to buy bread.

The American Wool Reporter calls attention to one of the absurdities of the present United States tariff which has been brought to the notice of Boston wool dealers. If Canadian wool is washed on the sheep's back, and then shorn, it is subject to a duty of twelve cents per pound when it enters the United States. But the water on the sheep ranges in this country is exceedingly cold, and it is looked upon as a cruelty to the sheep to force them into it for the purpose of washing them. If the wool is washed after shearing, although no cleaner than that by the other method, it is subject to a duty under the present law of thirty-six cents, and this, too, on wool which is worth only from thirty-three to thirty-five cents a pound. Of course, under such circumstances, it is obvious that the feelings of the sheep respecting cold water will not be very much considered.

England's Asian Railway.

With the completion of the Khojak Tunnel another link is forged of that line which, in the years to come, will probably be known as the Great Central Asian Railway, uniting the East and the West, and girdling half the world's circumference with rails. The undertaking, which has not its equal in India, was the outcome of one of three projects submitted to the Government of India, and was the one specially recommended by the engineer-in-chief. Under this project the line from Killa Abdulla is continued 60 miles from Quetta, into the Khojak Pass, piercing the Khwaja Amran Range, and finally establishing a temporary terminus on the Chaman plain. The Secretary of State cordially indorsed the Government of India's approval, with the result that the first sod of this great work was turned in December, 1887. It was estimated that the line, the tunnel and the concomitant works would cost about 131 lacs, but an additional seven miles having been sanctioned later on the Chaman side, 12 lacs more had to be added to the original estimate, bringing the total to 143 lacs. The tunnel, the great engineering work of the scheme, is about two and a half miles in length, and is pre-eminently the longest in Asia.

Many and appalling were the difficulties which surrounded its formation. The tunnel itself is responsible for a considerable increase in the expenditure, bringing the sum total to 152 lacs, or nine lacs above the estimate. Fuel for working the boring machines, a very considerable item, was made all the more expensive by the action of the Northwestern Railway, which enhanced the rates of carriage after the works were begun, and into the coffers of which went most of the excess. Extra arching was another item, and thence as due to the loose nature of the strata inside the mountain—contrary to what might have been anticipated from an examination of the surface. And again, when within 100 yards of completion when every one concerned was rejoicing to think that the two ends would meet, by a most unfortunate piece of luck a vortical stratum of clay charged with water was met, and out of it came pouring a torrent of water and mud at the rate of several hundred gallons a minute. Even now water still issues from this part of the tunnel, but not in very considerable quantities. This unforeseen circumstance retarded the tunnel work for six months. All along the work had been carried on most rapidly, and as much as 37 yards a week was done at a pace. The cost is less per yard than that of any of the larger Alpine tunnels, such, for instance, as the Mont Cenis, St. Gothard, or the Arlberg, although these had the immense advantage of unlimited water-power for driving their machinery. In the Khojak the rockdrilling machinery used was Schram's. The rope inclines over the mountain were features in the work. These were built to facilitate the transport of material from one side of the range to the other, and ran up the hillsides at a gradient of one in two and a half. They carried a total of three-quarters of a million tons of material.

As originally intended, the tunnel was to be completed by October, 1890, but the work was delayed for the reasons already mentioned, and also by the severity of the winter of 1890-'91. Within four months 43 inches of rain fell, most of it in the form of snow, recharging the mountain range with water. The winter cold was unprecedented, 24 degrees below freezing being registered during the night, while the maximum during the day was only 36 degrees. The result was excessive mortality among the coolies, and no fewer than a fourth of those employed—that is to say, 1,000 men out of 4,000—lost their lives during that one winter. A regiment of pioneers was quartered near the mouth of the tunnel, and rendered good service; their presence, moreover, was invaluable in keeping in check the lawless Pathans and members of other equally turbulent tribes, from which the labor was entirely recruited. From these facts a good idea may be formed of the immensity of the work that was so quietly and yet so expeditiously carried on away on that remote frontier.

It is said that the bishop of London went to see one of his parishioners, a lady with a prodigious family which had recently been increased. As he rose to leave, the lady stopped him with:

"But you haven't seen my last baby."

"No," he quickly replied, "and I never expect to."

Then it is stated, he fled.

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