

Africa sees, a night of silver light that touched all things tenderly and beautified them. Amber had seen such nights in other parts of the great Continent, but never had he remembered such as this.

He sat in a camp chair at the entrance of his tent speculating upon the events of the day. Who was this mysterious stranger that went abroad at night? For the matter of that, what had the leopard been doing to invite his death?

He called up Abiboo from the fire round which the Houssas were squatting.

"It is strange to me, Abiboo," he said, "that the white man should shoot the leopard."

"Lord, so I have said to my men," said Abiboo, "and they think, as I, that the leopard was creeping into a place that sheltered the white master."

Amber smoked a reflective pipe. It occurred to him that the place where they had come upon the first blood stains had been near to a similar dried-up water way. When he came to give the matter fuller consideration he realized that it was a continuation of the river bed near which they were encamped. Following its course he might come upon the spot under an hour. It was a perfect night for investigation—at any rate he resolved to make an attempt.

He took with him four soldiers including the sergeant, who led the way with the lamp. The soldiers were necessary, for a spy had come in during the day with news that the warlike folk of the "Little Alebi" had begun to march in his direction.

Though the river bed made a well defined path for the party it was fairly "hard-going." In places where the deputation made an impenetrable barrier they had to climb up the steep banks and make a detour through the forest.

Once they came upon a prowling leopard who spat furiously at the brilliant white glow of the electric lamp and, turning tail, fled. Once they surprised a bulky form that trumpeted loudly and went blundering away through the forest to safety.

After one of these detours they struck a clear smooth stretch.

"It must be somewhere near," began Amber, when Abiboo raised his hand abruptly. "Listen," he whispered.

They stood motionless, their heads bent. Above the quiet of the forest came a new sound.

"Click—click!" It was faint, but unmistakable.

Amber crept forward.

The river bed turned abruptly to the right, and pressing closely to the right bank he dropped to his knees and crawled cautiously nearer the turn. He got his head clear of the bush that obstructed his view and saw what he saw.

In the centre of the river, plain to see in the bright moonlight, a man in shirt and trousers was digging. Every now and again he stooped and gathered the earth in both hands and laughed, a low chuckling laugh that made Amber's blood run cold to hear. Amber watched for five minutes, then stepped out from his place of concealment.

"Bang!"

A bullet whistled past him and struck the bank at his side with a thud.

Quick as thought he dropped to cover, bewildered. The man who dug had had his back to him—somebody else had fired that shot!

He looked round at the sergeant.

"Abiboo," he said grimly, "this is a tad palaver: we have come to save a man who desires to kill us."

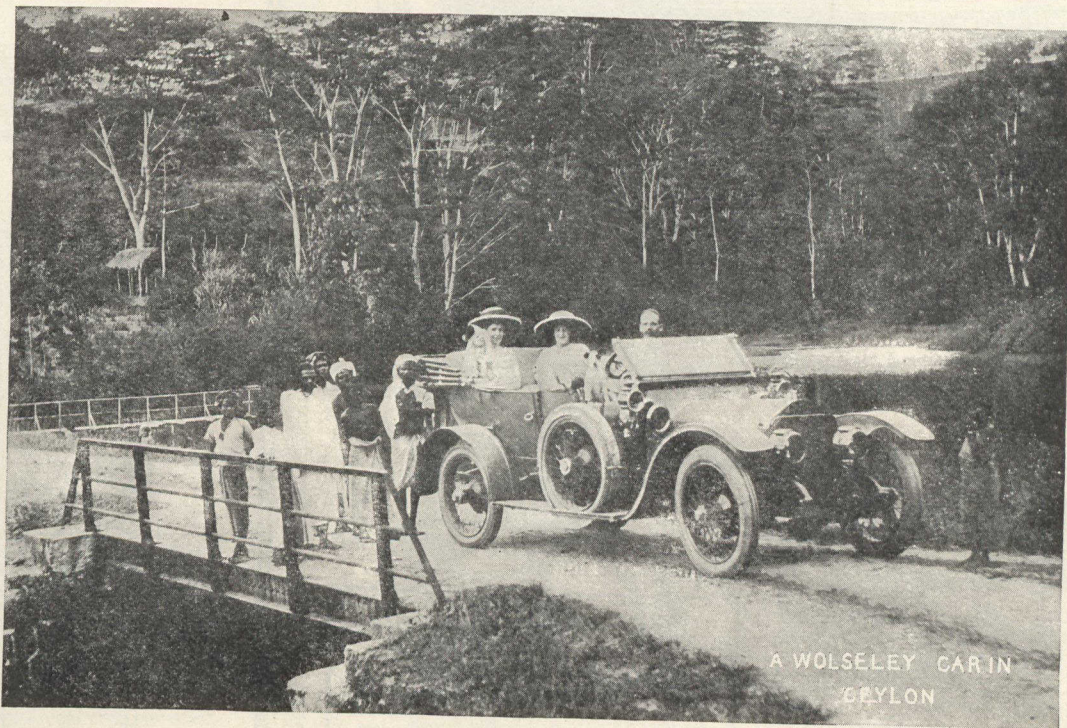
Crawling forward again he peeped out: the man had disappeared.

Taking the risk of another shot Amber stepped out into the open. "Sutton!" he called clearly. There was no answer.

"Sutton!" he shouted,—only the echo came to him. Followed by his men he moved forward.

(To be continued.)

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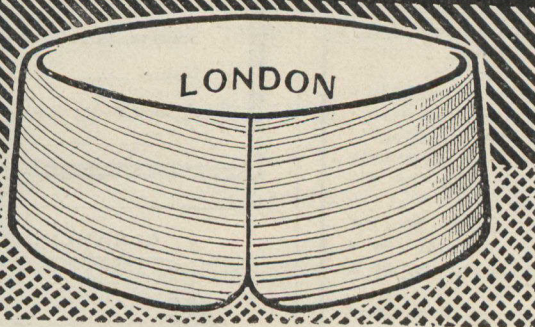
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