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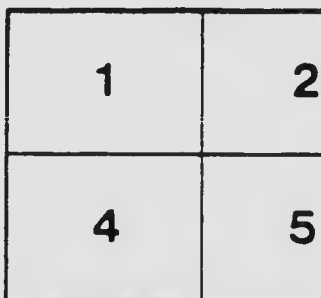
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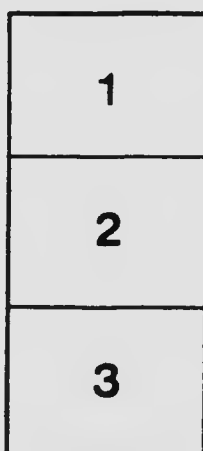
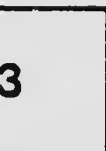
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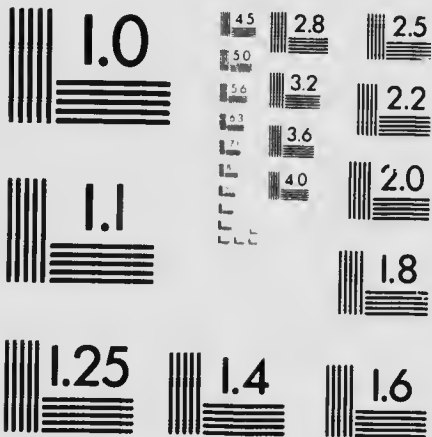
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Gentleman Solomon

CHAPTER I

IN BUFFALO

Doctor Cliff Seaforth heads his diary with the title "The Relation of John Solomon, Gentleman". This story cannot be better begun than with certain quotations from Seaforth's diary. The very word "Relation", as he uses it, smacks of the unknown and mysterious. One thinks of the old Jesuit Relations which preserved so much of early Canadian history; of those other Relations from Japan and far missionary centres in the olden days, all filled with strange things, all reeking with the wander-lust and the spread of the White Christ's faith.

Seaforth says: "I use the word in all reverence. We saw incredible things to the full, as strange as any reported in the relations of the Iroquois torture or the splendours of Ieyasu, and we fought great fights. If we were not missionaries, at least God certainly fought for us."

Seaforth was well established in Buffalo as an eye, ear, nose, and throat specialist. He was a young man, only twenty-four years old—yellow of hair, grey of eye, with square-chopped and ugly features. He had made his way through Johns Hopkins by prize fighting, sparring, and lessons in the manly art, and he was proud of it. He had fought his way into an education and a profession, and he had done it manfully.

This, then, was Seaforth's position when Walter Firth turned up. Firth and Seaforth had been class-mates and firm friends at college, then Firth had taken a position as ship's surgeon in the P. & O. line. In the ensuing two years he had had strange adventures, and had now come home for good, as he thought, bringing with him a wife and John Solomon. Firth went into offices with Seaforth at once.

He was a quiet, reserved man, saying little, and always dependable; small wonder that Seaforth admired him. Tall, dark, handsome, and possessing giant strength, he was only a year older than Seaforth, and yet appeared to be a man of forty. His adventures, which had involved him with John Solomon and won him his wife, had aged him terribly. Mrs. Firth was very lovely, and took great delight in giving young Seaforth what he had never known—a home.

With them lived the man John Solomon—but let Seaforth's diary now speak for itself. Those who have read of John Solomon in the public

prints will find Seaforth's comments hugely amusing; those who have not, will find them hugely informing.

January 5th.—I do not know what to make of this man Solomon. He is a Cockney Englishman, fat, blue-eyed, his face like a blank sheet of blotting paper. He lost his right leg at the knee while adventuring with Firth, who admires and respects him. So does Mrs. Firth. I do not.

January 8th.—Solomon was smoking his filthy clay pipe in my office to-day, confound him! I haven't the heart to rebuke the fellow. He's too helpless, too simple, too open-hearted. A word would crush him. I'm afraid his artificial limb does not set very well. He insists on wearing carpet slippers, too; thank Heaven he goes to New York shortly on business!

January 10th.—Wonder of wonders! The Associated Charities has been endowed with a cool half-million, part for poor children and part to provide artificial limbs for the needy and indigent—and this John Solomon gave the money! Good heavens, I thought he existed on Firth's charity—oh, the thing would be absurd if it were not a fact! Query: Is he a crook of some sort? Yet I find something touching in his absolute dependence on others; at times, his wide blue eyes light up with almost human intelligence. He may not be an utter fool.

January 12th.—Solomon came to me about his eyes to-day; proved to have a slight astigmatism. Said he was getting old. So he is, poor chap! Seems to like me, and even said as much outright; it made Firth chuckle, though I can't say just why.

January 15th.—Poor Firth was stabbed to-day and robbed of a queer jewel he fetched home from the East. He will be in hospital for a fortnight or so. The deuce of it is that he was to have accompanied Solomon to New York next week; now, it seems, I am expected to go instead. Fine state of things! To leave my patients and Associated Charities work to go on a joy trip with a fat Cockney. I think not! Confound his insolence!

And, at the time, Seaforth really thought not. He had no intention of lugging John Solomon around to see the sights, as he believed the other intended. His enlightenment was not long in arriving, however. That trip to New York was fated to change the destiny of thousands of men and women and children, and to give Cliff Seaforth himself an entirely new angle on life.

January 20th.—Visited Firth to-day. Is he crazy or am I? He was worried over the New York trip; made me promise to go with John. Then he said this: "Cliff, there is more back of it than we know. John is no fool. He is richer than the Rothschilds; he's a bigger man in Africa than anyone alive, and if you had half his sense you'd be well off." Curious! Poor Firth must have been a bit off his head, though his temperature was not high.

January 22nd.—John came into my office to-night, asked about the New York trip, and I let him have it straight—told him exactly what I thought of him. I was angry, for he had been smoking his old pipe in the office again. He remained very respectful, as always, heard me

out fully, and then inspected me with his wide-eyed stare. "But I like you, sir," he said softly. "I like you werry much, indeed, Doctor Seaforth; and likes ain't a matter o' looks, as the old gentleman said to 'is new 'ousemaid. May I ask, sir, if so be as you are a honest Christian gentlem'n?" The question flattened me out momentarily; then I told him that I was no better Christian than most, and as much a gentleman as any other American—even if I had made myself into one. He nodded and went out. What could the fellow mean?

Seaforth soon found out what Solomon had meant. During the next afternoon, he drove Mrs. Firth to the hospital, and found the Cockney with Firth. After some general conversation, Solomon rose and carefully shut the door, whittled some plug tobacco into his dirty clay pipe, and turned to the young specialist.

"Doctor Seaforth, may I ask if you're a fighting man?"

"No!" snapped Seaforth, his irritation aided by Firth's grin. His grey eyes were dark with anger, but Solomon only nodded and then disregarded him for a time.

"Most on 'em says that," he observed. "Now, sirs and missus, I 'ave summat werry important to say. Mrs. Firth, ma'am, would you let your 'usband go off with me on a sea voyage—knowing as 'e was a-going into danger of a 'undred kinds? Would you be willing, ma'am, as the old gentleman said to 'is prospective third?"

A gleam shot into Firth's dark eyes, but his wife went white; she was little more than a girl, and they had only been married a year.

"What—what do you mean, John?" she asked, staring at him.

He removed his pipe. Into his face came a strange flash of expression, which struck Seaforth as a glint of indomitable will-power, of tremendous and awful resolution; yet the very idea was absurd, thought the specialist.

"I mean this, ma'am: I'm 'ere in America alone, and can't count on me friends in Africa any more. All I can count on is Doctor Firth and Doctor Seaforth——"

"Explain, John, explain!" broke out Firth. "Here, Molly and I haven't been married a full year, and yet you ask to——"

"And we thought you were going to live with us always," interrupted Mrs. Firth reproachfully. "Yet, here you go off again——"

"I 'ave to, ma'am!" exclaimed Solomon, agitated. "I ask this of you, ma'am. I ask you to give up your 'usband; I ask 'im to go with me to a werry bad place, where mebbe none of us won't come out; but I don't ask 'im to be doing of it for me, mind that.

"No! I need two white men as I can trust. We'll go into 'ell—beggin' your pardon, ma'am—and we'll see some awful things. We'll 'ave to be prepared to die any time. We'll 'ave to fight. We'll get no fame, win or lose. But——"

He paused, seemingly to find words. Mrs. Firth was gripping her husband's hand hard, her face like a sheet. Seaforth's grey eyes flamed from beneath his thick brows, and he watched Solomon as a dog watches an ill-smelling stranger.

"But, sirs and ma'am, we'll do *this!*" cried the little man swiftly. "There ain't no man but me as can do it, and I 'ave to 'ave 'elp, what wi' this leg o' mine. We'll do this: we'll lift a 'ole race o' 'umans out o' torture and slavery that's worse than death; we'll raise thousands o' people from 'ell to 'Eaven, just like that. O' course, we don't need to do it, so to speak; we ain't forced to do it—but we're able to do it, and that's the main thing. It's an awful place, they say——"

"Come, man, get down to facts!" said Firth sharply. "What do you mean? Just what do you intend? Where are you going?"

A twitch of nerves convulsed Solomon's face. To Seaforth it seemed as though expression were trying to break through the pudgy countenance vainly.

"I can't tell you," he answered thickly. "I—I don't dare, and that 'ere is the honest truth! It's too 'orrible. 'Sides, I can't take no chances, as the old gentleman said when 'e made the ugly 'ousemaid 'is third. Them rubber people 'as their spies; they've been a-watching of me——"

He broke off to stare at the wall, his lips moving silently. Seaforth slowly realized that the man

was in deathly earnest about something. Firth spoke out:

"Brace up, John! Give us something concrete to go on."

"Aye!" Solomon straightened up. "We're a-going to a place what's been made into plain literal 'ell; we're a-going to make it into 'Eaven. We're a-going to do the work of honest gentlemen if we die for it——"

"Rubber tortures, John?" asked Firth shrewdly, having taken the hint.

"Right, sir! Only don't ask me no more. Now, ma'am, will you let 'im go? It ain't for 'im to say, but for you."

Seaforth could not understand, but he realized that there was some connection with the rubber atrocities in the Congo. These things took place in the later days of King Leopold's rule, when the hue and cry of Europe had forced Leopold into seeming compliance, and all the world thought that the rubber tortures were over and done with. Being at a loss, Seaforth looked at Mrs. Firth, wondering what she thought of it all.

The poor girl stared at the window and fondled Firth's hand; it made Seaforth heartsick to look at her. He knew that they had not been settled in Buffalo ten months when her husband had thus been stabbed; on top of this, Solomon asked her to send him to almost certain death for nothing more than the chance of helping far-off heathen.

She might have argued that it was none of

their business; that they had nothing invested in rubber stocks; that they might let the missionaries fight the devil and all his works; that Firth's business was healing the sick in Buffalo, not in Africa, and a hundred more such arguments. But she only stared at the window, white-faced.

Meantime, it occurred to Seaforth, with a sudden shock, that John Solomon was no fool. A week previous he had been talking of rubber atrocities; now Seaforth wondered if it had been with some hidden purpose. The idea of this fat Cockney poking his nose into such things was absurd, of course. Yet Mrs. Firth seemed not to think so.

"Walter shall go," she said, never once seeking her husband's eyes, and she looked very steadily at Solomon. "If you do not bring him back to me, John, I know that you will not come back yourself."

"No, ma'am, that I won't," said John, very simply.

Seaforth sat dumbfounded, unable to speak. Then John Solomon proceeded to outline arrangements which first gave Seaforth an inkling of his uncanny foresight, his curious ability to plan far ahead and at the last moment to force other men into concurrence with his plans.

As neither of the partners would be able to get insurance, Solomon said he had made over to Mrs. Firth the bulk of his own estate in the event of her husband's death. As Seaforth was alone

in the world, he cared nothing about insurance—and Solomon seemed to be quite aware of it. To secure the two against an unavoidable loss of practice he handed to each a cheque for ten thousand dollars for one year's services.

He had quite arranged that Seaforth should accompany him to New York, where he had to meet a man, and desired a witness. In two weeks, Firth would come on and join them, and they would start at once for their mysterious destination—which was doubtless the Congo. All this while Seaforth sat silent, frowning, and at length Solomon turned to him with a quiet twinkle.

"I suppose as 'ow I needn't ask your consent, sir, as the old gentleman said when 'e kissed the 'ousekeeper?"

There was something so ludicrous, so wholly commonplace and matter-of-fact about the whole thing, that Seaforth's ill-humour vanished in a laugh.

"I'm with you," he said curtly, and Solomon departed, chuckling.

Left alone with the Firths, Cliff Seaforth began to question them. Then it was that his eyes opened and he learned things unbelievable; things which all the world knows now that Solomon's journals have been given free publicity.

Solomon had lived most of his life in the Near East, and had been gun-runner, filibuster, and general intriguer among Eastern peoples. He had organized a tremendous network of men, a system

of people absolutely devoted to him, which extended no one knew how far; and he had managed this intricate network for years, playing now one game and now another. He had served half the thrones of Europe. He had worked himself into a position of untold influence and power in the Islamic world, and was reputed to be himself a convert to Islam.

This last, Firth knew for false, from his own experiences. *Eventually Solomon had gone too far in his games, and had been forced to choose between Cross and Crescent. He had deliberately grappled with the Porte, and had won the fight. Then came up that menace to the Christian world, the brotherhood of Senussi, that monastic Order which controls all Islam to-day; Solomon had struck a blow at its power and its menace. Also he had nearly smashed his own power, his men were slain or scattered, and, with the Firths, he had fled to America, thinking to end his days in peace. But now—now had arisen a new cause demanding the one man who could champion it, and Solomon felt himself called.

Laughable? Yes. Incredible? Yes. All this and more, thought Seaforth. This fat little Cockney, in tarboosh and carpet slippers, with his smelly clay pipe and wide blue eyes and expressionless face—this man a hero, a champion of ideals, a stubborn opponent of evil and a later-day Crusader? Was it possible?

*See story entitled "Solomon's Quest".

Seaforth went home, dazed. That afternoon he spent an hour alone in his office, trying to make himself believe, trying to reconcile the astounding story to the man. Had Solomon been a stalwart, fearless, heroic person, it would be different. But he was not. He was a simple, pudgy, one-legged fellow who could not speak good English. He was even so afraid that he dared not tell his proposed destination. Seaforth had got thus far when Solomon walked in upon him without knocking.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but I found this a-lying in my room."

He handed Seaforth an envelope. Upon it was written an address—an office room on one of the upper floors of the Flatiron Building—and the words "Four p.m., 25th January". Inside the envelope was a cross of iron, the top arm forming a loop. Seaforth inspected it and then looked up, frowning.

"What is it? Some joke?"

"No, sir. It means to meet the agent of that 'ere rubber deviltry, sir."

"Oh!" Seaforth stared. "The man you expected to see in New York, eh?"

"Good God, no!" Solomon plumped into a chair, rose again, wiped his brow; he was terribly agitated. "I was a-going to meet someone else, in that werry Flatiron Building, Mr. Seaforth! I told you we was watched—oh, dang it, dang it, dang it!"

He took the thing and went away, shuffling. That night Seaforth wrote as follows in his diary; his last entry therein, and illuminative as regards his mental state, or, rather, the change in his mental state:

January 23rd.—John and I go to New York to-morrow. The trip will prove this: Either he is stark staring mad or—or I owe him an apology. I begin to suspect that he is perhaps a gentleman. What does the word mean, after all? Frock coats and top hats, or the impulse to sacrifice one's self in hope of lifting burdens from other people? The world laughs at such an impulse, calls it absurd and quixotic; but I am not so sure. And often the world laughs at the wrong thing. Have I done myself so, perhaps? A frock coat may well hide a villain; a clay pipe and carpet slippers may disguise a gentleman!

CHAPTER II

NEW YORK

Cliff Seaforth owed a great deal to Walter Firth, and knew it fully. When the two men were classmates at Johns Hopkins, Seaforth admired the other for his great strength, his good breeding, his handsome mien and ways. Firth, in turn, was attracted by his friend's very uncouthness, and set to work to re-mould him. Often he seconded Seaforth at ten-round bouts, but more often he taught him social usages, helped him to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them. And always Firth's was the courageous, uplifting hand, the heartening voice and spirit.

They had grown near to each other when the parting came, and the reunion had been wonderfully happy for both men. Never had Firth referred to the old days when Cliff Seaforth had been a cub in the ways of gentlemen; but on the day when the latter left with Solomon for New York, he did so. He had come home from the hospital that morning, and sent for Seaforth.

"Cliff," he said, his gravely handsome face tinged by his quick smile, "John Solomon is going into a big thing, and I'm afraid you'll run up against some bad people, sooner or later. Now, I know you pretty well; you're no world's champion, but you are a holy terror with your temper and fists together, and——"

"T'anks fer de soft stuff, cully," grinned Seaforth. "Your lordship will please remember that I am now a professional man of some standing; surely you don't mean to insinuate that John has hired me for a sparring partner?"

"Incorrigible! Listen: I'm warning you to keep yourself in hand, Cliff. You can do it, and you must. John makes his plans about three months ahead—the Lord only knows how—and no emergency arises that he is not prepared for. Remember that."

Seaforth nodded soberly. Mrs. Firth came in, and they could say no more, but he kept the warning well in hand.

On the run to New York, he gained some surprising information from Solomon. The two men had a compartment to themselves, and, being face to face with the twentieth century, Seaforth was disposed to look at the entire project as sentimental bosh—and said so frankly. John Solomon made no direct reply, but fished out the iron cross which had been left in his room, and inspected it attentively.

"Werry curious," he observed at length.

“Mr. Seaforth, may I ask if you ’ave ever studied Egyptian antiquities?”

Seaforth looked at the iron symbol, and it struck a chord in his memory. Somewhere he had seen that odd looped cross, but could not quite place it. Solomon caught his frown and nodded.

“ ’Ere you are, sir. This ’ere thing is called the emblem o’ life; sometimes it was carried by the god Horus, and sometimes by the goddess Maat, or Truth. That’s all the books say, but there’s more. Yes, sir, there’s more, just like that. Any Egyptologist can tell you as ’ow this ’ere looped cross stood for the old phallic worship of Egypt; and ’ere it is used to-day by them there rubber devils.”

He went on to regale Seaforth with tales of the rubber country. According to him, this looped cross, or *ankh*, to use its Egyptian name, was a mysterious symbol used by the systematized rubber hunters, and it possessed some queer power over the black tribes. What that mystery and power was, Solomon did not know. As to present conditions in the Congo, however, he was well informed.

In the interior of the country, the rubber atrocities went on absolutely unchanged; but, instead of being in the hands of agents, the whole thing was farmed out to a single man. This man was named Wagner, Captain Wagner, and it was he who had organized a terrible secret system,

which used this *ankh* as its emblem, and which oppressed the natives even more bitterly than in the old days.

"Is it a secret society, then?" frowned Seaforth, only half-believing.

"No, sir, not that. This 'ere Wagner, 'e 'as 'is army o' black cannibals—the same old Congo army as all the papers wrote about—but 'e 'as something more. Why, sir, 'e's been a-getting a mortal lot o' rubber, 'e 'as, and, what's more, 'e's got it from tribes what never give in to Belgian rule. But ain't it werry odd, sir, as 'ow this 'ere Egyptian symbol should be used in Central Africa to-day?"

It was odd, certainly, but Seaforth did not account it particularly remarkable. After a long silence, Solomon asked abruptly if he had ever read the book "Allen Quartermain". Seaforth nodded.

"Yes, and a blamed good book it is, John! Queer flight of fancy, eh, to conceive such a vast unknown country in the middle of Africa!"

"Just so, sir," John agreed. "Only it ain't exactly what you might call fancy, as the old gentleman said when 'e seen the ugly 'ousemaid."

"Eh? Why, you can't claim that such a place exists?"

"O' course not, sir! You listen 'ere, now." Solomon leaned forward earnestly, peering into Seaforth's rugged face. "The story o' that there

unknown country was told to Mr. 'Aggard by an old 'unter, the original o' that 'ere Allen Quartermain. British East Africa, it was; I 'eard the yarn told myself, at mess one night. It's a native legend that such a country exists. Now, go into the West Coast and you'll hear the same legend. Go North, you'll hear it, too. And they say as there's white pygmies. Don't all that mean something, sir?"

Naturally, Seaforth laughed with great disrespect, for which he paid later. Solomon grew sulky and refused to say another word on any subject whatever; instead of trying to connect his scattered hints, Seaforth went forward to the buffet car and talked politics, as a safer way to court insanity.

They drew into New York in the early morning-secured rooms and breakfasted at the "Belfont", and Solomon dispatched a huge sheaf of cablegrams. To judge from the stares and questions of the operator, Seaforth thought they were assigned to some queer corners of the world; but he asked no questions. Then they considered plans for the day.

Solomon stated that he was to meet a gentleman at two o'clock, at the Flatiron Building, and promptly elected to ride on the top of a Fifth Avenue bus until luncheon. He needed fresh air and plenty of it, he said.

"And how about your rubber agent?" asked Seaforth. "Going to meet him, too?"

"We'd better, I suppose," sighed John uneasily. "But I'm mortal scared, sir!"

Seaforth grunted, and they took their way toward Fifth Avenue. They were a queer pair, and drew many a curious look—Solomon, with his stiff walk, his pudgy figure, and his amazingly blank features: Seaforth, with his sawed-off but merry countenance, his wide shoulders and thin hips, and his square, high-flung chin. Men stepped out of his path, yet turned to look after him with admiring eyes.

So all that morning they rode from the Square to the Tomb and back again, while Solomon pulled at his filthy clay pipe and said nothing whatever. Seaforth resigned himself to wait, and began to have serious doubts as to whether he had not sadly misjudged this little Cockney. Also he found himself liking Solomon very much, strange to say.

"Well," he reflected inwardly. "I'll apologize handsomely if I've been wrong, and more than that no man can do."

Solomon's leg troubled him little. Firth had fitted him with the best artificial limb that money could procure, one which was warranted to last in all climates, and by this time Solomon experienced small difficulty in getting around. Seaforth liked the fact that the little man never referred to his maimed leg under any circumstances.

"Why don't you smoke, sir?" asked Solomon,

as they sat down to luncheon. He had discovered a Turkish restaurant run by a Greek, on Fourth Avenue, off Twenty-third Street, and was enjoying himself hugely.

"Because I know better," grinned Seaforth. "Was that Turkish you were talking to the waiter?"

"No, Greek," chuckled Solomon. "Those are Turks at the table behind us, though, and they're a-talking about you. They take you for that 'ere Battling Nelson, sir."

This was a gratuitous lie, but Seaforth could not know it; he flushed somewhat, and his grey eyes narrowed dangerously. Then he recollected himself and caught the twinkle in Solomon's eyes as that gentleman spoke again.

"Pugnacity and self-consciousness is all werry well in their place, Mr. Seaforth, but this ain't their place, I says. Inconspicuousness is a great wirtue, as the old gentleman said when 'e buried 'is third. By the way, sir, you might be a-readin' this."

He passed a newspaper clipping across the table, and Seaforth took it up. The clipping read as follows:

Boma, Belgian Congo, January 21st.—"There are no more Congo atrocities." Thus declares Professor John E. Earl who, with his daughter, Miss Frances Earl, of Baltimore, has been investigating conditions here. They will leave for the Aruwimi country in two weeks, under government protection, in order to visit the upper districts.

"Well, what about it?" demanded Seaforth, returning the clipping.

"Nothing at all, sir," chuckled Solomon, stowing it away again. "Only that 'ere Mr. Earl must be a werry easy gentleman to fool——"

"Oh—Frances Earl!" broke in Seaforth suddenly. He had been trying to place that name. "Why, I used to know her when I was at Johns Hopkins——"

He fell silent, staring down at his coffee; his flushed face very clearly revealed to Solomon what passed in his mind. He remembered Frances Earl as a splendid, sunny-haired girl with serious eyes and wonderfully carven features; he remembered himself as an awkward cub, afraid to dance through shame of his great-knuckled hands, afraid to speak through shame of his partially sloughed Bowery dialect, depending wholly on the tutelage of Walter Firth.

So he sat there with burning face, then suddenly he squared his shoulders and his head shot up, a flare of deep anger in his grey eyes.

"I'm as good as any man alive!" he broke out, as though that train of thought had been verbal. "I'm ashamed of nothing I've done, and I've won my place——"

"Time for our appointment, sir," murmured Solomon, and rose noisily.

John Solomon was unusually wise in the ways of men.

They walked in silence around to Broadway,

and so came to the Flatiron Building, the face of Frances Earl still lingering in Seaforth's mental vision. He did not shake off his thoughts until they had stepped from the elevator and he found himself entering a large suite of luxurious offices.

"Your card, sir?" asked the gate boy. Solomon inspected him earnestly.

"Young man, you are werry forward, as the 'ousemaid said to the new butler. If so be there's anyone here as wants to see John Solomon, why, 'ere I be."

The boy stared, mumbled something, and hurriedly opened the gate. He led them through the offices and on into a private room where sat a gentleman before a polished mahogany table. Then it was Seaforth's turn to stare.

For he recognized the gentleman as one of the foremost financiers and philanthropists in the country; for obvious reasons his name in this chronicle shall be South. No word was spoken until the door had been closed, but Mr. South eyed his two visitors narrowly. He was finely dressed, from morning coat to spats, and the room itself was "fair fitted up to the nines", as Solomon afterward said.

"This 'ere is me friend, Doctor Seaforth, sir," said Solomon. "If it's all the same to you, sir, 'e will stop with us."

Seaforth bowed slightly and seated himself. An uncomfortable silence fell. Mr. South looked down at some papers on his desk, and tapped

reflectively with a long paper knife. Solomon's eyes roved about the room innocently, and finally settled upon an ornate clock high on the side wall. Seaforth waited, recognizing the fact that he was in the discussion but not of it.

"Er—Mr. Solomon," began the financier, "I sent for you because I have read some surprising things about you and have had them verified by my agents. I recognize the fact that you are a person of peculiar talents. I would ask you, Mr. Solomon, if you would be willing to devote these talents to the cause of humanity?"

"Why, sir, that all depends," murmured Solomon, his wide blue eyes fixed upon the great man in respectful awe. "That 'ere 'umanity is a werry great thing, sir."

"Ah, quite so, quite so!" Mr. South swung around and gazed out of the window toward the wintry Hudson River. "I fear there is a lamentable condition of things in the Belgian Congo, Mr. Solomon. I understand, on good authority, that the atrocities continue unchecked in the interior, though King Leopold has ostensibly yielded to public clamour and ended them. In other words, the rubber tortures still prevail in secret."

"So I've 'eard, sir."

"Good! Mr. Solomon, you probably know the situation very well. I have sent for you to ask what you go to the Congo as my agent in order to put an end to these rubber horrors. You may

do this in any way you choose. Unlimited money will be at your disposal, and you will have a free hand.

"These things, in the twentieth century, are awful—awful!" Mr. South was quite in earnest, and caressed his watch fob nervously. "I have been blessed with great wealth, Mr. Solomon, and I feel that it is my given duty to make that wealth serve humanity and the noble cause of—of the human race and freedom——"

"Just a minute, sir." Solomon's blue eyes opened a trifle wider. "Did you send that 'ere Professor Earl to investigate, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"Er—yes, yes, of course!" admitted the financier, looking somewhat startled. "How did you guess?"

"Well, sir, you made a werry big fool of yourself," said Solomon calmly. "'Cause why, 'e's a-going up into the interior, and 'e'll never come out, just like that."

The financier sputtered, then he saw that Solomon was in earnest and became genuinely distressed. He begged for explanations, and Solomon made them; the point was, it proved, that government protection meant little, and if Earl discovered anything he would be promptly taken care of by the rubber agents and silenced.

Seaforth, watching Mr. South, felt sorry for the man; Solomon was deliberately baiting him, and he could not realize it. The financier was evidently very earnest in his desire to do good,

but it was quite as evident that in some manner he had rubbed John Solomon the wrong way.

"Oh, this is terrible—terrible!" he broke out at last. "I never dreamed that poor Earl and his daughter would be in danger! I will order them home at once; I will cable him to——"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, you won't do nothing of the kind," said Solomon. "You might 'old 'im for a bit at Boma—say, a matter o' three weeks. Then 'e can go ahead all shipshape, sir."

"Then you will go?" exclaimed the financier eagerly. "Here is a certificate of deposit for one million dollars, Mr. Solomon, which I have placed to your account, provided that you are able to sweep these terrible atrocities out of the Congo for ever ——"

"One minute, sir!" Solomon's blue eyes were wider open now, and there was a curious note in his voice. "I says, sir, that money ain't able to buy no man what's worth being bought, just like that. Wirtue is its own reward, as the Good Book says, but it ain't 'uman nature to 'unt wirtue werry 'ard. Them 'ere conflicting statements is facts, sir, as you 'll find some day."

"Why--why, what do you mean, Mr. Solomon? Surely you would not refuse?"

"Yes, sir. I won't 'ave nothing to do with that 'ere Congo, 'cause why, I ain't got any feelings for 'umanity like what you 'ave, sir. But if you'll go along with me, sir, and lend

me the support o' your presence, so to speak, I might consider it."

"Impossible, my dear man!" cried the astonished financier, oblivious to the quick smile of Seaforth. "Utterly impossible! I have interests——"

"Werry well, sir," and Solomon rose. "Mr. Seaforth and me, we won't trouble you no longer, sir. But mind this—you cable that 'ere Professor Earl and keep 'im back for a matter o' three weeks, just like that. I wishes you a werry good morning, sir."

Seaforth rose and followed him to the outer offices, leaving the financier staring after them in blank amazement. That feeling was reflected in the mind of Cliff Seaforth, though he said nothing of it until they gained the outer corridor.

Why should Solomon refuse this very flattering proposition? There could be no doubt of Mr. South's absolute sincerity, and he had proposed the very thing on which Solomon's mind was set. Further, his offer to pay all expenses and his extremely handsome remuneration should have been an objective to any man, rich or poor. Seaforth was frankly puzzled, and, when they stood before the elevators, he said so.

"What does it mean, John? Why in the name of all that's holy did you refuse that offer?"

Solomon mopped his brow.

"For two reasons, Mr. Seaforth, sir; two werry good reasons. Number one, I won't take no money for doing of the right thing by me fellowmen,

and if a man wants to 'ire good done, let 'im go do it 'isself, says I. Number two—— What time is it, sir?"

"Three o'clock."

"This 'ere rubber agent we're a-going to meet at four, 'is office is right above the one we left, if you'll notice. Did you 'appen to observe that 'ere clock in Mr. South's room, sir?"

"It was a very good clock," frowned Seaforth, wondering.

"Yes, sir, it was. Reason number two, that 'ere clock 'ad a dictograph inside it, and that 'ere dictograph went straight upstairs. 'Ere's the lift, sir."

Seaforth stepped into the elevator, dazed. His whole mental balance had been jarred and upset. It was as though Solomon had ripped away the cloud, and he saw the man's astounding nature clearly at last.

Firth had been correct, then! John Solomon was entering upon this thing deliberately, as a matter of sheer chivalry and humanity; but he was doing it in his own fashion and wished no interference. Knowing that the hidden dictograph would carry all that was said straight to the office above, he had refused the offer of the philanthropist; but he had also refused it because he was a finer gentleman than Mr. South.

Seaforth stepped out at the ground floor, walked to the entrance, and then turned suddenly. His square-jawed face was very grave, and his deep grey eyes were quite steady.

"Give me your hand, John."

Solomon obeyed, looking up questioningly. Seaforth smiled.

"John, I apologize deeply for my former words and thoughts regarding you. I realize now that you're a truer gentleman than any man I ever knew."

The pudgy little man withdrew his hand hurriedly, pulled out his pipe and plug and knife, and began to whittle. Then he looked up.

"That's werry good o' you, sir, as the 'ousemaid said when the old gentleman 'eld 'er 'and in the entry. Now, sir, we 'ave an hour afore our next appointment. Do you recall, Mr. Seaforth, 'ow I was telling you about a gentleman named Wagner?"

"Eh? Captain Wagner, the head of the rubber agents?"

"The 'ead of 'em all, sir. It's 'im as wrings the living 'cart out o' them poor black men, Mr. Seaforth. It's 'im as fixed up that 'ere secret system. It's 'im as runs it all, and it's 'im as we've got to look out for, sir. 'Cause why, 'e is right 'ere in New York this blessed minute."

"Here?" Seaforth was startled. John Solomon nodded and struck a match. "How do you know? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir. What's more, 'e's right 'ere in this werry building, and it's 'im we're a-going to meet at four o'clock. Dang it, this 'ere pipe is stopped up!"

CHAPTER III

SHANGHAIED

“And these things can happen in New York?”

The thought still drummed through Seaforth's brain as he followed Solomon into the offices above those of the estimable Mr. South. Once more they were shown through outer rooms to a private office, and once more they were left alone with a man who inspected them gravely; once more Solomon introduced Seaforth, and they sat down.

The man who faced them across the table was of a very different type from the financier, and Seaforth looked at him in puzzled surprise. He was frock-coated and immaculate, and looked the gentleman. He was powerfully built. His jaw was long and hard, his lips thin and rather cynical, his features deeply bronzed and rather pleasant. The one distinctive feature about his face was that his steel-blue eyes were crinkled about the corners.

There was something fascinating in these tiny creases, for they were not caused by smiling, decided Seaforth instantly. They looked evil—

or, rather, they looked as if they might be tenable of evil. Yet this man was no ruthless tyrant, to all appearances, no cruel master of cannibal soldiers. Seaforth was distinctly disappointed.

"Good day, Mr. Solomon. You and your friend are quite welcome. My name is Ernest Wagner." The man's voice was biting, but was pleasantly modulated.

"Yes, sir," murmured Solomon respectfully. "I got your message, sir."

There was a little silence, while Wagner looked at his visitors. And suddenly Seaforth realized something very definite. In Wagner's eyes had glinted surprise when they entered, and now there rested a touch of contempt in their steel-blue depths.

"Let us have plain speaking, Mr. Solomon," and all the pleasant quality dropped out of Wagner's voice, leaving it hard and cold and bitter. "When I summoned you, I knew that the eminent philanthropist directly below us"—and the words were a sneer—"was intending to make you a certain proposition. Now I know that you refused that offer, luckily for yourself."

Seaforth started. Solomon had been right about that dictograph!

"Yes, sir. I thought as 'ow it might be werry dangerous, sir."

"Quite right." The contempt in Wagner's voice leaped out openly. "You are a greatly over-estimated man, Solomon, for I've looked you

up thoroughly. I happen to know that your influence is destroyed, your organization smashed, your power completely gone. You will not deny it?"

"No, sir," responded Solomon humbly. "I'm sorry to say you're right, sir."

"Very good. Now, I'll warn you in case you're tempted to reconsider your decision given Mr. South. If you show your face in the Congo, if you shove your nose into my affairs, you're a dead man. And mind this: you'll not meet a pleasant death! I'll have no monkey work from you, my man."

Wagner did not raise his voice, and his features did not change a particle in the delivery of this threat. Solomon bowed his shoulders, quite crushed.

"Yes, sir. I'll bear it in mind, Captain Wagner."

"Oh, you know me, eh?" Wagner swung toward Seaforth, and now those little creases about his eyes deepened into a flash of venomous malignant evil. "As for you, Doctor What's-your-name, you'd better cut loose from this man, and do it quick. That warning goes for you, understand?"

Seaforth met those steel-blue eyes, and there was a flame in his own cold grey gaze—a flame like the sun-glint under a mass of ice.

"I understand this," he said slowly, unheeding Solomon's warning look. "I understand that you're a damned blackguard, Wagner."

The other seemed to stiffen in his chair. His

bronzed face set and hardened under Seaforth's gaze, and his steel-blue eyes narrowed into a terrible menace.

"So?" he said, and his voice was like a whip. "Now you men get out of this office in a hurry. I've no more time to waste on you."

White and shaking with anger, but remembering Firth's warning, Seaforth rose and followed Solomon through the outer offices to the corridor. Once outside, the pudgy little man turned to him a face that was streaming with perspiration.

"Dang it, Mr. Seaforth, you've been and done it!"

Seaforth was still too angry to speak.

"Yes, sir, you've been and done it. But mebbe it ain't so bad, after all. 'E thinks as 'ow I'm a blooming fool, which is a werry good thing. Let's be going, sir."

They returned to the "Belfont", and neither man spoke until they reached it.

Now Seaforth had fully awakened to the situation. That brief interview with Captain Ernest Wagner had shown him that the latter was a man of terrible possibilities, yet had under-valued John Solomon—exactly as the Cockney had intended. Therefore Seaforth demanded some account of Wagner, and Solomon extracted a small red notebook from his suitcase, turning over the leaves until he came upon the desired entry. It was written very neatly and legibly, and was quite to the point:

Wagner, Ernest. Age, 29. Ex-captain in Belgian Army. Fought with Boers in South Africa; censured for shooting and torturing prisoners. Well educated, extremely able. Vices, none except women. Family, none. Has complete power in upper rubber districts of Congo; organized secret control of natives. Disappears for long intervals in interior. In 190— sold some curious Egyptian (supposedly) ornaments to Louvre. Claims to have discovered race of white dwarfs; could not verify; claim disallowed by scientists. Character very bad.

"H'm!" grunted Seaforth. "Where did you get all this data on him?"

"That's me secret, sir," chuckled Solomon. "I 'ave a lot o' men in them notebooks o' mine, and I 'ave a lot o' them notebooks. Do you 'appen to know what the dream of me life is, sir?"

"No. What is it, John?" smiled the American, interested.

"Why, sir," and the pudgy little man hesitated, "ever since I come to this 'ere country I've been a-thinking werry 'ard. As I said, I 'ave a mortal lot o' men wrote down in them notebooks, and I've seen a mortal lot o' criminals. Well, sir, if I ever come out o' this 'ere Congo muss, I 'ave a notion to settle down 'ere in the States and go to cornering of criminals, just like that."

"What—become a detective?" Seaforth looked hard at him. "All I can say is you'd make an uncommonly good one, John!"

"Yes, sir, so I 'ave thought meself," assented

the little man modestly. "Well, well, the future is in the 'and of Prowidence, says I. Now for plans, Mr. Seaforth."

Solomon had his plans completely mapped out, and his most difficult task was explaining them to his associa' Seaforth had been amazed before, but now he was utterly astounded.

In order to get into the Congo and offset Wagner's influence, it was necessary to reach the highest authority of all--King Leopold himself. Accordingly Solomon was departing for Washington that night, and deigned to impart his design to Seaforth.

He stated quite frankly that he had influence with the French and English governments and could bring pressure to bear at once. There was no doubt that their passports would be waiting for them at Boma, port of entry to the Congo. After that, all would go well unless they entered Wagner's territory, when neither passports nor influence would avail them.

"What will, then?" asked Seaforth doubtfully.

"A few friends o' mine as will meet me, and the 'and o' Prowidence, sir."

Solomon insisted on taking the Washington trip alone, as Seaforth would remain in New York for Firth, who would come in a few days. Their passage had already been engaged to Liverpool, where they would catch a Belgian liner for Boma. More than this the little man wou' say nothing, as regarded future plans.

“But mind this, Mr. Seaforth,” he declaimed solemnly, “you watch out mortal sharp while I’m gone! If you see any more o’ this Wagner, you look the other way. Nothin’ can upset me now except you go and get yourself into trouble, sir. So you watch out, just like that!”

Seaforth swore that he would run from Wagner at sight, and after dinner went down to the station with Solomon. He had no expectations of seeing the Belgian again, and laughed at Solomon’s uneasy feeling. His outspoken words of the afternoon had met with nothing more than an extremely venomous look from Wagner, and it never crossed his mind that the rubber agent had given him more than passing attention.

Accordingly, he did a very foolish thing. In his old days of struggle, he had frequented a cheap Italian opera house on Fourth Street across the Bowery, where he could satisfy his passion for music at a low rate. When the Cockney’s train had pulled out, Seaforth happened to remember this place, and bent his way thither in reminiscent anticipation.

To his delight he found the Teatro Garibaldi unchanged, bought a twenty-cent seat for *Otello*, and entered at the end of the first act. All was unchanged; the chorus was execrable, and the orchestra much worse; the principals sang with Latin abandon and sang rather well, and Seaforth enjoyed himself immensely. Finally *Otello* rolled down the steps, died upon a kiss, and Seaforth

started back to his hotel well satisfied with his dissipation.

After that all was blank. He could not even tell when he had been struck or who had done the striking.

He wakened to a dismal pain, a throbbing, pulsating ache that drew his hand to his head. Mingled with this was a violent nausea, a penetrating smell of oil, a tossing motion that completely overcame him.

For two days and nights he lay wretchedly seasick, with a huge bump on the back of his head, where a slung-shot had struck him; he cared nothing for life, cared not where he was or what happened to him. He had never been to sea before, and he paid worse toll than most landsmen.

His tortures were indescribable. He realized very dimly that he must have been spirited away, shanghaied from the heart of New York City, but the knowledge mattered nothing to him. He was horribly sick with the extreme thoroughness of seasickness. Toward dawn of the third day, someone emptied a bucket of freezing water over him. He wakened to find himself hungry and recovered, and presently discovered that he was being dragged to the deck of a ship, but by kindly hands. After that, he found himself in a warm room eating ravenously, while a half-dozen men lined the table before him.

Within twenty minutes he had learned several

things. His name was John Jones, and he had signed on as A.B. aboard the oil-tank steamer *Carrie B.*, of New York, for West African ports with petroleum and ballast. Further, he was expected to "hump" on deck and join the port watch, and to "peel his eye" for the second officer, who was "laying" for him. In a word, his ship-mates were kindly men and sympathetic.

Now, let it be here set down that the adventures of Cliff Seaforth on the oil tank *Carrie B.* have nothing to do with the story except that they got him to Banana Port and so up-river to Boma, capital of the Congo State. Therefore, the over-anxious reader may skip to the next chapter and miss nothing of moment; but as the said adventures of the said Cliff Seaforth on the said steamer were both stirring and highly creditable to his powers of endurance—to say nothing of his fighting ability—they are here set forth in some detail. After all, one point did prove to be a link between both his past and his future.

This point was a scrap of paper which he found in the ragged garments covering him. Examining it, he gained the reason for his present position in a single line of typewriting—which is not acceptable as evidence in a suit for damages.

Wishing you a pleasant voyage, with compliments of E. Wagner.

Seaforth read it, laughed dismally, and tore

it up. How or why he had come there mattered little; the great salient fact was that he was there, and the *Carrie B.* was outward bound to Africa.

Utterly disregarding the warnings of his mates he put his head into his hands and thought. He was self-dependent, for Solomon and everyone else were quite out of reach. What, then, was he to do?

Remembering the stories he had heard of shanghaied men, knowing the utter futility of trying to prove his identity, he almost arrived at the sensible conclusion that he could only make the best of things and work his way out to Boma. After all, John Solomon and Firth would arrive there in course of time, he could attest himself to the consul by cable and so get funds, and——

But just at this crucial point the mate stamped in and took Seaforth by the neck.

That was an unwise move for the mate, who was a silent Swede of large frame. It should be remembered that Cliff Seaforth was somewhat heartened by food; but at bottom he was still groggy with pain and the after weakness of his illness. Nevertheless, he forgot Firth's warning, lost his temper, and swung on the mate.

He was not a pleasant sight, for his stubble-grown features were caught up in anger and his deep grey eyes blazed fire. The first mate had little chance for observation, however. Seaforth drove in savagely to the stomach, crossed his right

to the jaw, and with an expression of ludicrous surprise the big Swede collapsed, senseless.

"My eye, he's plumb crazy!" yelled someone, and the men rushed for the deck.

Seaforth followed, frowning reflectively. He had started wrong, and all he could now do was to seek the captain, explain what had happened, and take his medicine like a man.

The open air revived him wonderfully. He found the *Carrie B.* swinging along through a surge of wintry foggy seas, and stood on the deck looking around in search of the captain. The men kept their distance. Seaforth started forward and met the second officer, a Scotchman who was half-dressed, angry at being aroused during his watch below, and who rather prided himself on his skill with his fists. He had no trouble in seeing that Seaforth was the culprit, but to the American's surprise did not offer battle.

"No more o' this, Jones," he growled menacingly. "For'ard with you!"

"Go to the deuce!" retorted Seaforth hotly. "I want to see the captain."

"Oh, you do?" The second mate surveyed him insultingly. "So your lordship wants to rouse up the old man, eh? Why, you——"

He had intended to make Seaforth hit first, and succeeded amply, catching a short-arm jab in the mouth and rolling head first into the wet scuppers. He was up instantly, and the excited men formed a ring with gleeful shouts.

Seaforth was in no condition to battle, but instinctively fell into his old crouch and rushed the fight. The second mate was a trimly built welter-weight, but he did not regard rules, and went into the combat with fists and feet and knees. A kick roused Seaforth's temper to savagery, a stunning blow in the neck sent him reeling—and then he proceeded to cut up the Scotchman in merciless and scientific fashion.

The entire fight lasted for three minutes. At the end of that time the second mate was hanging to the rail, dazed and bleeding, and groping for his revolver. Seaforth jerked it from him, and pushed him into the group of men.

"Where's the captain?" he demanded shortly.

Receiving an awed and wholly complimentary response, he betook himself aft and located the cabin of the "old man". There he hammered on the door with his revolver until an amazed and indignant face appeared. The face was rotund, decidedly British, and was adorned with grey mutton-chop whiskers. Seaforth shoved the door open and entered.

"No fooling, please," he snapped as the stuttering captain retreated. "I've just knocked out your two mates, and I can handle you into the bargain. My name's Seaforth—Cliff Seaforth, M.D., of Buffalo, New York State. I was shanghaied and put aboard your darned tramp under the name of Jones. What are you going to do about it?"

The captain looked at the revolver, and sat

down in his bunk precipitately. Then his British complacency flooded back on him, and he nodded calmly.

"Sorry to hear it, Doctor Seaforth. Any proofs?"

"My word."

"Ah—quite so! I hope those mates of mine did not strike you first?"

Seaforth, who was cooling rapidly, reflected.

"No, I can't say that they did. Why?"

"Because it's against the law," explained the relieved captain.

"Then I'm guilty of mutiny, eh? What about my being shanghaied?"

The captain rubbed his grizzled whiskers thoughtfully, then peered up with a humorous twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, I can do you a sight of harm, and you can do the line a sight of harm—which might cost me my berth. You're not a fool, so you'll see I can't put back to port. Come, work your passage and I'll pay you off at Boma, if you like, and there won't be no ill feeling on either side."

"Fair enough, captain." Seaforth leaned back against the door weakly. The reaction had seized him. "Pass me your word on it?"

"Eh? Of course—what are you trying to do?"

"Faint, I think." And Seaforth grinned slightly as he went down unconscious.

So he worked his passage to Boma, and neither of the mates laid finger on him during the rest of

the trip. The *Carrie B.* was anything but a fast boat, and by the time she sighted Africa, Seaforth was worked down to fighting trim, was healthier than he had been for a year past, and was looking forward eagerly to seeing Solomon and Firth.

At length, after sundry stops to unload petroleum, they ploughed into anchorage at the wharfless port of Banana, with the mangrove islands to one side and the bedraggled, dirty sand strip called a town on the other side. Their papers established, they steamed up the river to Boma between palm-strewn banks of golden sand, tangled jungle, and windy, grass-grown plateaus with hills far away.

They tied up beyond the iron government wharf, and Seaforth received eighteen dollars. He shook hands with all, from captain to cook, and dropped into a native canoe to go ashore. No sooner had he stepped ashore than he was met by Miss Frances Earl, of Baltimore, who gently chided him for not arriving sooner.

Poor Seaforth thought the heat had gone to his brain, but managed to shake hands.

CHAPTER IV

ORDERS FROM SOLOMON

Boma is built at the foot of a red earth hill, and is not pretty. The town consists of wandering structures of wood and sheet iron; it has its hospital, theatre, bandstand, and barracks, and a few palm avenues. The one wharf is forty yards long, and built of iron, but non-government steamers must tie up to trees.

So Seaforth stood on the grass-grown bank and looked into the grey eyes of Frances Earl. Twenty yards away, a score of unhappy negroes were working, chained neck to neck. But Seaforth had no eyes for anything but the girl.

She looked older than when he had last seen her, nearly three years ago; older, graver, more womanly. Her sunny hair, her fine-chiselled features, her calm steady eyes were the same, but there was a hint of something graver and deeper and sadder in her face which he could not at first understand.

And, wonder of wonders, how had she expected

him? As the girl met his puzzled eyes, she smiled a little, and dropped his hand.

"I heard that you were coming," she said simply. "I'll explain later. But—how changed you are from the medical student I used to know, Cliff Seaforth!"

"I do look ragged, for a fact." And Seaforth rubbed his stubbly chin uneasily. "I'm dying of curiosity, Miss Earl, but if there's any place I can shave and get some clean clothes——"

"You poor boy, come right along to the consul's," she cried, turning. "He'll put you up, and be only too glad. There are cables for you, and some men have been pestering him for three days past, trying to extort news of you."

With his mind in a whirl, Seaforth followed her blindly. What did all this mean? Cables, men waiting for him—the thing struck him like a glow. He had thought to land unknown and friendless, and this surprising reception swept him off his feet. With no more questions, he accompanied the girl.

They turned into a wide low iron house, and Seaforth met a pleasant young man named Innes, who proved to be the consul. Innes took him to a room, provided him with a shave and bath and an outfit of "whites", and half an hour later Seaforth rejoined his host and Frances Earl on the screened veranda.

"This is a welcome, indeed, for a poor shanghaied sailorman!" he laughed.

"Shanghaied?" Innes looked up swiftly. Seaforth, who had taken for granted that if they expected him they must know of his plight, explained how he had left New York. The girl's eyes widened a trifle, but Innes pushed a cablegram across the table.

"Read it," he said. "That'll explain why we looked for you."

Recognizing the hand of John Solomon in this, even before he read the message, Seaforth spread it out. It was in French, as delivered by the government operator.

Cliff Seaforth, physician, will arrive Boma via oil tramp *Carrie B.* Can be identified by Miss Frances Earl. Kindly further him in all ways consistent with your position. Secrétaire Général at Boma now has passport and papers in readiness.

The message was signed by the Secretary of State. Before Seaforth had more than looked up, Innes passed a secret message to him. This was addressed to Seaforth himself, and contained but four words:

Get hold of Earl.

SOLOMON.

"But, confound it," broke out the puzzled American, "what does it all mean? Where is your father, Miss Earl? His employer, Mr. South, said distinctly he would hold him at Boma——"

There was a troubled silence; then the girl replied quietly:

"Mr. South cabled too late, Doctor Seaforth. My father received an unexpected chance to join a government expedition to the upper Aruwimi, and accepted. I was left here, as they had no accommodation for me. When Mr. South's message came for him, he was already past Leopoldville and out of reach. That was three weeks ago, and we have heard nothing from him since then."

Seaforth looked at the consul, and met a warning shake of the head.

"There are your passports and papers," and Innes passed them to him. "They seem to be pretty comprehensive, too. Are you going to investigate atrocities?"

There was irony in the final words. Seaforth shook his head.

"Blessed if I know what I'm going to do, and that's a fact. My orders seem to be to get hold of your father, Miss Earl. By the way, do either of you know a Captain Wagner?"

The girl flushed a little. Innes jumped, then transfixed Seaforth with a keen gaze of inquiry.

"Yes, we know him," he answered curtly. "If you do, you'd better explain how."

This sudden coolness was surprising. Seaforth frowned and considered. After all, Innes was to be trusted and he could do no better than outline the whole situation, for it was quite plain that

the mention of Wagner had jeopardized his own position.

So he told in as few words as possible how he had met Wagner, and did not withhold the intentions of John Solomon, in so far as he knew them himself. Frances Earl heard him with intent interest, her eyes fastened on his, grey to grey; but while those of Seaforth were a deep brown-mottled grey, hers were of a light, clear, warm blue-grey that could flash with light or soften into grave reflection.

"Quixotic, my dear fellow," exclaimed the consul, when Seaforth had finished. "Absolutely impossible for you chaps to do anything! Miss Earl's father has been poking around for six months and has found nothing. There are atrocities, of course, but the investigators never find them. Go into Wagner's district—about the only one left which produces a good quantity of rubber—and you'll find them; but you won't reach Wagner's district, especially now that Wagner is there himself."

"Hold on!" cried Seaforth, amazed. "Wagner is in New York, as I told you——"

"You mean he *was* in New York," smiled Innes. "You came over by a slow oil tramp, and he came by fast mail. He got here three days ago, managed to insult Miss Earl, and hurried up-river."

Wagner's "insult" proved to have been an offer of marriage, made at first meeting with the girl. She had repulsed him hotly enough, and he had

gone to his own district at once. Seaforth's eyes burned a little.

"I told him he was a blackguard," he said. "Now, as I understand it, Mr. Earl has gone up-river; Wagner has followed. Is Earl in any danger, Innes? Out with it, man; you've probably been lying to Miss Earl, but you needn't bother any longer. I know her."

This direct attack completely upset the consul, who finally returned that Earl was most certainly in danger, despite his "government protection", for he had meant to investigate Wagner's closed territory.

"All right," snapped Seaforth. "Then I'm going after him, since I have orders to get hold of him. Tell me how I get up-river?"

Innes shrugged his shoulders and complied. Six hours up-river was Matadi; from here to Stanley Pool and Leopoldville, above the cataracts and two hundred miles distant, ran a narrow-gauge railroad. From Leopoldville, an Upper Congo steamer could be had, or else a launch, by means of which Seaforth could cruise about the Congo and its tributaries for months without reaching an end.

"All right. Now get out a map. Where's Wagner's territory and how do I get there?"

The district controlled by Wagner was a large one. It extended from the Aruwimi and Ituri Rivers on the north to the Elila River on the south; from the Congo on the west, to the British and German borders on the east.

Nearly all was jungle country, save for the north-west portion adjoining Lake Edward and the Mountains of the Moon, where were hills. The district was practically unexplored. It was inhabited largely by pygmy tribes and by the Bakumu tribe of more normal natives. Having grasped these salient facts, Seaforth nodded comprehension.

"Good! I can read French, but not talk it, so I'll have to have an interpreter. How much more of an entourage do I need, provided that I stick to the river routes?"

"In that case you'll need no more than the three men who've been waiting for you. One's an Arab half-caste, the others are native chiefs he brought in from up-country. Want to see 'em?"

Seaforth nodded, and the consul rose and vanished. Who were these three men? Agents of John Solomon, most probably. His respect for the pudgy little Cockney, which had of late risen by leaps and bounds, now became a dumb admiration.

"Are you really going to look for my father?" asked the girl softly.

"Of course. There is no saying when Solomon and Firth will show up, and there's no time to waste. Hello—are these my friends?"

"They are," said Innes, reappearing and leading three figures. "Ali, this is Doctor Seaforth."

The first of the three men salaamed. He was a tall, cadaverous, gloomy-eyed Arab of perhaps sixty, to judge by his white wool; for there was

no doubt that he was partly of negroid blood. Straightening himself, he gazed at Seaforth a moment, nodded, and then spoke in very good English:

“You answer the description, effendi. We serve you.”

The other two men turned out to be hideously ugly natives, stark naked save for loin cloths and copper-wire ornaments. Ali could talk their dialects, it transpired. One of them was only four feet in height; the other was much larger.

By dint of much questioning, Seaforth elicited the following surprising story from the Arab: Among the cables which Solomon had dispatched from New York was one to Ali, an old servitor of his who had charge of Solomon's cotton plantation in British East Africa. Ali had started for the Congo, but at Mombasa had received another cable from Solomon, which caused a change of plan.

This cable, sent out after Seaforth's disappearance, sent Ali by rail to Port Florence, on to the upper caravan route which strikes the Aruwimi, and so on overland to Boma—a journey directly across the heart of Africa, which the Arab had managed in three weeks. It had nearly killed him, but he had done it. On the way he had picked up these two chiefs from Wagner's territory and had brought them with him.

Seaforth knew that Solomon must have ascertained that he had been shanghaied and delivered

aboard the *Carrie B.*, and had doubtless learned also of Professor Earl's departure up-river. Given this much, he could reconstruct the amazing orders and plans of the Cockney—amazing because of their thorough attention to every detail.

Not daring to trust anyone in the Congo, Solomon had ordered this Arab to meet Seaforth, and had cabled an exact description of the American. Through his influence at Washington he had caused the secretary general of the Congo to have Seaforth's papers in readiness. Ali had been ordered to bring two chiefs from Wagner's district, and had done so. There only remained the question of money—and this was settled by Innes, who stated that Seaforth could have any sum he wished.

Seaforth found that it would take three weeks to get up-stream to Wagner's closed territory, for the Congo current runs five miles an hour. Ali and the two chiefs could make all arrangements, and his own passport and papers could do the rest. There was a steamer leaving for Matadi next morning, and at this Seaforth nodded.

"No use hanging fire, then. We'll go at once, Ali. Make all arrangements, and draw enough money from Mr. Innes to last us."

Innes protested against such a hasty departure, but Seaforth was firm. In the end the consul departed with Ali, for it was late in the afternoon and reservations must be made.

"You're a rather forceful man, Doctor Seaforth." And the girl smiled slightly. "It is hard to

reconcile you with the man I knew three years ago."

"I'm glad of that," laughed the American. "I was an awful cub then, what with prize-fighting and the rest. But Firth licked me into shape——"

It was the first she had known of his career, and he found himself talking of it freely and without constraint.

"You have done wonders," she said softly, when he finished. "To think of how you literally fought your way up. Why, it sounds like a novel; it really does! And all the while I was seeing you at dances and thinking what an—an——"

She paused suddenly, and he grinned.

"Go ahead. Don't mind my feelings."

"Well, what an ungainly young man you were," she concluded frankly. "I would love to meet your friend John Solomon. Still, no matter how earnest he might be, I don't think it possible for you to really effect anything. Most of the Congo has been squeezed dry of rubber. Wagner's district still sends forth a good quantity, but he keeps it rigidly closed, and no one knows how he gets it."

"But the atrocities have not ceased?"

"Of course not. Father and I could ascertain little. However, it is morally certain that the natives are still tortured, and they are openly enslaved. How can John Solomon do anything? Wagner is said to be a friend of King Leopold, and is powerful."

She told him some of the things she and her father had seen—things which were bad enough, yet as nothing to the earlier atrocities and horrors of the rubber trade. In the coast regions these horrors had ceased, largely because the rubber was gone, but in the interior the blood-squeezed lumps of red gum were still obtained.

“Well, Solomon will probably follow me up-river,” nodded Seaforth. “I don’t know what he expects to do, or how, but I’ve come to have a very firm faith that he’ll do something. The head of the affair seems to be our friend Wagner. Do you know anything of his secret organization?”

“Nothing; but that is one of the things my father was anxious to investigate. I do hope that we’ll catch up with him.”

“Eh?” Seaforth jumped at the word. “We? You’re not going with me.”

“Why, certainly!” The girl’s eyes widened a little, but there was a smile on her lips. “Don’t you want me?”

He looked at her, amazed, but thought she was jesting.

“No, I don’t want you, Miss Earl. So that’s settled.”

“I’m glad you think so,” she retorted calmly. “You may as well find out right now that you can’t lord it over me, Cliff Seaforth. I’m worried about father and I intend to accompany you; that’s all.”

At this instant the consul returned from his

office, Ali following. Seaforth appealed to him in blank dismay, and Innes at once stated that it was quite impossible for the girl to go. In reply she turned to Ali and ordered him to buy her a ticket to Leopoldville when he procured that of Seaforth. Ali salaamed gravely.

"I won't allow it," broke out Seaforth hotly. "Why, girl, think of the snakes and bugs and things! You can't be allowed to run into all kinds of danger——"

"If I can't go with you," she broke in quietly, "I'll follow you—tag you in another launch, hire my own servants."

"But there will be no accommodations for you!" cried Innes.

"Get them."

"Look here, Miss Earl!" And Seaforth's jaw set hard. "You can't go, and that's all there is to it. We'll be voyaging for a month, perhaps more, and will be in a small launch all that time. There will be no place for a woman. Can't you realize that?"

For a moment she regarded him, level-eyed and cool.

"I realize this—that I do you the compliment of trusting your protection; that I'm capable of caring for myself; that equally with my father I have permission from the government to go where I will—and that I mean to go. Now, do I go with you and Ali, or am I forced to hire my own servants and party?"

Innes said something under his breath, and stared at her. Seaforth screwed up his face savagely and tried to compel her with his eyes, but he encountered a will as stubborn as his own, realized that while he himself was not angry he seemed quite cool and well pleased and determined—and knew he was beaten.

"Why should you object merely because of sex?" she said quietly. "I know nothing about the country and matters of this kind. I am a father who is in possible danger, and not I can take care of myself, and in return for your protection of me I can make myself useful in a hundred little ways, from sewing your clothes to managing the cooking. Why not regard it as a partnership?"

Perforce, Seaforth yielded. The only reason she should not go was that she was not a man, yet for that very reason she must be the better partner.

"I will," he asserted, forcing himself into graciousness. "If you insist, to be it. I'll do my best to make things easy——"

"I don't want them," she flung out scornfully. "I'm not asking you to make things easy. I'm asking you to become a partner in all it implies. Will you or won't you?"

"I will, because I have to," laughed Seaforth, and laid his great hand across the table frankly.

"We are partners, Frances. Shake!"

"I will," said Seaforth.

With the words she went red, but her eyes did not falter. And in their depths the American read something very plain to him. They were partners; they were going on a long journey, and he must forget that his partner was a woman. In other words, he must forget that she was Frances Earl, which was for him a much harder task. Acknowledging this fact, Seaforth agreed to it mentally. He was quite ignorant that he was but obeying the instincts of a gentleman, so he only thought of it as stern necessity.

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CHAPTER V

UP-RIVER

Matadi, with its miniature rock of Gibraltar, and its zinc railroad shops, and its chained slaves, was far behind. Seaforth stood on the junk-spattered river-front of Leopoldville and surveyed the purchases of the gloomy-eyed Ali.

Out on the river passed the state boats—house-boats almost, save for the stern paddle wheel. The river-front itself was heaped with discarded boilers, plates, fire-bars, and other junk. In front of the port captain's office was a ship chandler's shop, and Ali was now engaged in swearing at the unhappy Belgian proprietor. He did it carefully, so that Frances Earl and Seaforth should not hear, but he did it thoroughly.

"Cabin aft for you," observed the American. "Cool and curtained. We'll rig mosquito curtains under that forward awning and be in shape to start by morning."

Tied to a mangrove root at their feet was a launch, twenty feet in length. Her engines—four-cylinder—stood amidships, with a cover to shed

the rains. Aft, was a small open cabin, while the forward deck was covered by a stationary awning.

"Too small for six, but just right for five," stated Frances critically. "You'd better see the port captain now if you expect to leave in the morning. I'll attend to the provisioning, and Ali will get up your mosquito curtains."

Ali had leased the craft in Seaforth's name from a discouraged independent trader, and she was fitted with batteries and a searchlight for night travel. The Belgians, contrary to the Berlin Act, systematically tried to put obstacles in front of outside merchants and travellers, reserving traffic and trafficking to the State monopoly. In five minutes, Seaforth, who promptly adopted the girl's suggestion, gained another instance of this.

The Belgian port captain, who was gross and greasy, puffed at his pipe and pawed Seaforth's papers, and finally shoved them back, telling the American to return on the morrow. He was carrying arms and two natives, which was forbidden, but if he would the young mademoiselle introduce, the affair might be managed.

At this point the port captain was lifted from his chair and jarred violently by a boot toe. Seaforth dumped him on the floor, jerked him up, then bent over and looked into the frightened man's eyes.

"I'm leaving here at dawn," he said coldly. "Get up and sign those papers."

The Belgian rushed to the window, and turned, pointing dramatically.

"Do you see those soldiers?" he cried, crying with rage and mortification. "I will have them chain you up——"

"*Assez*," broke in Seaforth, with a glance at the black soldiers drilling before the barracks. "There's an American flag over that boat. Sign those papers!"

The port captain signed them, and Seaforth left. Crossing to the ship chandler's shop, he found Ali still swearing and bargaining over the counter. The shopkeeper was coolly insolent and quite disdainful. Seaforth informed him that the boat left at dawn.

"That is not my business," yawned the Belgian. "Leave, if you wish."

Seaforth caught him by the shoulders and plucked him over his counter, screaming; then flung him against the wall.

"Send those chop boxes down, and do it now!" he ordered coldly. "You're dealing with Americans, my friend."

The Belgian obeyed. Once outside, Ali looked up admiringly.

"Effendi, it is easily hat you are a man!"

"Thanks," grinned Seaforth. "You can run an engine?"

Ali assented.

"Then we start at dawn. Have those two chiefs sleep aboard to-night."

And at dawn they started up the misty steaming river.

Upon consulting with Frances, Seaforth decided to push on to the Lindi River, which left the Congo just east of the Aruwimi and struck directly into Wagner's district. It was only partially charted, but would take them to where they could get traces of Earl, at least. He figured that it was fifteen hundred miles up-river.

They would have no difficulty in renewing their petrol supply at stations along the Congo, so that their deckload consisted chiefly of provisions, and a water filter for drinking purposes. Now, almost for the first time, Seaforth turned his mind to the two native chiefs.

The larger of these, whose name was so indefinite that he was promptly christened Sambo, was head of a tribe completely decimated by Wagner. He had interesting tales to relate through Ali. The smaller man's name was Mbara, and his people were dwarfs who lived along the farther Lindi River.

Ali was quite frank in stating that in his earlier days he had been a slaver, and so knew most of the Congo dialects. Mbara he had induced to accompany him through promises of wealth, for the dwarfs controlled the deeper jungles, and Mbara was powerful among them. Sambo, however, the Arab picked up as a fugitive. It seemed that Sambo's tribe had taken to hiding from Wagner's forces.

“Do you think he would bring his people to us, Ali?” asked the girl.

“Why?” struck in Seaforth. “They’re probably in bad shape— —”

“That’s why I want to see them. I have my camera, and if we can get proof of atrocities and tortures, so much the better. How about it, Ali?”

The Arab conferred with Sambo, and finally replied that once they reached the Lindi River Sambo would be glad to comply. The chief had been informed that Seaforth and Miss Earl were “Ingleza”, and to native minds the English stand for freedom.

The State boats would require a month or more for that up-river trip, as they crawled slowly against the current, did not travel at night, and tied up for lengthy intervals while the “boys” cut firewood. Seaforth’s launch did far better, however. She could make six miles an hour against the current, and by alternating watches with Ali, the American managed to keep running at night. He allowed two weeks for the voyage.

That was a strange trip, and compelled much more space in Seaforth’s “Relation” than can be given it here. The river was miles wide at times, and constant recourse to the charts was necessary. Now they would drive on between mountains of green grass in deep blue water; again the river would become a wide brown lake dotted with islands, alive with flamingoes, scarlet cranes, egrets, and parrots.

Sometimes they came to dreary settlements, where they renewed petrol and provisions. These State posts were jungle clearings, a hundred yards square, with a white agent in charge; lonely men these, sometimes unvisited for months, who begged for news of the outer world, and gazed on Frances Earl with haggard eyes. From them Seaforth heard that the girl's father had gone up-stream—always up-stream.

Of natives they saw none, save the chained slaves at the posts. An occasional river steamer almost awash, a few trading scows floating downstream with rubber and ivory and palmoil, and no more. They passed Dima, with its brick houses, and repair shops for the State boats, and floated on along the mighty artery of the wilderness.

Just before reaching the Aruwimi River, Seaforth gained his first sight of what was really going on here in the heart of Africa. They had reached a desolate little post, deserted save for one man who was dying of fever. He was a Swiss, and spoke English perfectly. That night Seaforth, who was trying to relieve his suffering, heard a terrible story.

"The commandant and the sub-lieutenant are away on punitive expeditions," he was informed by the dying man. "When I came, five years ago, there were two thousand natives living here. Go and look in the grass—it was too much trouble to bury them. A week ago I had a dozen natives

here, but Wagner came and whipped them to death——”

“Wagner? Captain Wagner?” broke in Seaforth.

“There is only one devil,” smiled the dying man, and his smile was ghastly. “Go and look in the grass. We have killed them all.”

At dawn Seaforth went and looked in the long grass which surrounded the dilapidated buildings. There were skeletons everywhere. He came upon an overgrown flower-bed bordered with skulls. On a post was set a smoke-dried human hand, pointing the way to the commandant's office—surely a quaint conceit! Sickened by all it portended, Seaforth left the Swiss some medicines and rejoined the launch, saying nothing to Frances. The Swiss had said that Professor Earl had been in two days in advance of Wagner, and it looked dark.

“I'm afraid, Frances,” said the American as they left the post behind, “that unless Providence has held Wagner off, your father is in his power. Basoko is ahead, at the mouth of the Aruwimi. Suppose you wait there and let me push on——”

“Where you go I go,” she said curtly. Seaforth urged her no more.

Basoko was to be their last halt in charted regions, for the Lindi River branched off just beyond. At Basoko they learned that Professor Earl was only three days ahead of them, but that he had turned up the Lindi River with Wagner,

while the government expedition went on up the Congo proper.

Now, this Lindi River proved of great interest to Cliff Seaforth. On the chart it was, and still is, set down as a vaguely dotted line fifty miles from the Congo. Yet Ali swore positively that it was a great river, that it crossed the caravan route from Lake Albert to Stanleyville, and that it had not been explored or mapped because of "strange people", of whom all the natives were afraid.

Who these "strange people" were, Ali professed not to know. They were not warriors, because the black soldiers under Wagner had subdued them and now conducted the reign of terror through their influence. He could or would say no more.

They left Basoko with full petrol tanks and with the Stars and Stripes flying over the launch. Although Seaforth did not realize it, the unhappy natives were quite aware of the difference between the blue Free State flag, with its gold star, and any other flag. As the launch passed up-river from Basoko, her tricolour was seen and the jungle depths began to thrill into life.

Thus it was that, when they came to the Lindi River and were about to dispatch Sambo in search of his own people, a group of natives waved to them from a small point ahead, and Ali promptly set the launch toward shore. The scene that ensued left both Frances and Seaforth white and shaken—the girl with pity, the man with fury.

There were a score of natives in all, eight of them

men and the rest boys. Some had a hand lopped off, some a foot; some had been shot and mutilated. Ali and Sambo talked with them; then the Arab turned, throwing a cautious glance at the girl.

“Do you wish to hear what they say, effendi?”

“Conceal nothing!” ordered Frances, whose camera had been busy. The Arab sat on the rail and rolled a cigarette, quite unconcerned.

“There is but one God! Effendi, here is the tale of these men, all that are left from a village of five hundred. They said: ‘Our village had to bring twenty baskets of rubber four times a month. We got no pay. Then the rubber got scarce, and it took us ten days to get that amount. We had to go farther into the forest to find the vines. Our women starved; we had no food. Some of us died from wild beasts. When our rubber was short the white man and his soldiers killed us. Some were shot, some had other things happen to them that were—worse. Men and women, all! Effendi, this is the tale, and I have spoken truly.’”

The poor wretches broke into a flood of entreaties that the “Inglezi” would help them and give them food. What Seaforth could spare he gave them. Heartsick, he was forced to put out once more and leave the maimed creatures screaming after him.

That night they entered the Lindi River, and with the next morning the big native, Sambo, bade them farewell. But the manner of his going

was so strange and so significant that it gave Seaforth no little disquiet.

The American was at the wheel beneath the stern awning. Frances was at his side, writing down the story they had gained from the natives the day previous. The dwarf chief, Mbara, was squatted up in the bow, while Ali was asleep.

Seaforth had suddenly remembered the curious iron symbol which had been sent to Solomon in Buffalo—that odd looped cross which Solomon had said to be the token of Wagner's authority over the natives.

Thinking that either the girl or Ali might know something of it, he told her what Solomon had said, and with a piece of soap drew the outline of the *ankh* on the deck. He had barely finished when Sambo came aft for a drink of water from the filter. The black chief idly glanced down at the deck—and then stood, staring, his face ashen grey.

“Hey! What's the matter?” queried Seaforth in execrable French.

Sambo stared down, mumbled something inarticulate, and then, with a single leap, flung himself over the rail and struck out for shore like a madman. Seaforth tried to bring the launch about, knowing that the river was alive with crocodiles and hippopotami, but as they swept around Sambo splashed up to shore and disappeared amid the hanging creepers.

Wakened by Seaforth's shout, Ali came running aft.

"What the deuce does this mean?" The American pointed to the deck. "Why should it send that fellow scampering——"

To his amazement, the features of the gaunt Arab flashed livid; then his sandal swept out and rubbed over the soap, erasing the mark.

"Would you frighten *him* away likewise, effendi?" And he pointed to the figure of Mbara, forward.

"But what does the thing stand for, Ali?"

"I do not know, effendi." And Seaforth knew that he lied. "I do not know what it is, except that it brings death to all men in this district. We are now in Wagner's territory."

"Is it a fetish of some sort, then?" asked Frances, wondering.

"Yes." And Ali glanced half-fearfully at the dun deserted waters. "Yes, it is the fetish Azrael—may Allah preserve us!"

And he stalked forward to finish his sleep, and refused to speak further on the subject of the *ankh*.

Seaforth told the girl what he knew about the thing. This brought to his recollection the entry in Solomon's notebook, wherein he had read that Wagner had sold a collection of supposed Egyptian jewellery to the Louvre.

"Could it be," she asked slowly, "that he?—but no, it's too improbable!"

"What?" demanded Seaforth, frowning.

"Nothing is improbable in this country."

“Well, then, about those Egyptian things and this Egyptian symbol of the *ankh*. It’s very odd, Cliff. Father and I have investigated Wagner as thoroughly as we could, and I don’t recall that he was ever in Egypt, or was known as an archaeologist. In fact, he’s been in this country too long. He’s absolute ruler in this district and owns half of the stock in the dummy company, of which King Leopold holds the remaining stock. Where did he get that Egyptian jewellery, then?”

Seaforth shook his head, puzzled.

“What was your idea, Frances? I can’t see any light. Wagner keeps this district pretty tightly closed, from all I can gather.”

“It struck me that he might really have found some Egyptian things here, Cliff. Of course, the idea is incredible, but you know the old Egyptians spread out half over Africa, or the negro tribes raided their southern cities and made off with the loot, exactly as did the Huns and Goths to the Roman provinces. Some of this loot might have been fetched into this eastern Congo——”

“I’m afraid you *are* stretching probabilities,” laughed Seaforth. “However, we’ve lost Sambo, so we’ll make no more pictures of the symbol, because we may stand in need of our friend Mbara later.”

Wild and incredible as Frances Earl’s suggestion seemed, the American was to discover that it was a better-aimed shaft than any from his own quiver.

CHAPTER VI

TROUBLE

Two days passed—days of poignant steaming heat that made Seaforth envy the nearly naked Mbara and the equally unabashed Ali. He himself wore pyjamas, and wondered how on earth Frances Earl could look so cool, when she must be roasting, in her khaki suit.

For all they could see, Wagner's party might have vanished in the wilderness. Jungle hemmed in the river. It was slow and broad and sluggish, but toward noon of the second day the current grew swifter, and high country could be made out ahead. Save for the scores of hippopotami, the river appeared to be quite deserted on either bank.

Seaforth had no arms, except for an automatic pistol and several clips of cartridges which the consul had given him on leaving Boma. Frances had a small pearl-handled revolver which she always carried. Ali displayed no arms, but Seaforth shrewdly conjectured that the Arab kept pistol and knife concealed. Mbara had a dozen

tiny darts and a blowpipe, which he had made on the voyage. The darts were poisoned with a reddish waxy substance which Ali declared to be fatal.

Where they were Seaforth did not know. Mbara's country was to the north, it seemed, and the dwarf was quite indifferent whom he served or what became of him so that he had plenty to eat and a few copper bracelets.

Toward sunset of the second day, the situation changed abruptly. The river had run east and west. Now it swept out in a great curve to the south, running through deep jungle. To the east were high hills. And without warning the launch swept down around a curving promontory to a large and apparently prospering station.

Half a dozen bungalows of corrugated iron, a larger store, a background of grass huts, a weedy clearing where manioc and plantains were growing, a plantation of rubber vines—this was the station, with the Free State flag drooping listlessly in the sunset from a flagpole.

In the half-overgrown parade ground a string of neck-chained slaves were at work, while half-naked black soldiers stalked around with guns in evidence. In the background appeared more slaves, more soldiers, some women and children. As the launch drew in to the landing stage shouts rippled up, and from one of the bungalows a white man came staggering to the river bank. He was drunk, but not too drunk to be polite at sight of

the girl. He was a young man also, with a beard and drink-sodden pale-blue eyes.

"Welcome!" he exclaimed unsteadily, speaking French. "Who are you?"

Seaforth produced his papers and passports, which the Belgian fumbled over and returned unread. He introduced himself as the physician of the post, and his name was Vanderdonk. He was visibly ashamed of his condition at sight of Frances, and made no bones of the fact that he was drunk.

"Take any of the bungalows that you like," he muttered. "Dine with me, please. I am very lonely, and I will sober up at once. Everyone is away on a punitive expedition. No hope, no hope, no hope——"

He staggered back to his bungalow, mumbling despondently. Seaforth looked at the curious black soldiery, who inspected the launch with insolent eyes. They were cruel-looking men, these, their faces utterly evil beyond any power of description. The American's grey eyes narrowed, and he turned to Ali.

"You and Mbara sleep aboard the launch—anchor her a bit out in the stream. Think you these devils will offer injury?"

"Not to me and the dwarf, effendi," returned Ali gloomily. "They fear these dwarfs and their poison. But you—it would be better to sleep on the boat."

"I'll be hanged if I do!" broke out Seaforth

angrily. "Frances, will you occupy a bungalow if I sleep at your door? It will be a pleasant change, and I think we need fear nothing."

She nodded, and Seaforth watched while Ali and Mbara anchored the launch twenty feet from shore. Then he turned and strode to the bungalow next that of Vanderdonk. Upon examination this proved to contain three rooms. It was fairly clean and was well fitted with mosquito curtains. Ten minutes sufficed to put one of the bedrooms at the girl's disposal. Seaforth dragged a cot from another room and put it near her door, and they went forth to dine with Doctor Vanderdonk.

How he had managed it, Seaforth could not say, but he was fairly sobered and was attired in clean "whites". He informed them that his servants were preparing dinner, and they sat on his veranda while waiting.

Seaforth bluntly asked after Wagner's party, and with some hesitation Vanderdonk replied that Captain Wagner had passed only yesterday, without stopping. Yes, he had noticed a white man in the captain's boat, an elderly man with a beard and spectacles. This was, of course, Professor Earl, and Frances was delighted at the tidings.

"We ought to pick him up to-morrow then," said Seaforth, "or next day at most. Where is his head station?"

The Belgian looked at Frances, and his pale eyes lighted up.

"Pray," he said earnestly, "do not seek your

father, mademoiselle. Do not go on, for it is madness, madness. There is no hope for this wretched country, for you or for me, for anyone. That Wagner is a devil—I tell you this, now that I know who you are. It matters not—I will never see Antwerp again.”

“Come,” exclaimed Seaforth, shocked at the man’s aspect of utter dejection. “Brace up, Vanderdonk! What do you mean?”

“Have you not seen?” With a despondent gesture the other sank back in his chair. “Tortures, death, murders on every hand, and for me nothing but suicide. Oh, we Belgians are not responsible, dear friends! Hundreds of us have been lured to this land, to be murdered or to commit suicide at the end.”

Seaforth flashed the shocked girl a warning glance. He saw that Vanderdonk had enough liquor left in him to make him talkative, and so held silence. His reasoning was justified, for the Belgian continued at once:

“Yes, suicide! Why, think you, do I make a beast of myself with absinth? It is because I cannot bear these horrors longer, because I have no authority over those black soldiers out there, who murder and mutilate at will!”

“But why have you no authority?” demanded the girl indignantly, heedless of Seaforth’s tacit warning. “Are you not in command here?”

“Command!” Vanderdonk laughed with wretched scorn. “No man commands save Captain

Ernest Wagner. Listen—I will tell you this. Like others, I was offered a salary and a bonus, an administrative position. I was advanced five hundred francs for my outfit, and I am pledged to work off the sum. I came here and found that to get results I must condone the most horrible crimes ever man imagined. I resigned. The government took my resignation, but said I must work off my debt. Oh, God, what a debt of blood!”

The miserable man shivered. They were sitting in the half-darkness now, but it was not the river mist which had induced that shiver. Somewhere from the jungle behind them had risen one horrible scream, in a woman’s voice.

“Why not go down the river and escape then?” asked Seaforth, deeply stirred.

“The steamers are all under government control—how could I? I threatened that if I were forced to stay I would expose the conditions here when I returned to Belgium. They are going to take me to Boma by the next steamer. When I get there they will prefer charges of cruelty against me—irony, irony!—and they will put me in the Boma jail. Do you know who are in that jail at Boma? No, you do not. Some are criminals, but most are men like myself, men who could not pay the price of blood. I am afraid to blow out my brains, so I am drinking myself to death. No help, no help, no help!”

Vanderdonk seemed to sink into a stupor.

Horrified as Seaforth was at the awful story, its truth was stamped in every line of the Belgian's wretched face. Yet it was incredible.

"Do these things happen?" he muttered to the girl. White-lipped, she nodded.

"Yes, often. They will not let him go."

The American cursed under his breath. For the first time he saw things in a new light. These men were not all red-handed. Like poor Vanderdonk, many of them were victims of a remorseless system and absolutely beyond help. He began to realize that the task which John Solomon had taken upon himself would do more than rescue black people from torture.

They went in to dinner, and were served by two cowed and abject native women. Vanderdonk roused slightly, but although it was quite evident that he was gently born and was impressed by the girl's presence, he could not abstain from drink. Little by little he relapsed into stupor, and by the end of dinner was in a drunken sleep. Later, Seaforth learned that the man had been forced to accompany some black soldiery on a punitive expedition, and what he saw then had drenched his soul in shame and remorse. For him, indeed, there was no hope.

The night passed without incident, and at dawn Seaforth was roused by Ali, who had fetched some breakfast for the two. The American regretted that they had not pushed on up-stream during the night, but the attraction of a civilized bed

had been potent. He was to regret it again, and that in no long time.

Vanderdonk appeared, sober, and asked after Frances. She appeared a moment later, and when they had spoken together the Belgian signed Seaforth to step apart.

"Monsieur, for God's sake go at once with the mademoiselle! Go quickly!"

"Eh? Why?"

"Because a party of natives have just come in with rubber. I have no authority over these black devils of soldiers, and they know it. Take her away, for in an hour this place will be worse than hell. When the commandant will return I do not know."

Seaforth saw that the man was in desperate, terrible earnest.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "We'll go at once. Ali!"

He dispatched Ali to the boat with Frances, merely telling the surprised girl that there was no time for breakfast now if they were to catch up with Wagner. There seemed to be none of the soldiers on the parade ground, and Ali and the girl walked down to the boat unmolested.

Seaforth himself remained for a moment, trying to obtain some information about Wagner from the Belgian. This he found impossible, for the man was overwrought and prayed him frantically to be gone at once. Finding there was nothing

else to do, the American stepped from the veranda—and then he paused.

For a little figure had appeared, running and moaning. It was a boy, perhaps five years old, and the boy's right hand dangled as he ran, half-severed at the wrist and spouting blood. Running after him, laughing hugely, leaped one of the black soldiers, knife in hand.

Seaforth never remembered clearly what happened, for stark madness leaped into his brain when he realized the horror. The soldier had crossed his path, and plunged his knife at the boy. As he did so Seaforth's fist struck him with awful force under the ear, and the man fell screaming, his jaw crushed.

For a long moment the American stood over the writhing man, trying to force himself into calm, but he could not. He heard Ali and Frances crying out to him, but there were other cries arising that dinned in his ears. He looked to the store behind the bungalows, and saw why the other soldiers had not observed his action.

Three of them were standing in front of the rest, in their hands the long chicottes or whips of hippopotamus hide, and three native women held by other soldiers. The women were being lashed. To one side were a party of frightened natives, with huge grass baskets partly filled with red rubber lumps. As he looked Seaforth saw a soldier seize on a child and crush in its skull with his musket butt.

He had read of these things, he had heard of them, yet until that moment he had never realized them. The sight drove sanity quite out of his head, and with a sobbing cry he ran forward. He was a terrible sight, for his grey eyes flamed from a convulsed face, and the fury which filled him seemed to radiate from him like a living force.

He was still unobserved. As he came he could not keep the details of that scene from stamping themselves on his brain—the red welts across the backs of the moaning women, the crushed child, the laughing soldiers. No thought of what he did, entered his mind. His brain was clouded in a red fury. He dimly heard Vanderdonk screaming at him, felt the man try to hold him back, and a moment later he was among the torturers.

He struck upon them like an avenging angel, and at first he quite forgot the automatic at his hip. The black brutes had no warning until he leaped into their midst and seized one of the chicottes from the man who wielded it. Then, whirling up the long, terrible, blood-letting lash, he began to smite with all the power that was in him.

Now, the chicotte is a difficult thing to handle dexterously, for so terrible a weapon is it that only trained whippers can avoid drawing blood at each stroke. Seaforth was not trained, and he was a man of tremendous strength. His first blow caught the man who had murdered the child,

and the lash cut half through his neck. His second blow fell on two of the torturers and bared their backs to the bone. His third blow flickered in among the soldiers and maimed two more for life.

With that, the astounded black men woke up. Some of them fled, but more of them rushed forward in rage. Seaforth sent the lash whirling in their faces, failed to stop them, and reversed his weapon. The heavy butt crushed in skulls and shoulders, but they came at him with yells of enraged fury. They were after blood, and would have it.

A musket blazed out, and missed. The chicotte caught the firer across the face and dropped him, screaming. Seaforth felt them all around him, striking with their guns and knives. Something ripped across his chest and drew blood.

Then, and not till then, he wakened to his danger. A musket butt glanced from his head, and he dropped the heavy whip, clutching at his automatic as he turned. With no mercy tempering the red flame of his anger, he shot down the man who had struck, and turned on the rest, his automatic spitting bullet after bullet, until the hammer fell with vain clicks.

Something hissed over his shoulder, and he vaguely saw the soldiers turn and flee in blind panic. Another hiss and another, and at each a man dropped. Then he was aware that Ali was gripping him and that Mbara was holding his blow-pipe to his mouth and sending forth darts with unerring aim. After that he knew little more.

Weak and utterly unnerved by the reaction which had come upon him, Seaforth turned and allowed Ali to lead him away from the shambles. He was numb with horror, and his brain reeled. Vanderdonk had vanished within his bungalow, where lay his only solace and remedy from these things.

Ali called off the murder-happy dwarf, and they led Seaforth down to the launch. He did not know that he was wounded and spent, but neither did he know all that he had done, happily. He collapsed on the deck where they dropped him, dimly heard the chug-chug of the engine, and felt that Frances Earl was holding his head in her lap and soothing his burning brain with the touch of her soft hands.

For a long time Seaforth lay there, the girl's tears falling on his cheeks. Gradually he collected himself, and he could not restrain the terrible choking sobs that gripped him, nor was he ashamed of his tears for once. So awful was the scene that it passed his realization. And these were the Congo atrocities? These were the things which he had pledged himself to wipe out!

"I could not help it!" he sobbed at last, trying to draw himself up. "That boy—those women—oh, the devils, the devils! And all this is the work of white men, that they may enrich themselves! You did not see——"

"Hush, Cliff, hush!" cried the girl frantically. "I saw it all. Oh, be quiet and lie still!"

He obeyed her, for the excess of his rage had left him weakened and helpless and inert. He felt that she was binding up the scratch on his chest, and after a little pulled himself together and sat up.

"Thanks, Ali," he said shakily to the Arab, who sat behind them at the wheel. "I was crazed for the moment. Thanks for your help."

"God is God!" affirmed Ali solemnly, his gaunt face livid. "Effendi, the old days of slave raiding were far better than these. Never, in the old days, did I see such sights as I have seen this dawn."

For a space they all sat silent, while the launch swept out into the wide reaches of the river, and the place of horror was swallowed in the jungle depths behind them. Then the Arab spoke again, as if to himself:

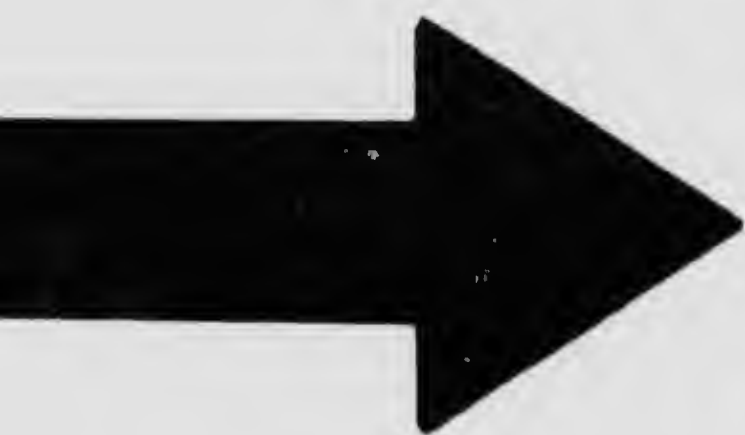
"May Allah curse these Belgians! May Allah bring to them and to theirs what they have brought to these black peoples! May Allah lay waste their homes and send them to Jehannum, they and their wives and children, without mercy——"

"Be silent, Ali!" commanded the girl sharply. "It is not the Belgians who have done this. They are a good people. They know nothing of it. It is Leopold and the men he sends here, men like Captain Wagner."

"Yes." Seaforth dropped his head in his hands, trying to shut out the horrors from his brain.

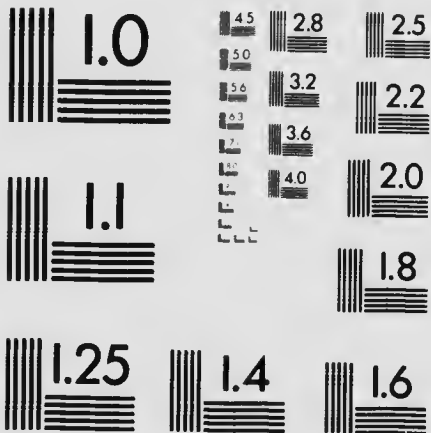
"Yes, the Belgians are innocent, Ali. Nonetheless,





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I think that some day the one God will, in truths make the innocent suffer with the guilty for what is done here. Go and get us something to eat. I will take the wheel."

And the launch swept on into the jungle of desolation, while the morning brightened and sent the river mists swirling up like writhing ghosts, wraiths of people murdered calling upon the blue sky for vengeance.

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CHAPTER VII

TRAPPED

Remorse over his acts of that morning did not trouble Seaforth a whit. These Congo soldiers were not men, but beasts, drunk with slaughter and torture. The American's only regret was that any had escaped.

"But I think it will bring trouble on us all," he said gloomily to Frances Earl at noon, as they discussed Ali's luncheon. "For your sake I am sorry, girl. Wagner will hear of it and——"

"Cliff, no more of such talk!" she broke in quietly but earnestly, and her warm blue-grey eyes rested steadily on his. "You did right—or if you did wrong it was a splendid wrong! As for ourselves, no matter what happens to me I will be only too glad to meet father again, and we can all go down-river together."

Seaforth gazed at her, and smiled a little bitterly.

"We will not go down-river," he said.

"How do you mean?"

"What did Wagner purpose when he took your father with him up the Lindi. You know that

these people have not hesitated to murder and intimidate missionaries and other foreigners who have interfered. Solomon knew this, and he ordered me to get your father. I mean to do my best, because John Solomon does not give orders unless there is something behind them. After what I have seen and done I am now convinced that we are going direct into Wagner's hands. But we are going on."

"Do you know where Solomon is?"

Seaforth only shrugged his shoulders in negation.

Perhaps it was the effect of the steaming jungle, the vast stretches of river, the weeks of savagery; more likely it was the effect of what he had seen at the last two stations, and the events of that same morning; but in any case he had been changed. His self-dependence had become a bitter fatalism, but only in part.

He believed firmly that they were going into danger, or worse, but he placed the blame on the pudgy shoulders of John Solomon, and cared little what might come. His belief in the justice of an offended Deity had been shaken. What omnipotent God could allow such horrors to take place unpunished? Quite simply, and without the least trace of blasphemy, Seaforth's mind resolved itself into the following statement:

"If the God of my fathers is the true God, then He will protect Frances Earl and perhaps me as well. If not, then we had as well die."

Nor was any sacrilege in his thought. When

in parlous straits and helpless to act, all men either become fatalists or they put themselves in God's hand, and Seaforth was of the latter kind. His trust in Providence was quite sincere and absolute, and he went forward with the faith that were God with them they need not fear.

Ali, like many a low-caste Moslem, was an utter fatalist—contrary to the commands of his religion, be it noted. Frances Earl thought only of rejoining her father. It seemed to her that, once they had found him, all would be well with them. Not in the least was she prepared for what they were destined to find before them.

As for Mbara, the dwarf squatted in the prow and worked at fresh darts. It seemed that these white people meant to give him killing, and he was satisfied. The only God Mbara knew and feared was already foredoomed, as he was to see that same day.

The afternoon was half-gone when, on a little knoll on the left-hand bank, Seaforth made out a clearing amid the trees, and ordered Ali over to investigate. The knoll rose above the river, and as they drew in beneath it Seaforth thought that he made out a large cross.

"It must be a mission station," exclaimed the girl. "There aren't any signs of houses, though. Do you know what it is, Ali?"

"Yes," nodded the Arab, looking more gaunt, and gloomy than ever. "You, too, will know, when you have seen it closely."

They drew in to a mass of tangled roots, and to Seaforth's surprise he saw Mbara leap ashore eagerly and slip off through the trees. He followed, with Frances, leaving Ali to tend the boat, and they followed the path of the dwarf, which seemed to be a well-defined trail leading up the knoll.

"A grave of some explorer, perhaps," Seaforth said, and then he stopped abruptly as the trees thinned out ahead and they reached the crest of the knoll. The object was in truth a cross—but it was a looped cross, the symbol of the *ankh*.

The thing was some twenty feet in height and was formed of wood. Fastened to the cross-arms and high loop and the upright were bits of cloth fluttering in the wind, while at its foot were a few calabashes. Mbara was prostrate before it, in evident adoration. The *ankh* bore no inscription or carving.

Feeling unreasonably angered, Seaforth turned and shouted to Ali to join them. They walked across the little clearing and examined the cruciform monument, when it became plain that the bits of cloth and the calabashes, which were full of meal or food, were votive offerings. The Arab hastened up, and Seaforth turned to him.

"What is this thing, Ali? Come, answer!"

The Arab spoke to Mbara, who replied without moving from his prostrate position.

"I myself know little of it, effendi," he said. "The dwarf says that it is the god of the White Mountain, who rules all this country. He says

that we had best make a present, or the god will smite us at once."

"Where is this White Mountain? Is that Wagner's headquarters?"

"Allah only knows, effendi. It is a native legend, that is all I can say."

Seaforth looked at him, frowning.

"Ali, I think that you lie, but never mind."

He strode forward and leaned over Mbara, catching up the heavy curved chopping-knife which hung at the dwarf's girdle. As his object became apparent, Mbara leaped up with a cry of fright, and stood staring. Seaforth stepped to the *ankh* and began to chop through the three-inch upright. A moment, and the thing toppled and crashed down.

"Ali, tell him that his fetish is dead."

The Arab obeyed. Mbara, shaking, took back his knife and stared at Seaforth in awe; then he dropped and prostrated himself before the American. Seaforth laughed and pulled him up.

"So much for the god of the White Mountain! Frances, I'll wager that this affair was set up by Wagner."

"It's recently been erected," she nodded assent.

"The post was unprotected and the ants had not eaten it. Well, let's go on, for this place makes me shivery."

Seaforth half-expected to see skulls and human bones, but found nothing of the sort, and they returned to the launch. Mbara was hugely elated,

and from that day his awe of Seaforth was firmly established, and was destined to bear fruit.

It never occurred to the American that he might turn around and go back to Boma. He had been sent to get Earl and meant to get him, after which things could work themselves out. He was in a red flame of fury against Captain Ernest Wagner, and the sad misery of Doctor Vanderdonk failed to warn him. When he returned to the outside world, if he ever did, he would do some exposing. So, at least, he told himself.

Returning, however, was likely to prove difficult. Yet he and Frances had their passports and official papers, as had Professor Earl also, and how would Wagner dare to interfere with them. Then, too, Solomon was coming.

"I wish I knew where John Solomon is, right now," he confided to the girl that night as their searchlight played on the waters ahead and they drove forward to the south and east. "It would be heartening, at least."

"He must be a wonderfully capable man, Cliff. Think how he provided friends for you at Boma and arranged everything——"

"Especially Miss Frances Earl." And Seaforth smiled for the first time since leaving the post that morning. "Do you know, I'm very glad to have you with me, despite the danger you're entering?"

"I'm a terribly useless companion," she said quietly. He glimpsed the fine regular profile at

his side, dim in the starlight, and his fingers gripped harder on the wheel. "If only I could prove of real help to you!"

"You are a real help, and better than any other."

"In what way?"

"Well, just because you're *you*, I suppose." Seaforth caught himself just in time, remembering that they were alone on the Congo, two thousand miles from conventions. "That is, you know, a— a woman always uplifts a man—I mean, the responsibility of having you along steadies me——"

He stopped abruptly, conscious of how little he had been steadied that morning; but she forbore to make the retort obvious. How her hands had come to him, when he lay with his head in her lap! They had been like a benediction, he thought, comforting and tender and——

"I would like to see this friend of yours, Walter Firth." His voice swept down his crowding thoughts and brought him to himself suddenly. "Perhaps he and John Solomon are at Boma now, or on their way up the river. Wouldn't it be fine if we met them?"

Seaforth launched into an enthusiastic encomium of Firth, and not for the first time. Presently the girl bade him good night rather abruptly, and retired to her sleeping quarters. An hour later he wakened Ali and crawled into the little cabin, to fall into slumber almost instantly. He was very weary, his head was sore, and the cut across his chest burned more than was pleasant.

Yet, in spite of everything, he was happy in the thought that Frances Earl both trusted and liked him. Now, with every hall-mark of civilization and culture erased, the innate nobility of Cliff Seaforth came to the surface.

It was not tact, and it was not craft; it was the simple-hearted fineness of the gentleman, the touch of almost feminine grace which alone drew a woman more than any exhibition of prowess or brute strength. Seaforth did not realize that. All he knew was that he must stubbornly keep himself from letting Frances Earl suspect that he loved her, until they were once more in a place where she did not have to depend on him, until they had reached her father or had been joined by Solomon and Firth.

The pen of Cervantes wiped false ideals of chivalry from the Old World; but at the same time the rude settlers of the New World were slowly moulding a newer ideal—the more potent because they did not know that they were doing it.

When morning came and the writhing mist whirled and swirled around them, they were forced to tie up at the bank until the sun had dispelled the fogs. Mbara caught a fish, and Al prepared breakfast. When on his way to wake Frances, he made a brief report to Seaforth, who was bathing with one eye open for crocodiles.

“Effendi, you said you would get more flour and tea from the Belgian doctor who was drunk. There is little left.”

"By heck, I forgot it!" exclaimed Seaforth in some dismay. "Never mind, we'll make out well enough until we reach a station."

He remembered that they had given most of their provisions to the group of natives met just before Sambo's desertion. He had intended to get more from Vanderdonk, but had quite overlooked it—in the rush of other events. There was no danger of their starving, for Mbara had shown that he could rustle food of sorts from the jungle, but it might not be pleasant for Frances.

Then there was the medicine case also. He had given the dying Swiss a large share of his quinine, and they had themselves used great quantities on the voyage up-river. He had meant to renew the supply at Basoko, and had again quite forgotten. He cursed his own heedlessness. As he was getting into his clothes, Ali returned.

"Effendi, the lady is not well. She has the fever, but does not know it. She will come on deck, however."

The Arab set about frying his fish, and in angry dismay Seaforth got out the medicine case. There was some quinine left, but hardly a hundred grains, and he and Ali each took fifty grains during the dank night watches.

"This is a nice affair!" reflected the American bitterly. "Owing to my own foolishness, either Ali and I must get down with fever or else Frances—confound it all!"

A few moments later the girl appeared to breakfast, but she could eat little, was flushed, and when Seaforth took her temperature he saw at once that she was down with river fever—a thing which had avoided them so far.

“What you ought to have,” he said, with his best professional manner, “is a nice clean bed and a trained nurse. If we can find 'em, you'll have them. Meantime, take this quinine and be a good girl.”

She took the bitter dose smilingly. They pushed out into the stream and chugged away toward the sunrise, while the now anxious American privately consulted Ali.

“The quinine must go to the lady, Ali. If you see any sign of a post, head for it. This river can't go on for ever and ever like this.”

“The ways of God are immutable, effendi,” murmured the Arab in assent.

Hour after hour they pushed on, and Seaforth knew that the petrol was also getting low. They must reach a station soon, he reflected. Once or twice they passed piles of cut wood, made ready for Wagner's government steamers, but saw no signs of natives anywhere about. At noon they passed another of the tall wooden fetishes, and this time Seaforth did not pause to cut it down.

After luncheon he turned in. He had slept for an hour when he was aroused by Mbara, and found that Ali had sighted a post ahead. Frances

was asleep, and the quinine had not helped her much, it seemed.

"I think we have reached Wagner's headquarters, effendi," said Ali, inspecting the shores ahead. "Do you see that steamboat?"

Seaforth nodded, peering through his binoculars and frowned a moment later.

This seemed to be a large post, for it possessed a dozen bungalows and buildings of the usual corrugated iron. It was set on rising ground above the eastern bank, and tied up to the trees below were two small river steamers. Yet the whole place seemed absolutely deserted.

No flag flew from the staff, but among the buildings he could see one of those curious symbols—an *ankh* of wood decorated with rags and calabashes. The steamers and canoes below were also void of all life.

"Head in," he said finally. "Miss Ear! will at least have comfortable quarters and a bed, unless the sleeping sickness or beriberi has struck the place. We may find some quinine here also."

He forbore to waken the girl until they had examined the place. Drawing in to the steamers Mbara leaped out with a rope and tied up the launch. Seaforth, gun in hand, swung over the rail and waved Ali back.

"I'll go—you remain and protect Miss Earl."

He strode up a zigzag path which took him to the height above, after finding that the steamers were indeed deserted. On reaching the parade

ground, and station, he looked around cautiously but saw little except death. Skulls were everywhere—skulls and bones of human beings. They bordered the paths and sat grinning in the trees and smoked hands of children pointed the way to the store. Horror rising anew within him, Seaforth entered this store, finding it unlocked.

It was filled with goods, and deserted, but seemed quite clean. He passed on to the bungalows and found no evidences of any plague. The entire place might have been in use an hour previous to his arrival. Finding that all was right, he shouted down to Ali to bring Frances up the hill, and prepared a bungalow for her.

Selecting one evidently occupied by the post commandant, he made up one of the cots, got quinine and nitrate from the store, and some tins of condensed milk. Ali arrived, half-carrying the girl. She was conscious, but feverish and very weak. In alarm, Seaforth took her to the room he had prepared, ordered her into bed, and departed with Ali.

Trails led away into the jungle, but Seaforth hardly thought that this was Wagner's head post, else it would not have been so desolate of life. So, considering himself in an enemy's country, he sent Ali to the launch with food and petrol, but left payment in the store for what he took. Then he returned to his patient.

Frances was in bed, and her condition disquieted him. He gave her quinine, made her a

solution of condensed milk and watched her drink it, then commanded her to sleep. With that he shut her door and set about preparing a bed for himself in the next room.

While he was still at work he heard a step on the veranda, but thought it Ali returning. Suddenly a voice came from outside—a black man's voice, but surely not that of Mbara. Seaforth strode quickly to the door and stepped out on the veranda, and found himself face to face with a smiling man clad in trim white uniform.

He was a powerfully-built man, this. His face was long-jawed, his lips were thin, and his features rather pleasant. About his steel-blue eyes crinkled deep creases, which seemed to be latent with evil. Seaforth stared at him, then flung a startled look to the stream below. He saw the launch, with Ali and Mbara, drifting out. As he gazed the launch turned and seemed to leap away, with men in canoes pursuing her.

"Good afternoon, Doctor Seaforth!" smiled the other man, and his voice was like the bite of acid. "I must say you fell into my trap rather neatly, eh?"

And with cold horror gripping him Seaforth faced once more Captain Ernest Wagner, lord of the Congo devils.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COMING OF SOLOMON

Doctor Vanderdonk felt a certain miserable satisfaction the day after Seaforth had left his station. One of the two punitive expeditions which had gone but a week before had been exterminated by the exasperated natives, and only one man had come in to tell of it. He had been allowed to come, for that purpose—leaving his nose and ears and hands behind him.

The unhappy post doctor celebrated over those tidings, which meant that his sub-lieutenant and twenty soldiers had been most deservedly sent to a hotter place than the Congo. During the afternoon, however, his commandant arrived with a train of fresh slaves and several hundreds of assorted hands and heads for smoking. Vanderdonk retired to his absinth bottle, and therefore missed entirely the subsequent proceedings.

The post commandant was an ex-card sharper from Ostend, named Malfayt—an ominous-sounding name to those who knew French. He heard of Seaforth's visit and said nothing, but puffed very

hard at his cigarette. Then he heard that two parties of natives had come in with rubber, so he called out his soldiers to the sport, and strode off to the store.

Seated on his camp stool at the store door, he allowed the trembling natives to bring their baskets to him. The first man had a very full basket, as did the second, and these he graciously rewarded with small pieces of cloth. The third man had little rubber, and poured forth a pitiful tale of having sought for miles, but vainly——

Captain Malfayt cut his tale short, and signed to his waiting soldiers. Promptly the offender was quivering beneath the chicotte, and when he was a writhing mass of flesh, the whipper cut his back into spurting blood with the final dexterous flick, and when he had risen and saluted the commandant, he was sent away.

One by one came the natives. Some were rewarded, some were lashed, some were given musket butts, and one woman was honoured by a bullet from Malfayt's revolver. When the tally had been completed, Captain Malfayt locked the store and sauntered over to see the prisoners taken on his successful expedition.

These were rebels, of course, and his soldiers were enjoying themselves hugely. Even the hardened Malfayt felt vaguely amused. Two or three women had been impaled, and several children were writhing on bayonets; the chieftain of the rebels and his whole family were seated in

a circle, and a soldier rubbed gum copal into their kinky wool, with many jokes. Presently Malfayt waved his men back, and touched a match to the gum copal.

"Bring Doctor Vanderdonk," he ordered his black sergeant, and seated himself once more on his camp stool, this time notebook in hand, preparatory to executing justice. It was justice which would highly please his superiors, he knew very well.

Vanderdonk, blind drunk, was carried out and propped up between two soldiers. Captain Malfayt ordered the rest to attention, as witnesses that he did justice.

"M. Vanderdonk," he declaimed sonorously, "it appears that yesterday strangers appeared in this domain privé, this domain sacred to his majesty, and murdered eight of my brave but helpless soldiers. Not only did you not prevent this atrocity, but you were overheard planning it during dinner the previous evening. Your servants appear as witnesses."

He waved a hand, and the two frightened servants were shoved forward.

"Do you plead guilty, M. Vanderdonk?"

Vanderdonk snored.

"Very good. Soldiers, you hear that he pleads guilty."

"We hear!" rose the yell.

"Then let him be given the chicotte until he is dead——"

Captain Malfayt paused suddenly. A yell had arisen from the river, and another; the crowd turned, and new yells of greeting went up at sight of a small government steamer heading in to the landing. So occupied had all been with the justice of the commandant that the steamer had not been observed until she was almost at the bank.

Captain Malfayt rose to meet his visitors. To his surprise, they were not the usual officials, but total strangers. He scented danger instantly. One man was very tall and handsome, although somewhat stern of face; another was short and fat, and puffed prodigiously, limping slightly as he walked. These two were the only white men, and behind them were some half-castes and Arabs from the coast. Even the crew of the steamer seemed to be strangers, and all were armed.

The captain was soon put at his ease, however, by the papers produced by the pudgy little man. As Malfayt talked very good English, he was quickly on good terms with them all, and took the two leaders to his bungalow. Perforce, Vanderdonk was reprieved for the time being.

"So—Mr. John Solomon—Doctor Walter Firth, —ah, Americans!" mused Captain Malfayt, scanning the papers. "Under the seal of King Leopold himself—sent to investigate the reports of atrocities—so!" He glanced up sharply. "You are sent by His Majesty in person, then?"

"Exactly," and Doctor Firth bowed slightly,

smiling. For some reason his lips were very white. Perhaps he had observed the chieftain of the rebels, who was still smouldering; gum copal sometimes burns into the flesh, and the torture is exquisite.

"Why, then, we will drink together!" cried Malfayt, with a great laugh, and turned to his wine tantalus. "Since you come from old Leopold, in a government steamer and with your own men, everything is all right, eh? Your reports will be made like all the rest, eh? Of course, of course! And, since you are Americans, all the world will no longer doubt our integrity, eh? Our good king loves a joke."

"A werry bright man you are, captain," observed Solomon, nodding his appreciation of the commandant's acuteness. "'Is Majesty will be most uncommon pleased to learn as 'ow you respect 'is motives!"

"Don't fail to mention that I've four thousand kilos of rubber to send in this fortnight," winked Malfayt, and began to roll a cigarette. He did it very carelessly and slowly, but not so slowly as he would have done had he known that when the match touched his cigarette he would die.

"Good!" exclaimed Firth approvingly. "No other investigators have troubled you, I hope?"

"Oh, I forgot!" Malfayt paused in his task, frowning swiftly. "*Mort de Dieu*, there was a madman here yesterday who murdered eight of my men—a madman who went on up the river in

a launch, with a white girl and two natives! Let Wagner settle with him, though. I've sent him word already."

His two visitors exchanged a swift glance.

"Then Captain Wagner's up this 'ere river?" queried Solomon softly. "We 'ad a werry pleasant visit with 'im at Boma, we did that. It ain't every man what can be so pleasant as 'im, as the 'ousemaid said of the butler."

"Right!" approved Malfayt, rolling his little cylinder carefully. "By the way, you saw those—er—those casualties outside, I presume?"

"We notices nothing as we ain't supposed to notice," returned Solomon, whereat the commandant laughed heartily. Solomon did not mention that he and Firth had been watching proceedings through high-power binoculars while coming up the river, and that they had distinctly seen Captain Malfayt's acts of tenderness.

"You are droll, you Americans," and Malfayt licked his cigarette carefully. "Yes, we had misfortunes. Eight of those poor people were killed by the madman yesterday; the rest came in from an unlucky hunt—poor, poor natives! Wild beasts are hard upon them."

"Werry 'ard," agreed Solomon. His hand had fallen to his coat pocket, and there was a look of peculiar tensity upon his almost expressionless face. "You see, sir, we come with our own men—all carefully picked, you understand. They won't tell no tales."

"Fine!" Malfayt held his cigarette aside and tasted his wine. "I clearly see that this investigation of the alleged atrocities is to be carefully done, eh? I missed Wagner when he went up river the other day, unfortunately."

Firth seemed to relax slightly, as if he had been waiting for such news. But Solomon's blue eyes widened a trifle.

"Then 'e 'as gone to 'eadquarters, sir?"

"Yes—to the White Mountain. The trail goes in from the next post, you know. But, of course, you're acquainted with all that."

He reached out for a match from the packet of vestas on the table. He struck it and held it to his cigarette. At that instant Solomon's hand left his pocket, holding a revolver. Two Arabs rushed in, and the cursing commandant was caught and dragged outside. A moment later came a rifle shot.

Firth and Solomon sat looking at each other, and Firth was very white.

"After what we saw, John," he said steadily, "there can be only one thing to do. We have agreed on our course."

"Yes, sir," and Solomon nodded as he rose. "It ain't cruelty, sir—it's justice, I says, just like that."

They went outside together. The black soldiers were grouped to one side of the parade ground, while the Arabs and half-breeds from the steamer faced them. Between lay the body of Captain

Malfayt. Firth walked out and stood beside the body, facing the black soldiers, and held aloft a paper with dangling red seal.

"I am sent from Bula Matadi," he said, using the native name for the government, "to exercise justice here. Captain Malfayt has been executed. You soldiers will stack your arms at once."

The black men obeyed, hesitant but overawed by the rifles of the Arabs. They were then divided into small parties. Meantime, Firth and Solomon walked to the store and investigated the groups of chained slaves and frightened natives. Upon announcing that they were "Inglezi", and had come to help the natives, they had no trouble in getting full news of Seaforth's actions on the previous day. Also they gained certain details of Captain Malfayt's recent raid.

Firth turned away from the maimed and tortured bodies with a grimace, and as he walked back his bronzed face was not nice to look upon. He looked at the parties of guarded soldiers, and horror rose in his soul at sight of them. Solomon, ghastly pale, joined him, and made a slight gesture. The Arabs marched the black soldiers off into the jungle. Presently shots were heard.

"I've seen some mortal bad things in me life, sir," observed Solomon wheezily, "but this 'ere beats 'e all, it does that."

"The worst of it is," muttered Firth, "that this is nothing unusual. It goes on every day all through Wagner's district. You don't suppose

Wagner knows we're coming, do you?"

"It's 'ard to say, sir," and Solomon frowned as he tugged out his clay pipe and began to fume it nervously. "We 'ad to force them orders on o' King Leopold, just like that. Still, if Wagner 'ad knowed as we were coming, he would 'ave warned that 'ere Malfayt. Dang it, who's that?"

Vanderdonk was reeling toward them. He was very drunk, but not so drunk as he had been. Having picked up Malfayt's notebook, Solomon and Firth already knew that Vanderdonk was guilty of nothing, and they took him down to the steamer between them. Presently the Arab and coast men drifted in from the jungle, cleaning their rifles, and the slaves were freed.

Sunset darkened luridly on the place of horrors. The slaves were allowed to loot the store at will and were warned to depart far beyond the vengeance of Wagner. Then Solomon and Firth settled down to a talk with the sobered Doctor Vanderdonk.

It took them no long time to ascertain his position. When he, on his part, learned what had been done that afternoon, he smiled wanly and foretold disaster.

"You cannot expect to bring force into this district and succeed," he said.

"We have King Leopold's warrant for whatever we do," returned Firth.

"True." Vanderdonk nodded, ironic mirth in his pale eyes. "And he gave you that warrant because he knew that Captain Wagner would and

could destroy you—even as a man crushes a fly. You know nothing of the region, I suppose?"

"Very little," admitted Firth, "beyond what Malfayt told us."

"So much the worse for you. At the next post up-river, you will perhaps find Wagner; from that post trails lead to the White Mountain, his actual headquarters. He controls all the native tribes, has a force of fifty black soldiers, and——"

"How does 'e control them, sir?" asked Solomon suddenly. "What's this 'ere secret business?"

Vanderdonk shook his head.

"That has been kept from me. I do not know. But there is no hope—no hope. I must go and get some absinth, or I will go mad."

He departed to his bungalow, despondent beyond words. Solomon and Firth decided that, as their boat had a searchlight, they would at once proceed up-stream. They sent a man for Vanderdonk, and the latter was found to have emptied a vial of morphine from the stores. He died shortly before midnight, still muttering: "No hope, no hope!"

"Another martyr!" exclaimed Firth, as they left the body. "Another martyr to the system, John. Do you think we had better go on, or not?"

Solomon tapped his pipe reflectively.

"We'd better be a-going on, sir," he answered at length. "It don't never pay to 'ang back, I says. If so be as we run into trouble, why, we'll go on, anyhow, I says. It's bound to come sooner or later, and it may werry well come short and

sharp, just like that. 'Sides, Mr. Firth, I 'ave me own notions of what's a-going to 'appen."

More than this, Firth could extract nothing from the little man. Solomon was moody and silent, but when they cast off and started upstream at two o'clock that morning, Firth noticed that certain of their Arabs remained behind.

Those Arabs had always puzzled Firth. They were all men from the Congo or from the coast, and they had been waiting for Solomon and Firth at Boma. Some of them were little better than negroes, others were of the old Arab stock which had raided the Congo before Belgium was a nation. All were fighting men, and swore by Solomon in preference to swearing by Allah.

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CHAPTER IX

WAGNER SCORES HEAVILY

Looking back at all that passed on the Lindi River, Seaforth could never believe it possible that John Solomon had foreseen Wagner's trap—had foreseen that the launch with Ali and Mbara would get away down-river—had foreseen what was to come next. Even though he knew much of Solomon's powers, this was incredible.

Consequently, this fate which seemed to work hand in hand with Solomon and which seemed to pluck him from disaster by a hair—this fate was called Divine Providence by Seaforth, and very likely he was right. The Arabs called it the will of Allah, which amounted to the same thing. John Solomon never called it anything.

When Cliff Seaforth saw Ali and Mbara go speeding down the river with the launch, and looked into Wagner's devil eyes and realized that he and Frances had been neatly snared, savagery rose within him. His first thought was to leap on Wagner and break him. But the Belgian read the thought, and smiled.

"Careful—you are covered!"

It was true. A soldier stood outside the veranda, musket to shoulder. The American controlled himself, hands clenched at his side, thick brows down-drawn over his angry eyes.

"It was very kind of you to bring Miss Earl," went on Wagner smoothly, an evil glitter in his steady gaze. "I may say that it has altered your whole future, Doctor Seaforth. Instead of being killed at once, I will turn your peculiar talents to advantage, and allow you to live for a time."

Still Seaforth said nothing. He understood the terrible menace which threatened Frances, and the thought struck a cold chill through him; but he only looked into the steel-blue eyes and waited. Wagner's hand darted out and caught the automatic from Seaforth's holster.

"Now, my dear sir, I will grant you life and liberty, for the present, on one condition. This condition is that you refrain from all personal recrimination and consent to treat me as an acquaintance, no more."

"Why?" demanded Seaforth, puzzled. "You're a scoundrel!"

"Certainly!" assented Wagner easily, but the tiny creases deepened about his eyes. "The reason is that I do not wish to lose my temper and order you impaled or crucified. I intend that you shall be of use to me. Come, now! Your death would effect nothing, but unless you can control your

villainous temper and treat me with outward decency, you shall die at once. Choose!"

Seaforth hesitated, and his very soul was wrung within him at thought of Frances Earl. He knew that this fiend would stop at nothing, and no doubt held Professor Earl a prisoner as well as the rest of them.

Yet there was sense in what the man said, and once more Firth's last warning struck back into his mind and aided him to coherent thought. Defiance would result in nothing but death, and his death would be useless at this juncture. It would be far wiser to take a chance on the future, to gloss over his hatred and fury, to make himself useful if he could, and, if he must die, to make his death serve some good purpose in the end.

"Mind," added Wagner, seeing the struggle in Seaforth's face, "I am not asking for your parole. You will soon find that you cannot escape from me. All I ask is that you keep calm and remain on outwardly good terms with me, and with my men."

"I agree," said Seaforth hoarsely.

Wagner inspected him curiously, almost admiringly, and, with a brief nod, tucked the automatic into his pocket.

"Miss Earl is inside?" he queried.

"Ill in bed—river fever," said Seaforth. "That's why we fell into your trap so thoroughly."

"Very well. You will attend to her, and take any medicines you wish from the store. We'll

probably leave here sometime to-morrow, and I'll have a litter ready for her. It will be a short trip."

With this, Wagner turned and left the bungalow, but a sentry remained on guard. Seaforth dropped into a chair.

Cursing his own heedlessness was of no avail, and the American stared gloomily out upon the scene. The afternoon was nearly gone. Wagner's trap had been simple enough—the soldiers and boatmen had merely withdrawn into the trees around. There was a scattering of white men in the throng, white men who went down to their boats; Seaforth made out the Danish steam-boat captain, the French or Swiss engineers, and got no comfort from their faces. While he watched, the canoes which had pursued the launch came back up the river, empty-handed, and the American drew a breath of relief. Ali and Mbara were safe for the present, at least!

His own situation left him in dull wonder. The blow had fallen as a bolt from a clear sky. Wagner had made no pretence of law or justice or excuse, and there was none needed. In this country was no law, save that of the strongest. Seaforth did not delude himself by thinking that Wagner's action was due to his own attack on the soldiers at Vanderdonk station; he knew quite well that it went farther back than that, back to New York and John Solomon.

He could not understand it, quite, but presently

Wagner came striding back to the bungalow, after giving his soldiers lengthy directions in the dialect. Seaforth admired the free powerful swing of the man, even while hating him vividly.

"Do you smoke?" inquired Wagner, bringing forth cigarettes, after he had seated himself beside the American. Seaforth shook his head. "So much the better. Well, I presume you are sorry you did not take the warning I gave you in New York?"

"Not altogether," and Seaforth laughed slightly, his eyes grim as ever. "I had the satisfaction of going for your black devils at the last station we came to."

"A runner brought me the news, this morning," and Wagner also smiled. "It was quite interesting. What do you know about John Solomon's actions—anything?"

Seaforth hesitated, then decided that Wagner must know a good deal, in any case, and the truth would harm no one.

"Very little. Thanks to you, I left New York suddenly. At Boma, I found Miss Earl waiting for me, by Solomon's orders. We came up-river together, trying to overtake her father. By the way, where is he?"

"Where you'll see him by to-morrow night, I hope. This fellow Solomon must be a rank fool, Seaforth! After I had warned him and you, do you know what he did?"

The American shook his head.

"He obtained a personal order from King Leopold, allowing him to enter the Congo districts with his own men and conduct an investigation in his own way. Leopold seemed to think the fellow was dangerous, and tipped me off. That was why I left New York suddenly and returned here. It was my business to take care of Mr. John Solomon and see that he was duly buried. What a fool the man must be!"

"I have thought so myself, at times," Seaforth grinned inwardly, seeing the one mistake which Captain Wagner was making. "Then he will be allowed to come here?"

"Of course! It is understood that I am to settle him, and I rather expect him to arrive to-night or to-morrow morning."

At this Seaforth stiffened in his chair, caught by surprise.

"What! Are you in earnest?"

"Rather!" laughed the Belgian, watching the river. "When he arrived at Boma, word was sent up by telegraph to the end of the line, and a fast launch caught me at Basoko with the tidings. I heard about you also, and, after gathering Professor Earl into the net, I laid a snare for you; now the snare is laid also for Solomon, and when we have disposed of the lot of you our work will go on in peace, I trust."

"So Leopold knew beforehand that you would nab us?"

Wagner laughed evilly.

"My dear fellow, of course he did! Mind, in using his name I do not speak of him personally, but of Cuvelier, Liebrechts, and the rest of the palace crowd who manage all these details for him."

"I understand that much," nodded Seaforth gravely. "You mean the committee which investigated the atrocities on the lower Congo and white-washed everyone?"

"Yes." Wagner peered through his cigarette smoke, his face suddenly transformed into hard cynicism. "This is about the last of the rubber up in this district, you know. Everything else has been milked dry, but there's plenty left here. Now, you'll dine with me, of course, in the bungalow opposite. Make yourself comfortable here, and take good care of Miss Earl. Come over in half an hour, and we'll be ready."

Wagner rose and sauntered off, leaving the American gripping his nails into his palms with fury. There was something in Wagner's air which roused all the latent ferocity in him; the man's perfect self-surety, his cold unruffled poise, his dominant manner and confident mastery, stirred Seaforth to the boiling point.

Yet, more strongly than ever, the American felt that he and Frances Earl were in the hand and keeping of God. He was overcome by what he had just learned; none the less, his faith was strong that, despite traps and snares, Wagner would not, could not, come out victorious.

The whole miserable expedition had been trap, he now realized. Wagner did not understand that John Solomon was a dangerous adversary but his superiors did, and they had sent him post-haste to destroy Solomon and gain time. Time was all they required. Another few years and there would be no need of a John Solomon.

Another few years, and the "Haute Congo" would be even as the lower Congo was at present—squeezed empty of rubber and rubber vines, its millions of defenceless natives cut to thousands, its thriving villages and plantations become deserts, and the jungle creeping over all to the extinction of humanity.

"There is the old primal enemy," and Seaforth looked across the sunset-scarlet river to the deep green jungle beyond. "For centuries, these black men have been fighting it, conquering it, and now the white man comes and sets black to killing black until all are gone. Then comes in the old enemy once more, and when the red hand of Leopold is thrust forth from this land the work will only have begun. I wonder if I will ever see that day?"

It was not likely, thought Seaforth. Wagner was all-powerful here, and not only his masterful personality but the secret power which was his also had given over the country into his hands. It seemed rankly improbable that any man could cope with him; Solomon's vague talks in New York had disclosed no firm plan of action, no

settled campaign, and Seaforth did not count greatly on the little Cockney.

This went to show that he had not yet appreciated John Solomon, who frankly stated that he was no fighter and preferred to gain his ends by the aid of poetic justice and the hand of Providence.

Sighing a little, Seaforth went inside, found that Frances was in a feverish and troubled sleep, and so turned again and sought the bungalow opposite. There he found Wagner, and no one else save soldier servants.

"Those canaille do not eat with me," said the Belgian scornfully, nodding toward another bungalow where the white men of his party were carousing loudly. "Go and join them, if you prefer."

"Thanks," returned the American dryly. "But the devil is better company than his attendant fiends."

Wagner's steel-blue eyes pierced admiringly through the dim lamplight.

"Seaforth," he said slowly, "you're a man, by God! Come in to dinner."

When they were seated at the table, Wagner continued his exposition:

"They don't send out our kind of men to this country. Those fools who are getting drunk yonder are worthless except as overseers. My black soldiers are far better. If I had a man like you at my side——"

"If you had a man like me at your side," broke

in Seaforth evenly, "you'd have a bullet through you in ten seconds. Now let's abandon the personal element and stick to the business in hand. I'm hungry."

The Belgian smiled his thin-lipped handsome smile.

"Very good. You must take care of Miss Earl, and the higher ground at headquarters will pull her up amazingly. I intend to make her love me, you see."

"You—what!" Seaforth looked up, staring.

"Make her love me—exactly. I asked her to marry me at Boma, and she refused. But now her father has consented to our marriage, and I think she will agree."

Upon this, Wagner took no heed of Seaforth's angry amazement, but proceeded to make himself agreeable. And never had the American seen a man who could deliberately make himself so fascinating—especially to another man.

Knowing all that he did, realizing that Wagner's hands were stained with the blood of thousands of black folk, with torture and murder and ruthless bloodshed, Cliff Seaforth yet found himself enwrapped in the man's personality. Wagner knew the world, and knew how to tell of the world in rare fashion; the polished gentleman to his finger-tips, he descanted upon literature and art and ethics, until Seaforth knew that here was the most remarkable person he had ever met.

Personal magnetism—that was it! Strength

of body and will, force of brain, culture, and education, and, above all, an intense, vibrant personality—these were Wagner's to command. Only by a great effort could Seaforth grip himself out of the man's mental toils and reach back to those words which had left him stunned.

Was it a lie that Professor Earl could approve his daughter's marriage to this monster? Perhaps. Make her love him, Wagner could not; of this, Seaforth was firmly convinced, until the other man's powerful brain began to bite through his scorn of the boast. After all, was it impossible?

Frances knew Wagner's character, as her father must know it; she knew it was he who controlled this rubber district and who was directly responsible for its horrors. And, knowing her character to the depths, or thinking he did, Seaforth's scorn was supreme. Gradually, however, dismay ate into his soul, for he realized that Wagner might well impress his marvellous mentality upon her—being utterly unscrupulous.

In all he said and did, the Belgian's ingenuity shone forth; his cleverness, his diabolical world-wisdom and shrewd felicity, were astounding, and even Seaforth's deep-rooted hatred could hardly resist the man's personal charm.

The American slept little that night, for the fever had gained on Frances, and, despite his attention, she fell into a delirium which alarmed him intensely. If Wagner had told the truth about leaving for high ground, this would be

the greatest thing possible in her favour.

He paid little attention to his surrounding that night. He was vaguely conscious that men were at work near the river bank, by the light of torches and cressets, but not until he strode wearily out into the dawning did he begin to realize Wagner's snare. Then he looked down at the river and cursed to himself.

From where he stood on the hill, he could see a long mud shoal running out into the stream. The boats and landings had been removed just above this, so that any boat coming from down-river would naturally go straight for them and so strike the shoal. Wagner strolled out from his bungalow, called him over to breakfast, and chuckled deeply.

"You see the scheme, eh? A runner just came in, saying that our mutual friend would be here in an hour. It's a pity he hasn't your brains and make-up, Seaforth, or I would spare him and make use of him. As it is—well, you'll see."

The American answered nothing, but gave his attention to breakfast. If Wagner so under-valued John Solomon, he thought grimly, there was yet hope.

Breakfast was hardly over when Wagner was informed by one of the white men that a boat was in sight. Seaforth watched the soldiers removed to the jungle, save for a few, and then at Wagner's request seated himself on the veranda of the bungalow.

"You'll see it all from a reserved seat," smiled the Belgian evilly. "And mind that you give no warning!" He tapped his revolver significantly.

Seaforth looked down at the river and the distant steamboat, and nodded. He could give no adequate warning, and had no intention of flinging his life away to serve no good purpose. In any case, Solomon might not be on that boat.

Most of the soldiers had vanished. The steamer gradually crept nearer, and now Seaforth made out that his own launch was running beside her, on the far side from their shore. The sight sent a thrill through him; Ali and Mbara had escaped and joined Solomon, then! At the bow of the steamer was run up a white flag.

"He's getting scared, eh?" sneered Wagner, and suddenly his face swept into malevolent evil beyond description. "You fool, to try and best Ernest Wagner! You fool!"

Seaforth clenched his fists and strained forward, watching. The steamer was heading for the boats tied up at the false landing, heading straight into the trap. Silence fell on both watchers. Aboard the steamer they could see a dozen men, all armed.

From the height, Seaforth could plainly see the mud bar, which was invisible to those on the steamer itself. Then, without a sound, the boat leaped into the mud; the stern paddle lashed the water into froth and drove her farther; she was stuck fast, and Solomon was snared, a hundred feet from the shore.

At the same instant, the river bank crashed out into a roar of musketry, and, as he sprang up in horror, Seaforth knew that the soldiers were doing their part. A veil of smoke drifted from shore, rifles cracked in response from the boat, while the hail of bullets ripped into the boat. The swift chug-chug of the launch sounded

"Some of them getting off in the launch," observed Wagner coolly. "They'll be nabbed downstream—let 'em go. If you'll get Miss Earl ready to be moved, Seaforth, I'll have the men ready with the litter in five minutes."

And Seaforth staggered a little as he walked away. John Solomon had fallen into the snare—well might poor Vanderdonk mutter, "No hope, no hope!"

CHAPTER X

THE WHITE MOUNTAIN

Seaforth was so weary, both in body and in mind, that he moved about in what was almost a stupor. He caught the salient facts of what was done, but cared nothing.

Solomon's steamboat, with some few dead, was brought in to the bank while the white river-men set off in one of the other boats in pursuit of the launch. A number of wounded men were brought up, prisoners, and Seaforth wondered idly why they were spared. Then his attention was given to Frances.

She was removed to a comfortable litter, which was carried by four soldiers. A villainous Belgian lieutenant was left in charge of the post while Wagner took charge of the expedition. Seaforth remained with the litter, soldiers marching before and after; in the rear were brought the prisoners taken from Solomon's boat, most of the crew having escaped in the launch, it seemed. Seaforth paid them no attention whatever, for he was very anxious concerning Frances Earl.

He had done his best for her with the drug at his disposal, and now could only trust that higher ground and the meeting with her father would pull her into shape. She muttered incessantly in her delirium, and at times he caught his own name; more than this he did not hear, and in fact refused to hear.

For an hour the file of men pushed through dense jungle, but followed a very good trail; then Seaforth found, with vast relief, that they were winding out of the jungle lands to higher ground. To his surprise he sighted some women at work in a manioc field, and then came across a large yam patch, also worked by women.

This was the first evidence of cultivation that he had seen, and he was the more surprised because it was done under the very nose of Wagner. But he was soon to learn that the Belgian was by no means responsible for this waste—from a rubber standpoint—of good labour.

By noon they were in a pleasant upland country, Wagner brought down a wild boar, and they halted for a meal. Wagner, Seaforth, and sub-lieutenant Klack, a weak-mouthed degenerate who was the only other white man present, dined apart from the rest; Seaforth obtained some condensed milk and managed to get Frances to swallow it, but she seemed little improved.

The thought of escape occurred to the American, but was impracticable on the face of it. To go back was out of the question, for he would be

caught and held by the authorities; north and south were nothing but jungles and desert plateaux, and the White Sisters and other missionaries had not penetrated thus far. To the east was British territory, but long before he could reach it he would either perish or be run to earth by Wagner's man-hunters.

His only hope was to go ahead and take what might come, especially since Solomon's expedition had been destroyed. That was the worst blow of all, to Seaforth; he felt that John Solomon had more than met his match in Wagner, and might now be counted out of the game.

When they started out once more, Wagner now marched with him in the van, and presently pointed out a hill of limestone ahead, with farther hills beyond.

"There's the White Mountain!" he said curtly.

Seaforth gazed at it with some interest, then bethought him of the prisoners.

"What are you going to do with Solomon's men you brought along?" he asked.

"Solomon's men?" Wagner looked at him curiously; then an unholy light glinted in his eyes. "Well, you'll find out later. I fancy I'll surprise you."

The American grunted, and asked nothing further. He obtained no sight of the prisoners all that afternoon, for they lagged in the rear of the column under guard and he was in the van with the litter. But, as they drew closer to the

White Mountain, and as he was enabled to make it out in more detail, he no longer wondered that Ernest Wagner was master of a kingdom here in the wilderness.

From a distance, the place seemed no more than a great hill of limestone, not unlike that at Matadi, but low and flat-topped. Closer approach disclosed buildings, then Seaforth could see no more as the little column struck in among trees; not until nearly sunset did he get another view, but when the afternoon was almost over they debouched suddenly on the White Mountain itself.

Seaforth guessed it to be a half-mile in length, the approach consisting of a native track which ascended a steep ravine in the flank of the hill, with a waterfall to the right. From the amount of water leaping down the hill, it was easy to see that the crest was fed by numerous springs—in itself an odd thing.

Except for one or two sentries, the great hill seemed bare and desolate of life, and the heat emanating from the rock was terrific. When at length they reached the wide crest, however, Seaforth stared at the scene before him in blank astonishment.

A large parade ground opened out, and beyond this were buildings of stone—low, well-built, and roofed with iron. There was a barracks of goodly size, several bungalows, and a large store. Beyond these buildings rose a low rock face, perhaps twenty feet in height, which had also

been fronted with masonry. Thus the buildings themselves stood in a level depression, while behind them for half the length of the hill was what seemed a huge platform, rugged and uneven.

Seaforth's first wonder was how these stone buildings could have been erected; a moment later his inward question was answered by the sight of files of slaves coming between long rows of huts. They seemed to be coming from the northern face of the hill, while the column had come from the western face. The American guessed shrewdly that they had been busied in cutting out the limestone, and later found that his guess was correct. The slaves were manacled together by neck chains, and their low thatch huts occupied a large space behind the barracks. Here, too, stood a tall wooden *ankh*.

"This will shelter you and Miss Earl," announced Wagner, pointing to the nearest of the smaller houses. "I'll assign you a couple of soldiers as servants."

"And guards, I presume," added Seaforth.

"Yes." Wagner looked at him, and under the look Seaforth went white-hot with fury. In the man's face was unbounded insolence, a cold sneering contempt which stung like a whip. "You'll report to me at sunrise and sunset, as to Miss Earl's condition."

"And—her father? Where is he?" demanded Seaforth, giving the other look for look.

"None of your business!" snapped Wagner, turning on his heel.

Seaforth glared after him, every muscle in his body aching to be at the man's throat. He checked himself, as two of the black soldiers stepped up and saluted. Finding that they understood French, he ordered them to bring the litter to the bungalow indicated by Wagner, and strode ahead to investigate the new quarters.

The house contained three rooms, was very decently furnished, and, when he had had Frances transferred from the litter to a bed, poor Seaforth settled down to a supper in his cheerless dining-room, with two murderers, miscalled soldiers, to attend to his wants. The situation was bad, but growling would effect no good end; after spending a decidedly long and bitter evening in churning over the facts, he took Frances' temperature, found her improving, and went to rest, with the savage determination that he would play Wagner's game like a man and prove himself the equal of his enemy.

With morning he visited his patient, and, to his delight, was greeted with a wan smile; she was awake and conscious, but very weak. Seaforth instantly went for his guards, and sent them to the store for beef extract and more milk. When Frances had taken what she could, he persuaded her to sleep once more, and left her in quiet. Raging inwardly, he wrote out a report of her condition and sent it to Wagner by a soldier.

This done, he set out to inspect the White Mountain.

He hoped, for many reasons, that he might chance upon Professor Earl, but he was not destined to find his quarry that day. By the black soldiers he was treated with respectful awe, partly because he was white, but more so because the fame of his deeds at Vanderdonk's station had spread among them all. The only white officer apart from Wagner was the degenerate, Klack.

Upon a more detailed inspection of the place, Seaforth saw much to puzzle him. From the condition of the place he guessed that Wagner had been here for two or three years at least, yet there were evidences of a much older habitation, in the shape of ruined huts and a deep pathway worn in the solid rock.

This pathway was particularly puzzling to the American. They had followed it up the ravine in reaching the hill crest, but it continued on behind the group of stone houses, to the curious upper rock which rose above. This upper rock, he now found, was cut clean and square across the hill, and its perpendicular face was composed of masonry containing many openings.

Seaforth attempted to approach it, but was warned back by sentries, and Klack appeared hurriedly at their call. He was a venomous little beast, whom Seaforth detested at sight, and it was quite clear that he returned the detestation.

"It iss forbidden to go near!" he cried out

sharply, with a slightly accented English. "Keep away!"

"You change your tone to me, or you'll regret it!" said Seaforth, and turned on him with a look which sent Klack's hand to his revolver. "Don't try pulling that gun on me! I'm not one of your slaves, my friend. What is this place, then?"

"That iss not your business, Doctor Seaforth," returned Klack, backing away a step, but with more respect in his voice. "It iss very private, yess."

The American nodded, and sauntered away, but the more he studied that queer masonry, the more he failed to understand it. From the deeply worn trail in the rock, which must have required decades and even centuries of constant use before it had assumed its present depth, other paths branched off to the openings in the rock face.

Of these openings, he counted six in all, and above each of them was set the symbol of the *ankh*, rudely carved but distinct. Yet, what were those openings? He might have thought them entrances to caves, since the hill was of limestone and was evidently pierced by springs; this supposition would have been borne out by the masonry and the symbols, which all seemed of great age.

To offset this, however, the openings were little over four feet in height, and therefore could not very well serve as doors. Had they been openings on some cavern, the people who had constructed

that masonry would have undoubtedly enlarged them, concluded Seaforth. The place was evidently an archaeological remain of some sort, however, and he wondered if there could be anything in the conjecture of Frances Earl, that the symbol of the *ankh* had indeed been brought into this far country from the land of Egypt in olden times.

His two servants, who were also his guards, trailed after him at a respectful distance, and, seeing that there were sentries nowhere else on the hill save at the ravine, Seaforth finally turned from the rock face and strode across the parade ground toward the slave quarters, where stood the tall wooden *ankh*.

It was now long after sunrise, and he had breakfasted on some fruit and cocoa, so that by the time he reached the thatched huts the slaves had been led forth to their day's labour. Seaforth was astonished at the number of huts, but found that there were a great number of women and children in them, whose duty it seemed to be to prepare food for the men slaves and for the garrison.

The condition of this portion of the place sickened him with disgust and horror. The hand of the taskmaster was all too plainly in evidence, and the miserable natives were worse regarded than animals. Later he ascertained that the men were there to work on the limestone, for Wagner was constructing a road to the river, while the women's duty was to cultivate the few fields and keep the White Mountain in fresh vegetables. The upper face

of the rock was to the north, and it was upon this rugged and uneven part of the hill that the men worked.

Following their track, Seaforth found that it wound down the hillside, and so avoided that guarded stretch of old masonry, winding around it and up again to the higher part of the rock. The path was unguarded, and, as no one seemed to care what he did, the American proceeded to investigate. And he discovered a curious thing.

Upon reaching the north side of the hill, which led down to the plain on a rather steep slope, he saw the chained gangs of slaves with their soldier overseers. They were working along the edge of the hill crest, but, instead of blasting out rocks in masses, they were laboriously cutting them out by hand!

Down below, half-way to the plain, was a lime-kiln. A rope and pulley sent huge baskets of rock directly from the quarry into the mouth of the kiln; other fragments were being worked over and squared at one side. Curiosity overcoming his repulsion, Seaforth approached one of the chicotte-armed soldiers and asked why there was no blasting going on.

"How can we blast with the White Ones under our feet?" growled the soldier.

Puzzled, thinking that he had misunderstood the poorly-spoken French, Seaforth made him repeat the words, whereat the man waxed surly and would say nothing. He did, however, proceed

to lash a native unmercifully, and the American turned about and retraced his steps; the senseless, pitiless brutality of these black men sickened him.

What had the man meant by White Ones? Groping for a meaning, Seaforth recalled John Solomon's notebook, and the mention of Wagner as having discovered white pygmies. Could this old dream of African explorers have come true? Was it connected with that queer masonried rock face, so carefully guarded?

Upon reaching the hilltop once more, Seaforth paused beside a sentry and again inspected those half-dozen entrances, if entrances they were. As he looked, he saw a vague group of men just inside the nearest, and heard the voice of Klack in angry tones, followed by the crack of a chicotte and a scream. Evidently some slaves were at work.

The American turned back toward his own house, but, upon approaching the group of buildings, he noted a crowd of soldiers and blacks around the store. A glance showed him that a band of natives had come in with rubber, and that Wagner was receiving them in Congo fashion.

This was the first actual rubber deviltry Seaforth had ever seen, and for five minutes he stood motionless, horrified by what he witnessed. He saw men, women, and children lashed and tortured and murdered ruthlessly, while the Belgian sat at the door of the store and watched with the eyes of a devil let loose; and ever the heap of red rubber

lumps grew as the baskets came. In those five minutes the American saw enough of the rubber atrocities to last him for life.

When at length he could watch no longer, he departed to his own dwelling, white and shaken. Here, to his amazement, he was halted by a sentry and was told to go to the house across the way. It was by Captain Wagner's order, said the man.

Infuriated at this, unable to believe that he was not allowed to care for Frances Earl, Seaforth turned and approached the murderous crowd around the store. Rage flaming within him, he strode through the throng in time to see Wagner giving a few bits of cloth to a native chief—the only payment for a huge heap of rubber, except for the half-dozen bodies to one side, and the shrinking victims of cruelty.

"What does this mean?" cried the American, as the black men fell back and left him facing Wagner. "Why am I not allowed to return to Miss Earl, Captain Wagner?"

"Be quiet!" commanded Wagner coldly. "According to your report of this morning, Miss Earl is now out of danger. Therefore you are to be put at another kind of work, my fine investigator."

Seaforth stared at the man, his fingers clenched, every nerve drawn taut by the horrors around him.

"How dare you!" he broke out, choking with anger. "You devil!"

Wagner leaped up. His keen handsome face was suddenly set in hard lines, and it was livid with fury. Seaforth's undaunted spirit seemed to madden him.

"Dog!" and his voice rang out like a whip. "Dog! I know your breed, and I tell you that I will break you before I kill you—do you understand?"

With a great effort, Seaforth conquered his passion. He knew that he was in danger, but he could not keep the flame from his grey eyes nor the harshness from his voice as he replied:

"I demand that you leave Miss Earl in my care! I demand——"

"It is I who demand here, and not you," interrupted Wagner, and now his face was wholly evil. "Perhaps you need proof of that, eh? Very well. Ho, there! Take him and lash him!"

Two soldiers leaped in. With a surge of stark horror, Seaforth realized their intent, and tried to fight, but they had caught him unawares and pinned him down. Irons clinked on his wrists, and when he broke the jaw of one man with a savage kick, more soldiers fell on him and ironed his ankles.

Then, while Wagner looked on smilingly, they lashed him with a chicotte.

CHAPTER XI

SLAVERY

It was well for Cliff Seaforth that his voyage from New York had hardened him and that the up-river trip had kept him in physical condition. Otherwise, it is quite certain that he would have died immediately.

As it was, that chicotting left him unable to move for two days, and only the dressing put on his back and sides by Bosangi enabled him to sit up and eat on the third morning.

Bosangi was a kindly old native woman, withered of body but great of soul, who was given Seaforth as an attendant—or, as the grinning black soldiers intimated, as a wife. The American could not talk with her except by gesture, but he had no great need of talking, in any case.

His situation was now only too plain, both to him and to everyone else. He had braved Captain Wagner and had fallen, and was now a slave. He occupied one of the thatched slave huts, with Bosangi for companion, and found

himself translated to another sphere of life. Gone were all his comforts and luxuries, and he was cut down to the bare necessities of existence.

Only a scattering of the native slaves understood any French, and the soldiers refused to speak with Seaforth. They gibed at him from a distance, but for some indefinite reason they seemed afraid of him.

This may have been caused by the tale of what he had done at Vanderdonk's post, but was more probably due to his attitude. As he stood at the door of his hut on that third day, he was not nice to look upon. He was half-naked, swathed in dressings of leaves, and needed a shave very badly; from under his matted hair gleamed forth his blazing grey eyes, and his great hands were clenched impotently before him.

Yet, with it all, he retained his air of strength, of authority. He had been lashed, whipped like a dog, and the consciousness stung him bitterly; but it had not broken his spirit. Wagner came and laughed at him, taunting him, but Seaforth answered nothing, and finally the Belgian departed, satisfied that his victim was crushed. But the American's silence came from a very different reason.

He had not dreamed that the chicotte was such awful torture. Not once had blood been drawn from his back, yet the experience had all but killed him. Now, however, knowing that Wagner did not mean to kill him at once but intended

making use of him, something in him hardened bitterly, and his soul solidified into the firm determination to drag down this man. From that moment Cliff Seaforth was a man of stone.

The future did not trouble him, because he counted himself lost in any case, and was not minded to be lost alone when the time befell. He had now no hope whatever. Outwardly he was a slave, a brute-beast like these poor natives, a thing to be ordered around and lashed. But inwardly it was otherwise.

Inwardly the American was strengthened. That torture had not broken him, but had made him tenfold more dangerous. It had shown him that Wagner was all-powerful; it had robbed Seaforth of all his old merry happy-go-lucky faith that all was for the best; it had wakened in him a cunning, a relentless fury of vengeance; it had changed him from an ordinary American citizen into a man with a blood feud.

Not his own feud alone, but that of Frances Earl. He realized the girl was in terrible danger from Wagner, for he remembered that line from Solomon's notebook: "Vices, none except women". He had Wagner's own word for it that Frances Earl was to be tempted and played with and won, possibly with her father's consent; yet not even Seaforth dreamed the terrible nature of that consent, or how it was to affect them all.

"He'll never marry that girl," thought Seaforth, as he sat at the door of his hut and stared gloomily

at the sunlight. "He thinks he's broken me—but I'll show him. Yes, by the Lord! I'll play the game from this on, and I'll play it with all the cunning of Solomon himself!"

And this proved to be a very wise determination. A few weeks previously he would have leaped at the throat of Wagner and crushed the life out of the man; now he was wiser, and resolved to be wary. He must learn what lay under this White Mountain—or inside it—before he could move. Then to strike at the source of Wagner's power and destroy it, then destroy Wagner himself—

"This is the man, sergeant. He'll be able to work to-morrow."

He saw Wagner point him out to a black sergeant, who approached and ordered him to join one of the quarry gangs in the morning. Wagner smiled and listened. Seaforth mumbled assent, and the Belgian departed, smiling evilly.

With the next morning, Seaforth departed to his slavery. Thanks to the skill of old Bosangi, his wounds—bruises, rather—were in a fair way, and the pain was greatly alleviated; every motion cost him suffering, however. He was not fastened in a string of slaves by the neck chain, but left alone, his wrists and ankles ironed loosely, so that he could work.

Through the six days that followed, the American's previous notions of a literal hell were thoroughly revised. From sunrise to sunset the

slave gangs were driven, beneath a blazing copper sky, working on the face of the limestone rock which reflected the heat with terrific force. They were driven without mercy, and when any of them dropped from heat or exhaustion, they were lashed into death.

Seaforth was kept clear of the lash by the overseer, a sergeant; but not until he had brained a soldier with his manacles—the soldier having nearly broken his ribs with a musket butt, through sheer cruelty. After this, he remained untouched, and did the work assigned him, which consisted in swinging a sledge. It was hard, terribly hard, but he endured it.

The time passed, to him, like a dream. It was a continual round of suffering, labour, hard sleep. Bosangi served him faithfully, bringing his meals and tending his wants with scrupulous care. He learned from one of the native slaves who spoke a little French that she was the last of a whole village destroyed by Wagner.

But if Seaforth himself remained untouched, it was not so with the others. The poor natives died like flies, not only beneath the sun and hard work, but beneath the lash and gun butt and knife and stake. The American saw things which he had not believed possible; the black soldiers loosed their passions for cruelty and blood, and there was none to stop them.

He gained nothing in his knowledge of the White Mountain or its secret, for while at work

he could not talk with his fellow slaves, and after sunset he was too weary to do more than fling himself down and sleep. Here and there, however, he gathered fragments from the talk of the guards and from what he himself heard, and managed to piece together a frail structure of facts.

Wagner gave his whole attention to collecting rubber, while Lieutenant Klack had charge of the work on the mountain itself--the quarry and other work which Seaforth did not comprehend. He guessed that it was something being done inside the passages which appeared in the masonried face of the upper rock--the platform above the houses. At times, batches of the slaves were taken thither, and once or twice he saw Klack at the curious entrance-ways, giving directions. That these were indeed entrances Seaforth no longer had any doubt. Where they led to was another matter.

Of Klack he saw more than he liked. The little Be' was a brute after the worst type, yet had more of Wagner's bravery and cool mastery. More than once he saw the man murder blacks, and toward Seaforth himself Klack displayed a venomous malice. Fortunately for all concerned, this did not extend to downright cruelty, but Klack delighted in striking the American across the face and heaping insults upon him for the benefit of the guards.

All this, Seaforth endured quietly enough, for

Klack and his insults were too petty to disturb him. None the less, he stored up each incident, and these bore bitter fruit in the future for Lieutenant Klack.

Wagner appeared infrequently, and for no other purpose than to assure himself that Seaforth was quite broken. Once he took a chicotte himself and gave the American a stinging lash across the back. Seaforth steeled himself, cowered, and Wagner swung off with a cold laugh.

Of Frances Earl he saw nothing whatever; but he chanced to overhear a most enlightening conversation.

What with labour and suffering, he had lost count of the days, but imagined it to be the sixth or seventh of his slavery. His own hut was at the edge of the slave quarters nearest the stone houses. He guessed afterward that Wagner had purposely come that way in order still further to test out the spirit of his new slave, and perhaps to add a refinement of torture.

As usual, he had fallen asleep at once upon eating Bosangi's mealies and beans; he had not yet become accustomed to the work so that he could remain wakeful, as did the black slaves. Suddenly he wakened, and knew it was still early because Bosangi had not yet retired beneath her grass mat. The keen voice of Wagner, from outside, had aroused him, and he caught the fragment of a speech.

"—because I am not so powerful here as

you suppose. True, I am in command, but my subordinates are spies set upon me. Were I to come out openly and put an end to all these cruelties, I would be removed and imprisoned within a month."

"But would not that be playing the part of a man, at least?"

Seaforth quivered to the girl's voice. So Frances was well again! It was probably her first excursion abroad, he reflected, for she must have spent the intervening week in slow recovery from the fever. Now Wagner's voice struck in, earnest and deliberate:

"I grant you that, Miss Earl. But what good would my removal be to these poor blacks? As it is, I am effecting a great deal, slowly but surely. What I can do without my lieutenant's knowledge, is done. To-morrow, for instance, Klack will be away, and I expect a large party of natives with rubber; if you will be present, you will see that my methods of payment are at least fair."

There was a moment of silence. Seaforth clenched his fists, restraining himself with an effort; Wagner's smooth talk was perfectly clear to him. This, then, was the fashion in which the Belgian hoped to win the love of Frances Earl—by posing as a liberator instead of showing his real tyranny! The bitter irony of it struck home to the American, yet he wondered if the girl would believe.

"Thank you; I will at least try to do you justice," came her voice, a trifle wearily. "But I know

too much of you, Captain Wagner—I have heard too much of your cruelty and tortures——”

“My dear Miss Earl!” broke in the man quickly. “Cannot you see how that is just the bitterest part of my burden? In order to effect anything, in order to establish myself firmly in power, I had to work slowly; I had to appear a brute in the eyes of all men, and take a load of misapprehension upon my own shoulders. That is the sacrifice I have made, and you alone know—you and your father and Doctor Seaforth.”

“And when does Doctor Seaforth return?” asked the girl, and the American heard their voices lessening somewhat, as though they were drawing farther away.

“Not for a couple of weeks, perhaps, and perhaps even more. He is looking into the sleeping sickness, as I told you, which has struck one of my farther districts. I hope that your father will have finished his investigations of the strange people and their customs——”

The voices died away, and were gone.

Seaforth lay gripping at his manacles, feeling himself impotent before the crafty brain of Ernest Wagner. The man had the ingenuity of a devil, no less! When he had said that Professor Earl had assented to the marriage with Frances, he had very probably spoken the truth. No doubt he had impressed some such distorted tale upon the older man, thought Seaforth, as he was now impressing it upon Frances.

But the diabolical cleverness of it! Here was Wagner, tyrant and bloodstained murderer, setting himself up as a self-sacrificing altruist—and making his argument carry force! Even as he lay there, chained and listening, Seaforth could almost have believed the overpowering earnestness in the man's voice. Wagner was a magnificent actor, and, remembering his tremendous personal magnetism, Seaforth wondered how long the girl could hold out against it.

Yet, feeling quite convinced that the potter had not shaped him upon the wheel merely to be flung, broken and outcast, among the potsherds of Africa, he fell asleep.

With the morning, he saw for the first time one of the prisoners taken from Solomon's boat. The man was of the same type as his old friend Ali—a negro-blooded coast Arab, thin and swarthy and villainous of feature. Seaforth had kept a sharp lookout for these men, but had seen nothing of them among the quarry gangs; he had finally concluded that they were at work under Klack, on the mysterious task inside the entrances of the upper rock. And in this he was quite right.

The Arab appeared manacled, as was Seaforth, and came under guard with a message to the sergeant in charge of the quarry. That morning Seaforth was at work shaping some of the roughly-hewn stone blocks, and while he worked he saw the sergeant come toward him, followed by the Arab.

By reason of his superior intelligence, the American occupied a somewhat higher position than the rest of the slaves, and he was not surprised when the sergeant addressed him directly, speaking, of course, in French:

"Take two files of slaves and carry these blocks where this man directs. Do not speak with anyone under penalty of the chicotte."

Seaforth nodded and turned to the neck-chained blacks. A gesture made them understand, and, picking up one of the cut stones himself, Seaforth followed the Arab. The soldier followed them watchfully; but, as they wended on the side path from the quarry, the American caught a muttered English word from the Arab in front of him:

"Come——"

That was all, for the moment. The guard had overheard the low word, and ran forward with a threatening cry, and his chicotte lashed down upon the Arab's back. With this he motioned them on angrily, and fell back again.

Seaforth felt a great surge of animation. Had the man some message for him? Were Solomon's men attempting something desperate? Even as he wondered, the Arab stumbled and fell heavily; so closely were they walking that Seaforth tripped over him, and as he came down he caught the swiftly-spoken English words:

"Eastern door to-night, effendi."

The guard ran forward again, cursing and

shouting. He lashed the Arab up, and lashed again at the furious look he received. The slow file passed on, and no more was said.

As they came to the southern crest of the hill, Seaforth saw a great crowd around the store, and guessed that Wagner was carrying through his carefully staged programme for the benefit of Frances Earl; but he cared little for that. He was not alone! These Arabs had something afoot! The thought was like wine to his brain.

The stones were deposited outside the rock face, and Klack appeared, with a vile insult to Seaforth. But the American only eyed that built-up face of rock, with the curious little entrances. The hill crest ran north and south, and the eastern door, therefore, was on the right. Klack and his half-seen band of slaves were at work with mortar and stone on the second doorway.

This much Seaforth gathered before he was sent back again to his labour. But now the work was as nothing to him, for he was looking forward to darkness. He knew it would be no great task to go to that entrance at night, for the perpetually chained slaves were unguarded at night, sentries being stationed only at the trails leading down from the hill.

Sunset came, and he marched back to Bosangi and her mealies, and ate with a light heart. He waited with impatience through a long hour, until darkness was well settled upon the White Mountain; from one or two of the stone bungalows came

light, and at the barracks the black soldiers were chanting and gambling, as was their nightly custom. At length Seaforth could wait no longer and, gathering up his chains, he left his hut with slow and cautious tread.

He met no one, and fortunately the moon did not rise until nearly midnight. Carefully he made his way toward the abrupt twenty-foot rock face, and found it unguarded save for one sentry at the farther end. Keeping his chains from rattling, Seaforth at length came to the eastern entrance, and paused. The place was quite deserted.

The sentry had seen him, however, and walked down to investigate. Seaforth sat down calmly, and when the man came up asked for a cigarette; he never smoked, but knew that the assumption of careless weariness would impose on the soldier, as it did. His request was refused, but, beyond satisfying himself that Seaforth's chains were intact, the soldier did not bother him, and finally withdrew once more after a warning to remain in sight. Seaforth was minded to throttle the man, but fortunately refrained.

As he sat wondering what was to happen, he saw a strange thing. From the second entrance came forth a small figure, which he took for that of a boy, and prostrated itself before the stars; from the other entrances came more such figures, all very small. The American watched them, astounded. As they lifted themselves and stretched

out their arms, he could make out that their nearly naked figures were white.

His heart began to pound at the thought. White pygmies! Was it possible? Were these the "strange people"? He stared at them, and after a moment they withdrew again and the rock was deserted.

Then, quite without warning, a wheezy voice came to Seaforth from the eastern entrance, which was almost at his back. It was very low, but very distinct, and when he realized what it was the American sat in astounded wonder.

"It's all werry well to worship the stars, I says, but it don't get a man nowhere. Werry 'appy I am to see you, Mr. Seaforth! I 'opes as 'ow you're in good 'ealth and prospects, as the old gentleman said when 'e asked the 'ousemaid to be 'is third."

CHAPTER XII

THE SLAVE Y OF SOLOMON

“Solomon!”

The American stretched where he sat, but only the low word escaped him. So incredible was the thing that for a moment it paralysed him. Then he awoke to caution.

This sudden resurrection of John Solomon was all the more stunning because of the night quiet. The Cockney himself did not appear; only his voice had issued from the rock face; the White Mountain brooded dark and silent under the stars, and a hundred yards away the lone sentry dozed over his musket, Seaforth quite forgotten.

“Can you hear me, sir?”

“Yes,” muttered the American thickly, and edged back nearer the masonry. “Yes, I can hear. Where are you?”

“Inside, sir. Wait till I get this ‘ere pipe a-going. Baccy is a werry good thing, I says, for them as uses it: what’s more, these ‘ere creatures take it as a mortal queer thing. Just a minute, sir.”

Solomon was here! The thought pounded in Seaforth's brain as he listened to the weird native chanting from the barracks, and even now he found it difficult of credence. Yet it was most undeniably true.

Not until then did Seaforth quite realize how much a man Solomon had come to mean to him. He had seen the Cockney had driven a wedge into his life. It was Solomon who had turned him from his old practice in Buffalo to the glory of a higher humanity service; it was Solomon who had suggested things for him to do which had not possible for him to be done at White Mountain.

Wagner would have fallen to blaming Solomon for the present situation, but this did not occur to Seaforth, because he was not a man to blame.

He had completely given up Solomon for dead, that he had seen the Cockney's steamer had been captured and his men sent drifting down the river in a launch. Now he comprehended that Solomon must have been among the captured, and that this must have been the surprise mentioned by Wagner had mentioned when he had questioned the Belgian about the captives while on the previous day.

At that sudden thought leaped into Seaforth's brain. He had almost forgotten Walter Firth amid the rush of misery and torture.

"Where's Firth?" he shot out swiftly.

"Now, Mr. Seaforth, a man as asks questions gets less'n 'e asks, I says," came the stolid response. A faint reek of evil-smelling pipe smoke drifted to him, and with a heart tug he recalled how often he had censured Solomon for smoking in his office at home.

"Mr. Firth ain't 'urt, sir," continued the voice calmly. "I've been and bribed that there guard to let us talk, but time's short. Now, sir, if so be as you'd tell me all what's 'appened, I'd take it mortal kind o' you."

The American understood, now, why the guard was dozing so peacefully at the other end of the rock face. He gave Solomon a briefly detailed account of what had happened since his capture, for the Cockney already knew what had gone before, having learned it from Ali and Mbara.

He laid special stress upon the actions of Wagner, and the latter's intentions toward Frances Earl. But his first wild exultation at the presence of Solomon gradually died away as he spoke.

After all, what could be done? Solomon was a prisoner and his men scattered, and Firth was either a captive also, or was lost in the jungle. They could do absolutely nothing, and now Seaforth was more concerned for Frances Earl than for the native victims of the atrocity system.

"This 'ere Wagner is a werry slick article," observed the Cockney judiciously, when Seaforth had finished his relation. "I'm afraid as 'ow Professor Earl is a-going to complicate matters.

If I'd knowed this, I wouldn't ha' let meself be captured, just like that. But what's done is done, and can't be 'eiped, as the old gentleman said when 'e kissed the curate's wife by mistake in the entry-way."

Seaforth wondered if he had heard that amazing statement aright.

"Let yourself be captured!" he repeated blankly. "What do you mean?"

"Dang it, I mean what I says!" came the irritated voice of Solomon. "Did you think as 'ow I was such a bloomin' fool? Now you sit tight, sir, and don't be asking of no more questions till I get me bit o' talk done with."

With that John Solomon proceeded to lay bare his entire course of action, to date. Listening, Seaforth did not know whether to admire the little man's audacious strategy or to condemn him as a quixotic fool.

Instead of attacking Wagner direct, Solomon had concluded that the Belgian's forces were too strong for him. Ali and Mbara had told him of how Seaforth and the girl had been trapped, and Solomon had at once changed his plan of campaign.

Leaving Firth with twenty of his men to approach the White Mountain gradually through the jungle, guided by Mbara, he had come on with the dozen remaining in the steamer and launch. Guessing shrewdly about what he had to expect, he had deliberately made up his mind to be captured with a few of his men.

At no little risk to himself, he had succeeded. Three of the Arabs had fallen to Wagner's bullets, four had been captured with him, all of them being wounded, and the remaining five had slipped off in the launch to rejoin Firth with news that all was well. Once more John Solomon had risked all on a desperate chance, and had won—so far.

"But what on earth will you gain by this fool-hardy business?" demanded the astounded Seaforth. "Now you're helpless, and we're all in for it."

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, we ain't nothing of the kind," came the answer. "'Cause why, Wagner 'e thinks as 'ow I'm smashed and me men gone. 'E don't know about Mr. Firth, 'e don't. But you wait, I says. I ain't through yet, sir."

As usual, Solomon had planned far into the future, and but for the unforeseen triangle of Wagner, Professor Earl, and Frances, his plans had been perfect. He had arranged a code of signals by smoke, in order to summon Firth to the attack whenever Wagner or a party of his soldiers might be absent on a punitive expedition.

Since entering the place, however, Solomon had changed his whole endeavour. And this was entirely due to the "strange people" who lived in the White Mountain. Of course he knew little more than did Seaforth himself, but it was through them that Wagner exerted his mysterious power over the pigmy tribes and the normal natives of the jungle. Therefore Solomon was waiting until

he had seen Professor Earl, who was somewhere in the interior of the mountain.

"Eh? What's that again?" broke in Seaforth at this juncture. "Is the blamed place hollow? Do these people live in caves?"

"Summat like that, sir. It's a mortal queer place, it is that! But you'll be 'ere quick enough yourself."

It was Solomon's idea that, since Wagner was playing a carefully-staged part with Professor and Frances Earl, he would remove Seaforth from the quarry, now that the girl was able to inspect the place. In such an event, Seaforth would be put at work with Solomon and his men, who were repairing some badly-damaged masonry in the passages.

Of these passages Solomon knew little, except that they led to cavern-like chambers within, where the White Ones seemed to live. In common with his men, Solomon was chained to the wall at night, Lieutenant Klack acting as jailer.

Yet John Solomon did not appear in the least downcast.

"The whole business is foolish!" exclaimed Seaforth irritably. "You should have wiped out Wagner in a straight attack, even if you had lost some . . ."

"A sorry fine," came a chuckle. "But we ain't here to wipe out Wagner; we're 'ere to wipe out them atrocities, I says."

"Well, isn't Wagner the one——"

“What’d be the good o’ killing him? We destroyed one post, where you saw poor Vanderdonk; but we did it so Mr. Firth wouldn’t ’ave no enemies in ’is rear. No, sir, when we kill Wagner we’ll ’ave to wipe out the ’ole business—this ’ere *ankh*, I mean. You don’t know what it is; no more do I. We’ll know when we see Professor Earl, sir.”

“But Wagner’s the one—” persisted Seaforth, when Solomon broke in.

“Beggin’ your pardon, sir, but ’e ain’t. It’s this ’ere White Mountain. Wi’out that, them ’ere Belgians couldn’t do a thing wi’ them pygmy tribes. As the Good Book says, it don’t pay for to go fightin’ your enemies unless you ’its ’em so ’ard they ain’t able to fight any more. Them Israelites knew what they was about, sir, when they cut off them ’ere Amalakites root and branch. If so be as a man ’as to fight, why, it don’t pay to leave the other man able to ’it back, I says.”

More than this Seaforth could gain no satisfaction from the other; but he acknowledged the weight of Solomon’s argument, even though he did not like the little man’s way of going about the matter. However, he soon found that Solomon was quite settled on his plans.

“If this ’ere *ankh* business is what I think it is,” went on Solomon at length, “and what I ’ave thought all along, why, we ’ave a werry good chance to work poetic justice on this ’ere Wagner. This wooden peg o’ mine is ’ollow,

sir, and I brought along two werry good things in it, besides a revolver. Wait a minute, Mr. Seaforth. I'll show you summat as 'll make you laugh."

The American heard the squeak of Solomon's wooden leg being unscrewed. A moment later there came a slight rattle of chains, and he gripped the Cockney's hand as it was protruded from the darkness. Solomon left in his clasp two small objects.

"Look at them 'ere things, sir. If I ain't werry much mistook, it's them as 'll bust Cap'n Wagner's power and authority, and werry good, says I."

Seaforth scrutinized the two objects in the dim star-glow. They were small boxes, and he could plainly make out the labels. One of them contained a coiled rubber snake which worked on a spring; the other held a vividly-painted rubber spider of large size.

"Good heavens—are you crazy?" demanded Seaforth abruptly. "What do you mean to do with these child's toys? Oh, it's rank nonsense!"

"Mr. Seaforth, it ain't the biggest things in life as makes the biggest results," came the wheezy but earnest answer. "Make the punishment fit the crime, I says, just like that. Them 'ere things is rubber, sir. I may be mistook and i may not; but I 'as me 'opes, just like that."

There was no more to be said. Solomon had explained a good deal and now meant to await

further developments, so Seaforth dragged himself back to his hovel, heartsick.

A rubber snake and a rubber spider! Were it not for the awful tragedy of their situation, the thing would have been laughable. His faith in John Solomon was completely staggered. Even in his weariness, dismay sent sleep flying, and he lay in gloom.

Firth was out in the jungle, with Ali and Mbara and a group of half-caste Arabs. The rest of them were in the power of Wagner. To Seaforth's mind, everything else fell prostrate before these dominating and cold facts.

What of Wagner's intent toward Frances Earl? The man had insulted her at Boma, yet now seemed to be on a good footing with her, doubtless due to his amazing personality and magnetism. Yet, was Frances Earl a girl to be so easily captivated?

"That's the devil of it!" groaned Seaforth. "I can't warn her. I can't know what's going on, and I'm helpless! If only Firth would take it upon himself to attack and wipe out the whole devilish tangle!"

But he knew very well that Firth would do no such thing without orders from John Solomon.

At dawn he marched forth to labour, wondering whether or not Solomon's prediction would be fulfilled. Was he to be put at work inside the passages, in order to be removed from any chance encounter with Frances Earl? She would surely

want to inspect the quarry and the slaves, and to follow out his programme, Wagner must assent. For the present, Klack was at work in the caves and was evidently remaining there by Wagner's orders.

If the Belgian were to continue in his pose as a liberator, he must fool the girl and her father very completely. He had told her that Seaforth was away, investigating the sleeping sickness, and would be away for two weeks. At the end of two weeks, then, he must produce Seaforth or else make up a highly-plausible tale. Perhaps at the end of that two weeks he would simply produce the American's body——

Seaforth, chopping at a block of stone while he thought, shivered a little. He looked down at himself, and groaned inwardly. He was nearly naked by this time. His body was matted with dirt, for the slaves were allowed only drinking water. His long hair and his stubby beard were thick and matted. Could he have looked at his face, could he have noted the lines and grim desperation implanted there by torture and mental anguish, he would have groaned again.

What wonder that, in this utmost misery of body and mind and soul, Cliff Seaforth lost his faith in Solomon? A rubber spider and a rubber snake!

Yet one thing had Solomon foreseen truly, because that noon came Wagner to the quarry, and beckoned Seaforth aside. The American remembered in time that he was himself playing

a part, and so he came humbly, looking down on the rock.

"I have a proposition to make you, Seaforth," and biting contempt rang out in Wagner's voice so that Seaforth gripped his nails into his palms and held himself tense lest he should break forth. The mop of yellow hair hanging over his brow concealed the flame burning in his grey eyes.

"What is it?" he asked sullenly, as a man dazed by his miseries.

Wagner stood, trim and handsome, looking down with frank disdain.

"Miss Earl thinks that you have been on a trip up the river," he said, after a long moment. "But perhaps you overheard our conversation the other night. I intended that you should."

Seaforth nodded, without lifting his head.

"Good! I'll be quite frank with you, my man. I have your friend Solomon a prisoner, and I had intended crucifying the two of you over in the graveyard beyond the lime-kiln. You haven't seen that graveyard yet, eh?"

Seaforth made no response, and Wagner laughed harshly.

"Well, I'll send you over there this afternoon, for we'll have to clean up a bit, since Miss Earl is interested in seeing the place. You can take a look at what is there, and that ought to put you in the right mood to listen to me to-night."

"Then you're not going to kill me?" asked Seaforth, quite humbly.

"Perhaps not—at least, not for the present. I can put you to much better use alive. How would you like to have a nice clean shave, to have a fine new outfit of white clothes—real shoes—a haircut—live in a bungalow——"

Seaforth winced. He could not help it. The very thought of these things was torture to him in his present condition, and his eagerness was quite unassumed when he looked up to meet the cold insolent eyes of Wagner.

"You—you mean it?" he asked hoarsely.

"Certainly—you'll have all this to-night, Seaforth, merely by assenting to my proposition. You'll assent, I gather. Now run along and join Klack, like a good boy—you'll find him over yonder."

Wagner nodded toward the hill above the lime-kiln, and Seaforth gathered up his chains and started.

Sure enough, he found Klack and a dozen guarded slaves waiting at the verge of the cliff. There was a dizzy path winding down toward the lime-kiln below, and when Seaforth had fallen in behind the chained negroes, Klack started them down.

The purpose behind all this was quite apparent. Frances Earl was to visit the quarry that afternoon, so Klack and Seaforth were being put out of the way. But what was this mysterious "graveyard" of which Wagner had spoken?

The American found soon enough. They passed

the lime-kiln, and so came to a clearing amid thick grove of trees. And of all the horrors which he had seen, this was the worst. There was good reason for Wagner wishing to "clean up".

At one time this had been in reality a graveyard—the graveyard of the "strange people". The tombs were all solidly builded, of limestone blocks, and each was marked with the symbol of the *ankh*; they were there in thousands, stretching far beyond the confines of the cleared space out and away into the jungle. Each was ten feet in height, and squarely built. The tops were level.

And on top of each tomb were bones. On some were men, lately dead—chained there; as the party entered the space, a dozen great vultures flew off with a hideous clatter of wings. Around the sides of the cleared space were set up great looped crosses of heavy wood. On each of these was a man or woman. Each *ankh* held its ghastly burden.

Seaforth dared look no further. There were other horrors that made him sick. Under Klack's directions the bones were cleared away, the shredded ruins of humanity were removed from each *ankh*, and all were flung carelessly into the jungle. To Seaforth the work was like a horrible dream.

At length it was done with, toward sunset. Nausea had come upon the American, and he sat to one side, gasping. Klack approached with a sneer, and kicked him heavily.

It was too much. With an inarticulate cry, Seaforth leaped up, and his two wrist irons took the venomous little Belgian across the face. Klack went down, senseless; as the guards ran up with ready muskets, Seaforth turned on them, and they hesitated.

"Pick him up and return!" ordered the American. He was in no shape for fighting, and the sickness had returned in a deadly spasm.

Fortunately the soldiers stood in too much awe of him to demur. The slaves were led away; Seaforth followed, and two of the big black soldiers bore Klack, whose face bled copiously. He did not recover consciousness for an hour afterward.

But Seaforth gave him no heed, moving as in a dream. That night he would have clean clothes, a bath, a shave! That night he would be a white man once more, and no slave!

Conditions? Of course there would be conditions—but for that Cliff Seaforth cared nothing. His spirit was not broken, but his body was very wearied. Oddly enough, he felt sorrow at parting from old Bosangi; he had never exchanged an actual word with her, but she had been kind to him. And so he toiled up the hill again, and if he thought of John Solomon, it was only with a contemptuous smile. A rubber snake and a rubber spider! Bah!

After all, Seaforth was very near to breaking.

CHAPTER XIII

HOW SEAFORTH SOLD HIS HONOUR

Just how near to breaking he was, Seaforth himself did not realize until he was standing before Captain Wagner in the latter's bungalow, which was a structure of two storeys. The attack on Lieutenant Klack had been reported and passed without comment by Wagner, who understood what was quite true—that it had been a last flicker of energy, no more. Wagner was well used to the breaking of men.

"I give you an alternative, Doctor Seaforth," he said coldly, dismissing the guard. "On the one hand, you may be taken out behind that graveyard at sunrise and given the chicotte until you die. You know what that means."

Despite himself, Seaforth quivered a little. Then, remembering that he was but acting a part, he mumbled something and dropped his over-angry eyes.

"Say 'sir' to me, you dog!" snapped the Belgian suddenly.

"Yes, sir," muttered Seaforth, fingers clenched on his chains.

"Ah, that's better. Now, on the other hand, you may be given a bungalow to yourself, with all the comforts of home; you will be no longer a slave, but a guest, in all senses of the word. You understand?"

"Yes—sir," muttered Seaforth again. He cringed, playing his part well.

"Enough of that! Stand straight, you broken-spirited fool!" cried out Wagner, disgusted. "Seaforth, you're a gentleman, I take it."

At the grim irony of this remark, a flutter of a laugh crept through the American's soul, but it did not reach his face.

"Then I want you to pass your word on one subject. You know my intentions toward Miss Earl—in part. You will know them more fully later on. Now, if you would be a guest and given the liberty of the White Mountain, you must agree to do two things."

Seaforth straightened a little, nodding.

"In the first place, you must meet Professor Earl and Miss Earl, you may be with me a good deal, and you must see something of Klack and the rest. In all this, you will promise me to breathe no word concerning me to anyone. You understand?"

Seaforth understood—and wondered at the sheer audacity of the man.

After torture, slavery, degradation—Wagner

meant to trust him with a vital secret. On condition of being made once more a man, he was to calmly stand by and watch Frances Earl be lured and led with devilish cunning; he was to be made a party to Wagner's scheme of conquest—nay, he was to further it! For, unless he were to be produced well and apparently complacent, the girl would naturally suspect Wagner of trickery.

"But—you would trust me, then?" he said, astounded.

And the thing seemed incredible, until he reasoned that behind it all there must be some very good purpose. Wagner was not sparing him out of pity.

"Yes, I trust you, Seaforth. You wouldn't trust me, but I trust you—damn you!"

And now Wagner's laugh rang harsh and menacing. It was clear that he hated the American, yet stood in need of him. And, realizing this, Seaforth grew bolder.

"No, I can't trust you, Captain Wagner. What assurance have I of my life?"

"The assurance that I need you," came the crisp retort. "See here, don't be a fool. I've got you and Miss Earl in my power—poor Solomon doesn't count. Now, I intend to make off with some loot and skip the country. In that I'll need help. I can't trust Klack, for he'd knife me in the back the first chance he got. Old Earl is a doddering idiot, so far as action goes.

"But you're a good beast, even with your spirit broken. I can trust to your word, though you hate me like the devil—eh? Good! Then here are my conditions."

With this, Wagner quite threw off his cold attitude of dominance. Once more he became the charming companion whom Seaforth had encountered at that dinner, which now seemed so long ago; once more he swept warmth and a cynical comradeship into his handsome face, and the vibrant magnetism of him was like an actual force.

"First, as I have said, your word to give no warning to anyone of the part I am playing with the Earls. Second, your parole. Third, your word to attempt no more assaults on me or my men. And fourth, to give me all the assistance you can in getting my loot above ground. Last, not to communicate with Solomon or his men."

"What loot?" queried Seaforth, rather stupidly. He was frankly puzzled by the queerness of the whole affair.

"You'll see. It's down in those caves below us, and we'll have a devil of a time getting it, I'm afraid. Well, what of our bargain? If you don't choose to agree, you may take the chicotte at dawn—for the final time."

The American stood with bowed head. He knew, and Wagner knew, that if he gave his word he would keep it. Any other consideration never

occurred to Cliff Seaforth, even when he was dealing with such a villain as Ernest Wagner.

It would certainly do no good to let himself be whipped to death the next morning. Yet the thought of standing by and watching Frances Earl being trapped made him wince again.

As to helping Wagner with his mysterious "loot", Seaforth paid little attention to this condition. It was destined to prove most important of all, but at the time it seemed the least important—as it really was, to Seaforth.

His parole would worry him, he felt. With Firth and Solomon's men waiting in deadly silence somewhere out in the jungle, with the White Mountain liable to attack and rescue at any moment, could he stand idly by? It would prove hard. Non-communication with Solomon would matter less, for he had already told the little Cockney everything he knew.

"You can't buy sweets for nothing," observed Wagner slowly.

Seaforth raised his head.

"True. I pass you my word on all these counts, Captain Wagner—with one exception."

"Ah! You think it wise to make exceptions?"

The sombre fire in Wagner's black eyes, the subtle ring of steel beneath the smooth voice, betrayed hidden anger. Seaforth nodded quietly.

"Yes. I pass you my word, provided no man lays finger on me."

At that, Wagner laughed, as though relieved.

"Oh, you're tired of being tortured, eh? All right. You'll not be touched. You will be treated absolutely as a guest, Doctor Seaforth."

"Thank you. Then you have my word."

Wagner took a key from his pocket, leaned forward, and unlocked Seaforth's manacles. Then, calling a soldier from outside, he ordered him to take Seaforth to the bungalow already prepared, and turned his back. Seaforth followed the soldier --free!

When the sun rose, he wakened and looked at the room around him--the clean walls and floor, the clothes laid out ready for him, the mosquito curtains; and, last but not least, he inspected himself.

What a difference! As he looked into the mirror on the wall, he wondered if this man could be Cliff Seaforth. True, the matted locks and the beard had vanished, and he was clean again--yet what a difference! He seemed years older. His features, always square-chopped, were now unwontedly grim and hard. His grey eyes were sunken.

The chicotte had left his back an ugly thing to look upon, and the manacles had set sore scars on wrists and ankles. But he laughed a little, as he rather anxiously inspected his head for grey hairs; his curly yellow hair belied all the tales he had read, for the week of torture had left it untouched.

"A week!" he reflected, as he dressed. "Why, it seemed like centuries, years uncounted! And

now it seems like a day. Well, I've got a hard row to hoe."

It was hard, bitterly hard, and it was going to prove harder, but Seaforth squared his shoulders and set forth to investigate. He had passed his word, and that settled the matter.

He found that old Bosangi and another native woman had been allotted him as servants, but by means of signs they made him understand that Wagner's bungalow was the common mess, and that he could seek his breakfast there. So he issued forth into the sunlight of dawn.

No sentry was at his door, and for a space he stood, silent, watching the slave gangs file off; only the day before he had filed with them and had slaved with them in the quarry and in the more terrible graveyard. And now he was free—free!

But he made no mistake. He knew that he was freed only because he could be of use, and that Wagner by no means intended that he should be free for ever. No—Seaforth realized fully that when Wagner was through with him, the end would be a bullet in the back, or perhaps worse. What did the beast actually intend?

Was he in earnest about his purposed flight? This was something quite dense to the American, who in the end gave up wondering about it and walked over to Wagner's bungalow. The sentry passed him with a salute, and he found Wagner at breakfast.

"Sit down, doctor!" motioned the Belgian cordially. "Miss Earl does not have breakfast here, but in her own quarters. By the way, please remember that you returned late last night from your expedition."

Seaforth nodded, and devoted himself to breakfast in silence.

"I expect," went on Wagner, after a little, "that Professor Earl will join us to-day. I informed him two days ago that his daughter was here."

"Where the devil is he, then?"

"Below us," smiled Wagner. "You see, the White Mountain is and has been inhabited by a very curious set of people, Doctor Seaforth. Perhaps you would like to hear about them? Professor Earl has been so engrossed in studying them that he has not once come to the surface since our arrival. Poor old man—it amuses him!"

And in this fashion Seaforth learned at last who the "strange people" were—or, rather, of what the White Mountain consisted.

Wagner stated baldly that the mountain was hollow with caves and was inhabited by a race of white dwarfs—or, at least, so ran the legend. Following the legend, he had come upon the place and had promptly seized it, in so far as he himself dared. And therein lay a curious fact.

He had found the caves actually in the possession of a race of seeming dwarfs, who were also white—this, as he expressed it, was "not a natural,

but a scientific fact". There were very few of them—hardly a score in all—though at other times they had been more numerous, and they lived continually in the caves. The only time they came to the outer world was at night, when, as Seaforth had seen himself, they issued forth briefly to worship the stars.

Living underground year after year, generation after generation, it was small wonder that they were white in colour. Nor could their eyes bear the light of day. Wagner laughed as he told of dragging one of the poor creatures forth to the sunshine, and how the wretched dwarf had withered and died in agony.

That was too much for Seaforth, who abruptly changed the conversation. He could not quite keep Wagner off the subject, however, so that by the end of their meal he had learned still more about the "strange people".

It was they who had instituted the worship of the *ankh*, and the White Mountain was regarded as a sacred place through all the district round about. The "strange people" acted as high priests of the cult, and were feared and obeyed by all the natives. When Wagner had come, he had found the "strange people" a helpless race, had promptly seized them, and through them had governed the pygmies and native tribes in spite of cruelties and extortions, almost without a revolt.

As for the "strange people", they lived in their caves, as heretofore. The natives brought offerings

of fruit and grain and meat, and Wagner did not interfere with the worship. Especially did he not interfere with such pigmies as came in. The dwarfs were of no use as rubber gatherers, and, owing to their use of poisoned darts, Wagner was quite helpless against them, so he carefully kept them conciliated. This explained the yam patches in the country below.

Such, in brief, was the present situation. Seaforth cared nothing at all about the "strange people", and would have paid no further attention to them had he not witnessed something a few moments later which testified vividly to the truth of Wagner's tale.

He had left the bungalow, intent on enjoying his new-found freedom to the utmost; as he started across the parade ground toward the defile leading down to the plain and jungle below, he halted at sight of a score of visitors. These, save for Mbara, were the first African pygmies he had ever seen, and he recognized Mbara himself among them.

None of them were over four feet in height, and all were armed with blowpipes and various other savage weapons. Escorted by a file of Wagner's soldiers, they came across the parade ground and deposited their arms before the masonried rock face. As they passed, Seaforth tried to attract Mbara's attention, but without success. He wondered if the dwarfs were a spy from Firth's party.

Having left their arms, the dwarfs split up into small groups and vanished into the cave entrances, bearing fruit and other offerings. The soldiers did not accompany them, but remained on guard outside, Seaforth noted; there was no sign of John Solomon, and he passed on thoughtfully.

Anxious to make a test of his seeming freedom from restraint, the American went directly to the defile leading from the hilltop, at the entrance to which was posted a sentry. He passed the sentry and walked on for fifty yards, but was not molested. Finding that he was indeed free, he slowly retraced his steps.

He thought that the sentry was eyeing him in a most uneasy fashion, and halted as he approached the man, grimly amused. Beneath his eye the black soldier seemed to squirm. Considering this strange, Seaforth spoke in French:

“What is the matter, dog?”

The soldier muttered something inaudible, and only at Seaforth's sharp command did he speak openly. The man was actually trembling.

“They say—they say you have a devil!”

“Oh! Who says so?” queried the American.

“All men know it—now you slew men down the river, and—and——”

Seaforth looked hard at the soldier, and thought he understood. The man had heard of that slaying at Vanderdonk's station; he saw Seaforth freed, after slavery; he was perhaps fearing swift vengeance. Yet there was something more.

"Well? What's the rest of it?"

"Even those little men knew it," blubbered forth the frightened sentry, in desperation. "They said, as they passed, that your devil had destroyed *that*"—and he pointed toward the tall wooden *ankh* erected before the slave quarters.

Then Seaforth understood. Mbara had talked of what had happened during their voyage up-river, and of Seaforth's destruction of the *ankh*. Had the dwarf some purpose in thus talking? Was he acting as a spy for Firth?

Wondering, the American walked back in deep thought, eyes fixed on the ground. He did not notice where he was going, until he was brought to an abrupt halt by a cry at his side:

"Cliff!"

Then he started into life, as his hands closed on those of Frances Earl and he found himself looking into the girl's eager delighted eyes.

"Why—where have you been? When did you come back?"

Bitterness smote the American, for he could not forget his rôle.

"I got back late last night," he said slowly, flushing a little. "I am glad to see you well again, Frances! You are looking quite yourself!"

She drew back from him a step, and small wonder. Even to Seaforth himself those words had sounded stilted, queer, embarrassed. Her eyes searched him frowningly.

"You're not ill? Why did you look so strange? Aren't you glad to see me?"

He tried desperately to force a more natural manner upon himself. His sunken eyes fastened hungrily on the girl's face, drinking in anew every detail of her delicate beauty, her puzzled surprise, her rebuffed eagerness and delight at the sight of him. Words leaped hot to his lips, but he held them back.

"I have only wished that I might see you with every hour," he said earnestly. "I've been a trifle ill, yes, but I'm all right. You're quite recovered?"

"Quite, thanks," she said, rather coldly. Yet her eyes dwelt on his face in baffled wonder. "Have you seen Captain Wagner?"

"I saw him last night," said Seaforth shortly. "Why?"

She was silent for a long moment, still studying him.

"What do you think of him?"

Now, indeed, Seaforth was taken aback, and showed it.

"Why—I think—to tell the truth, I don't know," he tried to cloak his dismay with a laugh, and failed dismally. "He's very peculiar. Where are you going, Frances?"

"Come along," she said curtly, and turned. "Some natives are here with rubber. Perhaps you'd like to see what goes on."

Seaforth followed her, perceiving that they were near the store, where a crowd was gathered,

for a number of natives had come in with the dwarfs. He knew that his awkward manner and embarrassed greeting had rebuffed the girl, yet he could not better matters by speech. So he followed in silence, brooding over his bad case.

The soldiers made way for them, and they walked through to face Wagner, who was seated on his camp stool receiving the natives. But here was no bloodshed. Instead, the amazed natives received cloth and brass rings for their rubber, while the soldiers grinned or sulked, and Wagner played the gracious philanthropist to his heart's content.

Suddenly looking up, he seemed to see his two visitors for the first time, and leaped up with a bow to the girl.

"Ah, good morning! I had not known you were here. And you, Doctor Seaforth—indeed I am glad to welcome you to the White Mountain once again!"

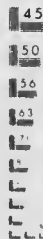
With eyes grimly belying his action, Seaforth took the proffered hand for a moment, knowing that he had sold himself. He wondered if Wagner could have foreseen what had actually taken place.

The man was cunning, infinitely cunning and farsighted. Had he by any possibility looked ahead when making his bargain—had he foreseen how Seaforth's unavoidable lack of confidence and guilty feeling of duplicity must inevitably strike a note of jarring discord with the sensitive, exquisitely tuned sincerity of Frances Earl?



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(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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“I am afraid,” reflected Seaforth to himself bitterly, “that I have driven a worse bargain than I suspected. After all, what is it that binds me to keep my word to this devil? Is not France Earl worth the sacrifice of my honour?”

And so he fell into temptation.

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bargain
at binds
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CHAPTER XIV

WAGNER PLAYS TRUMPS

"I expect your father this afternoon, Miss Frances."

They were at luncheon in Wagner's bungalow when the Belgian made this smooth announcement. He continued, before the startled girl could speak:

"Perhaps you could make a guess at something, Doctor Seaforth! What has so absorbed Professor Earl in his study of the people below us, is this: They are as white as Arabs or other of the Semitic races, yet they are no larger than our dwarfs. Why is this? I have gone through some of the old tombs in the graveyard—the place we visited last evening, Miss Frances—and found in them bones of people who were of our own size. Why, then, should their descendants be so small?"

As the girl asked no questions, Seaforth saw that she must be well informed on the subject of the "strange people". He also found the answer to a question that had long puzzled him, and blurted it out thoughtlessly:

"Oh! Then it was in those tombs that you found the Egyptian jewellery which you sold to the Louvre, captain?"

Wagner's eyes flashed to his, their blackness shot with surprise and fury. But for the sake of his rôle the Belgian spoke cautiously:

"Ah! And how do you happen to know that Doctor Seaforth?"

Having but one thing to say, Seaforth said it frankly:

"Solomon told me as much, Captain Wagner. He had investigated you pretty thoroughly, I believe. By the way, I wish you would tell me what has become of him. Has he been here?"

This cool countershot brought a thin smile to Wagner's lips.

"No, I've seen nothing of him."

So this, then, was the tale told Frances Earl! That Solomon had not shown up at all! The American nodded quietly in comprehension, and returned to the first subject.

"As to these white dwarfs of yours, I couldn't hazard any guess, but I'll be interested in meeting Professor Earl and hearing his conclusions. It's been perfectly safe for him to spend so much time in the caves, I suppose?"

This sent the girl's eyes to Wagner, who assented:

"Of course! The dwarfs are a stupid, inoffensive people—in fact, they seem no more than slugs, half-human degenerates."

"They're no more degenerate than your lieutenant," said Seaforth, with grim irony. "I've heard strange tales about his atrocious conduct while I was—away."

Wagner smiled again, evidently appreciating these hidden thrusts.

"Yes, he's a bad lot," he assented. "You know that he's responsible for most of the tortures and cruelty which I have tried to put down. The natives have given me some credit, I hope?"

Seaforth cursed the man inwardly. Frances Earl was searching his face, waiting for his answer; in her eyes that answer would either discredit or establish Wagner's whole story.

"They gave you more than a little," said Seaforth slowly. "I have never heard a native speak of you without giving you due appreciation, captain."

This quite satisfied Wagner, but Seaforth left the room abruptly, afraid to trust himself further under the Belgian's smoothly lashing tongue.

He went back to his own house in no very pleasant frame of mind.

Wagner was too much for him at the game of wits, and intended to hold the whip hand in all things. So far as Seaforth could tell, he held it firmly enough over the White Mountain and all upon and within it.

During that morning, the American had experienced a bitter struggle. Wagner held him gripped by no bond stronger than a spoken word, a promise. What if he broke it? A dozen words

to Frances Earl, and the net which held her would be ripped away. A short sharp attack on Wagner, and the man would be disposed of; Solomon might be freed, Walter Firth called in to the attack, and the greatest of the Congo atrocities would be wiped out for ever. Seaforth never doubted his ability to best Wagner in a personal encounter.

It was a strong temptation, a terribly strong one. Holding Seaforth back was nothing more than his word of honour. What if he broke it? Would it not be in a good and worthy cause? No one would censure him for it, certainly, for if ever the end justified the means, it was here and now.

Nay, rather—would he be justified in *not* breaking his word? The future of Frances Earl, the future of countless thousands of black people, the future of himself and Firth and Solomon—all these hung upon him. A word now, an action, and all would be assured; otherwise all would be thrown into the jeopardy of Ernest Wagner.

And so, in this extremity, Seaforth turned him to Walter Firth, as he had done in the old struggling days at Johns Hopkins. What would Firth do in such a case as this—Firth, the gentleman by birth and breeding? And this thought loosened the knot of Seaforth's perplexity.

"If old Walter gave his word, then by the eternal he'd keep it!" reflected the American. "And now I've given mine, I'll keep it."

After this the problem was settled for all time in his mind.

An hour after luncheon he was summoned from his bungalow by a soldier, to find Wagner awaiting him outside, with Frances Earl.

"We just had word that Professor Earl is emerging," smiled the Belgian. "As I've kept him supplied with food and comforts, he'll probably be quite presentable."

"He doesn't seem very anxious to see his daughter," put in Frances merrily. "You see, Cliff, Captain Wagner did not tell him I was here until two days ago——"

"You were unable to leave your house, my dear Miss Frances," said Wagner calmly. "As there was no need of distressing your father, and interfering with his work, I left him alone. Is it not what he would have wished himself?"

Seaforth said nothing at all, but followed them. They walked toward the wall of ancient masonry, and found a number of the dwarf worshippers squatting near the entrances, unmolested by the sentries. Wagner spoke to the soldiers, was pointed to the western end of the rock face, and, as they walked toward it, Seaforth saw Professor Earl issue blinkingly from one of the low doorways.

There was no mistaking the man, even had Frances not rushed to him with a cry of delight. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, wore spectacles and a grey beard, and was the typical savant from head to foot. His clothes were in extremely bad

repair, as might have been expected from his recent labours, but it was the man's face that held Seaforth.

For it was weak, pitiably weak. Behind the spectacles were rather vacant eyes; the brow was wide and high, the nose large and commanding but the mouth and jaw and chin betrayed irresolution, lack of assertion, which the beard could not hide. The face held firmness, yes, but the gentle firmness of a scholar, not the rugged strength and mastery which Seaforth would have liked to see there.

None the less, he knew, as he gazed, that Earl was the type of man to be loved for his very weakness—honest to a fault, sincere himself, and trusting others, a dreamer of dreams, beautiful but not practical. Exactly the man to have been chosen by a New York philanthropist, exactly the man to be tricked and laughed at and mocked throughout the Congo State; exactly the man Seaforth would have least thought to be father to Frances Earl.

Blinded by the sunlight though he was, the savant knew his daughter, and for a space the two stood silent, folded each in the other's arms. Seaforth saw Earl's long white hands patting gently the shoulders of Frances' khaki coat, for she had her back to him. Then the scientist put her gently aside, and, still blinking, held out his hand to Wagner.

"Ah, my dear captain!" he cried, and suddenly his face lighted up amazingly. "Oh, I forgot that

you did not know! See, see—when I have put these notes before the world”—he fumbled in a crammed side-pocket as he spoke, with growing excitement—“our names will never die in science!

“Those people of yours are descendants of Egyptians—there are hieroglyphs on their walls, down there! I could read some of the inscriptions quite clearly; their ancestors were the remnants of a lost Egyptian caravan headed by Ta-En-User, a priest of Maat under the Twenty-first Dynasty —”

“Shake hands with my friend Doctor Seaforth, Professor Earl,” interrupted Wagner abruptly. “It was he who brought Miss Frances up from Boma.”

Cut short in the midst of his exultant paean, Earl was hard put to it to collect himself. Almost mechanically he stretched out his hand, but Seaforth’s intentionally hard grip shocked him into cognizance of practical things. Frances, clinging to his shoulder, aided him.

“I used to know Doctor Seaforth when he was at college, father,” she said, and flung Seaforth a quick smile. “We followed you up the river and almost caught you.”

“I am very pleased to make your acquaintance, sir,” said the scientist. The high triumph had faded from his eyes, but his manner and voice were those of the old-fashioned Southern gentleman, and what he lacked in force was made up in courtesy. “Any gentleman who has rendered service to my daughter, sir, may command me.”

"The honour is mine," said Seaforth perfunctorily.

Wagner intervened quietly but firmly: "Professor Earl, I have some luncheon waiting for you. Miss Frances will take you to your bungalow where you will find your effects, Doctor Seaforth and I will expect you at my quarters shortly."

Arm in arm, the savant and his daughter departed to their house, while Wagner and Seaforth returned to the captain's headquarters. Neither of them spoke until they were seated on the veranda, but it was patent to Seaforth that the Belgian was doing some hard thinking.

"And now the game narrows, my friend," observed Wagner suddenly, and his black eyes drove up at Seaforth like a sword. "By to-night will have settled matters with the Earls. In the morning we go for the loot. The day after, I make up my caravan and we strike for Lake Albert and British soil."

The American digested this, wondering how much truth might be in it.

"Are you in earnest, then?" he returned slowly. "Do you actually mean to get this mysterious loot and skip out with it—give up everything here?"

Wagner's eyes narrowed.

"You'll see when Professor Earl comes."

More than this, nothing was said until a few moments later the scientist appeared. Frances had taken the gentle hint given by Wagner's words, and had not accompanied her father. When they

were seated about the dining table, Wagner with his cigar and Professor Earl with his food, the Belgian opened fire:

"Well, sir, did you see the *ankh*?"

"Yes," returned the other carelessly, "but it was nothing compared to those inscriptions! The *ankh* was doubtless made in later days, roughly——"

"But of gold, eh?" said Wagner softly.

"Yes, of gold, of course. The priest of Maat who seems to have founded this refuge for his people must have instituted the *ankh* worship. But the inscriptions——"

And with that Earl launched out enthusiastically, while Wagner listened and Seaforth thought. At last the American had a clue.

There was an *ankh* of gold, then, and possibly more ornaments of the same precious metal. Wagner intended to get hold of these and go. But why? Why should he leave this district, the rubber of which was making him rich?

Later Seaforth thought it strange that he had not struck upon the incentive. But at the moment he was perplexed and bewildered, until the scientist had made an end of his meal. Then Wagner swiftly brought him down to facts.

"Now, Professor Earl, let us talk about the future. You would like to get to the outside world with your notes, eh?"

"By all means——"

"Very good. I intend to take that golden *ankh*

myself, and we can carry enough of the other things to fully substantiate your story. But now let us come back to a prior subject—the subject of the atrocities which are going on in this district.”

Once more Earl relapsed into his rather helpless attitude. He glanced at Seaforth uneasily, but Wagner caught the look and answered it on the spot.

“I wish Doctor Seaforth to hear our conversation, sir, if you do not mind. I have explained fully to Miss Frances that my efforts have been exerted on behalf of these natives, and that I have done all man could do to avert the horrors prevalent here. Now, Professor Earl, please listen attentively.”

Wagner leaned forward, and from that moment he spoke slowly, in cool desperate earnest, weighing his words and driving home their sincerity in such wise that not even Seaforth, who hated him virulently, could doubt their honesty.

“I have spoken to you regarding my marriage to your daughter, sir, and you have been good enough to make me aware of your assent, on one condition.”

“Yes,” nodded Earl. “I stated that I would interpose no objection, Captain Wagner, if you could guarantee that the rubber atrocities in this district would cease for ever. It would be a laudable thing, sir, a highly laudable thing; it would certify your nobility of soul, and it would

certainly recommend you to Frances as nothing else could possibly do. Proceed, sir."

"Thank you," said Wagner, while Seaforth sat back, wondering at the man. "I am now prepared to meet your conditions, Professor Earl. As you probably know, no rubber could be collected from this district unless the pigmy tribes were kept under restraint, for their poisoned darts more than counterbalance firearms in the dense jungle. And, as you know also, I am the only man who has managed to hold them down, through seizing on this White Mountain, which all the tribes hereabouts revere. Consequently were this mountain to be destroyed by me, no Belgians would afterward get into this country and come out alive. Is that clear?"

"I- I do not quite understand, sir," floundered Earl, blinking over his spectacles in surprise. "You would destroy this mountain?"

"In a fashion, yes. I would destroy these underground caves, at least. With that end in view, I have already planted dynamite in large quantities around the entrances, and have made every preparation."

With this, Wagner flung himself into his task and laid bare every detail of his scheme to Earl and Seaforth. As he listened, the latter did not know whether more to admire the consummate deviltry of the man or to be lost in surprise as he fathomed the inner motives and absolute earnestness of Wagner. For that the Belgian was in

deadly earnest was now made clear beyond any question.

In brief, for the sake of Frances Earl he meant to give up all things.

That such action would mean a complete break with the Belgian authorities, Wagner knew; for this reason he intended to strike for British East Africa—not a difficult journey to cover.

His pose, to Earl, was that of the chivalrous reformer at last able to come into the open and fight. He proposed to hang Klack, which the vicious little degenerate well deserved, as even Earl admitted; he proposed to destroy the White Mountain and to send word far and wide that it had been done by the Belgians. This would effectually keep any more rubber agents from entering the district.

The "strange people"—the few that were left of them—would be dispatched to certain caves in a neighbouring hill, where they could linger out their wretched lives in peace. Earl made no objection to this, because he had seen that they were only half-human, and little better than beasts. The destruction of the mountain caves, however, came hard to him, being a distinct loss to science.

Wagner stated frankly that he had money invested in the United States and that Frances would not suffer, if married to him. And, in speaking of her, the man quite forgot himself and burst forth in a graphic portrayal of his hidden

ambitions and projects—a portrayal which gripped Earl fast, and left Seaforth astounded.

For beyond a doubt Ernest Wagner was inspired by the love flame which had fastened upon his soul, and the inspiration served to show Seaforth what omnipotent talents had been bestowed upon this man, who had dragged them in the dirt.

Nothing was too high for his aspirations. He briefly sketched schemes which dazzled his two auditors, and then dismissed them in a breath for higher things; he unleashed the burning energy of his mind, traced in words of fire projects and plans which he must have cherished for years—and, curiously enough, all made for good ends!

Nothing astonished Seaforth more than this—that Wagner, who for years had been the iron tyrant, causing blood and tears to be shed like water, should have pent up within him such seeming nobility of purpose. And it was not a pose by any means.

Nor was it the real nature of the man. Seaforth realized this fact, and it steeled him against Wagner's overbearing magnetism. Frances Earl had called it forth, he saw. It was her nature which had awakened in Wagner the desire for better things. The man had builded on a foundation of blood, and now he was ready to overthrow it—provided he could win the girl's love thereby. And he was in terrible, awful earnest. He was throwing his whole soul into the effort.

All three men sat in high tension, every nerve strung taut. Then, suddenly and fiercely, Wagner turned his passion-swept face to the American and spoke hoarsely:

“Go call Miss Francis here!”

Seaforth left the house. Outside, in the hot sunlight of afternoon, he paused and drew a deep breath. He was completely overcome by Wagner's dominant force and mastery; he felt crushed and numbed before the tremendous physical and mental vibrancy of the man—but now he remembered one thing. Wagner's whole plan was founded on a lie.

“That's it!” said Seaforth aloud, looking up at the sky like a man dazed. “Yes, that's it! He has turned about too late. He is not building upon remorse and repentance, but upon treachery and cunning. Ah, Frances, Frances—can you see it, I wonder?”

So he crossed to the girl's house, and summoned her.

They walked back to Wagner's quarters in silence. Outside the house, Seaforth stopped, and turned his grimly set face toward her, and she started at the torture in his grey eyes.

“I—Frances, you must—” He paused, gripped himself, and waved a hand in helplessness. “Go on. You will see for yourself.”

“Cliff! What do you mean? What's wrong?”

She caught at his arm, and the touch unnerved him.

“Go in,” he said thickly. “There is—I cannot explain. Go in, please.”

Looking back at him, she obeyed.

Return to that room Seaforth could not. How Wagner pressed his suit was not for him to hear, and he dared not trust himself much further. As it was, he would know soon enough. He went to his own bungalow and seated himself on the veranda, while old Bosangi brought him cooled water to drink.

But Seaforth did not drink. He sat like a man paralysed, saying nothing, hearing nothing, his hands clenched in his lap, his eyes fastened stonily on Wagner’s two-storied house across the parade ground.

How would Frances choose? Would she pierce to what lay below? Or would she fall under the lure of Wagner’s awful fascination, his tremendous magnetism?

“She cannot!” groaned Seaforth inwardly, and then gave himself the lie. “But if she does, then God help Wagner, for I will kill him if I must goad him into striking me first!”

So he sat—how long he did not know.

There came a movement—the door of Wagner’s screened veranda was opened. Three figures emerged. First came Professor Earl, wiping his spectacles, and after him Frances. Then Wagner—white-clad, handsome, powerful. The three paused for a moment in front of the steps, then Seaforth saw Wagner bend over the girl’s hand

even at the distance he could see the smile on her clear face as she turned and walked away with her father.

And, standing looking after them, Wagner suddenly lifted up his arms in one great gesture of overwhelming exultation. He had won.

Seaforth sat very still and motionless, like a man turned to stone.

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CHAPTER XV

THE LOOT

At the sunrise, Seaforth wakened to find himself still sitting in his chair, stiff and cold. A voice had wakened him—a voice singing an old Breton chanson of the Jolly Drummer; it was a sweet clear tenor that lifted from close beside him to the sunrise.

Seaforth came to his feet with a grunt at his stiff joints. He must have been sleeping there on the veranda all night. He looked down through the screens to see Klack passing, and the lieutenant glanced up and broke off his song with a vicious leer.

“Hola, my American! March with me to-day, and you will see fine sights for your delicate eyes!”

“Where are you going?” growled Seaforth, looking as surly as he felt.

“Out to gather rubber from thistles,” mocked the other, and so walked away. On the parade ground twenty of the soldiers were drawn up. Seaforth watched Klack join them, and then they all marched off.

Old Bosangi appeared, and Seaforth made sign that he wanted some fruit. His heart was sick within him, and he could not join Wagner for breakfast. He sank down into his chair again and ate mechanically the fruit that Bosangi fetched him.

He recalled later how there had been something strange about this early morning. Klack's son had been curious, and the lieutenant and his squad had marched down into the jungle, doubtless on an expedition. As the sun rose, the mountains seemed bathed in a crimson radiance, as though the great red disc were slaving over the white rock.

Behind the long low barracks were encamped the party of dwarfs, a score in all. They, too, were singing—a weird uncanny chant which bore no meaning to Seaforth. The slave gangs were filing out under the quarry soldier overseers amid a cracking of whips. Seaforth wondered dully why Wagner had promised Frances that he would free those slaves when he destroyed the White Mountain.

A soldier appeared and summoned him to breakfast with Wagner, but Seaforth sent back curt word that he had eaten already. The man returned with orders to go to Wagner's quarters at once. Seaforth cursed furiously, and obeyed.

He felt that no longer could he play his part of a broken-spirited man. Every glance, every word from Wagner made him want to go at the

man's throat. Yet he forced himself grimly down, with the inward promise that the time would not be long now. If Wagner had won the love of Frances Earl, he would not live to enjoy it.

He found the Belgian at a hurried breakfast, and was greeted with a curt cordiality which astonished him. Wagner handed him an automatic revolver.

"Here, Seaforth—we'll not need it, but in case those fools attack us we must kill them like mad dogs."

"Who?" demanded Seaforth, puzzled.

"Why, those white dwarfs—we're going after our loot, man!"

"Oh, I had forgotten about the loot," exclaimed Seaforth slowly, and so in truth he had. After all, it would be a diversion for the moment, he thought. Wagner gave him a darkly curious glance.

"They have no arms, those people. Most of them carry staves, but that is all. By the way, Professor Earl says that the place was originally occupied by dwarfs, and that the Egyptians, when they came, took possession of the caves. In the course of generations, they became smaller in size, probably through intermarriage——"

"Oh, let be!" exclaimed Seaforth, in irritation. "If we're going, let's go."

Wagner grinned. "Miss Frances is coming. There is no danger, for I'll send her back before we take the *ankh*."

"It is something sacred?"

"The embodiment of their worship. Solid gold. We'll need a file of slaves to carry it out. . . ready?"

Seaforth nodded, and they left the house together. At the house occupied by the Earls, Frances joined them with word that her father was resting; she was highly excited, but Seaforth only eyed her gloomily and held his peace.

He could not blame her for having fallen to the lure set by Wagner, nor could he blame himself for his own action; but Wagner he did blame, and swore inwardly that he would repay the man tenfold.

As they walked toward the western side of the moribund rock face, a black sergeant came running from the opposite side, and drew Wagner aside. Seaforth joined them, and heard the dialogue that ensued, which was in bad French.

"Captain! The white slaves have disappeared."

Wagner stiffened and snapped out a word. The sergeant cringed.

"It was just discovered when sentries were changed. He who watched from midnight until now was strangled. The irons were unlocked. The men went into the caves."

Wagner turned on Seaforth.

"Do you know anything of this?"

"Nothing," rejoined the American, hand on his revolver in his pocket. His level gaze and the wondering eyes of Frances Earl forced Wagner

dissemble his fury. He spoke to Seaforth under his breath:

"You will precede us, with a soldier. If you see Solomon, warn him not to fire on me, or you die at once. Miss Earl must not be endangered."

"You're not fool enough to take her in there?" exclaimed Seaforth.

"There's no danger. Solomon and his men will have fled further to the caves, for the whole hill is honeycombed. They'll be lost, and can stay there till doomsday, but I'm simply taking precautions. Go on!"

Inwardly raging, but outwardly hard set and calm, Seaforth turned to the rock front again. Two soldiers and a file of a dozen neck-chained slaves were waiting. One of the soldiers, with a candle, joined Seaforth; Wagner and Frances followed with the slaves, and the second soldier brought up the rear. The American stooped behind his guide, and stepped into the entrance before him.

But as he went he wondered. So John Solomon had escaped! Why? Surely the little Cockney did not know that Klack had marched away? Or was it possible——

Of course! Seaforth thrilled as he saw the whole thing opened out. Mbara had learned that Klack was going on his expedition; he had strangled the sentry and freed Solomon, and his whole party had fled into the caves!

But that would mean only certain and terrible

disaster. Wagner intended to bring off the *ankh* that morning, remove the poor, half "strange people", and destroy the cave entrance at once. That must have been why Kluge had been removed, for Wagner clearly distrusts a vicious little degenerate.

"I'll have to wait," thought Seaforth. "I can't let Solomon be buried alive certain."

By the flickering light of the candle, he saw that while the roof and floor of the passage were of rough stone, the sides were built up with stone blocks of great size. Some of the blocks had fallen in places, and it must have been in such ruin that Solomon and his four men had been engaged in the eastern entrance.

The passage was tortuous, and had seen to have been cut originally by water. Then, as a chamber opened out ahead, Wagner gave the order, the guide extinguished his candle, and the party halted.

Gradually Seaforth became aware that they were not in absolute darkness, and that they stood at the entrance of a large cavern room. A lamp was burning in a niche set high in one wall, and it gave a gentle, well-diffused light which was extremely dim, yet which permitted Seaforth to make out objects as his eyes became accustomed to it.

From behind, Wagner was speaking in a dialect to the soldier-guide at Seaforth's

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and the guide was repeating the words in a different speech to a figure who stood before them. This was one of the white dwarfs—a small stooped man who leaned on a staff, who was clad in a flowing white robe, and who finally made a gesture of assent as he turned.

“Go ahead, Seaforth,” said Wagner quietly. “He says he’ll guide us.”

With his hand on his weapon, the American obeyed. He was aware of one or two other figures who flitted around them in the dimness, with a patter of feet and click of staves. Then they came to another narrow passage.

This in turn opened on another larger chamber, or rather a succession of chambers, all walled with carved stones and all lighted dimly by those curious stone lamps. The mountain must be honeycombed with caverns, even as Wagner had said, and at thought of Solomon the American’s heart sank in dismay. Evidently the white dwarfs had seen nothing of him or his men, else the matter would have been reported to Wagner.

They passed on through other passages, while behind him Seaforth heard Wagner and Frances Earl talking, the Belgian evidently explaining or pointing out the wall carvings and other objects of interest to the girl. It was all very matter of fact, and Seaforth realized that Wagner’s mastery must be fully accepted by the poor creatures who dwelt here in near darkness.

And then, like a flash, everything had changed.

They were going through a narrow passage once more, when a sudden rush of feet came from in front and from behind. Their guide vanished, at the same instant, Seaforth felt hands grip him fast, and something round and cold touched his neck.

"Be quiet, effendi!"

Another voice echoed the words from the rear, where came the sound of a slight struggle, a heavy fall, and a faint cry from Frances Earl. Seaforth saw the soldier beside him bound hand and foot by a swarthy Arab, then he felt himself released.

Solomon's men had struck!

Seaforth turned and felt for his revolver, but it had been deftly extracted from his pocket. The dozen slaves were herded together in a miserable frightened clump, while an Arab was unlocking their neck chains. Beyond them stood Wagner, against whose body the fourth Arab was holding a short spear. The second soldier lay, an inert heap, on the stone floor of the passage, while above him stood John Solomon, clay pipe and all, holding an old-style revolver by the barrel. Frances Earl stood back against the wall, watching with frightened eyes.

The American strode past the slaves and joined her. Still watching Wagner, he held out his hand and felt her clasp it, then they stood silent. A new chapter of the drama was unfolding itself swiftly before their eyes.

"Hassim, take them slaves away!" ordered Solomon. The Arab who was releasing the slaves began at once to herd them toward the rear. Then Solomon struck a match and held it to his pipe. After two or three preliminary puffs, he stepped out and faced Wagner. The Belgian was eyeing him furiously, but kept his handsome face under perfect control.

"Werry pleased I am to see you, Mr. Wagner," said Solomon calmly. "Don't try to speak or move except at me orders, else that 'ere man o' mine will jab 'is spear into your dirty neck. It might be werry unpleasant, that there spear bein' sticky wi' the poison them dwarfs use. Now come along."

With this mild admonition, Solomon motioned them to pass him, nodding to the American as he did so, and wiping his brow, which was streaming profusely.

"Who is he?" whispered the girl.

Seaforth smiled, and urged her away from the wall, toward the little Cockney.

"Miss Earl, allow me to present my very good friend, Mr. John Solomon."

"Oh! John Solomon!" she cried swiftly, stared, and then put forth her hand. Solomon grasped it in an embarrassed fashion.

"Werry 'appy I am to meet you, miss. If so be as you stick close to Mr. Seaforth, you won't come to no 'arm."

"What are you going to do?" demanded the American quickly.

"I 'ave werry important business on 'and, sir, as the 'ousemaid said when the old gentleman was a-going to kiss 'er."

Solomon turned from them. Glancing around, Seaforth saw that Wagner was standing directly below one of the stone lamps, so that he was well lighted. The half-freed slaves were being urged in the direction whence they had come, and the bound soldier was lying beside his unconscious comrade.

Stepping up to Wagner, who eyed him with inscrutable features, Solomon felt in his exceedingly ragged coat and brought forth a little red notebook, which he tendered the Belgian.

"If you'll be so good as to look at that 'ere, sir——"

"What is it?" snapped Wagner, taking the book and opening it. Seaforth saw that inwardly the man was boiling with suppressed anger, but must have known that a touch from the spear at his neck would bring death. Solomon struck a match and held it up.

"That's me account, sir, wi' Cap'n Ernest Wagner. I'd be pleased to 'ave you cast your eye over it, sir, and if it ain't all shipshape and proper from the day we met you in New York to the time you made a slave o' Mr. Seaforth and give 'im the chicotte, why, we'll just cancel the account!"

In the matchlight Seaforth saw Wagner's face go absolutely livid as he calmly read the entries in the notebook; then he handed it back to Solomon, his hands trembling.

"I undervalued you, eh?" he said evenly. "Very well, Solomon. For this you'll get far worse than the death I had meant for you."

"Thank you werry kindly, sir." Solomon's expressionless face did not change as he put away the little red notebook, except that his blue eyes widened slightly more than usual. "Now, if you'll just march for'ard, sir, we'll all 'ave a look at that there blessed *ankh*."

Neither then nor through what followed did Frances Earl ask any further questions, and if her illusions regarding Wagner were being stripped away, she said nothing of it; but she clung to Seaforth's arm, and her eyes followed John Solomon in all that he said and did.

This, in all conscience, was strange enough to hold any one's attention. In the course of the next few moments Seaforth was treated to such a scene as he had read of in old books but had never expected to witness in the flesh.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW SEAFORTH KEPT HIS WORD

The party debouched into a chamber larger than any Seaforth had yet seen. As he presently observed, its walls were naked rock and were not lined with stone blocks; it was irregular in shape and was plainly no more than a virgin cave adapted to its present purpose. Its doorway was small and was closed by a great swinging slab of rock which, however, now stood open and unguarded. And in this chamber was the golden *ankh*.

Seaforth saw it from the entrance—a great looped cross of massy gold, some five feet high and as thick as his wrist. It was set loop upward in a niche in the wall opposite him, and was lighted by a stone lamp below it.

On his right ran the solid stone wall to meet that in which the *ankh* was set. On his left, in the dimness, he soon made out the seated figures of men; from their size, and the staves which some held, he knew them for the “strange people.” They were seated facing the *ankh* and the small circle of light around it.

As the party entered, they were greeted by

clicking sound from the white dwarfs, none of whom stirred. Solomon and three of his Arabs walked forward to the *ankh*; Seaforth and Frances Earl paused beside the entrance, and Wagner stood close to them, the fourth Arab holding him motionless with the poisoned spear.

Now from the darkness glided a small black figure, which proved to be that of Mbara. Seaforth saw that his earlier guess was correct, and that the dwarf had aided Solomon. He nudged Frances, and her fingers pressing on his arm told him that she also had recognized the figure.

The assemblage seemed to be awaiting something, and now it came. Solomon spoke to one of his Arabs, who addressed Mbara in a native dialect; the dwarf in turn translated into the peculiar clicking speech of the "strange people".

Suddenly as the whole thing had come about, Seaforth saw it all quite clearly. Mbara had acted as a spy, had gone between Firth and Solomon, and had managed to initiate the Cockney into the good graces of the "strange people". It was quite likely that Solomon had planned the whole procedure before even he had allowed himself to be captured!

Every eye was fastened on the pudgy little man, who stood puffing calmly at his vile clay pipe while the address was translated. The circle of half-seen white dwarfs was evidently fascinated and awed by him. Then he spoke to his Arab again, this time in English:

“Tell Mbara to go out and send that signal to call Mr. Firth, and be werry qu about it!”

The order was translated. Mbara nodded, crossed to the entrance, greeted Seaforth and Frances with a low word and a flash of teeth, and vanished into the outer darkness. Then Solomon spoke across the room:

“Captain Wagner, you’ve been and put that curse o’ rubber on this ’ere country. I’m a-going to turn it on you. You come ’ere to carry off that shiny cross o’ gold, and so I’ve told its owners, also I’ve told ’em your ’ole blessed plan to blow up the White Mountain—now you keep werry still!”

The Belgian quivered as he stood, and his arrogant handsome face was crossed by a sudden convulsion; but he said no word. Seaforth, however, started when he comprehended the speech. How on earth had Solomon learned so much? How had he heard of Wagner’s plan, retailed it to the “strange people”, made his counterplan and effected everything—when Wagner himself had only decided on the matter the previous day?

The White Mountain must have been mined for some time, of course, but Wagner could certainly have told no one of his project until he had spoken of it to Seaforth and the Earls. However, the little Cockney had not yet finished.

“A word out o’ you, Mr. Wagner, and you die

Mind that! These 'ere poor creatures is werry angry with you, sir, and all they want now is for me to show 'em as I'm a bigger man than you. I'm a-going to do that with two bits o' rubber, sir."

Then for the first time Seaforth began to glimpse what the little man's purpose might be; he had no chance for reflection, as Solomon addressed him at once;

"Mr. Seaforth, sir, I'm a-going to show these people as I'm a werry big personage. But don't you dare to laugh, sir, 'cause why, it ain't no laughing matter."

Then, turning, Solomon deliberately knocked out his pipe against the golden *ankh*.

From the darkness came a subdued rustling and a long gasp of horror; this deepened into a great clicking of tongues as Solomon stepped back. There, with its gold and green and scarlet startlingly distinct in the dim light, a coiled snake nestled at the base of the *ankh*, while from the loop hung, halfway down the shaft, a huge spider of equally glaring colours!

So deftly had Solomon whipped the things into place that even Seaforth was astonished; then he was indeed tempted to laugh at the seeming childishness of the whole affair. None the less, he knew that in the eyes of the "strange people" a great wonder was taking place, though he did not guess exactly how Solomon's idea of poetic justice was to work out.

He saw this a moment later. From the shadow rushed out one of the white dwarfs, and evidently a person in high authority, for he was bearded and bore a staff heavy with gold.

This person paused in front of Solomon with a furious address, almost a shriek, his clinking words re-echoing from all quarters of the chamber. The purport of his anger was plain, if his words were not, and Solomon stepped aside with a quiet gesture toward the *ankh*.

Instantly the dwarf whipped up his heavy staff and brought it down full on the rubber spider. The cord which suspended the toy broke, and the gaudy thing fell to the ground. Again the dwarf struck it—and still it squatted there, uninjured. Literally foaming with rage, the creature whirled up his staff and struck again and again at the snake and the spider, while his blows injured them not the slightest.

They did effect what Solomon had waited for, however, when they released the spring of the coiled snake. The thing shot out, like an arrow of many colours, and fell, quivering, to the floor. Again the dwarf struck at it, striking it full across the middle, but the blow only served to set seeming life into the writhing rubber.

And at that the chamber swept into an uproar. The dwarf dropped his staff and stepped back, realizing that he was powerless to hurt either spider or snake; fear clenched him, and he fell prostrate before Solomon. The latter reached up

to the lamp, took it from its place, and held spider and snake in the flame.

There was a little burst of fire, an odour of burning rubber, and the toys had vanished. Solomon, however, was not yet finished. He began to whittle tobacco from his plug, and filled his pipe, waiting for the assemblage of dwarfs to become quiet. Then suddenly he sat down before the *ankh* in the lamplight.

His hands went to his right leg. There came a squeak, and once more Seaforth saw what was coming. Not so the "strange people", however. As the false leg began to turn slowly, a terrible silence fell; it squeaked again, and evoked something like a subdued scream; then it came off completely, and after one long groan the audience sat in paralysed horror.

Solomon held his pipe to the lamp and lighted it. He pulled himself up, caught up the gold-incrusted staff dropped by the old dwarf, and took a step or two. Then he returned and screwed his leg in place again.

The thing was absurd, simple, childish; as old as one-legged men and artificial limbs; yet it produced its obvious effect. The white dwarfs came crawling forward, until they surrounded Solomon and the *ankh*; they prostrated themselves with groans and inarticulate cries.

The Arab guarding the Belgian was still intent on Solomon, was leaning forward over Wagner's shoulder, staring at the scene across the room.

Wagner sensed this fact, perhaps caught sight of the face, perhaps felt the man's breath on his neck; he suddenly brought up his right hand, clenched, across his body.

So deadly was the blow that it sounded like an open-handed slap. Wagner flung himself forward even as he struck, and the Arab toppled over with the unused spear falling from his hand.

In the dim light no one except Seaforth and Frances perceived what was going on. As the Arab crumpled up, senseless, at her feet, Frances cried out in sudden fear and alarm; but already Wagner had acted with unerring precision, and her alarm reached Solomon too late.

For, stooping over the Arab, Wagner had straightened up with a revolver in his hand. Even then he must have had his devilish revenge planned to the last detail; for, instead of shooting down Solomon, he fired at the lamp.

The bursting crack, the acrid reek of powder, these, and darkness. A great burst of voices followed, as the "strange people" shrieked out in agony at the bright flash of the revolver; then Seaforth's brain was pierced by a cry from Frances:

"Cliff! Cliff!"

He stretched out his hand. The girl was gone. A leap took him to the doorway and outside; he heard the great stone door slam shut behind him, then a revolver touched his face.

“Step along!” commanded Wagner crisply.
“Bring Miss Frances——”

Seaforth gripped the girl's hand. With Wagner's revolver pressing into his back and his brain in a wild riot of emotions, he was driven forth toward the entrances.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE WINNING HAND

"Here, take care of Miss Frances until I get time to attend to you."

With this rough command, Wagner called a soldier, placed him on guard, and rushed off, blowing a whistle as he went.

They stood outside the entrance to the caves, in the bright light of day, once more. To Seaforth it seemed that all which had passed had been like some evil dream, of which only the memory remained to haunt him. Then he looked down at the girl.

"Cliff—what is he going to do?"

"I don't know," and Seaforth laughed a little.

Even in that moment he realized how well poised was this girl, how different from his conception of what the average girl would have done. No tears, no wonderment, no silly questions; only a swift grasp of the situation, a sparing of words, a single incisive question which showed how keen and quick was her brain.

Yet her beautiful, finely carven face bore anxiety and suspense. As he looked into her eyes, Seaforth comprehended the terror in them, the half-mastered fear and alarm which she so bravely suppressed.

"You poor little girl!" he said softly, his stern and grim face melting into swift tenderness, as he completely forgot momentarily how she had fallen into Wagner's wiles. "Don't you worry, comrade! He can't circumvent John Solomon!"

And this the American firmly believed, after the things he had that morning witnessed. The pudgy little Cockney was more than ever a marvel to him. But, as though his mind were a pendulum, he shortly was forced to reverse his opinion, when at length Wagner's furious purpose was made apparent.

That alarm whistle had roused the White Mountain into wild energy. Seaforth thought of Mbara, and glanced around. Sure enough, a deep trail of smoke was ascending from the slave huts—the little dwarf chieftain had performed his task!

But Wagner had also seen that smoke, and he knew now from Solomon's order that he had foes to face in the jungle and hills around. He had some thirty of his black soldiers left, and these were at once placed in disposition.

From behind the barracks rose sudden yells and a crackle of musketry. To his horror, Seaforth saw that Wagner had flung his men on the dwarfs whom Mbara had accompanied, and who were

dwelling in a rude camp. So swift was the attack that these were massacred almost to a man before they had a chance to fight; one or two, among whom Seaforth recognized Mbara, went leaping toward the defile, but whether or not they got past the guards he could not see.

Half a dozen soldiers went at a run on the road to the quarry, on the other side the hill; a dozen ran up to the rock face to guard the entrances of the caves, and the remainder were flung out on the two roads which ascended the White Mountain, doubtless to act as videttes.

Where was Firth? The American watched the preparations with some dismay, and wondered what scheme was going forward. Wagner had disappeared among the slave huts, and a moment later Mbara's signal smoke was extinguished.

There came a cracking of whips, and a sudden activity was now apparent in the slave quarters where were the women and children. These soon came into view, bearing great loads of thatch and leaves, hastily torn from the huts. Wagner himself assisted in driving them, chicotte in hand, and herded them toward the rock face.

From one of the cave entrances came forth a little group of fearful men—those same half-freed slaves whom Wagner had taken in to bear out the golden *ankh*. The Belgian saw them and yelled forth an order; instantly the guards collected and fell upon them with musket butt and whip. The shrinking bewildered creatures were beaten down

or driven back into the darkness, and Wagner sent two of his soldiers to each entrance with orders to fire at sight.

Now the line of women slaves arrived with their burdens of dry thatch and leaves. Wagner, whip in hand, accelerated their pace with merciless blows and marshalled them toward the eastern cave entrances. Seaforth and Frances were standing at the opposite side.

"I wonder where father is?" exclaimed the girl, half-fearfully, glancing toward the stone bungalows. The American followed her gaze, but saw no sign of Professor Earl.

"He'll be safe enough if he stays under cover," returned Seaforth grimly.

"Why? What's going to happen?"

"I don't know what Wagner is up to, but he'll be caught between two fires unless he moves quickly. Firth and most of Solomon's men will have caught Mbara's signal, and may attack at any time——"

He broke off abruptly, in startled horror.

Until then, he had looked for Solomon's exit from the caves at any moment, even though it would be madness for five half-armed men to attack Wagner. With Firth attacking the defiles, however, Solomon might well create a diversion in the rear; and it was exactly this danger which Wagner was guarding against.

As the train of women arrived before the cave entrances, they flung down their bundles at

Wagner's direction—filling the two farther entrances with great heaps of thatch and palm leaves.

"The black scoundrel!" broke out Seaforth, astounded. "Oh, he'd never dare! It's too—"

"What? What is it, Cliff?" cried the girl, not comprehending.

"He's going to smoke out Solomon—but he can't have a hard job doing it unless he can get hold of some better stuff than that thatch."

The slave women were kept on the run, and in three minutes the two entrances were heaped over with huge piles of inflammable material. The guards clustered about the four other cave mouths. Wagner struck a match to the two heaps of thatch and these blazed up with fury; they made little smoke, apparently, but Seaforth saw that the draught carried smoke and flames together into the caves.

"It'll burn out quickly enough," muttered Seaforth, clenching his fists.

"Look!" cried the girl, and caught his arm suddenly. "Over there, beyond the fire!"

The American looked, stared, and then gave a groan of dismay as he realized how swiftly Wagner had acted, and with what deadly intent.

The quarry slaves, in neck-chained gangs, were being driven amid the cracking of whips and the shouts of their guards, and each man of them bore a fagot. These had been hauled up from the lime kiln below, Seaforth saw at once, for at the kiln

was firewood enough and more than enough.

The women were back again by this time, and began heaping their bundles of thatch in each of the four remaining entrances. Wagner directing them. From one of the low doorways came a shot, and the bullet dropped a soldier beside the Belgian; but Wagner whipped out a revolver, the grouped soldiers sent a fusillade into the cave mouth, and the piles of thatch were lighted.

That was the only token given that John Solomon was trying to issue forth. Now it was too late, and even Frances Earl comprehended; a little earlier, and Solomon might at least have died in the open, but as the flames blazed up even this was denied him.

The quarry slaves came on the run, file after file of them, and the piles of fagots quickly grew higher before the cave entrances. All six of these were soon blocked by the flames, while ever the piles of fagots increased. Wagner raged like a madman, sending back the slaves for more wood as fast as they deposited their burdens, and more than once striking down a man with his chicotte.

"God help Solomon now!" groaned Seaforth, in impotent fury and dismay. "Our only chance is that Firth will come, and come soon."

The whole face of the rock was rising into a sheet of flame and smoke, amid which the ancient carvings of the *ankh* over each entrance seemed to writhe and twist in anguish.

It would require much time, as Seaforth knew well, before the smoke could reach to the inmost recesses of those extensive caverns; yet the files of slaves continued to come from the quarry path, heaping new piles of fuel upon the flames.

And there was no sign of Firth's attack. It was Firth alone who could now save Solomon, but no shot or cry came from the videttes sent to guard the two approaches to the crest of the White Mountain. Seaforth's heart sank as he realized that Firth must have camped some distance off, to avoid discovery of his presence, and that his arrival could hardly be looked for in time.

"Can't you do something to help?" exclaimed the girl desperately. Then she gave a quick cry: "Oh, there's father now!"

The American drew her away from the heat of the flames, and looked toward the stone houses. Professor Earl had emerged, and was standing before his bungalow in a helpless fashion, apparently wiping his spectacles and staring around him in stark bewilderment. One hand still grasped an open notebook.

As it chanced, Wagner was coming from the store at the moment, bearing a box of cartridges for his men. He caught sight of Earl and hastened to him, urging him back into the house. Seaforth caught back Frances as she would have rushed forward.

"Wait, Frances! Let Wagner get away, then

"I'll take you over, and you can join your father until this business is settled."

The Belgian, however, now seemed to have leisure to attend to them. Leaving Professor Earl as the latter entered his house again, Wagner handed over his cartridges to a soldier and turned toward Seaforth and the girl.

As he approached, the American could not but note how the crisis and the vivifying power of action had changed the man. Ever handsome in its high arrogance and conscious strength, Wagner's face was now as though illumined by an evil inward light; the little creases about the eyes had deepened perceptibly, the eyes themselves glittered with unholy energy. The whole powerful body of the Belgian expressed this same ruthlessness and driving will-power. As he came striding up, Seaforth stepped out a pace.

"See here, Wagner, surely you don't intend——"

"Shut up!" rang out the deep voice, like the lash of the chicotte which Wagner still carried. "Take Miss Frances over to the house where her father is, and don't interfere with me. Miss Frances, I regret——"

"Miss Earl, if you please," struck in the girl quietly.

The simple conventional words left both men astonished. Wagner looked at her questioningly, and then smiled, as he bowed slightly.

"Miss Earl, allow me to escort you myself——"

"I do not wish your escort," she said, looking

at him very calmly, her grey eyes cool and a tinctured with contempt. "You are not a man, Captain Wagner. In fact, you are a villain and a liar."

Then, for the first and only time, Seaforth saw Wagner lose his poise. Those words must have stung into the man like acid. He flushed, stammered, and fell back a step.

"But tell me what you mean!" he cried, recovering himself with an effort. "How have I done wrong? Surely you do not blame me for defending myself against attack?"

The girl looked at him for a moment, level-eyed and self-contained.

"There is no further need of keeping up this pose, sir," she said evenly. "I know that you have lied to me from the start concerning your own position here. If you have any doubt of that fact, read this note, which was given me some time ago."

She drew a folded slip of paper from her dress and held it out. Wagner took it mechanically. He seemed paralysed by her words. Then, opening the paper, he began to read.

The words seemed to rouse him into life. Suddenly he looked up, crumpling the paper in his hand; so savagely was his face contorted that Seaforth involuntarily gathered his muscles for action. But there was no need.

"Solomon again!" cried Wagner hoarsely, and he shook his fist furiously toward the wall of flame.

and smoke that concealed the cave entrances. "Solomon again! Had I known this earlier, that man would never have died so easy a death!"

There was a moment of silence. The astounded Seaforth realized instantly what the whole thing meant.

Solomon, who knew from him the details of Wagner's trap for the girl and her father, had simply written her a note and sent it to her, presumably by Mbara. Then she, too, must have been playing a part! Seaforth whirled on her suddenly.

"And your decision—yesterday afternoon? What did you say to this scoundrel that made him so exultant? I thought—I thought——"

"You thought wrongly, Cliff," she said, her eyes meeting his frankly. "I was sorry for you, but I had no chance to explain. I merely told Captain Wagner that he might pay his addresses to me when once we stood on British ground. He accepted this as a favourable answer, perhaps——"

"Yes, he was a fool, my dear young lady," struck in Wagner.

The Belgian's eyes were flaming in a livid face. He had seen all his fine house of cards wrecked by John Solomon, and now at last the real nature of the man leaped out in all its nakedness.

"Go and rejoin your father, my dear," he said, with a deadly ring to his voice. "When this little

trouble is settled, I shall take up my case and
with you. I offered you honourable marriage and
honest love; you have seen fit to play with me
so now be thankful for what you may receive.
Doctor Seaforth, take Miss Earl to her house
and then attend me at my own quarters. I have
a word to say to you at once."

There was black menace in those final words.
Still smiling, Wagner turned and swung off toward
his own house. Seaforth gazed after him, his
rugged face aflame with anger, but the girl touched
his arm.

"Will you take me home, Cliff?"

Something in the words struck to the American's
heart. Home! Yes, God willing, he would take her
her home, but first there was work to be done.
So, without a word, he turned off at her side and
they crossed the parade ground in silence. Outside
the house assigned her and her father, she turned
and took his hand, and her eyes dwelt upon him
for a long moment.

"Good-bye, Cliff. Is there any chance that
we can escape?"

"Little enough," he answered thickly, and his
eyes were very hungry. "Good-bye, dear.
I love you, Frances, and there may still be a chance
that some day I will be able to tell you so in more
happy surroundings."

He had not meant to say the words; he hardly
knew that he had said them. But as he looked
down into the clear eyes of the girl, they seemed

to draw him forward, and his lips came down to hers.

"That is my hope, too, dear," she said simply.

She turned and was gone into the house. Seaforth stared after her like a man dazed, then turned and strode off toward Wagner's two-storied bungalow.

Only then did he awaken to the fact that something had happened. There were loud shouts, and a few scattered shots. The shouts increased, and Seaforth turned to see a figure running across the parade ground. To his amazement, he recognized it as that of Lieutenant Klack.

He broke into a run. Klack, likewise, was heading for Wagner who stood in front of his large quarters, waiting. Seaforth came up just in time to hear the little degenerate sobbing forth his story.

"They ambushed us and shot down our men—there are Arabs down there in the forest—I got through them, but they are coming——"

With a great thrill of hope, Seaforth comprehended what all this portended. Firth had cut off Klack's expedition and had destroyed it utterly, save for Klack himself! And Firth must be coming to the rescue, then!

"Be quiet!" commanded Wagner incisively. "How close are the enemy?"

"Within half a mile."

"Very good." Wagner turned on the American, and his face was like the face of a devil unleashed.

"So, Doctor Seaforth, you saw fit to break y word to me, eh?"

"I did not break my word," returned Seaforth surprised but cool. He met the lurid black e calmly, and gave look for look.

"You fool!" cried the Belgian furiously convulsion of rage twisting across his featur With a snarl he raised his chicotte and g Seaforth one lash across the shoulders; e through his clothes the American felt the bl and went staggering back.

"Klack, take this man down to the defile a stand him up in plain sight. When the ene appears, announce that at the first shot he w die. Then see to it that he dies. Take comma of the soldiers there. I must get my revolv and sun helmet, and will join you shortly."

Seaforth pulled himself together in time to s Wagner go striding into the house. Klack, revolv in hand, was eyeing him malignantly, and chuckl at the American's forward movement; Seafor was checked by the revolver touching h breast.

"None of that, my fine American! Now tur around and say your prayers as you go, for ten minutes you will be in another world."

Seaforth stood looking down into the venomor little creature's face. Outwardly he was cal enough, but inwardly a wild exultation wa thrilling through him. He was free—Wagne had freed him by that blow!

All the long days of anguish and mental torment and suffering ended in that moment, and Seaforth smiled. So terrible was that smile that Klack's face was swept by fear for an instant, and he cried out shrilly:

"Turn around! Turn around or I shoot!"

"I intend to pay my debts, Lieutenant Klack," said Seaforth, still smiling. "I have a little score to settle with you, have I not?"

His quiet tone completely deceived the other. Klack stared up at him curiously, and in that instant Seaforth seized the revolver and tore it away as if the other man had been a child. Before Klack could cry out, the American drew back, then struck; his fist cracked into the Belgian's jaw, and Klack toppled over with a choking moan.

Seaforth looked at his knuckles, and laughed as the blood oozed out. Then he flung down the revolver, for all caution had gone from him, and his mind was in a red whirl of rage and fury. He was vengeance let loose upon Ernest Wagner, and, still laughing, he turned into the door of Wagner's quarters.

Firth might come too late to save John Solomon, but at least he would find Frances Earl safe, thought Seaforth. Wagner's last threat to the girl struck back to his mind, and after that his soul was in a mad revel of anger, and all thought of his own safety was gone from him.

So he entered the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW SEAFORTH FOUGHT THE LAST FIGHT

The American crossed the screened verandah and entered the house itself. A glance through the opened doors showed him that Wagner was in none of the rooms; therefore, he must be upstairs.

The stairway was a squat affair, for the room above was not built very high. Six steps, a landing, a turn, and six steps more reached the top of the stairs. Seaforth began the ascent taking no care to deaden his steps. He cared for nothing now except to get at the master devil who had so long tortured him.

Between the landing and the stair-top, an old and rusted cavalry sabre was hung on the wall. It occurred to Seaforth to take the weapon, but he only smiled to himself and passed on. He wanted no weapons; his bare hands itched for Wagner.

The door of the room beyond was closed. Seaforth came to it. As he put out his hand to push it, the door was opened from inside. Wagner came

face to face with him—Wagner, belted with two revolvers, but barehanded.

For an instant the two men looked into each other's eyes, Seaforth smiling his terrible smile, and Wagner utterly astounded.

"You made a mistake, Wagner," said Seaforth, in the same quiet voice which had deceived Klack. "You struck me. You freed me from our bargain. Now—you pay."

With that, his fist lashed out, and he struck Wagner back into the room. Before the man could recover, Seaforth leaped after him, pinned him to the wall, tore free the two revolvers and flung them behind him through the doorway. Then he sprang back a pace, and laughed.

"Man to man, Wagner! Put up your hands and fight, you dog!"

For a bare instant he thought the other would not obey. Wagner stood, swaying slightly, his face demoniacal as his fury burst all barriers and gripped him. The mutual hatred of the two men was like a wall of living fire encompassing them. Then Wagner threw off his sun helmet and leaped forward, his powerful features livid.

Seaforth met the rush squarely, stepped forward, and his fists shot out into the pallor of his enemy's face. The Belgian staggered, recovered, and his long arms caught Seaforth and whirled him into the wall with sickening force. Seaforth reeled forward in blind rage, and was met with a stiff blow in the mouth.

He writhed desperately out of Wagner's death-grip, for the man seemed made of iron. All rules forgotten in the wild blast of his anger, Seaforth sent the Belgian back with an upper-cut and drove his left to the stomach; as he struck down again at the stooping man, Wagner brought up a heavy hobnailed boot, and flung it blindly. It took Seaforth across the brow, and sent him reeling back half-stunned to the opposite wall.

The Belgian was unable to follow for the moment; that stomach blow had all but paralysed him. He slowly rose and stumbled forward, but Seaforth fell back. The man's aspect was appalling; the livid face was spotted with red from Seaforth's fists, and the mouth was flecked with foam.

Wagner came at him like a devil incarnate, with two terrific blows that Seaforth could not avoid; one rocked back his head, the other caught him over the heart. But he had his back to the wall. For a moment the two men stood toe to toe, slugging in their maddened rage, and now the American made his blows tell as he systematically hammered Wagner's long powerful jaw. Again and again his fists smashed home, and with Wagner's first backward step Seaforth followed and sent him half-down over a table.

Neither man spoke; it was a silent battle, and the more terrible for its grim deadliness. Now, as Wagner hung to the table-edge, Seaforth leaned forward and drove in his right, thinking to finish it; as he did so, the Belgian lurched forward

and down. So rapid was the movement that Seaforth could not stop his blow.

His fist thudded into Wagner's skull, and a swift stab of pain shot through his arm. Wagner staggered back, but the American, following, felt sudden dismay as he struck again, and another twist of agony wrenched his arm. In the midst of the battle, he knew that he must have broken his hand on the Belgian's skull.

So, indeed, he had. That second blow all but fetched a cry from him, so sharp and bitter was the anguish; then Wagner was battering him backward in a furious burst of energy, flinging his whole weight forward in the endeavour to beat him under and grip him.

Twice Seaforth shot home his left, but he could not use his right, and the other was quick to sense the advantage. The American was driven back and back to the door. Then he remembered those two revolvers, which had fallen outside. If he could get to them——

He steeled himself to the effort and lunged, his iron will-power driving, out his broken right hand. It caught Wagner full in the mouth and stopped him; despite the sickening pain that wrenched back to his heart, Seaforth followed his blow with the left to the jaw. Then, whirling, he stumbled out for the revolvers.

With a roar of fury Wagner was after him, comprehending his intent. Both men had punished each other heavily, and were reeling; at the head

of the stairs, Seaforth paused to look about for the weapons. As he did so, Wagner flung himself bodily through the air, clutched both hands about the American's shoulders; the two crashed into the wall, Seaforth managed to get his left hand about his enemy's throat, and then they were plunging down the stairs together, fighting blindly.

The brutishness of it was horrible. On the landing, Wagner fell above, and got both hands about Seaforth's throat, tearing and choking. The American squirmed clear, but Wagner kicked him heavily in the side. And with that, Seaforth lost the last remnant of his self-control.

Catching Wagner about the knees, he threw out all his strength in the effort to lift the Belgian over the stairs to the floor below. He lifted, indeed, but they both toppled back together; Seaforth loosed his hold to strike one savage blow, then they crashed through the frail balustrade.

They had only four feet to fall—it was over instantly. Seaforth lay half-stunned, then rolled from the motionless body of Wagner. He slowly gained his feet, weak and shaken. The Belgian lay unconscious, breathing stertorously. Seaforth's foot struck against something, and he saw the old cavalry sabre that their battle had knocked down. He kicked it away, toward the outer door.

He was not far from collapse. His body burned, his brow was trickling slow blood, and his right arm was keen with pain. He saw Wagner's eyes open, and then the Belgian tried desperately to

rise, regaining consciousness. Seaforth turned to get the old sabre, which was a better weapon than none—then he halted abruptly.

No slightest sound came to him, but he sensed danger. He had no chance to act upon that sixth sense; something struck him around, and at the same instant he felt a terrific stab of hot pain through his back, and caught the muffled report of a pistol.

With one gasping choking sob Seaforth turned to see the figure of Klack, revolver still smoking, and he realized that the lieutenant had smitten him. His knees failed; he tried to reach out at the grinning venomous figure, but the floor swirled up and gripped him.

Something cold beneath him—something cold that touched his left hand. It was the old rusted sabre. Writhing, Seaforth tried to rise, and somewhere saw Wagner's face, leering horribly. But before him was the man who had shot him down—Klack; and in his hand he suddenly found the old sabre, and lifted it up and flung it as he staggered to his feet.

He saw the steel flash, caught another bursting report from somewhere, and an acrid powder reek stifled him, but he did not take his eyes from Klack. Both arms flung out, the little man choked and gripped his throat, where the rusted sabre had gone in and torn out the life. Then he fell back.

Seaforth stood on his feet now, blood hot on his back and legs; he was hit and hard hit, he

knew. Where was Wagner? The Belgian suddenly appeared before him, as in a hazy mist. Then the floor reached up at him, and he fell once more perfectly conscious, but helpless.

"He shot me in the back!" he groaned, and writhed up again as his iron will drove him. The blood surged out of his brain suddenly, and his eyes cleared as he rose; what was that mass thrashing about on the floor? He stared down horrified anew.

Before him was Wagner, and the man's hands were clenched about the throat of an old withered black woman—no other than Bosangi, whose people Wagner had destroyed utterly. Seaforth saw the two rolling over, but it seemed that Wagner was unaccountably weak.

Darkness swept over him, he caught himself staggering. There came a flash and a muffled report from the twisted figures on the floor. Wagner's voice lifted, for the first time since the fight began, into one inarticulate gasping cry. Still clutching the old woman by the throat, Wagner struggled up; he raised Bosangi from the floor, shook her to and fro like a rat until the revolver dropped from her hand and she shrieked out—then flung her a dozen feet away. Very quietly, Wagner went to his knees and so to his face, and lay motionless.

From somewhere outside came shots and yells that thrilled Seaforth with new life. He realized dimly that Wagner was dead, but this did not

matter in the least. Had Firth come in time? Would Solomon be saved? Firth must be warned where the Cockney was——

A terrible pain stabbed through Seaforth's back as he tried to move; he touched his broken hand to the wall, and the pain sickened him. Almost delirious with the agony, he writhed upward and stood erect.

"Firth! Walter!" he muttered thickly, only the one thought in his mind. "John is in the caves—pull away the fires——"

He must get outside, he knew, where Firth could see him when the attack had swept over the mountain. He went to the prostrate body of Wagner, tried to step across, failed and all but fell. Clutching at the door, he saved himself. The door swung loose to his hand, but he could not walk.

Every motion was intense anguish, though his mind was clearing again into sanity. Klack must have shot him under the shoulders, he reflected, because his hurt terribly. He must be losing blood fast, and there could be no time to waste.

He tried gamely enough to step out, but only lurched and fell against the door in a wild swirl of pain. For a little he lay there, and then opened his eyes. The veranda was so near!

Up and up he writhed, until he could crawl across the veranda. He finally came to the outer screen door, and pulled himself up, his head hanging on his breast. Laughing weirdly, he peered

at the bright sunlight outside, and glimpsed one or two soldiers in full flight. Something stopped them, something invisible—bullets. Firth had come.

“Firth!” he muttered crazily, and sank down on the steps outside. “Walter! Drag the fires away—John is in the caves—drag the fires away——”

And thus, five minutes later, Firth found him—still repeating the words.

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CHAPTER XIX

WARFARE DONE

"It's a werry 'appy man, as the Good Book says, what knows 'is own vine and fig tree, so to speak. I'm a-going back to America, just like that, Mr. Firth; and I ain't never coming to this 'ere part o' the world again--no, sir!"

The symphony of silences which had enveloped Seaforth suddenly cleared away, and he opened his eyes, sane-minded at last. He looked around.

He was lying in bed, and from his window he could see across the parade ground to the masonried rock face, strangely blackened with smoke. Turning his head, he saw Walter Firth standing three feet away; beside him, seated in a chair and writing busily in a red notebook, was John Solomon.

"Hello!" he said weakly, and tried to rise. Instantly Firth was over him, tenderly restraining him. Seaforth looked up into the stern dark face of his friend, and happiness swirled upon him.

"Go slow, old man!" cried Firth. "Conscious at last, eh? Now keep still. You've had a tough time, Cliff, but we've pulled you through, I think."

"You—you got there in time?" pleaded Seaforth. Firth smiled down at him, as Solomon stood up, wheezing.

"Yes. I found you muttering away, and we got John off with nothing worse than a smoke-filled system."

For a moment Seaforth looked up at them, and smiled. Solomon turned away very abruptly.

"Dang it!" he ejaculated unsteadily. "Dang it! 'Ere I be, crying like any baby! Dang it!"

A swift alarm smote Seaforth.

"What's the matter? What is it, John? Nothing's happened to—to Frances?"

"No," and Firth again repressed him. "No, she's all right, Cliff. Never mind what it is—John is taken that way sometimes."

None the less, Firth's dark eyes were brighter than usual.

"What's happened?" persisted Seaforth anxiously. "Is anything wrong?"

"Not a blamed thing, Cliff," and Firth laughed happily. "As soon as you can be moved we'll strike for the British border and blow up this place with the same mines Wagner laid. I know the whole yarn, you see. We've already moved what was left of the poor devils who lived here

to some caves in a neighbouring hill. There'll be no more rubber deviltry in this district, for the pygmies are already up in arms."

"These 'ere atrocities," and Solomon turned, sitting down in his chair again, his pudgy face expressionless and blank, "are done with, Mr. Seaforth. Werry 'appy I am to say so. There ain't going to be no more atrocities, as the old gentleman said when 'e married 'is third."

There was silence for a little. Slowly Seaforth comprehended it all. Firth and Solomon were using Wagner's own scheme, were intending to close the caves of the White Mountain for ever, and the pygmies would carry unceasing warfare against the Belgians for the destruction of their holy place! After all, it was poetic justice.

Then came a light step at the door, and the next moment Seaforth looked up into the eyes of Frances Earl. She dropped beside him, tenderly gripping his bandaged hands, and Firth did not restrain her.

"I guess I'll take a walk," said he.

But Seaforth paid no heed, for the girl had lowered her head, and was sobbing softly, her sun-bright hair blowing against his lips like a caress. John Solomon cleared his throat suddenly and rose, snapping shut his notebook.

"Account closed with Cap'n Ernest Wagner," he said solemnly. "A werry good job it is, I says.

Beggin' your pardon, sir and miss, I'll just step outside for a bit of a smoke."

He stumped to the door, and closed it noisily after him, but Seaforth still took no heed, and lay very quiet. The girl's hair was still blowing against his lips, and now he was very positive that it *was* a caress.

THE END

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