The People of the Mist

H. Rider Haggard

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DEDICATION

I DEDICATE THIS EFFORT OF
“PRIMEVAL AND TROGLODYTE IMAGINATION"
THIS RECORD OF BAREFACED AND FLAGRANT ADVENTURE

TO MY GODSONS

IN THE HOPE THAT THEREIN THEY MAY FIND
SOME STORE OF HEALTHY AMUSEMENT.
Ditchingham, 1894.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

On several previous occasions it has happened to this writer of romance to be justified of his romances by facts of startling similarity, subsequently brought to light and to his knowledge. In this tale occurs an instance of the sort, a "double-barrelled" instance indeed, that to him seems sufficiently curious to be worthy of telling. The People of the Mist of his adventure story worship a sacred crocodile to which they make sacrifice, but in the original draft of the book this crocodile was a snake—*monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens.* A friend of the writer, an African explorer of great experience who read that draft, suggested that the snake was altogether too unprecedented and impossible. Accordingly, also at his suggestion, a crocodile was substituted. Scarcely was this change effected, however, when Mr. R. T. Coryndon, the slayer of almost the last white rhinoceros, published in the *African Review* of February 17, 1894, an account of a huge and terrific serpent said to exist in the Dichwi district of Mashonaland, that in many particulars resembled the snake of the story, whose prototype, by the way, really lives and is adored as a divinity by certain natives in the remote province of Chiapas in Mexico. Still, the tale being in type, the alteration was suffered to stand. But now, if the *Zoutpansberg Review* may be believed, the author can take credit for his crocodile also, since that paper states that in the course of the recent campaign against Malaboch, a chief living in the north of the Transvaal, his fetish or god was captured, and that god, a crocodile fashioned in wood, to which offerings were made. Further, this journal says that among these people (as with the ancient Egyptians), the worship of the crocodile is a recognised cult. Also it congratulates the present writer on his intimate acquaintance with the more secret manifestations of African folklore and beast worship. He must disclaim the compliment in this instance as, when engaged in inventing the 'People of the Mist,' he was totally ignorant that any of the Bantu tribes reverenced either snake or crocodile divinities. But the coincidence is strange, and once more shows, if further examples of the fact are needed, how impotent are the efforts of imagination to vie with hidden truths—even with the hidden truths of this small and trodden world.

September 20, 1894.

THE PEOPLE OF THE MIST

Chapter I.
THE SINS OF THE FATHER ARE VISITED ON THE CHILDREN

The January afternoon was passing into night, the air was cold and still, so still that not a single twig of the naked beech-trees stirred; on the grass of the meadows lay a thin white rime, half frost, half snow; the firs stood out blackly against a steel-hued sky, and over the tallest of them hung a single star. Past these bordering firs there ran a road, on which, in this evening of the opening of our story, a young man stood irresolute, glancing now to the right and now to the left.

To his right were two stately gates of iron fantastically wrought, supported by stone pillars on whose summits stood griffins of black marble embracing coats of arms, and banners inscribed with the device *Per ardua ad astra*. Beyond these gates ran a broad carriage drive, lined on either side by a double row of such oaks as England alone can produce under the most favourable circumstances of soil, aided by the nurturing hand of man and three or four centuries of time.

At the head of this avenue, perhaps half a mile from the roadway, although it looked nearer because of the eminence upon which it was placed, stood a mansion of the class that in auctioneers' advertisements is usually described as "noble." Its general appearance was Elizabethan, for in those days some forgotten Outram had practically rebuilt it; but a large part of its fabric was far more ancient than the Tudors, dating back, so said tradition, to the time of King John. As we are not auctioneers, however, it will be unnecessary to specify its many beauties; indeed, at this date, some of the tribe had recently employed their gift of language on these attractions with copious fulness and accuracy of detail, since Outram Hall, for the first time during six centuries, was, or had been, for sale.

Suffice it to say that, like the oaks of its avenue, Outram was such a house as can only be found in England; no mere mass of bricks and mortar, but a thing that seemed to have acquired a life and individuality of its own. Or, if this saying be too far-fetched and poetical, at the least this venerable home bore some stamp and trace of the lives and individualities of many generations of mankind, linked together in thought and feeling by the common bond of blood.

The young man who stood in the roadway looked long and earnestly towards the mass of buildings that frowned upon him from the crest of the hill, and as he looked an expression came into his face which fell little, if at all, short of that of agony, the agony which the young can feel

at the shock of an utter and irredeemable loss. The face that wore such evidence of trouble was a handsome one enough, though just now all the charm of youth seemed to have faded from it. It was dark and strong, nor was it difficult to guess that in after-life it might become stern. The form also was shapely and athletic, though not very tall, giving promise of more than common strength, and the bearing that of a gentleman who had not brought himself up to the belief that ancient blood can cover modern deficiencies of mind and manner. Such was the outward appearance of Leonard Outram as he was then, in his twenty-third year.

While Leonard watched and hesitated on the roadway, unable, apparently, to make up his mind to pass those iron gates, and yet desirous of doing so, carts and carriages began to appear hurrying down the avenue towards him.

"I suppose that the sale is over," he muttered to himself. "Well, like death, it is a good thing to have done with."

Then he turned to go; but hearing the crunch of wheels close at hand, stepped back into the shadow of the gateway pillar, fearing lest he should be recognised on the open road. A carriage came up, and, just as it reached the gates, something being amiss with the harness, a footman descended from the box to set it right. From where he stood Leonard could see its occupants, the wife and daughter of a neighbouring squire, and overhear their conversation. He knew them well; indeed, the younger lady had been one of his favourite partners at the county balls.

"How cheap the things went, Ida! Fancy buying that old oak sideboard for ten pounds, and with all those Outram quarterings on it too! It is as good as an historical document, and I am sure that it must be worth at least fifty. I shall sell ours and put it into the dining-room. I have coveted that sideboard for years."

The daughter sighed and answered with some asperity.

"I am so sorry for the Outrams that I should not care about the sideboard if you had got it for twopence. What an awful smash! Just think of the old place being bought by a Jew! Tom and Leonard are utterly ruined, they say, not a sixpence left. I declare I nearly cried when I saw that man selling Leonard's guns."

"Very sad indeed," answered the mother absently; "but if he is a Jew, what does it matter? He has a title, and they say that he is enormously rich. I expect there will be plenty going on at Outram soon. By the way, my dear Ida, I do wish you would cure yourself of the habit of calling young men by their Christian names—not that it matters about these two, for we shall never see any more of them."

"I am sure I hope that we shall," said Ida defiantly, "and when we do I shall call them by their Christian names as much as ever. You never objected to it before the smash, and I *love* both of them, so there! Why did you bring me to that horrid sale? You know I did not want to go. I

shall be wretched for a week, I——" and the carriage swept on out of hearing.

Leonard emerged from the shadow of the gateway and crossed the road swiftly. On the further side of it he paused, and looking after the retreating carriage said aloud, "God bless you for your kind heart, Ida Hatherley. Good luck go with you! And now for the other business."

A hundred yards or so down the road, was a second gate of much less imposing appearance than those which led to the Outram Hall. Leonard passed through it and presently found himself at the door of a square red brick house, built with no other pretensions than to those of comfort. This was the Rectory, now tenanted by the Reverend and Honourable James Beach, to whom the living had been presented many years before by Leonard's father, Mr. Beach's old college friend.

Leonard rang the bell, and as its distant clamour fell upon his ears a new fear struck him. What sort of reception would he meet with in this house? he wondered. Hitherto his welcome had always been so cordial that until this moment he had never doubted of it, but now circumstances were changed. He was no longer in the position of second son to Sir Thomas Outram of Outram Hall. He was a beggar, an outcast, a wanderer, the son of a fraudulent bankrupt and suicide. The careless words of the woman in the carriage had let a flood of light into his mind, and by it he saw many things which he had never seen before. Now he remembered a little motto that he had often heard, but the full force of which he did not appreciate until to-day. "Friends follow fortune," was the wording of this motto. He remembered also another saying that had frequently been read to him in church and elsewhere, and the origin of which precluded all doubt as to its truth:—

"Unto every one that hath shall be given, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

Now, as it chanced, Leonard, beggared as he was, had still something left which could be taken away from him, and that something the richest fortune which Providence can give to any man in his youth, the love of a woman whom he also loved. The Reverend and Honourable James Beach was blessed with a daughter, Jane by name, who had the reputation, not undeserved, of being the most beautiful and sweetest-natured girl that the country-side could show. Now, being dark and fair respectively and having lived in close association since childhood, Leonard and Jane, as might be expected from the working of the laws of natural economy, had gravitated towards each other with increasing speed ever since they had come to understand the possibilities of the institution of marriage. In the end thus mutual gravitation led to a shock and confusion of individualities which was not without its charm; or, to put the matter more plainly, Leonard proposed to Jane and had been accepted with many blushes and some tears and kisses.

It was a common little romance enough, but, like everything else with which youth and love are concerned, it had its elements of beauty. Such affairs gain much from being the first in the series. Who is there among us that does not adore his first love and his first poem? And yet when we see them twenty years after!

Presently the Rectory door was opened and Leonard entered. At this moment it occurred to him that he did not quite know why he had come. To be altogether accurate, he knew why he had come well enough. It was to see Jane, and arrive at an understanding with her father. Perhaps it may be well to explain that his engagement to that young lady was of the suppressed order. Her parents had no wish to suppress it, indeed; for though Leonard was a younger son, it was well known that he was destined to inherit his mother's fortune of fifty thousand pounds more or less. Besides, Providence had decreed a delicate constitution to his elder and only brother Thomas. But Sir Thomas Outram, their father, was reputed to be an ambitious man who looked to see his sons marry well, and this marriage would scarcely have been to Leonard's advantage from the family lawyer point of view.

Therefore, when the matter came to the ears of Jane's parents, they determined to forego the outward expression of their pride and delight in the captive whom they owed to the bow and spear of their daughter's loveliness, at any rate for a while, say until Leonard had taken his degree. Often and often in the after-years did they have occasion to bless themselves for their caution. But not the less on this account was Leonard's position as the affianced lover of their daughter recognised among them; indeed, the matter was no secret from anybody, except perhaps from Sir Thomas himself. For his part, Leonard took no pains to conceal it even from him; but the father and son met rarely, and the estrangement between them was so complete, that the younger man saw no advantage in speaking of a matter thus near to his heart until there appeared to be a practical object in so doing.

The Rev. James Beach was a stout person of bland and prepossessing appearance. Never had he looked stouter, more prepossessing, or blander than on this particular evening when Leonard was ushered into his presence. He was standing before the fire in his drawing-room holding a huge and ancient silver loving-cup in both hands, and in such a position as to give the observer the idea that he had just drained its entire contents. In reality, it may be explained, he was employed in searching for a hall-mark on the bottom of the goblet, discoursing the while to his wife and children—for Jane had a brother—upon its value and beauty. The gleam of the silver caught Leonard's eye as he entered the room, and he recognised the cup as one of the heirlooms of his own family.

Leonard's sudden and unlooked-for advent brought various emotions into active play. There were four people gathered round that

comfortable fire—the rector, his wife, his son, and last, but not least, Jane herself. Mr. Beach dropped the cup sufficiently to allow himself to stare at his visitor along its length, for all the world as though he were covering him with a silver blunderbuss. His wife, an active little woman, turned round as if she moved upon wires, exclaiming, "Good gracious, who'd have thought it?" while the son, a robust young man of about Leonard's own age and his college companion, said "Hullo! old fellow, well, I never expected to see *you* here to-day!"—a remark which, however natural it may have been, scarcely tended to set his friend at ease.

Jane herself, a tall and beautiful girl with bright auburn hair, who was seated on a footstool nursing her knees before the fire, and paying very little heed to her father's lecture upon ancient plate, did none of these things. On the contrary, she sprang up with the utmost animation, her lips apart and her lovely face red with blushes, or the heat of the fire, and came towards him exclaiming, "Oh, Leonard, dear Leonard!"

Mr. Beach turned the silver blunderbuss upon his daughter and fired a single, but most effective shot.

"Jane!" he said in a voice in which fatherly admonition and friendly warning were happily blended.

Jane stopped in full career as though in obedience to some lesson which momentarily she had forgotten. Then Mr. Beach, setting down the flagon, advanced upon Leonard with an ample pitying smile and outstretched hand.

"How are you, my dear boy, how are you?" he said. "We did not expect —"

"To see me here under the circumstances," put in Leonard bitterly. "Nor would you have done so, but Tom and I understood that it was only to be a three days' sale."

"Quite right, Leonard. As first advertised the sale was for three days, but the auctioneer found that he could not get through in the time. The accumulations of such an ancient house as Outram Hall are necessarily *vast*," and he waved his hand with a large gesture.

"Yes," said Leonard.

"Hum!" went on Mr. Beach, after a pause which was beginning to grow awkward. "Doubtless you will find it a matter for congratulation that on the whole things sold well. It is not always the case, not by any means, for such collections as those of Outram, however interesting and valuable they may have been to the family itself, do not often fetch their worth at a country auction. Yes, they sold decidedly well, thanks chiefly to the large purchases of the new owner of the estate. This tankard, for instance, which I have bought—hem—as a slight memento of your family, cost me ten shillings an ounce."

"Indeed!" answered Leonard coldly; "I always understood that it was worth fifty."

Then came another pause, during which all who were present, except Mr. Beach and himself, rose one by one and quitted the room. Jane was the last to go, and Leonard noticed, as she passed him, that there were tears in her eyes.

"Jane," said her father in a meaning voice when her hand was already on the door, "you will be careful to be dressed in time for dinner, will you not, love? You remember that young Mr. Cohen is coming, and I should like somebody to be down to receive him."

Jane's only answer to this remark was to pass through the door and slam it behind her. Clearly the prospect of the advent of this guest was not agreeable to her.

"Well, Leonard," went on Mr. Beach when they were alone, in a tone that was meant to be sympathetic but which jarred horribly on his listener's ears, "this is a sad business, very sad. But why are you not sitting down?"

"Because no one asked me to," said Leonard as he took a chair.

"Hem!" continued Mr. Beach; "by the way I believe that Mr. Cohen is a friend of yours, is he not?"

"An acquaintance, not a friend," said Leonard.

"Indeed, I thought that you were at the same college."

"Yes, but I do not like him."

"Prejudice, my dear boy, prejudice. A minor sin indeed, but one against which you must struggle. But there, there, it is natural that you should not feel warmly about the man who will one day own Outram. Ah! as I said, this is all very sad, but it must be a great consolation to you to remember that when everything is settled there will be enough, so I am told, to pay your unhappy father's debts. And now, is there anything that I can do for you or your brother?"

Leonard reflected that whatever may have been his father's misdeeds, and they were many and black, it should scarcely have lain in the mouth of the Rev. James Beach, who owed nearly everything he had in the world to his kindness, to allude to them. But he could not defend his father's memory, it was beyond defence, and just now he must fight for his own hand.

"Yes, Mr. Beach," he said earnestly, "you can help me very much. You know the cruel position in which my brother and I are placed through no fault of our own: our old home is sold, our fortunes have gone utterly, and our honourable name is tarnished. At the present moment I have nothing left in the world except the sum of two hundred pounds which I had saved for a purpose of my own out of my allowance. I have no profession and cannot even take my degree, because I am unable to afford the expense of remaining at college."

"Black, I must say, very black," murmured Mr. Beach, rubbing his chin. "But under these circumstances what can I do to help you? You must trust in Providence, my boy; it never fails the deserving."

"This," answered Leonard, nervously; "you can show your confidence in me by allowing my engagement to Jane to be proclaimed." Here Mr. Beach waved his hand once more as though to repel some invisible force.

"One moment," continued Leonard. "I know that it seems a great deal to ask, but listen. Although everything looks so dark, I have reliance on myself. With the stimulus which my affection for your daughter will give me, and knowing that in order to win her I must first put myself in a position to support her as she should be supported, I am quite convinced that I shall be able to surmount all difficulties by my own efforts."

"Really, I cannot listen to such nonsense any longer," broke in Mr. Beach angrily. "Leonard, this is nothing less than an impertinence. Of course any understanding that may have existed between you and Jane is quite at an end. Engagement! I heard of no engagement. I knew that there was some boy and girl folly between you indeed, but for my part I never gave the matter another thought."

"You seem to forget, sir," said Leonard, keeping his temper with difficulty, "that not six months ago you and I had a long conversation on this very subject, and decided that nothing should be said to my father of the matter until I had taken my degree."

"I repeat that it is an impertinence," answered Mr. Beach, but with a careful avoidance of the direct issue. "What! You, who have nothing in the world except a name which your father has—well—tarnished—to use your own word, you ask me for my dear daughter's hand? You are so selfish that you wish not only to ruin her chances in life, but also to drag her into the depths of your poverty. Leonard, I should never have thought it of you!"

Then at last Leonard broke out.

"You do not speak the truth. I did not ask you for your daughter's hand. I asked you for the promise of it when I should have shown myself worthy of her. But now there is an end of that. I will go as you bid me but before I go I will tell you the truth. You wish to use Jane's beauty to catch this Jew with. Of her happiness you think nothing, provided only you can secure his money. She is not a strong character, and it is quite possible that you will succeed in your plot, but I tell you it will not prosper. You, who owe everything to our family, now when trouble has overtaken us, turn upon me and rob me of the only good that was left to me. By putting an end to a connection of which everybody knew, you stamp me still deeper into the mire. So be it, but of this I am sure, that such conduct will meet with a due reward, and that a time will come when you will bitterly regret the way in which you have dealt with your daughter and treated me in my misfortunes. Good-bye."

And Leonard turned and left the room and the Rectory.

Chapter II.
THE SWEARING OF THE OATH

Arthur Beach, Jane's brother, was standing in the hall waiting to speak to Leonard, but he passed without a word, closing the hall door behind him. Outside snow was falling, though not fast enough to obscure the light of the moon which shone through the belt of firs.

Leonard walked on down the drive till he neared the gate, when suddenly he heard the muffled sound of feet pursuing him through the snow. He turned with an exclamation, believing that the footsteps were those of Arthur Beach, for at the moment he was in no mood for further conversation with any male member of that family. As it chanced, however, he found himself face to face not with Arthur, but with Jane herself, who perhaps had never looked more beautiful than she did at this moment in the snow and the moonlight. Indeed, whenever Leonard thought of her in after-years, and that was often, there arose in his mind a vision of a tall and lovely girl, her auburn hair slightly powdered over with the falling flakes, her breast heaving with emotion, and her wide grey eyes gazing piteously upon him.

"Oh! Leonard," she said nervously, "why do you go without saying good-bye to me?"

He looked at her awhile before he answered, for something in his heart told him that this was the last sight which he should win of his love for many a year, and therefore his eyes dwelt upon her as we gaze upon one whom the grave is about to hide from us for ever.

At last he spoke, and his words were practical enough.

"You should not have come out in those thin shoes through the snow, Jane. You will catch cold."

"I wish I could," she answered defiantly, "I wish that I could catch such a cold as would kill me; then I should be out of my troubles. Let us go into the summer-house; they will never think of looking for me there."

"How will you get there?" asked Leonard; "it is a hundred yards away, and the snow always drifts in that path."

"Oh! never mind the snow," she said.

But Leonard did mind it, and presently he hit upon a solution of the difficulty. Having first glanced up the drive to see that nobody was coming, he bent forward and without explanation or excuse put his arms around Jane, and lifting her as though she were a child, he bore her down the path which led to the summer-house. She was heavy, but, sooth to say, he could have wished the journey longer. Presently they

were there, and very gently he laid her on her feet again, kissing her upon the lips as he did so. Then he took off his overcoat and wrapped it round her shoulders.

All this while Jane had not spoken. Indeed, the poor girl felt so happy and so safe in her lover's arms that it seemed to her as though she never wished to speak, or to do anything for herself again. It was Leonard who broke the silence.

"You ask me why I left without saying good-bye to you, Jane. It was because your father has dismissed me from the house and forbidden me to have any more to do with you."

"Oh, why?" asked the girl, lifting her hands despairingly.

"Can't you guess?" he answered with a bitter laugh.

"Yes, Leonard," she whispered, taking his hand in sympathy.

"Perhaps I had better put it plainly," said Leonard again; "it may prevent misunderstandings. Your father has dismissed me because *my* father embezzled all my money. The sins of the father are visited upon the children, you see. Also he has done this with more than usual distinctness and alacrity, because he wishes you to marry young Mr. Cohen, the bullion-broker and the future owner of Outram."

Jane shivered.

"I know, I know," she said, "and oh! Leonard, I hate him!"

"Then perhaps it will be as well not to marry him," he answered.

"I would rather die first," she said with conviction.

"Unfortunately one can't always die when it happens to be convenient, Jane."

"Oh! Leonard, don't be horrid," she said, beginning to cry. "Where are you going, and what shall I do?"

"To the bad probably," he answered. "At least it all depends upon you. Look here, Jane, if you will stick to me I will stick to you. The luck is against me now, but I have it in me to see that through. I love you and I would work myself to death for you; but at the best it must be a question of time, probably of years."

"Oh! Leonard, indeed I will if I can. I am sure that you do not love me more than I love you, but I can never make you understand how odious they all are to me about you, especially Papa."

"Confound him!" said Leonard beneath his breath; and if Jane heard, at that moment her filial affections were not sufficiently strong to induce her to remonstrate.

"Well, Jane," he went on, "the matter lies thus: either you must put up with their treatment or you must give me the go-by. Listen: in six months you will be twenty-one, and in this country all her relations put together can't force a woman to marry a man if she does not wish to, or prevent her from marrying one whom she does wish to marry. Now you know my address at my club in town; letters sent there will always reach me, and it is scarcely possible for your father or anybody else to prevent

you from writing and posting a letter. If you want my help or to communicate in any way, I shall expect to hear from you, and if need be, I will take you away and marry you the moment you come of age. If, on the other hand, I do not hear from you, I shall know that it is because you do not choose to write, or because that which you have to write would be too painful for me to read. Do you understand, Jane?"

"Oh! yes, Leonard, but you put things so hardly."

"Things have been put hardly enough to me, love, and I must be plain—this is my last chance of speaking to you."

At this moment an ominous sound echoed through the night; it was none other than the distant voice of Mr. Beach, calling from his front-door step, "Jane! Are you out there, Jane?"

"Oh! heavens!" she said, "there is my father calling me. I came out by the back door, but mother must have been up to my room and found me gone. She watches me all day now. What *shall* I do?"

"Go back and tell them that you have been saying good-bye to me. It is not a crime; they cannot kill you for it."

"Indeed they can, or just as bad," replied Jane. Then suddenly she threw her arms about her lover's neck and burying her beautiful face upon his breast, she began to sob bitterly, murmuring, "Oh my darling, my darling, what shall I do without you?"

Over the brief and distressing scene which followed it may be well to drop a veil. Leonard's bitterness of mind forsook him now, and he kissed her and comforted her as he might best, even going so far as to mingle his tears with hers, tears of which he had no cause to be ashamed. At length she tore herself loose, for the shouts were growing louder and more insistent.

"I forgot," she sobbed, "here is a farewell present for you; keep it in memory of me, Leonard," and thrusting her hand into the bosom of her dress she drew from it a little packet which she gave to him.

Then once more they kissed and clung together, and in another moment she had vanished back into the snow and darkness, passing out of Leonard's sight and out of his life, though from his mind she could never pass.

"A farewell present. Keep it in memory of me." The words yet echoed in his ears, and to Leonard they seemed fateful—a prophecy of utter loss. Sighing heavily, he opened the packet and examined its contents by the feeble moonlight. They were not large: a prayer-book bound in morocco, her own, with her name on the fly-leaf and a short inscription beneath, and in the pocket of its cover a lock of auburn hair tied round with silk.

"An unlucky gift," said Leonard to himself; then putting on his coat, which was yet warm from Jane's shoulders, he also turned and vanished into the snow and the night, shaping his path towards the village inn.

He reached it in due course, and passed into the little parlour that adjoined the bar. It was a comfortable room enough, notwithstanding its

adornments of badly stuffed birds and fishes, and chiefly remarkable for its wide old-fashioned fireplace with wrought-iron dogs. There was no lamp in the room when Leonard entered, but the light of the burning wood was bright, and by it he could see his brother seated in a high-backed chair gazing into the fire, his hand resting on his knee.

Thomas Outram was Leonard's elder by two years and cast in a more fragile mould. His face was the face of a dreamer, the brown eyes were large and reflective, and the mouth sensitive as a child's. He was a scholar and a philosopher, a man of much desultory reading, with refined tastes and a really intimate knowledge of Greek gems.

"Is that you, Leonard?" he said, looking up absently; "where have you been?"

"To the Rectory," answered his brother.

"What have you been doing there?"

"Do you want to know?"

"Yes, of course. Did you see Jane?"

Then Leonard told him all the story.

"What do you think she will do?" asked Tom when his brother had finished. "Given the situation and the woman, it is rather a curious problem."

"It may be," answered Leonard; "but as I am not an equation in algebra yearning to be worked out, I don't quite see the fun of it. But if you ask me what I think she will do, I should say that she will follow the example of everybody else and desert me."

"You seem to have a poor idea of women, old fellow. I know little of them myself and don't want to know more. But I have always understood that it is the peculiar glory of their sex to come out strong on these exceptional occasions. 'Woman in our hours of ease,' etc."

"Well, we shall see. But it is my opinion that women think a great deal more of their own hours of ease than of those of anybody else. Thank heaven, here comes our dinner!"

Thus spoke Leonard, somewhat cynically and perhaps not in the best of taste. But, his rejoicing over its appearance notwithstanding, he did not do much justice to the dinner when it arrived. Indeed, it would be charitable to make allowances for this young man at that period of his life. He had sustained a most terrible reverse, and do what he might he could never quite escape from the shadow of his father's disgrace, or put out of his mind the stain with which his father had dimmed the honour of his family. And now a new misfortune hung over him. He had just been driven with contumely from a house where hitherto he was the most welcome of guests; he had parted, moreover, from the woman whom he loved dearly, and under circumstances which made it doubtful if their separation would not be final.

Leonard possessed the gift of insight into character, and more common sense than can often be expected from a young man in love. He

knew well that the chief characteristic of Jane's nature was a tendency to yield to the circumstances of the hour, and though he hoped against hope, he could find no reason to suppose that she would exhibit greater determination in the matter of their engagement than her general lack of strength might lead him to anticipate. Besides, and here his common sense came in, would it be wise that she should do so? After all, what had he to offer her, and were not his hopes of future advancement nothing better than a dream? Roughly as he had put it, perhaps Mr. Beach was right when he told him that he, Leonard, was both selfish and impertinent, since was it not a selfish impertinence in him to ask any woman to link her fortune with his in the present state of his affairs?

Let us therefore make excuses for his words and outward behaviour, for at heart Leonard had much to trouble him.

When the cloth had been cleared away and they were alone again, Tom spoke to his brother, who was moodily filling his pipe.

"What shall we do to-night, Leonard?" he said.

"Go to bed, I suppose," he answered.

"See here, Leonard," said his brother again, "what do you say to having a last look at the old place?"

"If you wish, Tom, but it will be painful."

"A little pain more or less can scarcely hurt us, old fellow," said Tom, laying his thin hand on his brother's shoulder.

Then they started. A quarter of an hour's walking brought them to the Hall. The snow had ceased falling now and the night was beautifully clear, but before it ceased it had done a welcome office in hiding from view all the litter and wreckage of the auction, which make the scene of a recent sale one of the most desolate sights in the world. Never had the old house looked grander or more eloquent of the past than it did on that night to the two brothers who were dispossessed of their heritage. They wandered round it in silence, gazing affectionately at each well-known tree and window, till at length they came to the gun-room entrance. More from habit than for any other reason Leonard turned the handle of the door. To his surprise it was open; after the confusion of the sale no one had remembered to lock it.

"Let us go in," he said.

They entered and wandered from room to room till they reached the greater hall, a vast and oak-roofed chamber built after the fashion of the nave of a church, and lighted by a large window of ecclesiastical design. This window was filled with the armorial bearings of many generations of the Outram family, wrought in stained glass and placed in couples, for next to each coat of arms were the arms of its bearer's dame. It was not quite full, however, for in it remained two blank shields, which had been destined to receive the escutcheons of Thomas Outram and his wife.

"They will never be filled now, Leonard," said Tom, pointing to these; "curious, isn't it, not to say sad?"

"Oh! I don't know," answered his brother; "I suppose that the Cohens boast some sort of arms, or if not they can buy them."

"I should think that they would have the good taste to begin a new window for themselves," said Tom.

Then he was silent for a while, and they watched the moonlight streaming through the painted window, the memorial of so much forgotten grandeur, and illumining the portraits of many a dead Outram that gazed upon them from the panelled walls.

"*Per ardua ad astra*," said Tom, absently reading the family motto which alternated pretty regularly with a second device that some members of it had adopted—"For Heart, Home, and Honour."

"'*Per ardua ad astra*'—through struggle to the stars—and 'For Heart, Home, and Honour,'" repeated Tom; "well, I think that our family never needed such consolations more, if indeed there are any to be found in mottoes. Our Heart is broken, our hearth is desolate, and our honour is a byword, but there remain the 'struggle and the stars.'"

As he spoke his face took the fire of a new enthusiasm: "Leonard," he went on, "why should not we retrieve the past? Let us take that motto—the more ancient one—for an omen, and let us fulfil it. I believe it is a good omen, I believe that one of us will fulfil it."

"We can try," answered Leonard. "If we fail in the struggle, at least the stars remain for us as for all human kind."

"Leonard," said his brother almost in a whisper, "will you swear an oath with me? It seems childish, but I think that under some circumstances there is wisdom even in childishness."

"What oath?" asked Leonard.

"This; that we will leave England and seek fortune in some foreign land—sufficient fortune to enable us to repurchase our lost home; that we will never return here until we have won this fortune; and that death alone shall put a stop to our quest."

Leonard hesitated a moment, then answered:

"If Jane fails me, I will swear it."

Tom glanced round as though in search of some familiar object, and presently his eye fell upon what he sought. A great proportion of the furniture of the old house, including the family portraits, had been purchased by the in-coming owner. Among the articles which remained was a very valuable and ancient bible, one of the first ever printed indeed, that stood upon an oaken stand in the centre of the hall, to which it was securely chained. Tom led the way to this bible, followed by his brother. Then they placed their hands upon it, and standing there in the shadow, the elder of them spoke aloud in a voice that left no doubt of the earnestness of his purpose, or of his belief in their mission.

"We swear," he said, "upon this book and before the God who made us that we will leave this home that was ours, and never look upon it again till we can call it ours once more. We swear that we will follow this, the

purpose of our lives, till death destroys us and it; and may shame and utter ruin overtake us if, while we have strength and reason, we turn our backs upon this oath! So help us God!"

"So help us God!" repeated Leonard.

Thus in the home of their ancestors, in the presence of their Maker, and of the pictured dead who had gone before them, did Thomas and Leonard Outram devote their lives to this great purpose. Perhaps, as one of them had said, the thing was childish, but if so, at the least it was solemn and touching. Their cause seemed hopeless indeed; but if faith can move mountains, much more can honest endeavour attain its ends. In that hour they felt this. Yes, they believed that the end would be attained by one of them, though they guessed little what struggles lay between them and the Star they hoped to gain, or how strangely they should be borne thither.

On the morrow they went to London and waited there a while, but no word came from Jane Beach, and for good or ill the chains of the oath that he had taken riveted themselves around Leonard Outram's neck.

Within three months of this night the brothers were nearing the shores of Africa, the land of the Children of the Mist.

Chapter III.
AFTER SEVEN YEARS

"What is the time, Leonard?"

"Eleven o'clock, Tom."

"Eleven—already? I shall go at dawn, Leonard. You remember Johnston died at dawn, and so did Askew."

"For heaven's sake don't speak like that, Tom! If you think you are going to die, you will die."

The sick man laughed a ghost of a laugh—it was half a death-rattle.

"It is no use talking, Leonard; I feel my life flaring and sinking like a dying fire. My mind is quite clear now, but I shall die at dawn for all that. The fever has burnt me up! Have I been raving, Leonard?"

"A little, old fellow," answered Leonard.

"What about?"

"Home mostly, Tom."

"Home! We have none, Leonard; it is sold. How long have we been away now?"

"Seven years."

"Seven years! Yes. Do you remember how we said good-bye to the old place on that winter night after the auction? And do you remember what we resolved?"

"Yes."

"Repeat it."

"We swore that we would seek wealth enough to buy Outram back till we won it or died, and that we would never return to England till it was won. Then we sailed for Africa. For seven years we have sought and done no more than earn a livelihood, much less a couple of hundred thousand pounds or so."

"Leonard."

"Yes, Tom?"

"You are sole heir to our oath now, and to the old name with it, or you will be in a few hours. I have fulfilled my vow. I have sought till I died. You will take up the quest till you succeed or die. The struggle has been mine, may you live to win the Star. You will persevere, will you not, Leonard?"

"Yes, Tom, I will."

"Give me your hand on it, old fellow."

Leonard Outram knelt down beside his dying brother, and they clasped each other's hands.

"Now let me sleep awhile. I am tired. Do not be afraid, I shall wake before the—end."

Hardly had the words passed his lips when his eyes closed and he sank into stupor or sleep.

His brother Leonard sat down upon a rude seat, improvised out of an empty gin-case. Without the tempest shrieked and howled, the great wind shook the Kaffir hut of grass and wattle, piercing it in a hundred places till the light of the lantern wavered within its glass, and the sick man's hair was lifted from his clammy brow. From time to time fierce squalls of rain fell like sheets of spray, and the water, penetrating the roof of grass, streamed to the earthen floor. Leonard crept on his hands and knees to the doorway of the hut, or rather to the low arched opening which served as a doorway, and, removing the board that secured it, looked out at the night. Their hut stood upon the ridge of a great mountain; below was a sea of bush, and around it rose the fantastic shapes of other mountains. Black clouds drove across the dying moon, but occasionally she peeped out and showed the scene in all its vast solemnity and appalling solitude.

Presently Leonard closed the opening of the doorway, and going back to his brother's side he gazed upon him earnestly. Many years of toil and privation had not robbed Thomas Outram's face of its singular beauty, or found power to mar its refinement. But death was written on it.

Leonard sighed, then, struck by a sudden thought, sought for and found a scrap of looking-glass. Holding it close to the light of the lantern, he examined the reflection of his own features. The glass mirrored a handsome bearded man, dark, keen-eyed like one who is always on the watch for danger, curly-haired and broad-shouldered; not very tall, but having massive limbs and a form which showed strength in every movement. Though he was still young, there was little of youth left about the man; clearly toil and struggle had done an evil work with him, ageing his mind and hardening it as they had hardened the strength and vigour of his body. The face was a good one, but most men would have preferred to see friendship shining in those piercing black eyes rather than the light of enmity. Leonard was a bad enemy, and his long striving with the world sometimes led him to expect foes where they did not exist.

Even now this thought was in his mind: "He is dying," he said to himself, as he laid down the glass with the care of a man who cannot afford to hazard a belonging however trivial, "and yet his face is not so changed as mine is. My God! he is dying! My brother—the only man—the only living creature I love in the world, except one perhaps, if indeed I love her still. Everything is against us—I should say against me now, for I cannot count him. Our father was our first enemy; he brought us into the world, neglected us, squandered our patrimony, dishonoured our name, and shot himself. And since then what has it been but one

continual fight against men and nature? Even the rocks in which I dig for gold are foes—victorious foes—" and he glanced at his hands, scarred and made unshapely by labour. "And the fever, that is a foe. Death is the only friend, but he won't shake hands with me. He takes my brother whom I love as he has taken the others, but me he leaves."

Thus mused Leonard sitting sullenly on the red box, his elbow on his knee, his rough hands held beneath his chin pushing forward the thick black beard till it threw a huge shadow, angular and unnatural, on to the wall of the hut, while without the tempest now raved, now lulled, and now raved again. An hour—two—passed and still he sat not moving, watching the face of the fever-stricken man that from time to time flushed and was troubled, then grew pale and still. It seemed to him as though by some strange harmony of nature the death-smitten blood was striving to keep pace with the beat of the storm, knowing that presently life and storm would pass together into the same domain of silence.

At length Tom Outram opened his eyes and looked at him, but Leonard knew that he did not see him as he was. The dying eyes studied him indeed and were intelligent, but he could feel that they read something on his face that was not known to himself, nor could be visible to any other man—read it as though it were a writing.

So strange was this scrutiny, so meaningless and yet so full of a meaning which he could not grasp, that Leonard shrank beneath it. He spoke to his brother, but no answer came,—only the great hollow eyes read on in that book which was printed upon his face; that book, sealed to him, but to the dying man an open writing.

The sight of the act of death is always terrible; it is terrible to watch the latest wax and ebb of life, and with the intelligence to comprehend that these flickerings, this coming and this going, these sinkings and these last recoveries are the trial flights of the animating and eternal principle—call it soul or what you will—before it trusts itself afar. Still more terrible is it under circumstances of physical and mental desolation such as those present to Leonard Outram in that hour.

But he had looked on death before, on death in many dreadful shapes, and yet he had never been so much afraid. What was it that his brother, or the spirit of his brother, read in his face? What learning had he gathered in that sleep of his, the last before the last? He could not tell—now he longed to know, now he was glad not to know, and now he strove to overcome his fears.

"My nerves are shattered," he said to himself. "He is dying. How shall I bear to see him die?"

A gust of wind shook the hut, rending the thatch apart, and through the rent a little jet of rain fell upon his brother's forehead and ran down his pallid cheeks like tears. Then the strange understanding look passed from the wide eyes, and once more they became human, and the lips were opened.

"Water," they murmured.

Leonard gave him to drink, with one hand holding the pannikin to his brother's mouth and with the other supporting the dying head. Twice he gulped at it, then with a brusque motion of his wasted arm he knocked the cup aside, spilling the water on the earthen floor.

"Leonard," he said, "you will succeed."

"Succeed in what, Tom?"

"You will get the money and Outram—and found the family afresh—but you will not do it alone. *A woman will help you*."

Then his mind wandered a little and he muttered, "How is Jane? Have you heard from Jane?" or some such words.

At the mention of this name Leonard's face softened, then once more grew hard and anxious.

"I have not heard of Jane for years, old fellow," he said; "probably she is dead or married. But I do not understand."

"Don't waste time, Leonard," Tom answered, rousing himself from his lethargy. "Listen to me. I am going fast. You know dying men see far—sometimes. I dreamed it, or I read it in your face. I tell you—*you* will die at Outram. Stay here a while after I am dead. Stay a while, Leonard!"

He sank back exhausted, and at that moment a gust of wind, fiercer than any which had gone before, leapt down the mountain gorges, howling with all the voices of the storm. It caught the frail hut and shook it. A cobra hidden in the thick thatch awoke from its lethargy and fell with a soft thud to the floor not a foot from the face of the dying man—then erected itself and hissed aloud with flickering tongue and head swollen by rage. Leonard started back and seized a crowbar which stood near, but before he could strike, the reptile sank down and, drawing its shining shape across his brother's forehead, once more vanished into the thatch.

His eyes did not so much as close, though Leonard saw a momentary reflection of the bright scales in the dilated pupils and shivered at this added terror, shivered as though his own flesh had shrunk beneath the touch of those deadly coils. It was horrible that the snake should creep across his brother's face, it was still more horrible that his brother, yet living, should not understand the horror. It caused him to remember our invisible companion, that ancient enemy of mankind of whom the reptile is an accepted type; it made him think of that long sleep which the touch of such as this has no power to stir.

Ah! now he was going—it was impossible to mistake that change, the last quick quiver of the blood, followed by an ashen pallor, and the sob of the breath slowly lessening into silence. So the day had died last night, with a little purpling of the sky—a little sobbing of the wind—then ashen nothingness and silence. But the silence was broken, the night had grown alive indeed—and with a fearful life. Hark! how the storm

yelled! those blasts told of torment, that rain beat like tears. What if his brother——He did not dare to follow the thought home.

Hark! how the storm yelled!—the very hut wrenched at its strong supports as though the hands of a hundred savage foes were dragging it. It lifted—by heaven it was gone!—gone, crashing down the rocks on the last hurricane blast of the tempest, and there above them lowered the sullen blue of the passing night flecked with scudding clouds, and there in front of them, to the east and between the mountains, flared the splendours of the dawn.

Something had struck Leonard heavily, so heavily that the blood ran down his face; he did not heed it, he scarcely felt it; he only clasped his brother in his arms and, for the first time for many years, he kissed him on the brow, staining it with the blood from his wound.

The dying man looked up. He saw the glory in the East. Now it ran along the mountain sides, now it burned upon their summits, to each summit a pillar of flame, a peculiar splendour of its own diversely shaped; and now the shapes of fire leaped from earth to heaven, peopling the sky with light. The dull clouds caught the light, but they could not hold it all: back it fell to earth again, and the forests lifted up their arms to greet it, and it shone upon the face of the waters.

Thomas Outram saw—and staggering to his knees he stretched out his arms towards the rising sun, muttering with his lips.

Then he sank upon Leonard's breast, and presently all his story was told.

Chapter IV.
THE LAST VIGIL

For a while Leonard sat by the body of his brother. The daylight grew and gathered about him, the round ball of the sun appeared above the mountains.

The storm was gone. Were it not for some broken fragments of the vanished hut, it would have been difficult to know even that it had been. Insects began to chirrup, lizards ran from the crevices of the rocks, yonder the rain-washed bud of a mountain lily opened before his eyes. Still Leonard sat on, his face stony with grief, till at length a shadow fell upon him from above. He looked up—it was cast by a vulture's wings, as they hurried to the place of death.

Grasping his loaded rifle Leonard sprang to his feet. Nearer and nearer came the bird, wheeling above him in lessening circles: it forgot the presence of the living in its desire for the dead. Leonard lifted the rifle, aimed and fired. The report rang out clearly on the silent air, and was echoed from krantz and kloof and mountain side, and from above answered the thud of the bullet. For a moment the smitten bird swayed upon its wide pinions, then they seemed to crumple beneath its weight, and it fell heavily and lay flapping and striking at the stones with its strong beak.

"I also can kill," said Leonard to himself as he watched it die. "Kill till you are killed—that is the law of life." Then he turned to the body of his brother and made it ready for burial as best he might, closing the eyes, tying up the chin with a band of twisted grass, and folding the thin toil-worn hands upon the quiet heart.

When all was finished he paused from his dreadful task, and a thought struck him.

"Where are those Kaffirs?" he said aloud—the sound of his voice seemed to dull the edge of solitude—"the lazy hounds, they ought to have been up an hour ago. Hi! Otter, Otter!"

The mountains echoed "Otter, Otter;" there was no other reply. Again he shouted without result. "I don't like to leave it," he said, "but I must go and see;" and, having covered the body with a red blanket to scare away the vultures, he started at a run round some projecting rocks that bordered the little plateau on which the hut had stood. Beyond them the plateau continued, and some fifty paces from the rocks was a hollow in the mountain side, where a softer vein of stone had been eaten away by centuries of weather.

It was here that the Kaffirs slept—four of them—and in front of this cave or grotto it was their custom to make a fire for cooking. But on that morning no fire was burning, and no Kaffirs were to be seen.

"Still asleep," was Leonard's comment as he strode swiftly towards the cave. In another moment he was in it shouting "Otter, Otter!" and saluting with a vigorous kick a prostrate form, of which he could just see the outline. The form did not move, which was strange, for such a kick should have suffered to wake even the laziest Basuto from his soundest sleep. Leonard stopped to examine it, and the next moment started back violently, exclaiming:

"Great heavens! it is Cheat, and he is dead."

At this moment a thick voice spoke from the corner of the cave in Dutch, the voice of Otter:

"I am here, Baas, but I am tied: the Baas must loosen me, I cannot stir."

Leonard advanced, striking a match as he came. Presently it burned up, and he saw the man Otter lying on his back, his legs and arms bound firmly with rimpis of hide, his face and body a mass of contusions. Drawing his hunting-knife Leonard cut the rimpis and brought the man from out the cave, carrying rather than leading him.

Otter was a knob-nosed Kaffir, that is of the Bastard Zulu race. The brothers had found him wandering about the country in a state of semi-starvation, and he had served them faithfully for some years. They had christened him Otter, his native patronymic being quite unpronounceable, because of his extraordinary skill in swimming, which almost equalled that of the animal after which he was named.

In face the man was hideous, though his ugliness was not unpleasant, being due chiefly to a great development of his tribal feature, the nose, and in body he was misshapen to the verge of monstrosity. In fact Otter was a dwarf, measuring little more than four feet in height. But what he lacked in height he made up in breadth; it almost seemed as though, intended by nature to be a man of many inches, he had been compressed to his present dimensions by art. His vast chest and limbs, indicating strength nearly superhuman, his long iron arms and massive head, all gave colour to this idea. Otter had one redeeming feature, however—his eyes, that when visible, which at this moment was not the case, were large, steady, and, like his skin, of a brilliant black.

"What has happened?" said Leonard, also speaking in Dutch.

"This, Baas! Last night those three Basuto villains, your servants, made up their minds to desert. They told me nothing, and they were so cunning that, though I watched even their thoughts, I never guessed. They knew better than to tell me, for I would have beaten them—yes, all! So they waited till I was sound asleep, then came behind me, the three of them, and tied me fast that I should not hinder them and that they might take away Baas Tom's gun which you lent me, and other things.

Soon I found out their plans, and though I laughed in their faces, oh! my heart was black with rage.

"When the Basuto dogs had tied me they mocked me, calling me foul names and saying that I might stop and starve with the white fools, my masters, who always dug for yellow iron and found so little, being fools. Then they got together everything of value, yes, down to the kettle, and made ready to go, and each of them came and slapped me on the face, and one burnt me here upon the nose with a hot brand.

"All this I bore as a man must bear trouble which comes from the skies, but when Cheat took up Baas Tom's gun and the others came with a reim to tie me to the rock, I could bear it no more. So I shouted aloud and drove at Cheat, who held the gun. Ah! they had forgotten that if my arms are strong, my head is stronger! Butting like a bull I caught him fair in the middle, and his back was against the side of the cave. He made one noise, no more; he will never make another noise, for my head smashed him up inside and the rock hurt me through him. Then the other two hit me with kerries—great blows—and my arms being tied I could not defend myself, though I knew that they would soon kill me; so I groaned and dropped down, pretending to be dead—just like a stink-cat.

"At last, thinking that they had finished me, the Basutos ran away in a great hurry, for they feared lest you might hear the shouting and should come after them with rifles. They were so much afraid that they left the gun and most of the other things. After that I fainted; it was silly, but those kerries of theirs are of rhinoceros horn—I should not have minded so much had they been of wood, but the horn bites deep. That is all the story. It will please Baas Tom to know that I saved his gun. When he hears it he will forget his sickness and say 'Well done, Otter! Ha! Otter, your head is hard.'"

"Make your heart hard also," said Leonard with a sad smile; "Baas Tom is dead. He died at daybreak in my arms. The fever killed him as it killed the other *Inkoosis* (chiefs)."

Otter heard, and, letting his bruised head fall upon his mighty chest, remained for a while in silence. At length he lifted it, and Leonard saw two tears wandering down the battered countenance. "*Wow*," he said, "is it so? Oh! my father, are you dead, you who were brave like a lion and gentle as a girl? Yes, you are dead, my ears have heard it, and were it not for your brother, the Baas Leonard, I think that I would kill myself and follow you. *Wow*, my father, are you indeed dead, who smiled upon me yesterday?"

"Come," said Leonard; "I dare not leave him long."

And he went, Otter following him with a reeling gait, for he was weak from his injuries. Presently they reached the spot, and Otter saw that the hut was gone.

"Certainly," he said, "our bad spirits were abroad last night. Well, next time it will be the turn of the good ones." Then he drew near to the corpse and saluted it with uplifted hand and voice.

"Chief and Father," he said in Zulu, for Otter had wandered long and knew many tongues, but he loved the Zulu best of all. "While you lived upon earth, you were a good man and brave, though somewhat quick of temper and quarrelsome like a woman. Now you have wearied of this world and flown away like an eagle towards the sun, and there where you live in the light of the sun you will be braver and better yet, and become more patient and not quarrel any more with those who are less clever than you. Chief and Father, I salute you! May he whom you named the Otter serve you and the *Inkoosi* your brother once more in the House of the Great-Great, if one so ugly and misshapen can enter there. As for the Basuto dog whom I slew and who would have stolen your gun, I see now that I killed him in a fortunate hour, that he might be the slave beneath your feet in the House of the Great-Great. Ah! had I known, I would have sent a better man, for there as here Cheat will still be Cheat. Hail, my father! Hail and farewell! Let your spirit watch over us and be gentle towards us, who love you yet."

And Otter turned away without further ado; and having washed his wounds, he set himself to the task of preparing such coarse food as they had in store.

When it was ready Leonard ate of it, and after he had finished eating, together they bore the body to the little cave for shelter. It was Leonard's purpose to bury his brother at sundown; he might not delay longer, but till then he would watch by him, keeping the last of many vigils. So all that remained of the Basuto Cheat having been dragged forth and thrust unceremoniously into an ant-bear hole by Otter, who while he disposed of the body did not spare to taunt the spirit of his late treacherous foe, the corpse of Thomas Outram was laid in its place, and Leonard sat himself by its side in the gloom of the cave.

About midday Otter, who had been sleeping off his sorrows, physical and mental, came into the cavern. They were short of meat, he said, and with the leave of the Baas he would take the gun of the dead Baas and try to shoot a buck.

Leonard bade him go, but to be back by sundown, as he should require his help.

"Where shall we dig a hole, Baas?" asked the dwarf.

"One is dug," answered Leonard; "he who is dead dug it himself as the others did. We will bury him in the last pit he made looking for gold, to the right of where the hut stood. It is deep and ready."

"Yes, Baas, a good place—though perhaps Baas Tom would not have worked at it so strongly had he known. *Wow!* Who knows to what end he labours? But perchance it is a little near the donga. Twice that hole has

been flooded while Baas Tom was digging in it. Then he would jump out, but now——"

"I have settled it," said Leonard shortly; "go, and be back half an hour before sundown at latest. Stop! Bring some of those rock-lilies if you can. The Baas was fond of them."

The dwarf saluted and went. "Ah!" he said to himself as he waddled down the hill where he hoped to find game, "ah! you do not fear men dead or living—overmuch; yet, Otter, it is true that you are better here in the sun, though the sun is hot, than yonder in the cave. Say, Otter, why does Baas Tom look so awful now that he is dead—he who was so gentle while yet he lived? Cheat did not look awful, only uglier. But then you killed Cheat, and the Heavens killed Baas Tom and set their own seal upon him. And what will Baas Leonard do now that his brother is dead and the Basutos have run away? Go on digging for the yellow iron which is so hard to find, and of which, when it is found, no man can even make a spear? Nay, what is that to you, Otter? What the Baas does you do—and here be the spoor of an impala buck."

Otter was right. The day was fearfully hot. It was summer in East Africa, or rather autumn, the season of fever, thunder and rain, a time that none who valued their lives would care to spend in those latitudes searching for gold with poor food and but little shelter. But men who seek their fortunes are not chary of hazarding their own lives or those of others. They become fatalists, not avowedly perhaps, but unconsciously. Those who are destined to die must die, they think, the others will live. And, after all, it does not greatly matter which they do, for, as they know well, the world will never miss them.

When Leonard Outram, his brother, and two companions in adventure heard from the natives that at a particular spot on the mountains, nominally in the Portuguese territory near the lowest branch of the Zambesi, gold could be dug out like iron ore, and when, at the price of two Tower muskets and a half-bred greyhound, they received a concession from the actual chief of that territory to dig up and possess the gold without let or hindrance from any person whatsoever, they did not postpone their undertaking because the country was fever-stricken and the unhealthy season drew on. In the first place, their resources were not great at the moment; and in the second, they feared lest some other enterprising person with three Tower muskets and two grey-hounds should persuade the chief to rescind their concession in his favour.

So they journeyed laboriously to the place of hidden wealth, and with the help of such native labour as they could gather began their search. At first they were moderately successful; indeed, wherever they dug they found "colour," and once or twice stumbled upon pockets of nuggets. Their hopes ran high, but presently one of the four—Askew by name—sickened and died of fever. They buried him and persevered with