

A Goddess of Africa

A Story of the Golden Fleece.

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE

Author of "MISS CAPRICE," "DR. JACK'S WIFE," "DR. JACK," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

FUGITIVES OF THE ZAMBEZI.

It was in June, 1836, South Africa was in a state of agitation, and grave questions presented themselves for solution. Jameson had made his historic ride over the border in response to the appeal of the Matabele in Johannesburg, to meet his Waterloo at the hands of him and his horse of brass, while further north the hollow roll of tom-tom or war-drum told of the land of the fierce Matabele. Bulawayo had undergone a siege and the renegade Zulus were on the beaten back after a most desperate series of encounters in which the losses had been heavy on both sides.

It was indeed a period fraught with tremendous issues to the darling of the lo-axons settlers of South Africa. History was being made every day in America thirty, fifty, an hundred years ago, so it is in this wonderland of to-day—step by step the border has been pushed forward, the country wrested from savage ignorance and superstition and made to bloom like the rose.

Perhaps half a century hence a South African Chicago with a million people may rear its head on the banks of the Zambezi, where to-day the herds of impis gather in their kraals and the destruction of their white masters is a fate.

some months before with a retinue of many porters, and a guard of fighting men capable of doing considerable damage when armed with modern appliances for conducting the art of war.

Hence, their present wretched condition would indicate that they must have been engaged in numerous serious battles. Ill fortune seemed to have haunted them; men in whom they trusted deserted from the expedition; others were slain, or fell into the hands of the hostile negro tribes through whose country they were compelled to pass.

Thus their numbers had dwindled, but with undaunted courage they refused to turn back. Finally overwhelming disasters had come upon them, just when Hastings believed the tremendous work he had set himself was about to be carried out, and after a series of hot engagements with the savage enemy, the two forlorn fugitives, believing they had distanced their pursuers, threw themselves upon the ground under the great tree that stretched its giant arms out to shield them from the light of the declining sun. Hastings looked haggard, but there was a gleam in his clear eyes that spoke of an unquenchable spirit—one of a heart that could not be conquered by adversities.

He even smiles to see how carefully the odd genius at his side deposited his packages upon the ground, caressing them as tenderly as though they were dear to his heart, which was the exact truth, since the bundles contained the sole results of his weary months of scientific research during this venturesome pilgrimage through the heart of the Dark Continent.

As the savant would never desert these trophies while he had strength to "tote" them, it finally devolved upon Hastings to carry both guns, the ammunition and what other articles they had left out of the immense stock with which the expedition had begun.

He now proceeded to open one of the packages and produced a sparing amount of food.

"Come, we must take a little refreshment, professor. It has been a hard day, and I fear we've lost our last man. My mind would be more at ease if I knew how matters were going on to the south. Those rumors of an uprising of the Matabele disturb me. If they prove to be true I fear we shall never be able to reach Bulawayo."

The French man of science, having ascertained that his thirteen precious packages were all there and in good condition, condescended to share in the humble repast, and his manner was just as charming and the volume of his chatter just as unrestricted as though he stood in his dearly beloved Bois de Boulogne or under the Arc de Triomphe.

The jolly little professor was certainly a boon companion for a long journey, since he knew how to chase dull care away.

Hastings did not appear fully at ease, for his eyes almost constantly roved over the ground they had covered in arriving at this tree, and more than once he looked serious, while his hand involuntarily reached out in the direction of the repeating rifle, that had served him faithfully all through these months of wandering.

The shadows had commenced to issue forth from their hiding-places, and the forest seemed peopled with grotesque goblins that would require but a small stretch of the imagination to transform into skulking blacks, eager to close upon the fugitives.

In reality it was a peaceful scene, and under different conditions Hastings might have experienced an un-abounding admiration for the primeval charm that rested upon that African wood, neopled with feathered songsters, and in spots radiant with the bloom of countless flowers, though this was the season corresponding to our bleak November.

"Mon Dieu," said the Gaul, as he bit into the piece of hard tack which had been given him to gnaw upon. "zis is one supper fit for ze gods—at least it is a shame two gentlemen students do not fare better. Still I have ze hope we are coming near ze end, Monsieur Rex, and zat before long we shall only look back upon zis experience with a smile."

"Perhaps," muttered the other, still watching the skulking shadows suspiciously, "and I shall be glad for your sake, professor, when we reach a place of safety. As for myself, you know full well I have only had a taste."

"A taste—parbleu! hear ze man—a taste, when for ze month not one day it have pass without we place our heads in ze lion's mouth—not one night zat we feel sure we will see ze morrow's sun. Begar! I like your nerve, sir. Pray tell me zen when you ze full meal will take?"

"Just as soon as I am able to get up another expedition. Now that I know my wonderful secret was not

the vaporing of a crazed brain but founded on actual truth, I am more resolved than ever before to win the game. In my pocket, as you know, I carry positive evidence that the treasure of the dead volcano is no myth, no Sinbad the Sailor illusion, but an actual bona-fide fact. I have sworn to devote my life to securing it, and I am a man to stick closer than a mustard plaster."

"Ah! zat will I vouch for, and a companion royal. Nevaire will I forget how you stand over me in ze gloom of zat night and beat ze human jacksals wif ze butt of ze gun. But, Monsieur Rex, do not think I am quite blind because I have so devoted been to ze interests of science. When you turn ze face to the north once more, I am positif it will not only be to find zat wonderful treasure of ze extinct volcano, zat lies in ze heart of Africa, but because zere is one hope of again looking on a beautiful face zat charm us both."

Hastings appeared a little confused, as though the French savant's shot had indeed struck very close at home, but he laughed it off.

"What's the use of denying the soft impeachment, professor? To my dying day I shall never forget the startling impression that fair idol made upon me as seen in the midst of a thousand black kneeling worshippers. She was as beautiful as a dream. I have seen her in my sleep since—I shall see her always. Yes, I would turn my face again toward that land of heathen darkness and fetish worshippers if no other influence moved me than a desire to once more feast my eyes on her face. But say no more upon the subject. We are not yet out of the woods, and I fear these unseen perils may be too much for us, if, as we have reason to suspect, the Matabele god Milimo has sent the blood-drinkers out to war."

"Sacre! if zat be ze case, our only hope is to turn aside, following ze big hills and ze small ones, kopjes zey call 'em, so zat we go around ze plateau between ze rivers Gwelo and Khami, zat mark ze home of Matabele."

"How long is this plateau, professor?" asked Rex, who relied considerably upon the superior knowledge of his companion with relation to the topography of the country.

"More zan one hundred miles across and half of zat north and south."

Hastings shrugged his shoulders at the reply.

"That means more days of hiding and going hungry, more nights of travel. Well, we can do it, professor, if given half a chance; but it goes against the grain. What wouldn't I give for a regiment of our militia just now. What a swathe we would cut through the land where the beastly tom-tom sounds and incites the black warriors to battle."

"And I would be charmed quite could I but have ze regiment of Francs-tireurs on ze ground. In ze mirror of ze mind I can see zem charge upon ze heathen—what care zey whether ze assegais fly as thick as hail stones, and ze bullets sing like mad horns past zere ears. For ze lilies of France! Mon Dieu! what can stand before such heroes—ze black impis break and fly—zey throw away zere weapons, and shriek to zere god to save. Nothing can resist ze charge of ze terrible tigers. So new glories are won, and again England goes hand in hand with France in peopling ze desert places of ze earth. Such thoughts inspire ze lonely traveler, who blazes ze trail of civilization through ze wilderness, and whose torch—"

Just there the professor came to a sudden pause in his really eloquent effort, not that his breath had given out or his subject ceased to arouse enthusiasm. It was because Rex suddenly clutched him by the arm and dragged him to the ground with a single muscular effort. And as the savant assumed this involuntary horizontal position, there was heard a strange hissing whirr, followed by a dull thud, and turning his head the professor saw quivering in the tree trunk, with its lancet head buried three inches deep, a deadly assegai of the warlike Makalakas.

CHAPTER II.

THE BORDER LAND OF ETERNITY.

Again did Professor Jules owe the preservation of his life to the quick wit and ready hand of his companion in arms, since, but for his hasty descent from a perpendicular that murderous weapon of a South African warrior must have passed through his body.

Hastings realized that the crisis he had feared was upon him, since their pursuers were on deck, filled with the zeal of warfare, and determined to accomplish their destruction.

He was a man of action, this American, and even though the condition of affairs seemed next to hopeless, such a thing as surrender to the inevitable never entered his mind.

This is characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon blood—a grim determination to go down with colors flying.

It has been made historical on many a bloody field of battle in England, Scotland, America, yes, wherever the English language is spoken throughout the world.

If die he must he would meet his fate with face to the foe, a weapon in his hand, the fire of battle in his heart.

That would be the glorious end of a brave soldier—who could wish a better?

As with one hand he dragged Vendant to the ground, his other reached out and clutched the repeating rifle

that lay close by.

In days gone by that weapon had served him faithfully, and he knew he could place reliance upon it now. So long as there was a leaden messenger within its chamber, and he had the strength to press the trigger, it would send forth its deadly summons, until a breastwork of victims encompassed him about. As Travis and Crockett fell at the Alamo in Texas, with Mexicans piled waist high around them, so this bold son of Illinois meant to meet his end.

Considering the desperate nature of the situation he was remarkably cool and collected. He had anticipated just such a decisive moment as this and in his mind arranged his method of meeting the crisis.

"To arms! they come, the Turk, the Turk!" was what he shouted in the ear of his ally, and the men of that gallant Greek patriot Bozarris certainly could not have shown greater agility in pouncing down upon the swarming foe than did these two fugitives of the wilds in facing the blacks.

Already dusky figures could be seen darting from tree to tree, and Hastings, knowing the value of time, lost not a second in discharging his gun.

The report of the Winchester seemed to arouse the echoes of Hades—from every quarter there arose the most fiendish of yells, and one who had never heard these battle cries of the savage Makalakas before might well be pardoned for believing that a legion of black fiends from Tophet, led by Mephistopheles himself, had burst the barriers of the Inferno, and sought new victims on earth.

There was no time for exercising any deliberation in the line of judgment—to strike speedily and often, with the most fatal result was their one hope, and even that held out but faint chances of success.

Hastings was crouching there, almost flat on his face, behind the heterogeneous bundles which the savant had so carefully and solicitously piled up. They promised, at least, to form some sort of a barrier for the wretched fugitives, though the professor when making his collection had never dreamed to what base use they might eventually be put.

The rapid detonation of the Winchester told that it was in the hands of one who knew how to utilize its wonderful repeating qualities to the utmost, and the fiendish shouts of the black warriors no longer expressed only rage, but pain and consternation, as well.

(To be Continued.)

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Leaves for the east.....	4 10 p.m.
Arrives from the east.....	6 00 p.m.
Leaves for the west.....	10 55 a.m.
Arrives from the west.....	2 25 p.m.
Leaves for the east.....	7 05 a.m.
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Leaves for the west.....	3 00 p.m.
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"Gilliborough"—Leaves for Rocky Point daily at 6:30, 8:30, 11, 1, 2, 4, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30, 12:45, 2, 3, 4 p.m. Return at 1:15, 2:30, 3:15 and 5 p.m.	
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